

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

51ST Sitting

Thursday, 8TH December, 2016

Assembly convened at 10.16 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Need for proper decorum in the House

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I want to bring two things to your attention. I know that you are fully aware of what I would say now. I thought I would say it by way of reminder or clarification, or both. I notice over the last three days some Hon. Members - I do not want to use the word saunter - coming to the National Assembly and take their seats and then when they wish to do so, they rise from their seats and leave the chamber.

I notice, too, that there are, among our Hon. Members, Members who get up from their seats to find their way to another Member and would bend over to that Member and speak with their backs, sometimes, turned to the Chair. Yet, again, there are other Members who would reach across and not whisper and be finished, but sustain a conversation between spaces, totally unmindful as to whether the voice is carrying or whether, in fact, the posture, which they adopt,

is one which does not show regard for the Chair. I know, Hon. Members are aware of all of these things, and I only mention them by a way of a reminder.

The second point I want to bring to our attention, with as much force as I can command, is the one which speaks to our presentation here in this House. I did say, sometime ago, that, and we all know that, our proceedings are either benefiting or suffering from live streaming. I do not know which it is. I did, in an announcement, sometime last year or perhaps early this year, point out to Hon. Members that we are, in a sense, under watch and we are being looked at by our fellow citizens. I did say that. One of the things, which we do here, is to follow a Facebook presence and the results of it. I would just take the liberty of reading two things, a few comments on Facebook, before I complete what I want to say. One of the comments is:

- “Who needs the National Cultural Centre, when you got Parliament”.

That is one comment.

- “A parliamentarian just call the Ministry of Natural Resources the Ministry of Geology and Mines”.
- If you sit in Parliament for 15 minutes and do not laugh at least 200 times, then something is wrong with you.”

Bear with me one moment, please. I might say to Hon. Members that even, as I speak, we are on live stream. Throughout my service here in this House, I have been mindful of two facts. One is that whatever we say or do here finds a permanent record in the *Hansard*, whether we wish it or not, one year from now, indeed one hundred years from now. I have been mindful of that fact and have thought to present issues of concern to Members in a language which allows us to hold a concern level. Members would know if they have maintained a level, and whether that level is satisfactory.

I must say, however, and this is to continue where I began, that we are all learned in the English language. Some may be blessed with being versed in the English language. I am sure that we could find terms to employ in our debate which could convey our meanings and not necessarily use the terms which are less than parliamentary, even though they are used in a way which does not transgress a rule in Parliament.

I speak with great reluctance, but I did not find that I could in another way bring this to your attention. I make a confession. I left here last night in some deep contemplation. When I woke this morning, the first thought that came to me is that I really must say something along these lines. Now that I have said it I must tell you I feel no better than I did before I said it. If it troubles you too, then a problem halved or quartered, or whatever fraction is appropriate, is a problem lessened.

I ask Hon. Members to bear what I have said in mind and let us see how we could go up from here.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS, INCLUDING POLICY STATEMENTS

AN ACCOUNT OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE D'URBAN PARK DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

Minister of Education [Dr. Roopnaraine]: I had been asked through the press not to hide behind the explanations provided by President Granger on the D'Urban Park Development Project. Allow me, if you will, Sir, to set the record straight. In July 2015 the National Commemoration Commission (NCC) was established when the A Party for National Unity and Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government decided to commemorate the 50th Independence Jubilee Anniversary of the Republic of Guyana, in an appropriate way.

I was appointed to chair the proceedings of the National Commemoration Commission. The Opposition was invited to be a part of the commission, but never attended any of its meetings nor did it make any other contribution to the work of the commission. The decision was made to develop the D'Urban Park site when it was determined that the traditional venue for the independence celebrations, the National Park, would have required extensive repairs as well as the appropriation of the rugby field to accommodate the several thousand persons expected to participate.

The D'Urban Park Development Project was authorised by Cabinet and works began in the last quarter of 2015. In January 2016, I was asked by the President to sit as a director on the board of the Homestretch Development Incorporation (HDI). Although not my direct responsibility, the development team, with no budget, was given the task of preparing the site for the 50th

Anniversary. This meant relying on donations. It was no small task. Works were conducted in the full view of the population. Trees were cut down, sand and loam delivered to the site, bridges, drains and stands were constructed.

In April 2016, Col. Larry London, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the HDI, also a member of the National Commemoration Commission, informed the Government that the donations and credit arrangements, which it had been relying on to get the D'Urban Park Development Project on the way, had been exhausted. It was then decided by the Cabinet to have the Ministry of Public Infrastructure takeover the responsibility for the works to bring the project to completion in time for the 50th Anniversary. The CEO subsequently handed over to the Ministry of Public Infrastructure records of moneys and in kind donations collected. I anticipate that there would be a full and proper accounting from the Ministry of Public Infrastructure.

It is my understanding that many of the persons, who had made contributions to the D'Urban Park Development Project, did not want to be publicly identified or thanked presumably for fear of condemnation, or worse, from persons who are hostile to the project. It is also my understanding that none of the persons involved in the management of the development works, up to the point of the handed over to the Ministry, were remunerated.

I find it personally distressing that not only have we failed to acknowledge the enthusiasm and energies of those who were involved in the significant works to develop D'Urban Park for Guyana's 50th Independence Jubilee celebrations, instead greed and malice had been attributed to their patriotic efforts.

On a more personal note, allow me to add that in over 40 years of political activism thriving to achieve a better Guyana, I have never hidden behind anybody and I have never engaged in any act giving off even a whiff of malfeasance. I deeply resent any whisperings or hints in the media to that effect. I promise this august Assembly that I will not sit by and suffer in silence, if I am now accused by anyone of such acts.

10.31 a.m.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2017

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 2017 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2016-11-28.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2017, of a total sum of two hundred and thirty billion, three hundred and forty nine million and seventy nine thousand dollars (**\$230,349,079,000**), **excluding nineteen billion and seven hundred and seventy four million, and eighty seven thousand dollars (\$19,774,087,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to further provision in respect of finance.

[Minister of Finance]

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: I first wish to recognise the work of the Minister of Finance and the team for delivering an early budget for 2017. However, I wish to say and to support my colleague that being pressured to bring an early budget did not do justice to what this nation expects, so that Guyana can accelerate the pace of development which I believe all Guyanese are clamouring for. The \$250 billion budget should provide more goods, services and benefits for the Guyanese people. While the budget sum has been increased, many of the measures proposed will

have negative impact on the lives and activities of Guyanese across the board and in every sector. This argument has already been justified by many of the speakers on this side of the House in which it was elaborated about the increase in taxes, meagre shifts in the pension, no new policies, no expansion or enhancement of existing programmes and projects, no stated salary increase for the workers of this nation, no new investment initiatives and, of course, the reinventing of the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) into the green pathway which the other side has not as yet provided us with an explanation of what greening Guyana is all about.

Translate this to the people whose position ought to be positively impacted, and what do we get? The contraction of businesses, the emergence of extreme poverty looming ahead, uncertainty in the productive sectors, higher cost of living, no new investment in sight and that will translate also into lack of employment. We have seen already in the 18 months that have passed the slowing down and the melting down of our economic prospects. This means that we are heading straight into not a good life, but a total contraction of our economy. The ordinary man in the street, the business community, professionals, other workers and their representatives, women and youth have referred to this budget as the pickpocket budget, a reminder of the period under the People's National Congress (PNC), when each budget that was delivered to the House and approved came out with a caption. For example, I will only use one, a *badjet*. We are, I hope, not going back to that era, where every budget, which comes to this House in the future, will cause anxiety and fear and therefore capture a caption of all manner of names.

For those who are close to the grass roots people, the budget is also referred to as the budget for the APNU/AFC cabal, including the many special advisers. The APNU has failed to pronounce on the percentage increase in salaries for workers for 2017. Yes, the hard-working people of this country deserve to be treated fairly, and with some level of equity. They too need to be certain of what the budget holds for them. You cannot only signal what will be deducted from them, but you also need to tell them what they will expect in their pockets.

The coalition Government, according to them, continues to renege on the promises made to the people as it does nothing to arrest the erosion of the poor people's livelihood. It is unwilling to save sugar. It has had some bad words for rice while giving themselves an increase of 50 % and more of salary which baptised the Members as the fatter cats in this nation. A glaring example is the insignificant sum allocated for youths. After deceiving the youths into believing that they

were the focal point in the election campaign, that they were the complementary force for change and development, and that a good life filled with opportunities awaits them, with your winning at the elections, the disappointment, which followed, placed the youths out in the cold. It is with no seats for youth in the Cabinet, a single seat for youth in the Parliament and less youths are finding space in important positions at various levels of your administration. For example, there are no youth in the foreign service, on boards, on councils. They are all deprived of new blood and modern thinking. Technical and competent young professionals were dismissed for no reason at all from a number of sectoral Ministries. More than 1,900 young Amerindians were dismissed from the Youth Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Programme (YEAP) within days of the administration taking office - more than 1,900.

It is a fact that the new Government favours employment and appointment of mostly retired persons to positions in the Cabinet and overseas posting. Retirees have now taken over the many important positions, much to the dismay of many young people in this country. The boastful talk of putting youths first continues to be lip service. One would have expected that the newly approved youth policy, even though it lacked profound recommendation for promoting youth development, whatever recommendation contained therein, should have featured prominently in Budget 2017. Instead the old programmes, current programmes and only a few new initiatives were actually contained in the Budget 2017.

The budget lacks adequate allocation to address the problems and challenges faced by youths, while on the other side there is an aggressive motion to reward the former mayor of the city of Georgetown. I call on the Government to provide a realistic budgetary sum for addressing youth development and the challenges they face – unemployment, suicide, teenage pregnancy, underprivileged, lack of opportunities. Pursue, in a genuine way, the investment in youth with the same aggressive of pursuing the pension motion. However, what have we seen? We have seen a meagre \$50 million to launch the Youth Innovation Fund (YIF) programme to benefit 20% of Guyana's population, which are the youths - \$50 million. This \$50 million speaks to development of entrepreneurial opportunities for youths. One business in today's situation almost eats up \$50 million. That is a business in today's world. How are you going to tangibly, significantly invest in promoting entrepreneurship for young people with \$50 million? You attach so many conditions to this Youth Innovation Fund. I am sure that our young people will be

short-changed. I do hope that this \$50 million will be a good start. I commend this \$50 million, but I am not satisfied that this is good enough from this Government. What has happened? We have seen the continued deflated expectations of young people in this country. We have to do much more for them.

Turning my attention to Amerindians, or the Indigenous people, where is the “good life” for Amerindians? Today the issue of implementation is plaguing the premier Ministry of Indigenous People’s Affairs, as it relates to the implementation of programmes and projects which remain in slow motion. I listened carefully to Minister Garrido-Lowe when she mentioned the problems and challenges of implementation and that in this year’s budget she said that there is going to be some sums allocated to improve the state of affairs. I welcome that because if implementation, slothfulness and ineffectiveness are occurring in the premier Ministry that has the challenge and the responsibility to make right and provide the “good life” for Amerindians, then it should be welcome and we should not deny it.

Achieving projects objectives in that Ministry is behind schedule. Recognising this poor state of affairs, in the Ministry of Indigenous People’s Affairs, caused the His Excellency, at the National Toshao Council (NTC) Conference 2016, to propose the setting up of a unit to deal with the implementation of decisions emanating out of the conference of NTC conference. While this is contrary to the Amerindian Act of 2006, I believe the matter of slothfulness and ineffective leadership was so distressing to His Excellency that he made it quite clear in that proposal.

10.46 a.m.

I caution, however, that the implementation of the National Toshao Council (NTC) decision by law remains within the ambit of that independent Toshao Council. I call upon the Government to fulfil its commitment to the Indigenous peoples and the Indigenous Council. Fund them adequately so that they can fulfil their mandate; provide them with genuine support and stop the interference at the level of the NTC Executive. The Amerindian Act clearly records the role and authority of the NTC and they should not be allowed to be eroded. They should allow the NTC to function. Give them the budgetary sum of the \$63 million requested, which was submitted for consideration by the Minister. Why cut the NTC’s budget to a mere \$16 million? It has a tall

order of empowering, training, developing strategic plans for titled villages, untitled communities, satellites and Amerindian settlements across the vast hinterland areas.

In the same vein, I am appalled by the performance of the Ministry because one of the critical documents that should feed into the preparation and planning for the 2017 Budget to cater for Amerindians is the document that is derived from the Conference, that is, the NTC's Report. I am distressed because the NTC's Report has not yet been submitted to the Cabinet and to the NTC's Executive which is awaiting the outcome of that Report. I would like the Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs to tell us what yardstick, what feedback and how he arrived at making submissions on behalf of the villages across this hinterland when the Report that consolidates a consultative process of speaking and getting feedback from the entire leadership of Indigenous peoples is not yet with him. This is distressing.

In the same vein, again, I wish to record that the 2017 Budget also cut the submission or the proposed budgetary submission of the Indigenous Peoples' Commission (IPC). That Commission, too, has a mandate that is wide, vast and challenging. If the IPC is to conduct and to perform well, then it, too, needs to be funded adequately. If you read the IPC's Report that was presented to this Parliament... In fact, I do not recall anything being presented for 2015, but the earlier ones for 2013 and 2014 have all alluded to the fact that the IPC was starved of funds to complete and to adequately deal with the issues that come before it and to have outreaches that really is meaningful so that it will be able to represent the Indigenous peoples.

The Indigenous population should be brought up to date on the status of the projects executed by the premier Ministry, that is, the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs. Significant financial resources under the Guyana Norway Agreement are available. My information and that of my previous knowledge in that Ministry is that the Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) Project has, at its disposal, US\$10.755 million. Eighteen months has passed and this has not yet been used in a meaningful way. I say that because, after 18 months in Office, the only certificates of title, not grants of land, handed out in August of this year were those that were nearing completion prior to May, 2015. These were Yakarinta, Rupanau, Taruka, Tusaneng, Karisparu, Baramita, Chinowieng, Kato and Batavia. These titles and the work associated in the production of these titles were finished prior to May or June, 2015. We have waited almost a year before it was provided to the people. These are not new lands. This was just demarcation of the existing titles.

In 18 months, could the Minister say what is the number of new lands that were granted to the Indigenous peoples between June, 2015 to November, 2016? It is zero. The Minister of Finance should take note of this. There is sitting in the coffers of our Treasury, Guyana's Treasury and managed by the now Government, moneys that should be used to increase the asset base of Indigenous peoples' rights to land and ownership to lands.

The Indigenous population should be told why no new grant for land was prepared. The Indigenous population deserve an explanation. The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs sought an extension of this Project. Is it that the Hon. Member wants to tinker with the process? Posted on the Hon. Minister's office wall is his 10-point plan which includes the setting up of an Amerindian lands commission. Setting up such a commission is illegal and contrary to the Amerindian Act of 2006 which, therein, has a simple yet inclusive consultative process for grant of land to Indigenous peoples. I urge the Minister to provide strong leadership on behalf of the Indigenous peoples and stop tinkering with legal processes that can put at risk the status and rights of Indigenous peoples first.

The Amerindian Development Fund (ADF): From previous knowledge, in the first phase of this Fund, US\$1.883 million was available. In the second phase, which comes under the execution of the new Government, US\$6.25 million is available. We speak about creating employment; we speak about generating economic activities; we speak about food security and here is it, after 18 months, only a minor sum has actually been utilised. Why are we not accelerating the use of this Fund to assist the Indigenous communities in boosting their village economy? Something is wrong. Are we not concerned that things need to be done in these villages? Are we not concerned that we should be pushing even harder and putting more efforts to engineer the development and the good life which we preach about for the 10% of the segment of this population who remains in a position that is yet vulnerable? We have always recognised that. There is never too much that we can do for them because there is much to be done.

I now move to another area, a new area. The Budget records:

“With substantial oil resources in the region - and given the geopolitical challenges faced by our neighbours, Guyana, with the right amount of investment and technical expertise,

can become a regional oil and gas service hub. This would create a substantial number of skilled and semi-skilled employment opportunities for our people.”

My question to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs is: what are the plans with respect to ensuring Indigenous youths’ participation in this new oil and gas sector? The Budget offers \$650 million to build capacity in various fields and disciplines, scholarships, *et cetera*. I request of the Ministers to enlighten this House and to enlighten the Indigenous youths on what the approaches agreed on by their Government are to secure the full participation of the talented, educated and intelligent young Amerindians in this sector.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: I now turn to the Budget as it relates to other aspects of development. The Budget speech pledged:

“...we intend to kick start our development agenda by investing heavily in critical infrastructure, power, transportation, and logistics, among other areas.”

This is laudable but where, in this plan, do the Amerindian villages feature? Disclose to this nation what percentage of the infrastructure budget is allocated for the development of infrastructure in Amerindian villages. Tell us, of the \$13 billion allocated for hinterland areas or regions, how much is actually directed to the Amerindian villages? I perused the Estimates of Expenditure and I found that most of this money basically goes to the township. In the township, there are Indigenous peoples. But our concerns should also be for the 10% of Indigenous peoples who live in their communities. Do not try to mislead the House by announcing a huge \$13 billion budget for the hinterland and then associate it with Amerindian communities because the majority of that Fund does not trickle down to the Indigenous villages. I will give you an example why I would wish to speak on this. Road maintenance in the North Pakaraimas: since May, 2015 to date, the new Government no longer awards contracts to Village Councils to do maintenance work and that is loss of employment and loss of income.

11.01 a.m.

For 18 months, they have not been awarded a single road maintenance project. In fact, the trails in the entire sub-region of the North Pakaraimas are in a deplorable state, with the Paramakatoi

to Kato section at its worst. I call on the Government to address and upgrade the maintenance across the hinterland regions in 2017. If we are serious of bridging the gap between the Coastland and the Hinterland, then we must put the resources to help us, as a Government, to minimise that gap.

With respect to consultation and recognising Indigenous rights, the premier Ministry has denied recognition to the Four Miles Amerindian village, refusing to allow village election and encouraging serious infringement of the land rights and other rights of those villagers. And today, we have a titled village in the midst of the Port Kaituma Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) because the Minister failed to probably listen to his advisors or to listen to the facts. I do hope it will not occur in any other region. I know that, in Region 7, Dog Point, including Agatash, also form part of the township of Bartica. Nothing is wrong with that but I would like the Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs to put it in his priority list to ensure that their land rights are protected and guaranteed, whether they fall any place in a township.

This also goes for other areas. For example, the Mahdia Township is soon to come on stream and I do hope that a mistake will not be made and they will not turn their eyes away to recognise that Campbelltown, including the others, is not part of state land but is owned privately by the Amerindians. I only raised this because ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you must wrap up now.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will quickly, in two minutes, in the wrapping up...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you must conclude now.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Okay, Mr. Speaker.

I call on the Minister to represent the young people under the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) Project. Today, as I speak, Chenapau and Karisparu have not received a single payment for their participation in that Project.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please resume your seat.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Speaker, I resume my seat by saying, I ask that this Budget be recalled, revised and reconsidered, and that it comes back with substantive support for Indigenous development. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have, in our midst, four former Members of Parliament - Mr. James Bond, Mr. Christopher Jones, Ms. Vanessa Kissoon and Mr. Trevor Williams. We welcome them and are happy that they could spend some time with us today.

Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs [Mr. Allicock]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to join my Colleagues in supporting this wonderful Budget for a green economy.

The presentation of three Budgets in just over one and a half years is something any Government would be proud of. It is an indicator of a Government on the move, vigorously pursuing the interests of the citizenry. In this regard, congratulations to the Hon. Minister of Finance and team are in order.

I would love to engage the Hon. Member, Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai, but it would be wasting time. I would like to move on by educating her (them); just sit and listen to what this Government...

Budget 2017, among other things, gives life to the vision of our President with respect to the concept of one nation. It is the first Budget, in a very long time, which speaks to such profound terms in the realisation of the connecting of Guyana's Hinterland to its Coastland. The plan here is to meet out to our people. We have been segregated for too long by the former Government. It has not made the effort to bring us together. The many planned interventions in the areas of infrastructural development, food security, renewable energy, sustainable ecotourism development, security, communication, education, and healthcare delivery, among others, and the billions of dollars budgeted for the accomplishment of these planned interventions, tell the story of the importance of our Hinterland and Indigenous communities and peoples to the process of national development.

Building a Diversified Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese is an appropriate theme for our 2017 Budget. The several clean, renewable energy projects, such as

the proposed Solar Farm in Mabaruma, set the tone for our National Energy Programme for the future. The Minister of Finance, in his Budget speech, outlined the billions of dollars in savings which will be realised from changing of our street lights from energy inefficient bulbs to energy efficient light emitting diodes (LED) lights. The savings from the consumption of the heavy diesel fuel to power these existing lights can now be channelled to other development projects. The projected energy generation from the Mabaruma Solar Farm will see the new benefits from additional 17 hours electricity per day. The \$264 million 400 watts Solar Farm is indeed an exciting development. Former Members of Parliament from Region 1, who advocated for additional hours of electricity per day to Mabaruma and the residents of the town, must now be very happy.

The Guyanese citizens understand that the People's Progressive Party (PPP) will oppose the Budget. That is because the Guyanese citizens understand that the PPP is in Opposition and not in Government, although they want to operate as though they are in Government, a fact that seems to escape the attention of the Hon. Members on the other side of the aisle. This is, perhaps, why they continue to repeat their falsities for as long as it takes to believe them, as in the case of the repeated untruth of the Community Support Officers (CSOs) being fired. This was brought to this House before, where we showed where the Hon. Members on the other side, who were of that Ministry at the time, had this document from Cabinet that gave that period of operation until March. When they realised that they had lost the Elections, they cancelled a cheque which was to be paid to the youths, leaving them hanging, not knowing what to do, leaving them red and dread. They were trained as young politicians and not as developers or technical people. So when that was stopped, they realised that they could not do anything else but cry. The records show differently as we have proven the PPP's claim as absolutely false, over and over again.

Undertaking the first phase of the Linden to Lethem road complemented by a bridge across the Essequibo River, at Kurupukari, demonstrates the will of a Government's intent upon realisation of the type of development geared to lift the quality of life of all Guyanese and capitalise upon the opportunities of our continental geographical space. After 23 long years of waiting, the residents of Port Kaituma, in Region 1, must be breathing a sigh of relief because Budget 2017 will finally address their road.

Hinterland infrastructure is clearly important to our Government. Issano, Karau, Buck Hall, Karasabai, Monkey Mountain, Aishalton, and Chinowieng in Regions 7, 8 and 9 will all benefit from major road improvements. Rehabilitation of 12 hinterland airstrips, several hinterland wharves and ocean-going vessels are interventions which are all geared to lift the quality of life for all hinterland and Indigenous peoples. These measures are supportive of the countless other initiatives provided for in this very impressive Budget in the areas of food and water security, education and healthcare delivery, and youth development.

Our hinterland communities will benefit from some of the \$2.5 billion allocated to the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Programme. This is part of an integrated network of training interventions targeting our youth, and it will complement the other programmes such as the Youth Entrepreneur Skills Training Programme, the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development Programme, the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) platforms and our HEYS Programme.

11.16 a.m.

We have had 18 months. The 23 years cannot compare with the progress we have made so far. The Practical Instruction Centres (PICs) in Mabaruma, Bartica, Lethem and Mahdia will be re-established. The Bina Hill Institute of Learning will receive support to the tune of \$111 million, even as our hinterland school children benefit from \$90 million under the School Uniform Support Programme. There is also the expansion of the Hinterland Scholarship Programme in 2017. Our young people are guaranteed opportunities to adequately prepare themselves for the world of opportunities which are coming their way.

We heard about the oil that is coming. We are not ready yet to take up jobs on the oil rig but we are preparing for the indirect benefits. This is what we have to capitalise on. Our President speaks of an educated nation. These planned interventions take into account the training needs of our young people and the human resource requirements of our investors as well as the ambitions of our young potential entrepreneurs.

Open access to information in the hinterland will also be boosted. Guyana will soon boast of four additional hinterland community radio stations. These, apart from providing employment opportunities and support to the existing Radio Paiwomak, Radio Lethem and Radio Mabaruma,

will lead to the objectives of providing information opportunities for the preservation and promotion of Indigenous cultures and languages, and providing opportunities for the promotion of local talents and products. This will allow us to have relations with the coastal people. We are going to open up that opportunity so that our young people will be able to have the opportunity to make their own decisions by following what is happening. We have been able to add appropriate technology.

As a Ministry, we have our work cut out for us. Ours is the responsibility for the administration of the Amerindian Act. Ours is the responsibility for the welfare and wellbeing of the Indigenous peoples of Guyana. In furtherance of the work we are doing and must continue to do, we must ensure that the best interest of our Indigenous peoples guides us and that their villages and communities receive the goods and services to which they are entitled in a timely and qualitative manner. It is with this in mind that the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs will continue its pursuit of the Amerindian Land Titling Project and the funding of developmental projects in all our villages and communities. I am pleased to report that we have managed to secure a two-year extension to the Amerindian Land Titling Project to allow for completion of the work which we must do.

Further, we will commence the construction of the dormitory for tertiary students at Liliendaal. We believe that this measure will ensure the increased number of Indigenous youths who will pursue higher education. We understand the challenges of finding lodging in the city or on the coastland and the financial challenges, as well, which confront our Indigenous youths in the pursuit of higher education. The new dormitory will address these challenges and make possible, for many Indigenous youths, the attainment of tertiary qualification.

We intend to address the quality of facilities available to our Indigenous Guyanese citizens who must travel to the city and temporarily reside at the Amerindian Hostel on Princess Street, which has been left in a deplorable state. These brothers and sisters are away from their homes for reasons related to employment and sickness, among others. This Budget provides for the improvement of the dining hall as the first among several interventions planned for the future. The long-term projections with respect to the Amerindian Hostel are intended to make it a home away from home.

I know only too well that the Opposition has suggested and will continue to suggest, to whomever will listen, that this Budget does not have, as Hon. Ms. Yvonne Pearson and Hon. Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai suggested, economic activity for Indigenous peoples. I understand that position is rooted in the inability of the Hon. Members to comprehend all of what is contained in the Budget and their party's preference for handouts to be given as a form of control over Indigenous peoples. This Coalition Government promises to move away from the inherited practice of our predecessors to seek to control people by first starving them of opportunities and then offering them handouts as a form of induced servitude. We believe, instead, in the principles of self-determination of our Indigenous peoples. This is why the Ministry of Public Infrastructure will build roads, bridges, airstrips and wharves to stimulate and foster economic activity. This is why our young people, who have been trained in specific skill areas, will be motivated to create their own opportunities, making full use of the infrastructure to make simple their operations. They are there to become whatever they want to. We will give them that opportunity. Infrastructure development brings jobs with it. It leaves, in its wake, enormous opportunities both for the establishment and the expansion of businesses.

The Ministry is working in partnership with several organisations, such as Conservation International, Remote Area Medical, Iwokrama and the United Nations Development Programme, among others, at the moment. Our shared mission is to lift the capacity of our Indigenous population in every conceivable area. We are working to bring community development projects to boost food security, enhance healthcare delivery and expand sustainable economic ventures in ecotourism and agriculture, among several areas. The Government cannot do this alone. We are all in this together and that is why the way forward is partnership. The way forward is to understand Guyana, understand the need for each and every one so that we could be a happy people. Our Indigenous peoples have expressed a preference for such partnerships and outcomes as against handouts. All of the outcomes of the partnership engagement will create jobs. All of them will lift the quality of life of the hinterland and Indigenous peoples of Guyana, with minimal reference to the tax dollars and burden on the national Budget.

The claim of the Opposition regarding no provision for the 10-point plan, as adumbrated by the President, is lame at best. The plan was presented to the national assembly of Indigenous peoples, the National Toshao Council. There it was considered and, in principle, approved,

along with some recommendations being submitted. Thus far, the Hinterland Employment and Youth Services Programme has come into being and draft terms of reference for the Lands Commission are being discussed. Any person who has the capacity to read and comprehend will tell you that the objectives of the Hinterland Education Support Programme are consistently being achieved. This Budget directly addresses the projected outcome of the Hinterland Infrastructure Extension Programme.

The hundreds of millions of dollars allocated in the Budget tells the story which begs to be read by the Hon. Members on the other side. The Budget also frontally addresses the Hinterland Energy Development Programme of the Government of Guyana. One only has to look at the proposed solar farm for Mabaruma, among the other provisions and tax concessions in this regard. Additionally, the Budget lays the foundation for all of the other five points of the 10-point plan to come alive. Rome was not built in a day. Guyana, unlike Rome, has to be remodelled, cleaned up and then rebuilt. I believe that, given the circumstances, we are doing a remarkably good job of fulfilling our commitment to our citizens and lifting the quality of life in Guyana. This is what we are committed to. This is what we will not be distracted from accomplishing.

A careful examination of the 2017 Budget will reveal that great care was taken to ensure that duplication of expenditure by way of multiple undertakings of a similar nature by more than one Ministry or agency was, at all cost, avoided. No longer will citizens see two or more Ministries or State agencies spending their hard-earned tax dollars to do the same thing. One may recall that, as recent as October, 2014, the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) and the New Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) both recorded the same expenditure of the sum of \$111.2 million to the same thing. I refer to the *Kaieteur News* report of 9th June - I have a copy here – on the 2016 audit findings into the GMC.

11.31 a.m.

This is the era of accountability and transparency. The mistakes of the past have served and will continue to be, lessons for us which make us better stewards of the ship of state and the guardians of the rights and best interests of the people of Guyana. We must demonstrate maturity. We must walk away from the desire to behave as the Hon. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai

did yesterday in this House. We must never, again, allow any citizen to be assaulted at the urging of Members of the Executive, like Mr. John Adams.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I have asked Members to avoid personal references to other Members. [Interruption] I thank Hon. Members, but they must let the Speaker do his work.

Mr. Allicock: I withdraw the statement, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Please proceed.

Mr. Allicock: I, therefore, would like to urge that, for the future, we show that respect for one another, whether it is in or out of the National Assembly. As I listened to the Hon. Members on the other side, it is painting a very gloomy picture of what Guyana is. This is because there is a glaring show of ignorance of the hinterland in terms of... [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Allicock: Or lack of knowledge of the country that we have to manage.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the word you used should be withdrawn and another phrase should substitute it.

Mr. Allicock: Okay, withdrawn. I am saying that it goes to show that there is a great lack of knowledge of this country that we have to manage, to see a budget that is opening up the hinterland for development is not seen as something good. We prefer to stay on the narrow coast and keep this hatred for one another. I would like to ask that Members, on the other side, travel with me into the hinterland and travel with me to the mountains and look down unto the greenness, look at the rivers, the valleys, the forest, the savannah lands and the people, to see the responsibilities that we all have to bring this country to decency, bring this country to a country that we would not even have to talk about taxes being too high. We are not even one million people, why are we...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for more than 25 minutes.

Mr. Allicock: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask that we be honest. What you have done is left our people in the hinterland divided. We are now in the process of uniting

them and this is where radios stations, internet connections and all of these connections would be installed to help bring unity so that we can win the fight.

I would like to also say that, with this budget, we have a road to that good life. The green light is on, let us move forward to build this country for each and every one. I ask that you support this wonderful budget of 2017.

I thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, I stand with mixed feelings and I must say that I agree with your comments at the beginning of the Sitting, but I would like to register my strong protest about how my Indigenous brother, Mr. Alister Charlie, was insulted and treated yesterday.

[**Mr. Bulkam:** What about John Adams?] Shut up.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the term “shut up” is not acceptable.

Mr. Neendkumar: Okay, I withdraw that statement.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you were commenting on something the Speaker said.

Mr. Neendkumar: I said that I agree with what you said this morning.

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, Colleagues and Hon. Members of this House, I rise to support my Colleagues who spoke before me in this debate, by registering my strongest objection to the acceptance and implementation of the 2017 Budget.

Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members of this House, what a theme. We have been waiting for the good life to begin since after the presentation of the 2015 Budget. Let me state from the outset that the level of deception and hypocrisy implicit in this title, like the many inhibitive aspects contained in the substantive document, suggest that the Hon. Minister of Finance and his A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government, believe that the Guyanese people are lacking in the understanding of the basic English Language, and that they will remain docile in reacting to the inherent pains and sufferings that this budget's policies will realise.

I would rather refer to the 2017 Budget as the ‘Foundation of governance by taxes’. The contents and intent of this instrument of the Government’s plan is lacking and fall short of the mark, in so many areas, that even the most rational-minded citizen will see the many deficient aspects, the overall intent as a tool of burden and enslavement, as well as a tax and waste budget.

In my 40 years of public service, I have seen many budgets presented. Those presented under the dictatorial People’s National Congress (PNC) regimes, others of construct presented by successive People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Governments, and the two previous by the current Administration, which cannot seem to get off the mark in delivering the promised good life. I, therefore, must express my utmost disappointment in Budget 2017.

This is a budget that has attracted the most unflattering descriptions by each and every segment and sector of our society; a budget that will sink most of our people into recession and deep depression; a budget for the *fat cats* - the Ministers, their friends and families who now occupy prestigious positions with hyper-super salaries and outlandish and outrageous employment benefits.

It is relevant that, in clarifying the term *fat cats*, I make reference to the fact that the Hon. Moses Nagamootoo, while in Opposition, called us *fat cats* while we were in Government. He has since been in power for 18 months and his support for the budgets presented within this period has more than doubled, from \$267 million in 2015 to \$587 million today, an actual increase of approximately 120%. Notably, our citizenry has not benefited, by any significant measure, from these expenditures.

Under the Hon. Prime Minister, the Government Information Agency (GINA) is now being fattened with \$45 million dollars more for 2017 for operating expenses. This is a hefty 27% increase for wasteful propaganda, having regard to the fact that it was this same Government that previously awarded a meagre \$1 to the same agency under the PPP/C Administration. Accordingly, it is a burden on the backs of the people who now have to shoulder more taxes.

In the Prime Minister’s Secretariat, the Hon. Member will have a 17% increase in staff. I emphasise, an increase that is not needed. This office is projected to receive an average of \$3 million per year with generous employment benefits of housing, utilities, security and travelling. It is my understanding that an extra \$40 million, which is a 100% increase under line item 6284

of the Office of the Prime Minister's budget, will be used to facilitate these extraordinary expenses.

Not to be out-done, the Prime Minister has acquired a new Prado Land Cruiser that he is so in love with. Is it true that the Beharry Automotive Ltd. was asked to provide another similar one for when the PM has to travel out of town? Wow, talk about fattening the fat cows. This is why I described this 2017 Budget, earlier, as a tax and waste budget. This wasteful extravagance is pervasive in this AFC/APNU Administration's policy and the same is duplicated throughout the 2017 Estimates.

In the areas of culture, youth and sport, this wasteful expenditure on the *fat cats* is also a hallmark of this Regime. The youths are our future, so, why is it that the budgetary allocations to the Department of Culture, Youth and Sport, is non-reflective of the importance of the youths, as embedded in the National Youth Policy? The PPP Government had established a Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport in 1998 with the proud aim of highlighting and building a strong, modern and culturally rich Guyana. The Ministry sought to nurture youth as a powerful entity that contributes to affecting economic change, and to channel their energies and ideas into enhancing the country's social and cultural well-being. The Ministry sought to ensure that youths had equal access to culture and sporting experiences, which could catered for their all-round development, equipping them with the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to contribute to national development. But what has this coalition Government done? This Government has, inappropriately, reduced the importance of the Ministry to a third tier Department within another Ministry, with less significance and non-beneficial programmes for youths in sports development. This is how this Government shows care for our youths; this is how this Government supports sports or care about the people's cultural heritage. One must therefore ask how adequate the budgetary allocation is to the governmental authority that is primarily responsible for youth and our youth capacity development.

The projections in the 2017 Budget for Culture are 288% greater than the 2015 Budget. In 2016, it was \$733 million. We already have an idea of how much of this amount was misdirected in the guise of a jubilee celebration. In addition, over \$700 million may have been extorted, from persons and companies for the D'Urban Park Development Project. It is a travesty. This is a conservative estimate given the fact that the Government has not been forthcoming in providing

the true figures in a transparent manner. The 2017 Budget has been heavily and correctly criticised as lacking anything for youth and sport development. In 2014, the PPP/C Government spent over \$500 million dollars on youth programmes and there were over 150 persons employed in administering these programmes.

11.46 a.m.

By 2016, however, this amount was cut by half, and only 33 persons were employed. In this budget, two additional persons will be hired. One Administrative with an emolument of \$225,000 monthly, and another estimated at over \$450,000 monthly. A very *fat cat* indeed.

Under Sport, in 2014, there were 13 contracted persons working in this area, with a total budgetary allocation of \$13.7 million, averaging monthly of about \$90,000. By 2016, the APNU/AFC Government had completed their cleansing programme, but still had 13 contracted employees. However, the allocation, last year, was \$30.4 million, more than 250% over 2014. The salaries in this case averaged approximately \$200,000 per month. According to the budget for this year, 10 more staff will be hired, but they will get minimum wages. Clearly, the 12 will be working as the *beasts of burden* for these *fat cats* because they will be getting a minor salary.

The expunging of sports and arts development from the previous budget and its absence in this budget must be condemned in the strongest manner. It is an allocation that must always be accessible. Under the PPP/C Government, this programme assisted in precipitating initiatives in the areas of sports and arts, stimulating thoughts and actions. This fund facilitated the construction, rehabilitation and restoration of venues and facilities for sports and recreation. This fund also assisted in driving action among groups, communities and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as the programmes were born out of community needs, community consultations and stakeholders' ownership. Under the PPP/C Government, this fund reached every corner of our country and works in progress were ongoing. This was because the resources were budgeted for to see them reach their fullest potential. What a shame to see many of these facilities, in less than two years, now abandoned and becoming a wanton waste because of this Regime's neglect and failure.

The grounds at the Houston and Farm communities are examples, while the Visual Arts Competition has had to be postponed because of the lack of funds. Instead, we waste 10s of

millions of dollars on Carifesta Avenue, while reducing the carrying capacity of this once main access carriageway into the city. What a shame.

In examining the National Youth Policy, which ought to have been operationalised through the provision of vital resources in the budget, I wish to highlight some of the areas of concern for the attention of this honourable House. I refer to, among others, the need for clear and appropriate mechanisms to address the following:

- Sub-optimal conditions of living, including that of a caregiver for every youth nurturing facility;
- The lack of a comprehensive approach to the overall education and capacity development for every young person, dealing with school drop-outs in bringing them up to a level;
- The need for and the responsibility by Government to provide job seeking guidance at the appropriate age, and teaming with recruitment agencies towards facilitation;
- The need for targeting overall health and lifestyle issues, among cases of teenage pregnancies;
- Involvement in society and inculcation of core values and reintegration of juveniles into the society – not to put criminals into the society; and
- Overall care and protection, including children born out of wedlock.

While the foregoing is basic and can be expansive, the responsible ministry must examine the expenditure and compare the 2015 and 2016 budgetary performances, line by line, in an attempt to measure the impact of the investments and utilise this position to strengthen the proposals for the 2017 period. Importantly, this should have also included the cost for the maintenance of the key facilities and the complimentary programmes for which they could be used to augment national development programmes. For example, every sporting activity should be organised to take advantage of the maximum utilisation of the many major facilities set up by the PPP/C Government. In this context, these are not limited to, but would include facilities like the Aquatic Centre, the Synthetic Track at Leonora and now the pavilion at Albion. It is a shame for us to know that they cannot use the Synthetic Track. The National School Athletics programme was

held at the place where they love, that Mr. Jagdeo built, the Guyana National Stadium, Providence and they neglect giving the students an opportunity to run on the track. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are to refer to Members by their proper names. Do you wish to do that again?

Mr. Neendkumar: The Hon. Jagdeo. He has done enough. The results of this investment and the utilisation of the emanating programmes for all categories of sports must be evaluated with a view of informing adjustments, where necessary, to incentivise Guyana's performance at the local, regional and international levels.

There should be structured funding to support existing sporting activities, as well as incentives to catalyse new and emerging disciplines, together with complimentary technical support and safety mechanisms.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 15 minutes.

Mr. Neendkumar: Mr. Speaker, I will get there. The importance of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Programme (STEM), cannot be over emphasised. Capacity building in STEM is the future to many modern societies.

I would like to put one issue in perspective. The PPP/C had expanded millions of dollars towards the training of youths from all administrative regions through its Youth Entrepreneurial Skill Training (YEST) Programme for early school leavers, dropouts and those from depressed communities. This was as a second chance for them to learn a skill and to be marketable for employment.

Further, the President's Youth Award Republic of Guyana (PYARG) was another programme in which the PPP/C made large investments towards the development of youths at the various stages. This Government is gradually phasing out the YEST Programme and is paying little interest in the PYARG. This Government has taken away bread and butter from 1972 Amerindian youths by closing the Youth Entrepreneurial and Apprenticeship Programme. What a shame.

The enhancement and maintenance of sport facilities and grounds was a regular feature under the PPP/C Administration. [Ms. Ally: Did you carry back the... *[Inaudible]*.] I will tell you how I took it back and put it.

In the good life Budget 2016, this nation experienced what happened and the suffering it brought. Rising unemployment among youths; increase in crimes; the decline in the forestry sector; the decline in the rice and sugar production; rise in the cost of living; scaling down of the manufacturing sector; decline in the livestock sector; increase taxes; wage freeze in the sugar industry; meagre wage increases in the public sector and the reduction in the growth of the economy.

With a 2017 Budget in its present nature, next year would certainly be worse than this year. The budget lacks fiscal policies to stimulate the economy. Thus, it is evident that the economic development of this country was not pondered upon. The significant increases in taxes are meant to sustain a balance because of a poor and a visionless budgetary plan and presentation.

In a VAT regime system for the collection of revenues, collections are generally less in primary products and heavy agricultural based economies. It necessitates incentives to boost the manufacturing and value-added conversion of production. With these incentives removed and even the key agricultural sectors being rendered impotent, the mechanism of increased overall taxes will and cannot be sustained in the long term.

The 2017 Budget, therefore, demonstrates that the VAT regime is not thoroughly understood, since research has shown that VAT thrives within a framework that is different from the policies of this Government.

However, with all these flaws, the people of this country are commenting that they do not want this budget. I would like to assure this House and the Guyanese people, to be assured that the People's Progressive Party (PPP) will gain a resounding and inevitable victory at the next General and Regional Elections and would ensure a good life for the Guyanese people.

Thank you. *[Applause]*

Minister within the Ministry of Education [Ms. Henry]: It is with pride and humility that I stand this morning as a Member of this Government to voice my ardent support to Budget 2017.

To get started, let me thank the Minister of Finance and his team for working diligently to present a well-thought out fiscal plan, for this country, for the year 2017 under the theme: *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese.*

My presentation will focus on the achievements in 2016, as well as the measures and plans contained in this budget, intended to impact, positively, on the areas of culture, youth and sport. Before I touch on my specific areas, there are a few generalised statements which I would like to make about the 2017 Budget.

The first point being that this budget, like the two previous ones laid by this Government, continues on the path of investing in the development of our country's human resources. As one is aware, this Administration has been promoting education as the primary agenda of our country, given that education is one of the fundamental pillars of economic development.

We on this side of the House are convinced that investing in knowledge, information and human capital development is a prerequisite for prosperity, well-being and the good life of our citizens. Therefore, it is not by accident or guess work that education, health, social programmes and infrastructure have all received substantial allocations in this 2017 Budget.

The second point that I would like to raise is that of responsible economic leadership by this Government. This, of course, includes the pro-activeness in reforming and strengthening the tax system. Listening to the debate for the past three days have been quite an experience and it is really interesting to see how time past and people's views can change, and depending on where one is sitting in this House, one could even begin to suffer from selective amnesia.

Consequently, I feel compelled to remind this honourable House that, in 2007, when the Government of the day introduced some tax reforms, we were told then by the Government that the Value Added Tax and the Excise Tax introduced in 2007 would have been revenue neutral, but, as we know, our experiences would have thought us otherwise.

Additionally, there were many calls on the Government to rescind the tax measures in 2007. May I remind the Hon. Member, who regaled this House last evening of the many dissenting views on the tax reform that is being implemented in the 2017 Budget, that I have done my research and came up with an even longer lists of non-supportive opinions that were expressed in 2007. In

particular, I wish to bring to this House's attention two women's interest organisations, namely the Red Thread and Grassroots Women Across Race, when they had called on the PPP/C Government to withdraw these tax measures. The Government then, now sitting in the Opposition benches, opined to this country that these women missed the big picture of the macro-economic fundamentals and that the women ignored the benefits which taxation brings to this country as a whole, such as the availability of accessible free education, health care, better roads and other infrastructure.

12.01 p.m.

My question is who is missing the big picture now? Tax measures cannot only be good when you are the one introducing it. What is good for the goose should be good for the gander. The people of this country have seen it full circle and now have to ask themselves, whether they have to believe what they heard in 2007 or what they are hearing now from the PPP. These are two different narratives my Friend.

Let me say to the people of this country, especially the young people and many of them are here in the Chamber, that they should never allow themselves to be minimised by anyone who tells them what they think they want to hear. You deserve better than that. Responsible governments, the world over, have to make decisions that are prudent, sensible and far-sighted, not only for its people, but also for itself. As a Government, we have to be given the space, fiscal and otherwise, to implement our programmes.

This budget is aimed at putting in place a growth oriented tax system that will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our regulatory framework. We inherited a broken system and that is no secret, so we have to fix this country. That my Friend, requires practical measures and it is the collective responsibility of all Guyanese.

Even after listening to a kicking, screaming and bawling Opposition for the past three days, it is still my fervent hope that the Members on the other side will step up, take their own advice given in 2007, see the big picture and play their individual and collective parts in ensuring the development and well-being to the people of this country.

On that note, I will now turn my attention to Youth especially as this budget comes closely on the heels of the National Youth Policy, a document which has been passed in this House and which will create the strategic framework needed for the development of youths in Guyana. I would like to place on record that we have inherited a youth population that did not have the benefit of exposure to leadership training, due to no fault of their own. This Government, recognising the need to fill a gap in its first year, initiated a training programme which trained more than 400 young people in leadership skills development. To leverage this accomplishment, Budget 2017 makes provision in the allocation of resources to continue the development of the leadership skills of our young people.

I wish to add that, through this mechanism, our youth leaders are now being given opportunities to develop their skills, organise themselves and become more involved in youth development at the community and other levels. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

I understand you may not be able to comprehend all, but at least you can listen. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

During the 2016 Budget, earlier this year, I had indicated that we were addressing the issue of literacy and numeracy. I am pleased to announce to the people of Guyana that the pilot literacy and numeracy work ready programme has commenced. Since the commencement of this training programme, 33 young people from 13 communities have successfully completed training as instructors. Next year, these instructors will begin the process of teaching young people in their communities.

Additionally, many young people in our society have not been able to pass five subjects at the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC), including Mathematics and English Language. What this says is that many of them are not equipped to obtain apt jobs or to go on to acquire higher education. Accordingly, the Government began a pilot night school project in three communities namely, Sophia, North Ruimveldt and Soesdyke. The night school initiative is expected to expand to other communities, such as Port Kaituma in 2017. This is a clear example of how this Government is tailoring and modifying programmes to meet the needs of specific demographics.

This 2017 Budget will create employment for a number of young people, as we have heard in several of the presentations over the past three days. The Government is well aware of the fact that our young people have to be trained to develop to manage small businesses. With this in mind, last year we began training young people in financial literacy and business management. This training will continue in 2017 to supplement the cohorts of 51 persons trained in 2016 in agro-processing. Government sees training and evolvement as critical factors for growth, and for that reason, the sum of \$60 million was invested in the Madewini and Kuru Kuru Training Centres. In 2017, we will continue our investment with two additional skills training centres at Coldingen and Den Amstel. As I pointed out in the 2016 Budget, this is not *a cut and dry situation*. A comprehensive review of all training entities that fall within the Department of Culture, Youth and Sport was done to reorganise the various facilities to reach expected outcomes, eliminate duplications, inefficiencies and of course, to increase institutional capacity.

As we speak, the Government is relooking at the Youth Choice Initiative structures that were done under the PPP/C Government. The intention is to transform them, where salvageable, into learning centres and youth friendly spaces that young people can access and utilise. To further this Government vision, we will continue to strengthen all of our youth programmes by developing and modifying them to meet the changing needs and demands of our young people.

In 2017, the Department will move to provide transformative experiences for our young people, which would allow for life and vocational skills development. To this end, all vocational skilsl training programmes will be upgraded to meet the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) level 1 requirements. Instructors were already trained in this regard and the labs and equipment are currently being upgraded.

After listening to the young Hon. Member, making his debut presentation yesterday, and the Member on the floor this morning, I would like to highlight that a major cutting edge initiative to support our best and brightest young people with creative ideas, will commence in 2017 under the Youth Innovation Fund. This is not a mere \$50 million, as we heard flippantly a few minutes ago. The focus is on high impact, low costs. I am not sure if you got the memorandum, but the tide has turned and Guyana is moving again. It is not by accident that the President of the United States of America singled out and recognised the contributions of a young Guyanese lady in her

homeland, as a best practice in youth entrepreneurship, in one of his final addresses at the Youth Conference in Peru. This, my Friend, is a true example of the audacity of hope.

Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I will turn my attention to Sport. I wish to point out that sport is highly regarded as a tool for human development. Sport is a great way to bring diverse communities together. The Ministry of Education, through the National Sports Commission, will move to strengthen sports related services guided by a policy to be adapted in 2017. Speaking of achievements, in 2016, the National Sports Commission developed its first electronic National Database for athletes. This too will aid the Department in its work because we know sports play an important role in nurturing national identity and pride. We will work assiduously to prepare our athletes and the 2020 Olympics should see Guyanese athletes, not just participating, but rather they will be given the requisite support and tools to compete. To this end, Budget 2017 makes provision for the support of our athletes to benefit from training and development exposure. There is also provision to improve the sporting infrastructure in Guyana.

Our Community Ground Enhancement Programme has gone to another level, where it is expected that up to \$10 billion will be provided to enhance and upgrade identified facilities in every region. Synthetic tracks will be laid in Regions 2, 4, 6, 7 and 10, for which \$210 million has been allocated. As we know, no sports plan will be complete without coaches. So, training and the accreditation of coaches will continue in 2017. The Government of Guyana will leverage bilateral with Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, Germany and other partners to provide training in athletics, rugby, football, swimming and other sporting disciplines that technical assistance and support is available for. It is expected that this approach will support the in and out of school youths, as well as grass root sports programmes.

Fiscal year 2017, would also see us developing and implementing a strategy for clean sports in Guyana. This strategy will include training and the accreditation of our anti-doping officers. It will also focus on educating over 1,500 young athletes in the areas of clean sport and anti-doping. The Government of Guyana, through the department, will continue to pursue, at a minimum, international standards at all of our sporting facilities. This will allow us to host regional and international sporting events.

Speaking of international events, I am pleased to say that, in June of this year, we were able to host the Inaugural Aliann Pompey International Athletic Meet, right here in Guyana. Additionally, we are in the process of crediting the Leonora Stadium by the Caribbean Football Union and we hosted the Jamaica National Team in October of this year. The Leonora facility will host the first ever West Demerara Fitness and Health Expo for women and girls in West Demerara, sometime in 2017. Also, during 2017, several of our sports facilities will be upgraded and equipped with the Wireless Fidelity (Wi-Fi) services where events will be streamed and aired *via* the internet.

If one travels along the Homestretch Avenue, one will see the transformation of the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall. No longer will it be used as a slaughter house for goats. This is the level of transformation that is taking place in all sectors.

Having looked at Youth and Sport, let us move on to Culture. It is important to place on record that, as a signatory, this Government stands committed to the obligations under the 2005 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) Convention on the promotion and protection of the diversity of cultural expressions. Indeed, I can think of no other country for which the core goals of this convention are more apt. Two days ago, I listened to a Hon. Member on the other side regaled this House with all sorts of inaccuracies, and even claimed that he was not getting credit for the work he had done in culture. I wish to say that I will give him the credit here today. Where do I begin? Since 2005, the infrastructure for competent and transparent governance in culture in Guyana has either eroded or deliberately ...

[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Ms. Teixeira, you are disturbing...

Opposition Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: I was just reminding the Hon. Member that sarcasm is the lowest form of wit and I am sure you would agree with me on that.

Mr. Speaker: I did not inquire. I just wanted you to know that you were interrupting the Speaker.

Ms. Teixeira: I recognise that.

Mr. Speaker: Please have a seat, Ms. Teixeira. Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: Could you recognise my Colleague, Ms. Amna Ally, who also interrupts, Sir? Thank you.

12.16 p.m.

Ms. Henry: Mr. Speaker, may I continue? I would like to say that the governance of culture in Guyana has either eroded or deliberately not modify to meet the new challenges in both expenditure and management of cultural mechanisms and institutions. Many felt as though they were excluded and culture was in the hands of two or so bureaucrats with little or no consultative procedures nor operational accountability. It is even felt that this resulted in Guyana not being able to submit an important periodic report that was due in 2013 to United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). This will be corrected and I am pleased to say that under this Government Guyana will submit the report that is due next year. We need to take these conventions seriously and we certainly cannot continue to fail the people in the arts and creative industries.

To further strengthen what we are doing in culture, in 2017 the Government will present a cultural policy in this House and we will commence the building of an institute of creative arts. We have no such building in this country at this time. The dance school, drama school, music school and Burrowes School of Art will all be collocated. This is what we are talking about when we speak of an institute of creative arts. This building and accrediting the programmes offered would put Guyana on a comparable level with other Caribbean countries such as Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad. It is the great Mahatma Gandhi who said “a nation culture resides in the heart and soul of its people.” It must excite us to note that the music school in 2017, in addition to its large choir and steel pan, will establish a 100-person national orchestra.

Let me also report to this House that in 2016, in an effort to upgrade the inventory of musical instruments at the National School of Music and to afford students access to high quality music education, the Government of Guyana, as a responsible Government, took a decision to purchase two Steinway pianos. This may look like a simple thing to many of us, but let me point out that prior to this acquisition of these two pianos we had to borrow concert pianos from Surinam for national and other events. Our children, who are musically inclined, had to travelled to Barbados

to sit the advance level music education. This, to my mind, is the epitome of callousness and begs to question where is the compassion when our talented musician such as the young Adasie Lumumba had to incur exorbitant expenditure travelling to other countries to sit her music exams. It was fortunate her father, the Hon. Member, could have afforded this. Many other talented young Guyanese could not afford to travel and so their dreams and their hope of a music career was never realised. I want to take this opportunity to say to the young people of this country that this Government believes in your dreams and aspiration and we will continue to provide you with the opportunities and the support to nurture your talents and develop your gifts so that you can do and you can excel.

In 2017 the Department of Culture will continue to accelerate of digitalisation of all museums and archives holdings, allowing interactive use of museums and archives while also allowing online access and research.

As I prepare to conclude my presentation, I wish to say that the projects programme and activities contained in the Budget 2017 are exciting and offer new opportunities to development and a new approach to governance. I have never been more hopeful. I am confident that we are defining the future of Guyana together and providing every Guyanese with an opportunity to play a part in realising it.

Mr. Speaker, before I take my seat permit to say as we transition from the height of celebrating the 50th Anniversary of our country's Independence to the next 50 years, I would to place on record that 2016 was indeed a special year with many defining moments. We celebrated and rallied together as One People, One Nation and One Destiny across this country. We also witnessed a spontaneous expression of pride in what it means to be Guyanese. As we plan for Guyana's next 50 years, there will be new challenges to overcome and fresh opportunities to seize.

On that note I wish to thank His Excellency President David Granger for the confidence that he has reposed in me, to my senior Minister for his astute leadership and guidance, to my colleagues, on both sides of House, my staff who worked tirelessly, to the Members of the National Commemorative Commission, sponsors, donors and the people of this country who put Guyana first. I thank you. Our 50th Anniversary celebration was bigger than anyone of us, in the

end, who is going to have to share the future. My question, therefore, is what kind of future do we want to create? I call on all of us in this august House and the people of this country to take the opportunity to create a future of shared responsibility and shared prosperity. The road ahead will not be without challenges and potential opportunities, but we are a resilient people and we can achieve our common vision of a cohesive society, a caring people and confident nation.

Budget 2017 is transformative and will not be withdrawn. I, therefore, have absolutely no difficulty as it gives me great pleasure in recommending this budget to this honourable House.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have gone beyond the time when we should have taken the suspension. One Member was on her feet at the time we reached 12 o' clock and I thought that the better course was to let that Member complete her presentation. That has now occurred and we will now take the suspension.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, before we do that, could I ask you to remind the persons in the gallery that they are not allowed to participate in the discussions here by any means, whether clapping, or approval or any other means.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for that. Hon. Members, we had this occurrence last year. It is not necessary for the Speaker to tell Members how they showed conduct themselves in this chamber. Members of the public are here as our guest, not as our fellow participants. Hon. Members know that. It cannot be that we each walk with our cheering sections. There is no provision for that here. I would ask Members to remember this admonition. It is an admonition from the Chair. This will not happen again.

Sitting suspended at 12.25 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.40 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before we recommence our debate, it is my distinct pleasure to let you know of the presence among us of some very distinguished Caribbean personages - the Rt. Hon. Sir Dennis Byron who is President of the Caribbean Court of Justice, Ms. Jacqueline Graham, Registrar of the Caribbean Court of Justice, Ms. Christine Sahadeo, Vice Chairman of

the Caribbean Court of Justice Trust Fund, Dr. Linton Lewis who is the Chairman of the Caribbean Court of Justice Trust Fund, Mr. Glenn Cheong, Executive Officer Caribbean Court of Justice Trust Fund and Mr. Oswald Barnes who is a Trustee of the Caribbean Court of Justice. It is all a pleasure to receive the President of the Caribbean Court of Justice and the Chairman of the Trust Fund the Rt. Hon. Sir Dennis Byron. It is our pleasure to say welcome.

Hon. Members, I have committed a grave error, especially since Mr. Dookoo is a friend of mine and we both live in Guyana. Mr. Ramesh Dookoo is a Member of the Caribbean Court of Justice Trust Fund. I might add that Mr. Dookoo, Mr. Barnes and Ms. Graham are all Guyanese. We welcome you. The party was here this morning to have conversations and discussions with the Hon. Attorney General and the other personages who would have been involved in the discussions. They have completed it and have expressed a desire to sit in at this afternoon session for at least a brief period that is allowed for one speaker. Thank you for being here and welcome.

Vice-President and Minister of Foreign Affairs [Mr. Greenidge]: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I start by joining you in welcoming the President and the members of the Board of Trustees and Sir Charles Michael Dennis Byron in particular.

1.45 p.m.

I would just like to say that when I realise that you were about to introduce this distinguished team to us, I heard colleagues across the benches waving at me in glee. I suspected that it had something to do with the fact that they were expecting that the presence of such a distinguished set of visitors would constrain me. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I am always eminently reasonable, so all that I would say would fall within that category. I welcome the visitors and start by saying to you, Mr. Speaker, that I share with the Hon. Members of this distinguished House my contribution to this national budget debate for the year 2017. In that regard, I would like to acknowledge the role and the contribution of the Minister of Finance Winston Jordan and his team in the preparation of the budget which includes a number of interesting and useful innovations.

By way of context, please permit me to say from the beginning that I am certain that our listeners this afternoon, and most of those who would have listened to the debate prior to this presentation, would be struck by the relentlessly repeated tales coming from across the other benches about

the alleged behaviour and misbehaviour of the Government in office. Nobody could have missed the charges of malfeasance, inefficiency, irrational decision making, burdensome fiscal imports and the likes. Criticism of budgets, as you are aware, Mr. Speaker, is par for the course, so we have to live with those. However, peculiar to Guyana, is what I called a preoccupation from the other side with, what you may regard, as national deconstruction.

It is not so much that uncomfortable things are said, but it is hard to imagine a budget debate elsewhere, in which the Opposition would focus so much attention on, for example, the issue of race and ethnicity. It is a topic which appears in so many statements that it is not necessary to single out the contribution of my colleagues on the other side, Mr. Odinga Lumumba or the Hon. Member Alister Charlie. As an example of the temerity which characterises the Opposition in the professed defence, for example, Indigenous people, I note that the same representatives, who were silent when a former President told an Indigenous person that that person was unlucky that President Jagdeo was not there to slap him for the things he dare to say, have now found their voices and are loud in defence of the Indigenous community. It is a chorus that is almost indecent in its insincerity.

It is the same party that in 2015 was appealing to the nation for a nationalist embrace. We are being fed of a diet of half-truths. For example, I heard this morning from one of our colleagues across the benches that there were no young people in the foreign services, astonishing. That is a taste of the way that we debate issues, which are important and serious. I want to say that the crocodile tears, which are being raised in relation to the Indigenous community, are just that. We have seen the crocodile in action and the tears fool no one. They do not achieve the necessary racial division and bitterness at this point in time. I have no doubt, also, that many years, while the Government had demitted office when economic growth was positive, there were complaints about the new Government, which they believed unfairly complained, that it only inherited economic problems. That is also very commonplace. What is not commonplace is for the Opposition to do so when for the last 23 years it had been bludgeoning the public with selected economic indicator.

I heard yesterday my colleague and good friend, Hon. Member Madam Gail Teixeira, bemoaning the fact that on this side no credit was given to the Government for the positive economic growth, on which they ended their term in office. Well, as you know, that is very strange because

they inherited a rate of economic growth of 6.7% which continued for seven years and never once give credit for that, taking all the credit. Anything good was the result of their work and anything bad was the result of the other side. That is some of the backgrounds that I would like to draw to your attention.

Apparently, the thesis for re-election is that economic growth only ever took place under the People's Progressive Party (PPP) and it has never taken place under anybody else. It is, of course, a complete fabrication. Frankly, I was moved to tears to hear the Hon. Member, again, Madam Gail Teixeira, complained about the unfairness of the Government's spokesmen in ignoring this position growth. You may not have met my grandmother, but my grandmother had a favourite aphorism which was *do suh nah lik suh*. That is the story I would like to draw to your attention. [Ms. Ally: My grandmother too.] It might have been the same one too.

In the distinguished Member's statement there was not any mention of the illegal expenditures of the PPP and the constitutional breaches that send the PPP Government before the courts in 2013 and 2014 or of the no confidence vote or the constitutional action that led President Ramotar to prorogue the House. There was no mention of the illegal actions of a Minister of Finance advised by what could only be described as maybe a rogue Attorney General with no regard for either constitutional precedence or the decision of the House. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I recalled you extolling the virtues of patience and reasonableness. I was tempted to interject, and for respect for the Standing Orders, but I did not because I believed that. You referred to someone in this House in a certain term which is not acceptable. I am sure you are not challenged to find other descriptions. Please withdraw that.

Mr. Greenidge: I would withdraw it unreservedly, Mr. Speaker, and say to Hon. Members that we had an Attorney General who advised the President not to sign into Bill and laws. Bills which this House had approved, some of them approved unanimously. They were never unconstitutional. There has been no mention of the public pronouncements and recorded statements of Members on the other side whose statements to a journalist, for example, bordered on one on general lawlessness.

What I am saying is that we find ourselves in a situation in which the discussion of the budget is couched and surrounded by a set of largely irrelevant issues and attempt to diverse attention from

the substance of the budget.

[**Mr. Nandlall:** Speak to the budget.]

We would

speak of the motion that almost took you to the Committee of Privileges, if you want to speak to something.

Having made those general comments, I would like to turn to the year 2016 as far as the foreign affairs policy is concerned. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had sought simultaneously to maintain a robust programme in defence of Guyana sovereignty and its territorial integrity and to promote Guyana's development agenda internationally. Hon. Members would not be surprised that one of the Ministry's first and most important preoccupations over the last 12 months has been our relations with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. It has been a year in which we have been actively engaged with the efforts of the Secretary General of the United Nations in his very personal endeavours to find a way further in our controversies with Venezuela. That way further was the title the Secretary General gave to the proposal he made for the resolution of the controversies. Guyana cooperated fully with the Secretary General and made every effort to bring his proposal to fruition. Unfortunately, Venezuela did not do likewise, and in the end, I dare say, frustrated the Secretary General's best efforts. The way further proposals envisage a conclusion at the end of the year, which is, of course, also the end of the Secretary General's term as we have indicated before.

We have every reason to believe that the Secretary General decision will be conveyed to us eminently. Just as we have gone out of our way to ensure that the representatives of the Opposition and some representatives of the civil of society were apprised and consulted in the preparation and the pursuit of our case with the United Nations (UN), I shall ensure consultation with the Opposition and the other groups as soon as the Secretary General's decision is received from the UN. For the time being, diplomacy obliges me to leave matters to that.

I may add that notwithstanding the limited financial and human resources available to us, the Ministry has been able, in large part, to attain a high level of success, especially in terms of garnering support for Guyana's position on the matter of the controversy. We have also coordinated Guyana's response to developments and challenges, globally and regionally, and continue to seek support for the promotion of a better life for all Guyanese. This was achieved through a structural realignment of the organisational structure of the Ministry, so as to place

particular emphasis on areas central to promotion of the Ministry's economic diplomacy programme and the safeguarding of Guyana's interest.

As regards staffing, I would like to say that the purpose of the realignment, I mentioned, was not only to ensure value for money in the deployment of human resources, but to enhance the realisation of the Ministry's strategic objectives. We reported last year on the effort to recruit new ambassadors steeped in relevant skills and having the experience necessary to prosecute our goals. I think we have largely been successful in that regard.

There has been increased emphasis on the economic diplomacy and that emphasis requires the acceleration of trade and investment activities. It requires also that the Ministry fast-tracks training in various aspects of the economic diplomacy and that initiative was reflected in the diplomatic training programmes undertaken in the 2016 for the preparation of persons for diplomatic postings overseas and for offices in the Ministry in general.

2.00 p.m.

The resuscitated Foreign Service Institute (FSI) has been tasked with the responsibility of crafting programmes geared to meet the needs of the Ministry. In this regard, a number of training programmes in the areas of foreign languages and trade were successfully launched. They were supplemented by guest lecturers from distinguished invitees on issues such as the legal aspects of negotiating international trade agreements, international border disputes, economic relations with the European Union (EU) and Brexit as well as, for example, on the question of geographical indications.

The foreign sovereignty and territorial integrity: Given the significance of this year which marked not only the 50th Anniversary of the independence of Guyana but also the 50th Anniversary of the Geneva Agreement, particular emphasis was placed on promoting initiatives relating to the preservation of Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity. [Mr.

Nandlall: That is not in the budget.] If you had bothered to look at the budget, you would have seen that the budget speech made reference to these very issues and why it was moneys were being allocated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I cannot expect you to have read it before coming here, given your past performance. In commemoration of this event, the Ministry published a book written by Sir Shridath Ramphal entitled *Guyana in the World: The*

First of the First Fifty Years and the Predatory Challenge. A series of televised programmes was also launched during the course of the year and these were supplemented by booklets and other printed materials and lectures at home and in various avenues abroad, ranging from King's College University of London to gatherings of the diaspora.

Additionally, as the Ministry seeks to enhance traditional relations and establish closer relation with new bilateral partners special emphasis was placed and will continue to be placed on image building in order to improve Guyana's standing in the international arena. To this end we have set out to ensure, not only that appropriately trained ambassadors are appointed, but that that step is complemented by the appointment of especially skilled Consular Generals, such as the Consular General in New York, who come with both academic and people's credentials necessary to facilitate a handling of relations with the diaspora.

In relation to bilateral relations, Guyana's bilateral, political and economic engagements establish an important basis for strengthening political and economic partnerships in the various regions of the world. These remain important vehicles for corporation and for promoting Guyana's national priorities. The national priorities of the Government as well as of Caribbean Community (CARICOM) are pursued through these engagements. In 2016, relations with traditional friends and new partners were significantly enhanced through several high level exchange visits and bilateral meetings convened in the margins of regional and international events.

The visit to Chile by His Excellency the President, in response to an invitation from Michelle Bachelet, for example, resulted in the conclusion of two agreements, a visa waiver agreement and a bilateral air services agreement along with a commitment to initiate several joint activities in key areas of development, including telecommunications. The former agreement is critical in facilitating easier travel, a basic prerequisite for enhancing investment in Guyana. Arising out of intensified collaboration with the Russian Federation, including an official visit by myself in July, a reciprocal visa free agreement was also concluded. It now allows persons with ordinary passports to travel to either country without need of an entry visa. These are but two examples of the work being done in the bilateral area.

During the course of the year, several ambassadors were also accredited on a resident and non-resident basis. We do not have time to go through that now. Colleagues will be aware that the Government has established two new embassies abroad, namely in Trinidad and Tobago, to cover Trinidad and Tobago in these new Caribbean states and in Switzerland to cover bilateral matters with Switzerland and to deal with the World Trade Organization (WTO) issues and a plethora of international and multilateral bodies based in Geneva. With the support of the Government of Switzerland, Guyana was able to establish an embassy in Geneva and that development would also allow for both the enhancement of cooperation with Switzerland and our more active participation in the many UN organisations based in Geneva. Of these undoubtedly the most familiar to Hon. Members would be the WTO which is critical to the economic diplomacy drive. The primary purpose of the Geneva office is trade. It is the WTO that sets the framework for international trade and trade agreements. It is the most important of all the missions in that sense.

Brussels, which has long housed an embassy, is also to be strengthened by the addition of another ambassador. A considerable part of that mission's mandate is to assiduously pursue the deepening of trade relations with our main trading partner and our main source of concessional aid. I will remind you of course that not a matter of two months ago an agreement was signed with the EU amounting to \$24 million EU grant to support the sugar and related diversification activities.

Our two most senior ambassadors have been posted to China. One of our most accomplished scientists and scholars has been posted to India. With this improved representation in India, Brazil and China, it is expected that 2017 will witness more extensive cooperation and a higher level of cooperation implementation with respect to bilateral projects, especially those pertaining to information technology (IT) and infrastructure.

We firmly believe that the path to greater prosperity for Guyana and the rest of the Caribbean lies in greater integration within the region and with the rest of the world. It is for this reason that membership of CARICOM remains of particular importance and of interest to Guyana. Albeit at short notice, Guyana successfully co-hosted along with CARICOM Secretariat the 37th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community. From January 2017, Guyana will assume the chairmanship of the conference and Guyana will have the honour

of hosting from February 16-17 the 28th Intercessional Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community. CARICOM remains critical to Guyana in pursuit of our diplomacy and our national sovereignty. It is for this reason that we propose to make a special effort to encourage and support the acceleration and deepening of the integration process. In the last meeting of the heads held in Georgetown, they agreed to initiate an examination of that process and to see how it might be improved. We will lend that effort our maximum support.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, I am sure your turn has passed. I would suggest you allow the Hon. Member to complete his speech and then let his turn pass.

Mr. Greenidge: Mr. Speaker, I cannot agree with you. I think that is a crime comment. I do not think her time has passed. She is hoping that it is to come.

Only this morning I signed, on behalf of Guyana, the tripartite agreement for the implementation of the CARICOM/Cuba project for the creation of a training centre to stimulate the development of children as adolescents and youths with special education needs associated with disabilities. This centre will be housed in Georgetown and the building to house that entity, at this point in time, is 80% complete.

On 1st November, 2016 Guyana launched the CARICOM Single Market Economy (CSME) Application Processing System (CAPS). CAPS is a fully integrated web based information management system. Applicants for the CARICOM skills certificate can now use the system to submit their application online from anywhere at their convenience. Guyana is the first country to utilise the system. As part of its wider public awareness activities, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with the CARICOM Single Market Unit of the CARICOM Secretariat hosted a private sector and rural communities workshop and facilitated travel sensitisation exercises in Georgetown during the period of the 2nd and 3rd of November. The two activities formed part of the Ministry's continued collaboration with the CARICOM Secretariat in sensitising and engaging various stakeholders at the national level to ensure that they are aware of their rights, benefits and the opportunities available under the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas.

As mentioned a short while ago, a review of the CSME is being conducted as mandated by the conference of Heads of Government of the CARICOM community. The Ministry is working with the CARICOM Secretariat to ensure that the review is completed in Guyana. The review

exercise is expected to be completed before February 2017. Additionally, the Ministry will be working with the relevant agencies to push for the enactment of legislation developed and submitted by the CARICOM Secretariat for incorporation in Guyana's domestic law.

The Government of Guyana is committed to the maintenance of peaceful stable and prosperous region. It recognises that prosperity can only be realised under the condition of peace and stability and in this regard the Ministry continues to follow closely the activities of Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) and Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) and maintain active participation in the process. As Members will be aware, we signed an agreement enabling us to be an associate member within Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR). The Ministry will continue to promote the green agenda also at the bilateral level.

Through the various regional and international mechanisms, the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organisation as a subregional mechanism remains important and relevant in this regard. In the coming year 2017, Guyana proposes to target a selected group of bilateral states with the objective of deepening the corporation and trade. There will be increased focus on the strengthening of economic relations for the promotion of Guyana's trade, investment and tourism potential and the enhancement of the Partial Scope Agreement, for example, with Brazil. Arising out of the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, we are pursuing the review of this agreement and the very rice export that is being mentioned by my colleague. This effort to give effect to the strategic objectives of strengthening Guyana's political economic and social relations with targeted states through the outcome of structured bilateral mechanisms and high level visits to reflect national priorities and the CARICOM agenda is a very important part of our programme.

I am going to close by making mention of the initiatives at the multilateral level. Guyana is a small state that remains committed to multilateralism and a rule based international order. To this end, the Ministry will continue as far as possible to participate and play an active role in all fora of the UN system and in specialised agencies, funds and programmes promoting the pillars of multilateral activity namely global security, sustainable development, human rights and the international law. We will continue to embrace all initiatives in strengthening the UN system and its strengthened role in multilateralism. The diaspora, of course, remains an important partner in

national development and we will continue to promote that side as well as South –South cooperation so that we can play an active role in the formulation of the agendas of the south.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity of being able to contribute to this debate on the Budget of 2017. [Applause]

2.15 p.m.

Mr. Seeraj: On this side of the House and, indeed, of the Assembly, I would also like to join you in welcoming our distinguished guests to this fourth day of our debate. I hope they will thoroughly enjoy their short stay here during the course of our debate.

Over the course of the few days since we have started the debate, there have been a number of references being made to the subject matter which is, of course, our 2017 Budget. What is repetitive is, of course, the praise on the side of the Government, which does not have to do with the contents of the Budget but it has to do with “it is an early Budget; it is a big Budget; it is a Budget that came the earliest...in nearly four decades” and all of that.

The Hon. Minister, Ms. Nicolette Henry, spoke that *what is good for the goose is good for the gander*. I want to express my 100% support for that statement. If what is good for the Cabinet Members can be translated to what is good for the Guyanese people, then this Budget debate will be over. The Estimates will be passed without too much of a fuss. By that I mean, if the Cabinet is good enough for a 50% increase in salary, then I expect the public servants, our hardworking health workers, members of the disciplined forces and our sugar workers will also bid for 50%. They were promised 20% during the Elections campaign. We were not told that they were contemplating a 50% increase on their salaries. If they had known that, I doubt whether the results of the 2015 Elections would have been what it is.

That is why, after analysing the campaign and the aftermath of the campaign, the post-Election period, this country is in the kind of trouble that it is in. All over, our citizens are expressing their discomfort, their disappointment and, of recent, their horror as events unfolded, Budget after Budget. The most recent onslaught has to do with the taxing of a basic essential form of existence in a land that is named Guyana – land of many waters. We are being taxed for water. What we are being told by the Government side is that there are 183,000 consumers or

subscribers to the Guyana Water Inc. (GWI) and 155,000 will not be paying Value-Added Tax (VAT). Everyone will be paying VAT. Those whose consumption is less than \$1,500 will be paying VAT because most Guyanese, especially those who live on this coast, drink bottled water. If you drink bottled water, the supplier of bottled water will be paying more than \$1,500 per month. The Minister was very clear. He said that the \$1,500 is not a discount. If you go to \$1,501 you have to pay on the entire amount. None will not escape. This argument that is being put forward by the Government's side that you will not be paying VAT is a fallacy. There is no way anyone of us can escape paying VAT on water.

Similarly, there is VAT on electricity. Even if your monthly bill is less than \$10,000, you will be exposed to bearing the cost of VAT on electricity. You do not live in the isolation of your home. Once you go out there and you purchase any manufactured commodity, the cost of that 14% VAT on electricity will be in the price of that commodity. The argument of if you are below \$10,000 you will not pay VAT simply does not hold. Guyanese all over have pronounced on it. It is not the People's Progressive Party (PPP) or it is not people going to Congress. I doubt whether members of the Private Sector Commission (PSC) will be going to congress. Members of the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association and the ordinary Guyanese will be not going to Congress.

As of today, there is a letter from one Mohamed Khan who is not a supporter of the PPP and who will not be going to Congress. He is a Coalition supporter. It is in today's *Kaieteur News* newspaper, dated 8th December, 2016. This is what he had to say:

“No need to conserve electricity, GPL is doing it with blackouts.”

[Mr. Williams: What is the source?] *Kaieteur News* newspaper of 8th December.

“The Coalition Government is getting away with a lot in the 2017 Budget which was presented in the National Assembly. It offers a crumby yield to Public Servants and nothing for the disabled and single parents who have to carry the biggest burden on paltry incomes then repays you with a cheesy VAT increase of 14% on water and electricity. Then they have the gall to tell you conserve on every unit of electricity and on every drop of water. We do not have to conserve on these things, GPL is doing it for us with blackouts. When the consumers get blackout there is no water. Every day in Essequibo

we experience prolonged power outages. Yet, it is this very policy and the Budget that is perpetuating the crisis and undermining our economy. The new VAT exemption categories will definitely grossly distort economic performance and result in higher prices for the commodities affected.”

This is from Mohamed Khan.

The Federation of Independent Trade Unions in Guyana (FITUG) is not going to Congress. “Budget adds further burden to an already stricken populace”... What they are saying here is that FITUG, having examined the 2017 Budget, has come to the conclusion that the Government has fallen woefully short of its promise of delivering the good life to all Guyanese. It goes on and on.

This will have an impact on all of us. *Kaieteur News* newspaper of 8th December, 2016: Banks still claim “foreign currency not in abundance”. This will definitely have an impact on our economy as the days go by. When the Hon. Minister of Business spoke, he said that the PPP did not leave a sustainable economy. Over a decade of sustained economic growth during a period of the worst economic crisis in recent history: is this not testimony of sustainable development? How can the Minister of Business stand in this House and say that we did not leave them a sustainable economy. We just have to look at the records. If I should quote from an extract from the *Millennium Development Goals* (MDGs), our achievements, which is also an indicator of how good the country is doing:

“Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger.”

Watch the market. Guyana met internationally established targets in fight against hunger; half the proportion of people who suffer from hunger; reduction of the prevalence of under-nourishment from 19.1% in the 1992 period to 5.1% in 2010/2011... It was even better up to 2015. We might start to go down after 2015. Reduction in the absolute number of under-nourished persons; malnutrition in children under five years has decreased; a portion of persons living in extreme poverty declined from 28.7% in 1993 to 18.6% in 2006 and was much better by the year 2015.

All of these are indications and indicators of what was happening in our economy. *Millennium Development Goals* 2:

“Achieve universal primary education.”

We were told that we do not have an educated population. We were regaled about our people not being educated to take up manufacturing challenges and how to diversify and all of that. How can we compete with an energy bill that is, in some instances, four times that of our competitors? Yet, when we moved to have renewable energy, a size that was never seen before in this part or at least in the Caribbean, it was slaughtered in this very House that we sit in. On MDGs: on track to achieving universal primary education; gender parity and education; average attendance in primary schools of 74%... These are testimonies that when the PPP/C assumed office in 1992, it developed this country to such an extent that we were recognised locally, regionally and internationally. I was very happy for Minister Holder; soon after assuming office, Minister Holder travelled to Rome to receive, on behalf of Guyana, the Certification for Guyana from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) for achieving and meeting the MDGs as it relates to food security. I am certain that the Minister will say that Guyana achieved it.

It is even more in the rice sector. It is even more of a glaring example of economic transformation that took place. The Hon. Minister Gaskin should have taken time to look at that. I was really disturbed when a Colleague Member of Parliament (MP), Hon. Jennifer Wade, said that the paddy farmers are aware that PPP mismanaged the rice industry and that the Government received a collapsed rice industry. I wish to quote the Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, as it relates to this particular issue. This is what Minister Jordan had to say in Budget 2015, *A Fresh Approach to the Good Life in a Green Economy*:

“Unlike sugar, rice has been an amazing success story. The industry has recorded consistently higher levels of output, making the 400,000 tonne bar, in 2011, and the 500,000 tonne bar, in 2013. For 2014, rice output attained an impressive 635,238 tonnes, an increase of 18.6 percent.”

This is the Coalition’s Minister of Finance. Yet, a Member of the Coalition can come to this House and say that they inherited a collapsed rice sector.

2.30 p.m.

A similar story is told of sugar. When the target of sugar was surpassed in 2015, what the Minister of Finance said was that it was due to prudent management, efficiency in management. In 2016, when sugar did not meet the target, the PPP is to be blamed for it. How can we vacillate

so much with our analysis of events as they unfold? We have to be consistent in recognising that, if we are mismanaging and taking the economy downhill, then we have to admit that. Not for our convenience we should say that it is bad weather when things do not go well and say it is the PPP/C; and when things do go good then we take credit for it without acknowledging what was said.

These are some of the things that were mentioned:

Transformative budget: The only transformation that we are seeing is more taxation. We might argue here and we might want to defend the Budget from the other side. Who will be the judge? The judge will be our people. The judge will be the Mohammed Khan, the G.K Lall, the Anand Goolsarran, the Christopher Ram, the speed road operators, the rice farmers, and the sugar workers. Those are the people who will be the judge of how this Budget is going to affect them. So we can stand up here and defend... As one writer puts it – I think it was Mr. Anand Goolsarran – do not waste time trying to defend the indefensible. Accept that there are some areas that need improvement; accept that the Opposition has constructive criticisms to make; accept that you are not perfect; engage in consultation and let us move on. Do not try to defend the indefensible. It will not work.

We were told that the Budget is crafted to maintain an enhanced revenue stream. It is not only crafted to maintain an enhanced revenue stream. It is crafted to tax our people more; extreme taxation on our people that will result in them getting poorer and poorer as we go along. There is an abundance of cases that we have to look at.

The Minister of Finance, in trying to garner more revenue to meet this huge Budget of \$250 billion cast his net far and wide to see where it is the revenues will come from. And when we were told that the VAT of 14% and the zero-rating and the exemption of items will not affect our people, the Minister, in looking to garner revenue, if he is a miner, will not go and spin batel at the seaside at the Guyana Marriott Hotel to get gold. He will go into Konawaruk, Mahdia or Marudi to spin that batel if he is a miner. If he is a farmer, the Minister will not go to plant rice at Kuru Kururu; he would probably go to Cane Grove to get the better productivity. And when the Minister sought to put VAT on water and electricity, it was a studied approach, knowing fully well that these are the areas that will garner the most revenue. And that is why, in the Budget, an

amount is not stated. The Minister cleverly stayed away from stating the amount that these measures will result in revenue collection. We conservatively estimate that these new measures will bring in an additional \$50 billion to the coffers. And that is why the Minister did not put it in the Budget. It is because they want to spin this tale that this will not have an impact on our people. If it will not have an impact, why take the risk or chance of putting it in the Budget, knowing very well that these will be unpopular moves? Why would you take that risk if you do not know how much it will bring in? And that is what we are saying; the Ministers, including the Hon. Minister Jordan, know very well what is going to be the outcome of these new measures that they are proposing.

The productive sectors have not been spared the wrath of this Budget. In 2015, in the Minister's Budget Speech, he said that rice will be given \$23 billion. Let me quote exactly what the Minister said, Sir, on page 24:

“Mr. Speaker, over \$23 billion has been allocated in this budget to support further payments to over 7,000 rice farmers.”

This was a good start. It was the first Budget and a good start. To date, 18 ½ months after, we are still looking for the \$23 billion. But it was a good attempt in 2015; at least something was offered.

In the 2016 Budget, nothing much was offered but, at least, nothing was taken from the industry and we were not taxed more.

In the 2017 Budget, when farmers most need support and help, what we find happening is that there will be further taxes by this Government while having no expectation of getting any support. There will be further tax by nearly \$150 million of the farmers' money which will go towards some experiment at the Wales Estate. It is not going to support sugar workers; it is farmers' money and not taxpayers' money. This is revenue from the farmers and I can substantiate that. Instead of giving support to the sector, this Government is now moving from a position of promising \$23 billion in 2015, giving nothing in 2016, and, in 2017, proposing to actually take from those who are already on their knees to fund some kind of experiment to which we have had no consultation whatsoever on. All over, the plight of the farmers can be heard far and wide.

I was quite disappointed when my Colleague, Ms. Jennifer Wade, whom I have known for years and whom has been in the industry for quite a while, did not at least express some concerns about the plight of the farmers in Region 5.

Proposal for Region 5 to increase the burden on farmers: what is the proposal from the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary Agriculture Development Authority (MMA/ADA)? The proposal is charges. Just as we have taxation on the general populace, we have now targeted charges on farmers for drainage and irrigation. We had called on this Government, by way of a motion, in recognition of the crisis in the industry, for them to waive the drainage and irrigation charges, to waive the land rent, to institute some budgetary measures to give support to this sector that is so vital...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Sir.

I will probably ask the Minister, Ms. Amna Ally, who is not here, to grant me an extension in the spirit of cohesion and the Christmas holiday.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not want to disappoint you. There are no extensions in this debate.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Sir.

They are moving now to increase the charges to farmers. It is not by 10% or even the 50% that they granted themselves; it is not by 100% but almost by 400%. For drainage and irrigation charges in what we call the project area, it is proposed to take it up to \$8,000 per acre. The first proposal was much more than that; it was almost \$12,000 per acre. These are from farmers who are barely seeing their way. This is from an industry that consistently broke the record over the past four to five years and started to decline under this Government. In recognition of their suffering, we are targeting them now for increase in rates.

In the cattle area, not rice alone, the increase has moved from just under \$500 per acre to \$2,500 per acre. In another area called Von Better area, it is from \$1,673 to \$3,500. The Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) lands – GuySuCo is in crisis too – have not been spared the wrath of

this hammer coming down on their heads; it is from \$1,673 to \$2,500. For rice lands in the Mahaicony Abary Development Scheme area, the proposal is to move the rates from \$1,241 to \$7,000 per acre.

The Right Bank, Mahaicony, from about \$400 to \$3000 per acre. And that is only for some services and, in a lot of instances, one does not benefit from it. Land rental: rental of lands from \$1,000 to...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, there is a distinct disturbance and I say it is from the two front rows. The Speaker will have to assist Members to remember the Standing Orders.

Mr. Seeraj: Rental of rice lands - and this is on top of those charges I spoke about earlier – is from \$1,000 to \$7,000. Pasture lands, where there is absolutely no service from that, is from \$200 to \$1,400 per acre.

I want to briefly mention the statistics as it relates to how rice has been doing. In 2012: production exports - 422,000 tonnes, income - US\$196 million; 2013: production exports 535,000 tonnes, income - US\$239 million; 2014: production exports - 635,000 tonnes, income - US\$249 million; 2015: production exports - 687,000 tonnes, income - US\$220 million. This is the beginning of the decline; we exported more and got less. And we know which Government took office there. It is not only the rice farmers but the entire agriculture sector.

2.45 p.m.

The Minister spoke at length in Budget 2015 and Budget 2016 about diversification into other areas. We have not seen any evidence whatsoever of any impact of the hundreds of millions of dollars allocated in the two previous Budgets. We have not seen any evidence of any development in these areas.

Cash crops have not been spared. Inspectors are going around and if one has more than 20 chickens in a pen, one is deemed to be a commercial producer of chickens and has to register for VAT. If one has more than one bank of eschalot behind one's house, one is deemed a commercial producer of eschalot. The point was made over and over that, if one's productive

sector is going to be taxed, then one will not be able to produce competitively; one will not be able to export and one will not get foreign exchange; our currency is going to come under pressure; inflation is going to go up; life is going to become increasingly miserable and we will not be able to trade effectively. The cry now that the foreign exchange is drying up is because of the policies against our productive and manufacturing sectors and our industry, in agriculture and other areas. If we export less, we will get less foreign exchange.

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

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, in closing, this Budget is so indecent. I will not say withdraw it. I am going to join my Colleague, Cde. Damon, from the Essequibo Coast, and say to the Minister of Finance to take this Budget down to Princess Street and put it in the incinerator; put it separately. We would not want this Budget to contaminate any other product in the incinerator. I would recommend that the Minister does that and comes back fresh to this House after consulting with the people on measures to improve their lives and to offer to them what is promised in the Budget, to give them a good life; it should be the good life for all and not the good life for a few who we are not only paying the VAT on their water but we are actually paying for their water.

Thank you very much, Sir. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will pause for a moment to allow our guests, Sir. Dennis and the rest of the members who are visiting us, to depart.

Guests withdrew from the Chamber.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Holder]: Mr. Speaker, as I rise to make my contribution to the debate on Budget 2017 under the theme, *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*, we, on this side of the House, continue to inspire growth and reinstate confidence for the people of this dear land, and, for this, I join with the rest of my Colleagues in congratulating the Hon. Minister of Finance for a Budget well received.

In 2017, agriculture will continue to contribute 16% to the economy. I must add that agriculture has received over \$18 billion in 2017. This remains one of the largest budgets for this sector, highlighting Government's commitment to agriculture and the persons involved therein.

Agriculture remains a priority area for addressing problems of unemployment, poverty alleviation and for fostering economic development. Significantly, the country is focusing primarily on sustainable food security, increasing productivity, expanding commercial agriculture, import substitution, income diversification and export orientation. In 2017, we will continue production transformation through agricultural diversification; improvement in drainage and irrigation systems; improvements in research, extension education and marketing; strengthening our regulatory framework governing fisheries, chemical and ground water management. Hinterland development with large-scale agriculture in both the Rupununi and Intermediate Savannahs will also be advanced.

We will be pursuing interventions that will ensure food security for all, specifically access to safe food throughout the country, with a view to maintaining a healthy and productive population. With the passing of the Food Safety and Animal Welfare Bills, the activation of such practices within Guyana will ensure that the country is a benefactor of many advantages, especially as it relates to international trade. It is expected that these Bills will boost the economy and ensure consumer confidence as well as give Guyana a national reputation in terms of the food products exported.

One of the most topical subjects this year and the object of much letter writing in the press has been the Guyana Sugar Corporation and the Guyana sugar industry. Over the past years, not much was done by way of securing the future of both the industry and the future wellbeing of its employees. Opportunities existed in the past to reorganise and modernise the industry but these were not pursued. Reference is made here to better sugar prices; funding from the European Union (EU); accompanying measures following the reform of the EU sugar price regime; access to appropriate levels of skills and experience, *et cetera*.

The current Government, in May, 2015, inherited a sugar corporation and sugar industry that were badly run down. Indeed, the first approach by the then management of GuySuCo was for support from the then Government, amounting to \$16.9 billion, excluding capital investment, to finance the operations for 2015. The magnitude of the request came as a great shock to the Government and it was only after the appointment of the new Board of Directors and Interim Management Team did this Government begin to appreciate the extent of the decline of our sugar industry.

While the onset of the El Niño weather phenomenon or drought would have had a very favourable impact on harvesting during the second crop of 2015, as a result of excellent ripening and harvesting conditions, it took its toll on the production this year. The combined effect of the poor state of the cultivation, coupled with the impact of El Niño, resulted in a shortfall of 23,600 metric tonnes of sugar.

Additionally, 2016 has been plagued by poor labour turnout, lack of spares, equipment shortages, in particular cane punts, and factory breakdowns. As indicated earlier, the shortage of skills and experience, together with the serious underinvestment in the industry, is taking its toll. While the 2016 second crop started late as a result of the wet conditions which succeeded the drought and cane yields are higher than forecasted, the Corporation would be unable to harvest all its canes before the end of the year and it is estimated that some 153,300 tonnes of cane would be carried over into 2017. This is equivalent to some 11,300 tonnes sugar.

No doubt, there are those who are ready to twist what I have just said for narrow political mileage. Let us bear in mind that the El Niño or drought has resulted in a drop in world production of sugar over the previous season of over 13 million tonnes. Production declines were experienced by producers in Central America, the Caribbean, Cuba, China, India, Philippines and Thailand, to name a few. Guyana was not unique in this regard.

Between July, 2015 and December, 2016, this Government would have provided GuySuCo with \$23 billion in support. GuySuCo has advised that should the industry remain as presently structured, it would require subsidies from the Government in the sum of \$ 18.6 billion and \$21.4 billion for the years 2017 and 2018, respectively. Where is this money to come from without causing serious dislocation to other sectors of the economy which are also in great need of investment? What is even of greater concern to the Government is that this magnitude of subsidy would have no positive impact on the financial state of GuySuCo. Because of the prevailing sugar prices and GuySuCo's cost structure, the Corporation would continue to lose billions of dollars each year and would continue to require billions of dollars in subsidy also each year, despite significant increases in production. The economy simply cannot afford this.

Government is deeply concerned about the future wellbeing of the sugar workers and their families. Government is also deeply concerned about the state of the other sectors of the

economy and the critical need for investment in these sectors. It would be irresponsible of this Government to not sensibly address these challenges in a sustainable manner. Therefore, in relation to GuySuCo and the sugar industry, the Government has appointed a Cabinet Subcommittee to recommend the way forward for the industry after taking into consideration the recommendation of the Commission of Inquiry into GuySuCo, the report of the Cabinet appointed committee on diversification of the industry and recommendations emanating from the Corporation itself, *inter alia*. These recommendations will be presented to Cabinet for due consideration prior to the end of this year, with a view to their implementation in 2017. The successful implementation of these initiatives should return GuySuCo to a state of self-sufficiency and eliminate its reliance on the Government for subsidies.

In 2016, rice production is projected to decline by 12.7% to 600,000 metric tonnes. This reduction is due to the El Nino weather conditions and some farmers exiting the industry due to the loss of the high priced Venezuelan market. Due to the El Nino phenomenon, only 84% or 76,717 hectares were sown out of the targeted production for the first crop of 91,072 hectares. Of the 76,717 hectares sown, 3,311 hectares were lost. In 2017, rice production is expected to increase by 1.3%.

On the other hand, we export to 35 countries. This has led to an increase in exports by 1% over 2015 at the end of October, 2016. However, due to the reduction in world market prices, the value of exports will decline. The Prices at the end of October was US\$370 per tonne compared with US\$394 in 2015. For 2017, we project exports to be around 531,000 tonnes (valued US\$180,984,000).

I am also pleased to report that the Managing Director and a team from the Mexican Rice Council are planning to visit Guyana around mid-January, 2017, with a view to initiating paddy sales to that country. I must also bring to the attention of this House that sales to the Venezuelan market have recommenced and is steadily growing at prices in excess of US\$500 per tonne. Up to the end of November, 2016, we had exported 6,700 tonnes to Venezuela at a price well in excess of US\$3 million.

The Rice Research Station at Burma continues to work assiduously to improve the rice lines being offered to farmers. However, improved rice lines necessitate improved management

practices, seeding rates, sowing methods and disease management. Government has been diligently employing various technologies in its effort to reduce the impact of severe weather. In 2017, diversification to specialty rice varieties, with increased emphasis on the development of value-added production, such as rice/wheat flour blend, rice noodles, pasta and pre-cooked rice products, will be pursued.

In his address to the National Assembly in October, His Excellency, President Granger, observed that:

“The 2017 National Budget will evince measures aimed at developing a more diversified and climate-resilient agricultural sector. We will promote agricultural expansion further inland by introducing mega farms in the Intermediate and Rupununi savannahs. We will promote the expansion of non-traditional agricultural production, such as coconuts, fruits and spices; and we will promote the increase of aromatic rice production which will add to production in the rice sector at the higher end of the value chain.”

Because agricultural diversification is so fundamental to the wellbeing of the green economy transition, I would like to spend my remaining time talking about what it will take to achieve these developmental advances and share their benefits. Hinterland agricultural development will continue to be an important facet on our agriculture development agenda.

3.00 p.m.

In 2016, emphasis was placed on finalising plans for expansion of the agriculture station at Ebini and the establishment of a new station at Pirara in Region 9. Work will continue in 2017 in pursuit of these stations becoming a reality. Emphasis will be placed on cassava, peanut and orchard crops and cattle at Ebini, whilst at Pirara, the focus would be on cattle, rice, orchard crops and cassava. These developments would be supported by an Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) programme which is coming on stream in 2017.

Orchard production was increased at Ebini in 2016. At Hosororo in Region 1, a farm has been initiated to test and produce planting material for the cultivation of turmeric, black pepper, avocado and citrus. Our intention is to ensure that we become self-sufficient in spices within the

next three years. Our farmers, especially in Region 1, would be the beneficiaries of these interventions. We currently import over US\$1 million in spices for the processing sector.

In 2016, a farm was also established at Kato to demonstrate commercial agricultural production. This will be fully operationalised in 2017. Similarly, a facility was constructed at Kamarang from which farmers would be able to access technical and advisory services. A similar facility will be established at Paramakatoi, in 2017.

We continue to place emphasis on the other crops sector, which is of vital importance to our economy from both a food and nutrition security standpoint, as well as for exports. This sector recorded a 2.5% growth by mid-2016 and a 4.4% growth is anticipated for 2017.

The coconut subsector was given much prominence in 2016. This culminated with the coconut festival in October. As we are all aware, coconut ranks after rice and sugar, both in terms of acreage and exports. A coconut roadmap was finalised in 2016 to further catapult this important commodity. The roadmap was a collaborative effort between the public and private sectors and was adopted by the Ministry of Agriculture. Over the next 10 years, the Guyana coconut industry will demonstrate consistent growth rates, rising from severe underdevelopment to a fully integrated economic partner at national, regional and global levels.

In 2017, coconut nurseries would be operationalised at Mon Repos, Wakenaam and the Pomeroon for the expansion of the industry. We would also be looking at importing elite planting material for distribution to farmers. A lot of emphasis will be placed on value-added, coconut products, especially coconut water and virgin coconut oil. We have seen expansion in acreages in the Pomeroon and the establishment of a coconut water bottling facility in the region.

The Government has been very supportive of the coconut industry. The sum of \$49 million was allocated for the acquisition of chemicals to treat palms that were affected by the red palm mite. This is an on-going exercise and, to date, in excess of 1,400 farmers have been the beneficiaries of this exercise. We recognise that Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is the long term solution for managing the red palm mite. Consequently, the utilisation of natural enemies and other green agricultural practices will be employed to combat this problem.

It is also significant to note, that we have made significant progress in managing the Black

Sigatoka Disease affecting the plantain/banana production. In 2016, we should be recording our highest plantain production ever - in excess of 70,000 tonnes. This will be further increased in 2017 to supply the plantain chip factories to be operationalised at Parika and Leguan.

Cassava is another commodity we have been talking about for years. I am pleased to say that we would be placing more emphasis on mechanised cassava planting and harvesting in the hinterland savannahs, as well as on the coastland.

Crop diversification is an on-going exercise. Under the auspices of National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI), several new crop types were introduced in 2016. These included breadfruit, melons, sweet potatoes and sweet peppers. New introductions will continue in 2017, especially those crops which can withstand the vagaries of climate change.

NAREI will continue to work with the private sector to further enhance agricultural development nationally. As an example, NAREI would be working collaboratively with Amazon Caribbean Ltd. (AMCAR) on the establishment of a 500 acre organic fruit farm at Herstelling in the Berbice River. An initial, 100 acres will be established in 2017. These fruits would be processed for the export market.

Mangrove management/restoration has also been an integral component of our work programme. In 2016, brushwood groynes were constructed at Walton Hall and Lusignan. Five thousand mangrove seedlings were also planted at Better Hope.

The Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA) has been allocated \$45 million in the 2017 capital budget and growth in the livestock sector is projected at 2.5% in 2017. Guyana is self-sufficient in poultry production. In 2016, production increased by 5% over 2015 to 32 million kilogrammes. Positive growth will continue in 2017.

As an integral part of its hinterland development programme, the Ministry of Agriculture has acquired Black Giant poultry with improved genetics from Brazil to be used to upgrade the local creole bird population. This initiative will improve the nutritive base of hinterland residents, through the increased production of both meat and eggs. These birds have the ability to thrive on resources from within the communities and will, therefore, eliminate the need to have feed material shipped from the coast.

A key developmental pillar of the local beef subsector is the introduction of animals of improved genetic material, through breeding bulls, semen and embryo transplants. Selected cattle farmers in several regions have benefited from GLDA's bull rotation programme. This is augmented with the provision of breeding animals from its genetic enhancement programme, with most of the related activities being conducted at the Ebini and Mon Repos agricultural stations.

It must be noted that, milk was the top imported food in 2015, at a cost of US\$27 million. Over the last five years, we have noticed a 55% increase in the volume of milk and milk products imported into this country. In 2015, imports were almost 10 million kilogrammes. At one time Guyana had one of the most flourishing dairy industries in the Caribbean. As the Minister of Agriculture, I will try to ensure that this industry sees its glory days once more. The industry is stymied due to the absence of adequate milk processing facilities. My Government will see the construction of a modern milk processing plant over the next few years, capable of not only producing fresh milk, but also butter, cheese and other dairy commodities. As such, we will coordinate milk production by establishing cooling stations at strategic locations. It is anticipated that, with these interventions, along with the necessary technical support, the sector will grow by about 10% in 2017, while at the same time making a significant contribution to increased farm incomes.

The Duck Hatchery Programme continues to make a significant contribution to the advancement of the local duck industry. Duckling production in 2016 is projected at 266,000, a 25% increase in 2015. This is expected to remain strong and positive in 2017 with a 50% growth. With the current positive developmental trajectory of the industry, it is poised to break into the export market with the necessary administrative and technical support. This will have the knock-on effects in creating more jobs, facilitating product diversification and contributing to foreign exchange earnings and will, therefore, make a tangible contribution to our Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Regarding the fisheries sub-sector, over the years, we have established some fundamental building blocks. In 2016, we reaped the benefit by recording a positive growth of 11%. However, an increase in aquaculture will become necessary as a substitute for seafood, as we realise that the marine resources are becoming challenged. As such, there was more detailed planning, especially as it relates to aquaculture and small scale fisheries. We have seen over 20 new

aquaculture farms come on stream. Furthermore, deep sea fishing has been introduced to Guyana. It will be further encouraged, as this is an area of our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) that is not exploited. Additionally, thus far in 2016, the marine sub-sector has recorded exports of 17,930 metric tonnes (MT) or \$12.7 billion.

In 2017, the promotion and development of a sustainable aquaculture and inland fisheries sector will be achieved through the maintenance of the indigenous stocks and the research and promotion of new marketable species at the Satyadeow Sawh Aquaculture Station. The formation of the National Aquaculture Association will serve as a catalyst for the promotion and development of the subsector. Furthermore, progress with hinterland fishing will be propelled with the assignment of staff to the North Rupununi area to assist with the Arapaima Management Plan and to encourage aquaculture activities.

The improved livelihood of our people remains a thrust of Government as we are advancing the cause of a new market approach to value-added production and productivity. The Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) will continue to create an enabling environment for the promotion, development, utilisation and exportation of non-traditional agricultural commodities.

In 2017, the establishment and operationalisation of the chips and flour processing facility at Parika will come into fruition. Cassava processing is rare with limited value addition done in Guyana. Cassava is cultivated in most regions, especially the hinterland, although, it is currently not exported. The result is depressed prices due to a glut in the market. The Ministry of Agriculture will undertake to establish and operationalise at least one processing facility to produce high quality cassava flour, reducing our high import bill for wheat, currently at US\$21 million. We will work in tandem with the bakeries to have the cassava flour incorporated with wheat flour. This is being done very successfully and extensively in Barbados. This initiative is expected to reduce post-harvest losses, create market opportunities for fresh produce and create gainful employment with the associated foreign exchange savings through a reduction in wheat imports.

In promoting Agriculture Business Development, through linkages with respective agro-processors, the Guyana Marketing Corporation introduced approximately 40 new products in the Guyana Shop, in the area of fashion, beauty and enhancement, there is currently a wide array of

soaps, including ginger and aloe, lemon grass, coffee, turmeric and honey fragrance. Facilitation in this area of product development will continue in 2017.

Non-Traditional agricultural commodities are exported in both the fresh and processed forms *via* air and sea. Guyana's major regional export destinations include Trinidad, Suriname, Antigua and Barbados, while the main extra-regional destinations include the United States of America (USA), Canada and the Dominican Republic. The main exported commodities are coconut, coconut water, pineapple, mangoes, eddoes, watermelon, pumpkin, papaw, heart of palm and sauces.

Given the critical nature of our water resources to agriculture and other sectors, great importance must be placed on water planning, development and management that is done by the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) and the Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary Agriculture Development Authority (MMA/ADA). Taking due cognisance of the effects of global warming on rainfall patterns and sea level rise, we recognise that our systems must be improved. The objective of executing capital works in the medium term would, therefore, be to improve drainage and irrigation throughout Guyana, which would contribute to the long-term aim of achieving a high capacity Drainage and Irrigation (D&I) system that actively contributes to improved agricultural productivity and reduced incidents of flooding.

A holistic approach is necessary for proper management on both a technical and managerial level. In 2017, we will commence the process of detailed mapping of facilities, structures and drainage and irrigation channels in each region, these maps will show their location and other pertinent data. It would indicate which works are executed by water users associations, community development councils, farmers' groups, neighbourhood democratic councils, *et cetera* and would be a major asset in depicting the D&I systems throughout Guyana.

For the first time, the NDIA will be undertaking works in Region No. 9. The North and South Rupununi villages have traditionally, suffered from inadequate water supply for their crops and livestock during dry months of the year. This has severely affected their livelihood. To this end, we will be improving or building rainwater harvesting facilities in these communities, commencing in the North Rupununi. Works are planned for the villages of Woweta, Rupertee, Annai, Aranaputa, Massara, Toka, Parashara and Nappi.

The NDIA is expected to be more proactive in 2017 with the introduction of a dredger for clearing outfall channels, thereby significantly decreasing the possibility of flooding along the coastland.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

Mr. Holder: Thank you Mr. Speaker.

Given the quest for alternative sources of energy, specifically, for hydropower development, we will commence the construction of new climatological and hydrological stations in Kato, Chi Chi, Sand Landing and Amaila Falls.

3.15 p.m.

This will effectively ensure that the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA) is equipped with data on the potential of these rivers for power production for the implementation of future projects.

Another important area of focus for hydromet in 2017 will be the implementation of the ISO Quality Management System (QMS) at the National Weather Watch Centre (NWWC). The implementation of a QMS will ensure that the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) maintains its standing as an international port of entry for aviation.

In terms of regional development, we plan to install Automatic Weather Stations in Regions 1, 4, 8 and 9 to expand our network. Water Level loggers will be installed in Regions 3, 6 and 8 and in the Pomeroon River, in Region 2. A tidal gauge will be placed in Region 6, to monitor oceanographic data to support the budding oil and gas and other industries.

To produce globally recognised agriculturists and to promote and support agricultural development through education and training, the Guyana School of Agriculture (GSA) will go forward in 2017 focusing on acquiring accreditation as a reputable agricultural education service deliverer. To this end, facilities will be upgraded to meet industry standards.

The Pesticides and Toxic Chemicals Control Board (PTCCB) continued to execute its mandate through the holistic and comprehensive management of pesticides and toxic chemicals in Guyana. During 2016, this was realised through the monitoring of imports of chemicals, with the registration and issuance of 1,137 licences for pesticides and toxic chemicals to date. There are

now 165 licenced pesticide vendors in Guyana, who are also involved in the management of restricted use of pesticides.

A total of 175 pesticide storage cabinets are also being distributed with focus on sound storage practices. Training is provided to educate pesticide users on proper storage practices. This programme has led to the establishment of a much needed private/public partnership approach within this industry. A Pest Control Operators' Basic Proficiency Certification Programme was completed with 43 persons and millers being trained and certified.

Major projects are also in the pipeline for 2017 and onwards, these include: US\$12.4 million - Rural Agricultural Infrastructure Development Project. There is also the US\$11.89 million - Flood Risk Management Project, this is estimated to cost \$2.5 billion in 2017. The benefits of this project would include reduced flooding and improved drainage and irrigation for over 300,000 residents on the East Coast of Demerara. In 2017, the majority of works will be carried out. These include, the construction of three Pump Stations at Lusignan, Buxton/Vigilance and Hope/Enmore; the reconstruction of the North Eastern Dam of the East Demerara Water Conservancy; specialised training for staff in Hydraulic and Hydrology Modelling; and an Emergency Preparedness Plan for the East Demerara Water Conservancy.

There is a US\$3 million - Cunha Canal Rehabilitation Programme to assist in drainage on the East Bank; a US\$8.5 million — Hinterland Environmentally Sustainable Development Programme; and a US\$15 million - Sustainable Agricultural Development Programme Project.

In 2017, preliminary works for the agricultural census for the entire country will commence. We will contract firms to design and supervise the construction of the agricultural stations in Regions 9 and 10 in Ebini and Pirara and pilot meat processing facilities in Regions 5 and 9.

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

Mr. Anamayah: I rise to make my contribution to the debates for 2017. As I do so, I ask myself, why is there a need for any debate on this budget, to begin with? There has been national outrage and condemnation of this budget, and rightly so. We should not be belabouring this point anymore. I think our speakers have clearly advanced many cogent and compelling reasons as to why this budget should be withdrawn.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Simona Charles-Broomes, said in her presentation that the coalition Government is a Government that listens. But I ask to whom? Civil society, the trade unions, financial analysts, economists and everybody, all and sundry, have spoken, but all it seems would be ignored. Everyone would be ignored, including the Opposition benches.

This Government believes that it has all the answers. It does so believe and it is prepared to ignore the advice of the PPP Members, sitting on this side of the House, who collectively have over 100 years of experience in running a country and managing its affairs.

During the Hon. Minister of Finance's presentation, we heard, well this was said so many times, the boast of the third budget of the coalition Government in 18 months. But therein lies the problem. It is obvious that no effort was made to put any content in that budget; anything that would benefit our people; anything that would assist this ailing economy; anything that would move our country forward and would bring people out of poverty. In fact, the budget does the exact opposite. It is obvious that the Minister of Finance and, in fact, the entire Executive are incapable of managing the financial affairs of our country. This budget proves that they do not know what they are doing. The problem is that they do not know that they do not know. How is it that after two decades of presenting budgets in the House, the PPP/C never had to impose such an oppressive taxation regime on its people? The PPP/C did not try to tax the country into oblivion as this Government is trying to do. The PPP/C must have been doing something right. But now something is dreadfully wrong.

Last year, I stood right here in this House, when the Hon. Minister said that he projected a 4.4% growth and I said in my speech last year that that was a myth. Are we to expect that this budget would deliver the projected growth in GDP of 3.8%? That is wishful thinking and that simply cannot happen with the measures that we see therein. It is evident that they are incapable of coming up with a plan to run our country and much less an economic plan that would take us into the future. They are running us into the ground.

It is obvious that the Government did not consider the severe hardships, economic problems and other adverse negative consequences that will flow from this budget. I join the call of my Colleagues on this side to ask that the budget be withdrawn. Minister of Finance, come back in three months and use that time to craft a proper budget. Also, use that time to take up the Leader

of Opposition's offer for some advice and some help – sit with him. If you do not want to sit with him, at least listen to him. Hon. Member, let us see if you are serious about social cohesion. Let us see if you are serious about putting your country first and putting petty partisan political agenda second. Drop the arrogance, swallow your pride and do what is right for our country.

While this budget is being taken to Princess Street, I strongly recommend that the APNU/AFC *2015 Manifesto* be taken there also and burnt. This is your contract and promise to the people. Here is what the Hon. Prime Minister said:

“Whilst we need to reform the Value Added Tax (VAT), we propose to restructure the tax recovery system, not to oppress wage earners”.

Has this budget done that? In the manifesto also, under the heading of taxation, this is what is stated:

“The present tax system is highly inequitable and unjust. The overall tax burden in Guyana is considerable. The ratio of Central Government revenue to GDP is the highest in the Caribbean”.

Well, after this budget it will be the highest in the world.

It would be remiss of me if I do not share with the House the comments of the Chambers of Commerce in Berbice, in particular the Central Corentyne Chamber of Commerce. [Mr. Williams: What is the source?] It was quoted in *Guyana Times* newspaper, Monday, 5th, December, 2016, on page 9. The heading reads:

“Guyanese it seems are destined to remain in poverty” – according to the Chamber of Commerce.”

“One item that has jumped out at us and one which we have found to be totally reprehensible is the imposition of VAT on electricity and water. This is a real sleight of hand operation by the Minister of Finance, reducing VAT by 2 % and then coming through the backdoor and poking it back at us. We are calling for this measure to be withdrawn, immediately. The VAT measures in the budget are a three-card trick thinking that our people would be fooled again.”

I also have a message from a number AFC supporters from Berbice for the Leaders of the AFC in the House, the Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Nagamootoo, and the Hon. Minister of Public Security, Mr. Ramjattan. They are asking that they go to Whim and Number 47 Village in Berbice and explain to them.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am reminding the two front benches that they are disrupting the work of the House. Please contain yourselves.

Mr. Anamayah: Thank you for your protection Mr. Speaker. They are asking that they go to them and explain to them how the 14 % VAT on electricity, water, internet and telephone services and social media services would be of benefit to them. They are at a loss and they want to know how that would inure to their benefit and they are demanding your presence there to explain that to them. Let us see how the spin doctor will spin that one. [Ms. Ally: Give us the names.]

I have to give you a list Hon. Member.

During the consultations on the estimates for the constitutional agencies, some of us learnt of the concept fiscal space or the lack of fiscal space, which was used as the reason to cut the budgets of those agencies. But how is it, when it comes to spending on themselves, the Executive, with these enormous salary increases, *squandermania* on the D' Urban Park Development Project, inauguration ceremonies, balls and dances or whatever, how is it that, when it comes to those spending, there is what that could only be described as fiscal incontinence.

3.30 p.m.

The doctors here would have to explain that to some of the Members on that side of the House. The Government is afflicted with fiscal incontinence when it comes to spending on itself. Conversely, when it comes to giving the cane cutters and the sugar workers an Annual Production Incentive (API) or a bonus; giving the policemen and women a much needed and earned bonus; giving the public servants the 20% that they were promised, we have the opposite, fiscal constipation. That is what we are experiencing when it comes to giving the poor people of this country what was promised to them. The doctors in this honourable House would have to prescribe the maladies and the medical treatment to solve those problems.

Since the assumption of office, the Executive has rode roughshod over another very important branch of Government, which is the Judiciary. Right here, in this House, we have seen cuts to the budget of the Supreme Court amounting to approximately \$750 million. No new Judges have been appointed, although suitably qualified persons were recommended by the Judicial Service Commission (JSC). This is having a serious impact on the timely delivery of justice to our people and in dealing with the backlog.

A Family Court was built under the PPP/C, commissioned by this Administration, and has absorbed two full-time Judges. This is putting additional burden on our Judiciary. We have witnessed instead from the Executive a full frontal assault on the Judiciary, where they are calling the head of the Judiciary a dictator. No one works harder than our Judges and Magistrates in this country.

After three weeks in office, the Executive saw it fit to give itself a 50% plus salary increase. After 19 months in office, do you know what our Judges got? One miserly 1%. This is discriminatory and wrong. What has the Executive done to merit an increase? How can the Judiciary be given 1% and how could that be justified? Shameful!

Surely, if hundreds of millions can be spent on *a white elephant* like the D'Urban Park Development Project, moneys should be found to pay our Judges. But do more than that, provide them with Legal Research Assistants as they need and as is done in Trinidad and Tobago and elsewhere in the Caribbean. They also need medical insurance. The medical insurance was on the cards and it was about to happen under the PPP/C, but under this "I don't care" APNU/AFC Executive it has fallen off. It is no longer important; it is not a priority. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.

We must realise that, in our system of cheques and balances, it is the Judiciary, our Judges in particular who are the guardians of our democracy and the upholders of the supreme law, our Constitution. It is they who will protect us and the citizens of this beautiful country of ours against the excesses of an Executive Government that is bent on doing that. We saw that recently. The Courts had to intervene in the Carvil Duncan matter and in the Core Homes matter. There are many more cases pending and there are many more decisions that have already been

given. This is not the time to starve the Judiciary of resources and to, in anyway, undermine its independence. The independence of the Judiciary must be safeguarded.

This brings me to one measure in the budget. So, speaking directly to the Hon. Minister's budget presentation, on page 82:

"Persons leaving Guyana with tax liabilities - It is proposed to revise the provision of Section 45 of the VAT Act by deleting the proviso which allows for a court order to be obtained to enforce this provision."

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 15 minutes.

Mr. Anamayah: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This means that this removes the protection guaranteed to our citizens. It gives the Executive and the tax man too much power to prevent a citizen from leaving this country, if he decides, by whatever flawed calculation, that a person owes taxes. It is draconian and it needs to be withdrawn also.

I will move quickly along to the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), the Skeldon Sugar Estate in particular. I received a call this morning before coming here from a cane farmer. His query to me was, "Adrian what is happening to sugar? What is happening to the Skeldon Estate in particular? Are they going to close it?" My simple answer to him was that that seems shrouded in secrecy. I am hearing the same things he was hearing, that it would be closed; that it will be sold; that it will be privatised; and that it is a *ticking time bomb*. This Government ought to bring the issue of GuySuCo to the House, to the select committee where it belongs, so that the Members of the Opposition here can make their contributions to safeguard the industry. The importance of the industry to Berbicians cannot be overstated. Businessmen and women in Corriverton and throughout Berbice are worried about the future of the industry. It is giving them sleepless nights because they know the importance of it to their survival in Corriverton.

GuySuCo presents the Government with an opportunity to rise to a challenge. The industry has issues, yes, one cannot gainsay that. The Skeldon Sugar Estate has issues, yes, but it presents an opportunity for the Government to rise to the occasion and to confront those challenges and meet them, and to deliver on one of its campaign promises, not to close any sugar estate. It calls for creative and innovative thinking, but we are seeing the exact opposite. It seems that the Skeldon

Estate is being sabotaged. There is no more robust maintenance schedule. The Estate Manager is not being given the resources he needs to run the estate. Mr. Speaker, I will give you two examples. The estate needs a punt fleet of 900 punts. It was given 500 punts. How can the Estate Manager operate like that? How can he meet his target? It needs nine mechanical harvesters. This Government has given six or four and a half. So, they are setting up the industry for failure.

On the issue of diversification, under the PNC and the late President Burnham, diversification was tried. Let me just go through a list of what was tried – cherry it failed; onion, blackeye, dhal, tilapia, craw fish, cotton cheese, dairy and pumpkin, all of these failed. The Government also tried rice and it failed and it will fail again. If the Government cannot grow sugar cane then it cannot grow any crop. The sugar cane is the sturdiest crop. The Minister of Agriculture should tell the Government that. One can bulldoze it, burn it or do anything with it and it would still grow and produce. If the Government cannot grow sugar cane, how will it grow rice? That is a failed experiment as the Hon. Member, Mr. Seeraj, had said and it is doomed to failure.

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

Mr. Anamayah: Thank you Mr. Speaker.

In closing, I am reminded of what the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, said that, in this House, he felt like *Alice in Wonderland*. I completely understand his plight. Alice, in the guise of the Minister of Finance, has taken the entire Executive down that *rabbit hole* into a fantasy land where the good life exists and where VAT and all these things are good, and where the economy is booming.

I will describe this budget, in closing, as sadistic. It is designed to inflict maximum pain and suffering on our people. It seems as if, when the Cabinet sat to craft it, it was thinking about measures that would inflict the greatest harm to our people and they have succeeded. No one has been spared, except them. So they should congratulate themselves for such a remarkable achievement. The deflowering of the National Treasury must stop now. This budget has to be withdrawn. The nation should not be taxed for APNU/AFC's incompetence and mismanagement of the economy.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members I will bring to your attention a practice which is gradually developing. I just saw it demonstrated a few minutes ago, where Members in this House waved their arms about. Some of that is directed to this Chair. I do not know whether it is to the Speaker, but it is directed this way. What I would ask Members to do is see if they could avoid that. Practices of this kind seem to multiply, so let us try to avoid it.

Minister of Public Health [Dr. Norton]: If it pleases you Mr. Speaker. I fully support the Minister of Finance on the presentation of his Budget 2017 titled: *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*. The Hon. Minister, Mr. Winston DeCosta Jordan, informed this august House that the coalition Government continues to prioritise the health and well-being of all the people of Guyana, as a pillar of ensuring economic development, happiness, productivity and prosperity. Thirty one billion two hundred million dollars or 12.5% of this budget shall be expended in the health sector comprising of seven programmes.

Over the past 18 months, we in this coalition Government have never lost sight of the goal of our health sector's strategy, which is, "To achieve universal coverage for health care by creating an efficient and modern system with adequate human capacity and with high quality health infrastructure". One of the seven programmes I mentioned before is that of Policy Development and Administration. This programme serves to ensure the efficient coordination and management of human, financial and physical resources that are so necessary for the success of the administration of the Ministry's operation.

3.45 p.m.

Of the \$1.7 billion allocated to this programme, \$274.5 million is set aside for capital expenditure. Some of the projects, which are expected to be undertaken in this programme, include the reconstruction of the head office complex of the Ministry of Public Health in a three-phase implementation schedule of approximately \$100 million in this first phase. It is a known fact that the head office of Ministry of Public Health was burnt to the ground nearly eight years ago, that is, since July 2009 during the past regime. The People's Progressive Party/civic (PPP/c) seemed quite contented in letting it remains that way. This coalition Government, on the other hand, has better ideas.

We are now correcting this situation because it is the proper and orderly thing to do. It is not as was intimated by one of our colleagues across the floor that the Ministers of Public Health want to be in some posh office setting. No, to the contrary, both Ministers in this Ministry are quite fit, keen and ready to go out in the fields, across the savannahs, over mountains and up the rivers, where we can interact with the people and to appreciate and be more aware of their living conditions, like no other Minister of Health has ever done before. We have gone and will continue to go to these places rather than to be in some office in Georgetown.

Also, included in this programme is the construction of a laboratory and administrative building for the Food & Drug Department for \$110 million. A further \$20.7 million will be used to procure laboratory supplies, quality control aids and proficiency testing materials. This would include the purchasing of fume hood and a steam digester both for the excise laboratory at a cost of \$11.2 million, 2 incubators and a hot air oven for the microbiology lab at a cost of \$2 million, and 5 analytical balances for all the laboratories at a cost of \$7.5 million.

In addition, the National Public Health Reference Laboratory will also aim to strengthen its quality management system with the end goal of achieving the accreditation of the International Organisation for Standards relating to quality management systems requirement. This will certainly minimise our dependence on overseas testing. Under this programme, as well, a refrigerated delivery truck will be purchased at a cost of \$20 million for the Materials Management Unit at Diamond.

The objective of the programme of regional and clinical service is to ensure that regional and clinical services are provided consistently and adequately in all regions of this country. This is especially so in the far-flung hinterland Regions of 1, 2, 7, 8 and 9 that seems to have been forgotten by the past regime. It is revealing to know that as we visit these communities the villagers are always welcoming, delighted and seemingly pleasantly surprised as they claimed that never before they had been visited by any Minister much less by a Minister of Health. Except of a particular case where a certain former Minister, not a Minister of Health, encountered quite a challenge of stepping with her stiletto heels in the soft sand of the village yard which was so artistically imitated by an elderly woman of the village to the amusement of the villagers. These villages, which would include Waikrebi, Kurutuku, Arau, Kaibarupai, Wax

Creek, Imbotero and Basha, have all become household for the names now Ministry of Public Health, just to name a few.

Proposed in this sectors budget is money for equipping district hospitals in these hinterland regions with specialised staff and equipment, so that health services are as accessible, acceptable, affordable and appropriate as possible, given the availability of resources and where it can be delivered with equity and quality. This will vastly reduce the need for and the cost of medical evacuations which cost as much as \$48.4 million this year and it is budgeted for \$57 million for this year.

It seems a telling message to persons of the hinterland region when a colleague from across the floor expressed his total disagreement, which some amount of disgust, that the fact that a donated computed tomography (CT) scan machine was earmarked for Bartica. This speaks volume of the regards the PPP/c has for the hinterland regions. Why not Bartica? Why does it have to be West Demerara or Suddie? Besides, Bartica is central to so many hinterland and riverine communities, not only Region 7, but also is readily accessible to communities of Regions 3, 8, and 10. Bartica's public hospital has become one of the most efficiently run institutions with a functioning operating theatre 24/7 and its similarly functioning Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). It can boast of having a staff of 16 doctors including eight specialists of obstetrics and gynaecology, orthopaedics, paediatrics, dermatology, ear nose and throat, cardiology, anaesthesiology and general surgery. The hospital in Lethem, Mabaruma and Mahdia are all going in that same direction. I can assure this honourable House that the CT scan, which was sent to Bartica, along with the one that was sent to New Amsterdam Hospital, is technically and physically well stored in air-conditioned containers and it was certified by the visiting engineers that the storage conditions are acceptable.

This programme has been allocated a sum of approximately \$1 billion for capital expenditure of which approximately \$347 million was earmarked for the construction of a drug bond at Kingston - \$250 million, a furnace at Kwakwani - \$6 million dollars, provision of an elevator at the Linden Hospital Complex - \$25 million and rehabilitation of the old hospital building in Linden to accommodate psychiatric, renal dialysis and chemotherapy services - \$10 million and \$23 million will be used for the completion of doctors quarters at that same institution, as an ongoing project in Port Kaituma.

Other rollover projects are \$34.3 million for the upgrading of the Diamond and Leonora Diagnostic Centres and the construction of a nurses' hostel in Region 1 for \$12 million. Some of the retention projects would be the extension and remodelling of the hospital at Kwakwani to house the operating room unit, the rehabilitation unit and a larger nurses' rest room. Fifteen million dollars will be used to purchase a fully equipped ambulance for the hospital at Kwakwani, two dialysis machines at a cost of 3.5 million. A DC 3600 haematology analyser will be bought for the Linden Hospital Complex for \$3 million and \$50 million will be used for the purchase of autoclaves, analysers, electrocardiography (ECG) machine, defibrillators, doppler, monitors, among other equipment.

Included in the programme of regional and clinical service is the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) and \$500 million is provided for capital expenditure. In this House, there has been much complaint about the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, especially the Accident & Emergency (A&E) Unit. There is the complaining of the long hours patients have to wait, the A&E Unit being overcrowded and no beds for admitted patients. Hindsight, that I must remind the Hon. Member that it is always twenty - twenty but the House must be informed that the GPHC provides the highest level of care within the Government owned and operated health care system. This hospital has been undergoing a transformation to better meet its mandate. Its capacity for higher quality and complex care has increased significantly in all the major specialties. It has an expanded programme for cardiac care, including invasive cardiology and open heart surgery. Only last Friday last I commissioned the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit at that institution. Also there are joint replacement and spinal surgeries, renal replacement programme, including renal transplant, enhanced oncology, enhanced neonatal and paediatric programmes, along with obstetrics and gynaecology.

As a result, there is pressure and demand for more space and infrastructure resources within this institution. We of this coalition Government are the first to recognise this condition and we are committed to doing all we can as soon as possible to correct this situation. This is also well known to the Hon. Member who came complaining, yet we are all heard and saw the performance and the play to the gallery. I do wish him luck on his campaign trail at his upcoming congress. This Hon. Member is fully aware of a building master plan by Peter Milne which was done as part of the health sector reform for the functions, plans and architectural brief

of the new inpatient facility at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. It is a fact that at one point in time, the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation had over 600 beds in its inpatient facility and now that amount has been reduced to 450. This is so because in the original plan of the past Government to build that new inpatient facility, a total of 318 beds were to have been provided for the medical & surgical patients.

This new facility should have been made up of the north and south wings with a total of 214 beds and a west wing of 104 beds, but because of the inefficiency and all the problem that arose in that past regime, including the adjustment of pile height and a delay in approving the variations of work, construction was delayed and resume some two years later. The funding was unable to provide for the construction of the west wing. I can show here and for all the Hon. Member in this honourable House the original plan of this hospital. You would notice that half of the plan was not completed and it was here for all to see that portion accounted for 104 beds. For someone who has played an integral role in this fiasco, that person has the temerity to now come here and complained that there is bed shortage.

Ms. Teixeira: Can we ask that the Hon. Member share this document to the House as he demonstrated it?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, would you reclaim your seat?

Ms. Teixeira: I beg your pardon. I did not make a Point of Order. I ask that the Hon. Member share the document with the House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Ms. Teixeira, you have interrupted the debate to make a point that is not a Point of Order.

Ms. Teixeira: You have asked for all the documents to be shared. I am asking for the documents to be shared.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, could you take your seat?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Dr. Norton: The Hon. Member actually referred to an editorial in *Stabroek News* newspaper conveniently to describe this budget. I will also refer to an editorial, but this time it is from

Kaieteur News newspaper to describe the same budget where it states that since becoming the Opposition, some of the PPP Members, including its leader, have been behaving as if they have been canonised.

4.00 p.m.

Their criticism of the budget and their angel-like behaviour are deceitful and hypocritical, to say the least. This accurately describes the Hon. Member's behaviour when he comes here with his display of best described as a sourpuss. I would also like to point out that it is not adequate...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I sure that you know that you use a language that is not allowed in this House. Could you withdraw that epithet? I must say to Hon. Members, I thank everyone for wanting to do the work of the Speaker, but for the moment I am sitting here and for that time I would do it. I notice, if I may say so, that the hand movements are taking over. There is a process that existed here. We had the example with Ms. Teixeira interrupting a debate to make her comment when she must know that at the end of that debate of that speech she could have got up and addressed the Speaker, but she chose to do it then. Now, other Members, it seems that they could do other things. I am not sure how long the Speaker would try to not apply the rules. I am not sure how long this would happen.

Hon. Member, you are required to withdraw the epithet and then move on.

Dr. Norton: I withdraw.

I would like also to point out that it was not accurate for another Hon. Member to come before this House, in a typical alarming style, painting a horrifying situation of the status of our expanded programme on immunisation and nutrition. The Hon. Member, as a past Minister of Health, should be fully aware that immunisation coverage is based on a yearly target, which is an accumulated target. The vaccination programme measures the coverage on a continuous basis and as such the statistics given is for 75%, which is the third quarter of this year's estimated births. It is impossible to be able to give the annual coverage when we have only covered three quarters and compare it to the year before. The coverage measured out of 75%.

In other words, in this budget, the one-year-old immunised against tuberculosis (TB) and bacillus chalmette–guerin (BCG) shows that it is 75%, but because it is the third quarter, that 75% is

actually equal to 100%. If at the end of the year you compare it, it would be 100%, because it is the third quarter, likewise for the diphtheria pertussis tetanus (DPT) pentavalent is 73% out of 75, which is excellent. To date, the immunisation has maintained vaccination coverage of over 90% for all antigens. Currently, for the third quarter, the coverage is the following: pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) 13 - 65%, measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) - 69%, polio - 70%, haemophilus influenza - 73%, hepatitis B - 73%, DPT - 73% - excellent coverage.

Not only that, but Guyana has successfully received certification for the elimination of measles and rubella. We are currently in the process of eliminating the wild polio virus too, after successfully implementing the injectable polio vaccine and switching from trivalent oral polio to bivalent oral polio vaccine. I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, for 2016, the programme encountered many challenges such as the increased demand for yellow fever vaccine after the outbreak in Angola, the risk of importation of diphtheria after the outbreak in the city of Bolivar in Venezuela and the chicken pox outbreak. Five regions, however, were targeted for mop up activity in the face of the diphtheria outbreak and a total of 1,262 persons were given the first doses of vaccine. The booster doses will be repeated during the coming week.

I must tell you, Mr. Speaker, that it is unfortunate that such a description was meted out and could be considered as an insult to the hard-working nurses, community health workers, doctors and medics by the utterance of such vicious statement.

Similarly, that is what is reflected in the indices of malnourishment. It is only for up to the third quarter and not the whole year. Rather than going there, the Hon. Member should explain to this House what went wrong with the Basic Nutrition Programme, Phase 2, where a contracted sum of US\$1.5 million dollars was signed. The New Guyana Pharmaceutical Corporation GPC was paid an advance of 70% or US\$1.1 million of that sum, that is for the production sprinkles, only for a request to be made to the New GPC to seize the production due to low consumption of the product and a large quantities were expired. We are coming to this House and talk about the children of our nation being malnourished.

In 2016, \$88.7 million was spent on the extension of the maternity block of the (GPHC) and in 2017; \$11.8 million is budgeted as a retention project for same. This block will provide 50 patients beds and it consists of two floors. On the ground floor, there are training rooms, doctors

and residents on call rooms and offices. On the first floor, there are two operating theatres, birthing room area, post delivery room area and a step down unit along with a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit [An Hon. Member: Which area is that?] It is at the Georgetown hospital's maturity wing.

The GPHC spent \$10 million to complete the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit together with the Guyana Programme for Advanced Cardiac Care. This has the capacity for 14 beds for the management of persons in need of critical care. The cardiology unit at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation would now be able to provide cardiology services to citizens who otherwise would not be able to afford these services. It is interesting to note that when the Hon. Comrade referred to what the 14% value added tax (VAT) was doing, he was only referring to it if persons go to a private office. This coalition Government is making every effort to ensure that the services are readily available and citizens would not have to go to the private sector for services and products. Going to the private sector should be an option or a choice. If you want to go, then so do it.

We are so concerned about health services, yet many of us prefer to remain in the private sector rather than going to the public sector where we could treat the people across this nation who might not afford to go to the... [Ms. Manickchand: Where were you?] I was in the public sector all my life. I was in the public sector. At least you could go and make a contribution even if you want to stay in the private sector.

The Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation has demonstrated... Its motto of "We Care" is for not only for its patients, but also for the staff, especially our hard-working nurses. To this end, mobilisation has begun for the construction of a day care centre for the staff of the hospital at a cost of \$30 million.

In an attempt to reduce the annual rental cost for visiting faculty, consultants and medical teams, \$25 million has been earmarked to commence the rehabilitation of the staff quarters at Waterloo Street. This facility will provide in excess of 19 self-contained, single and duplex apartments. Additionally, \$30 million has been allocated towards the rehabilitation of the main operating theatre to improve sterility, among other things in the theatre.

To protect significant investment in key equipment, CT scanner, anaesthetic machines, echocardiography machines, ultrasound machines and to ensure a reliable supply of clean and steady power within the main operating theatre, the maternity theatres, the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and the NICU, approximately \$85 million have been allocated towards the procurement of four large uninterrupted power sources.

Moreover, in 2017, an additional \$445 million has been budgeted for the continued improvement of the diagnostic capabilities of the GPHC, so that patients could be treated in a meticulous and efficient manner. For medical equipment, 63 patient monitors, ventilators, defibrillators, instruments and equipment for thoracic surgery, digital mammography system, pathology equipment, radiology equipment, ears nose and throat (ENT) equipment, paediatric equipment, neurosurgery equipment and neurology equipment. All of this has been budgeted in this Budget 2017. In keeping with the Government's green agenda, \$4 million has been allocated towards replacing all security lights with light emitting diode (LED) lighting within the compounds of the GPHC. Efforts will continue to transform the GPHC into a state-of-the-art facility.

To this end, Budget 2017 will cater for the commencement of a computerisation study to assess the needs of the corporation, present the various options of computerisation and make recommendations for cost effective and scalable solutions. At the end of this process, the GPHC will have a road map to computerise all business, hospital processes and patient records, that is, from the point of initial contact to the completion of treatment at the facility. Furthermore, \$12 million has been allocated for the procurement of a laboratory information system.

All these capital expenditures have been along together sufficient financing for current expenditure for the capacity building and training of our human resources. To this end, 19 doctors completed postgraduate studies in the area of orthopaedics & traumatology, anaesthesia, emergency medicine, paediatrics, obstetrics & gynaecology and internal medicine, infectious disease programmes. This was only for 2016. This is an ongoing process and 20 additional doctors are currently enrolled in the 2016/2017 academic year.

The master's degree in psychiatry programme began in 2016 with an intake of 4 residents. This is all a part of the postgraduate programme for physicians at the GPHC. Along with the doctors, we also had the launching of the emergency nursing programme through the collaborative effort

of GPHC, University of Guyana and Vanderbilt University of the United States of America. Initially, 20 nurses will be trained and will receive a bachelor's degree at the successful completion of this two years' programme. Already, arrangements are being put in place for a similar programme in neonatal intensive care nursing programme and as well as an advanced midwifery programme. Similarly, they would be ending with a bachelor's degree. GPHC continues recognised and accredited a training site of the American Heart Association. To this end, 72 persons were trained in advanced cardiovascular life support and 217 persons in basic life support.

4.15 p.m.

Having declared all the future plans for the health sector in this Budget 2017, in such a massive way, one can only conclude that this coalition Government is preparing for a long stay beyond 2020. [Applause]

Minister of Public Infrastructure [Mr. Patterson]: Mr. Speaker, colleague Ministers, Hon. Members on this side of the House and Members of the Opposition, I stand to congratulate my colleague and his hard-working team for the wonderful effort in putting together this Budget 2017, which was well done, a remarkable feat in doing so before the closure of the 2016 financial year. We are a progressive Government. I am elated to be part of the team which is working with great vigour to transform this land of ours into a heaven here on earth. I know with the measures contained in this budget, we will attain our goals.

From the standpoint of my remit, focus will be placed on a more concerted effort to ensure that roads, bridges, energy, power generation and other infrastructure works are undertaken and expanded, thus leading to a more integrated infrastructure for the creation of linkages with all regions and all Guyana. With the kind of initiatives programmed and with the courage and ingenuity we can and we will be able to bring about a transformation never envisaged. It is therefore incumbent on all, especially the 'fence sitters', some of my colleagues on the other side who only see gloom and doom, to catch the vision and come on board to see Guyana and Guyanese attain the zenith of progress and prosperity thus delivering a "good life" to all Guyana and Guyanese.

In regard to the theme, *Building a Diversified Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to all Guyanese*, my Ministry has already initiated steps to create the linkages. The Hon. Minister of Finance touched on a number of areas under my purview in his Budget 2017 speech which highlighted the passion, drive and ambition of this Government, in regard to infrastructure development. Continuing in that vein, I will now review the performance of my Ministry in 2016 and provide a projection for 2017.

The overall budget expenditure for 2016, as of December 16, 2016, the current voted among under Programme 1, Policy Development and Administration, expenditure stood at \$2.87 billion out of \$3.4 billion which is 84% as of December 16. Public works' expenditure stood at \$2.4 billion out of \$2.95 billion, out of 82%. In Programme 3, transportation expenditure stood at half a billion dollars out of \$790 million which is 63%. Overall, under the current account, it is 82.8% expenditure and our overall anticipation is anticipated to be fully expended by the end of the financial year.

The capital provisions specific expenditure stood at \$6.2 billion out of \$12 billion, local expenditure \$7.8 billion out of \$10.7 billion. Overall, we are currently at \$60.4 billion expenditure at the end of the year. We were given a contingency allowance advance in a supplementary provision of \$7 billion and expenditure, so far, has been \$3.8 billion. The majority of the outstanding amount is the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) payment which is specific. I understand that sum is being processed as we speak. The total overall budget at 2016, current, capital and supplementary was \$37.7 billion. In 2017 the total budgetary allowance for the Ministry of Public Infrastructure is \$34.55 billion. The current provision is \$7.2 billion and the capital provision is \$27.6 million. This represents an increase of \$13.8 million overall for our 2016 allocation.

I now address the waterfront development and enhancement project which was proposed. In my Budget 2016 presentation, I listed several projects to be funded by the Government of Guyana and the United Kingdom (UK) Caribbean infrastructure, from the UK, Caribbean infrastructure fund, Department for International Development (DFID). However, in reviewing the situation the preferred option of the donor was for one large project which would stand out and which could be easily visible. With this in mind, the Ministry has proposed two revised projects, which have been accepted by the funding agency. There will be the creation and restoration of a

modern waterfront recreational area between Kingston and Ogle which will include the upgrading of the Stabroek Market and the Vreed-en-Hoop Stelling. To ensure that this waterfront development remains accessible year round, and in keeping with the announcement that the Minister of Business made, there will also be the acquisition of a dredge in this part of this project. Additionally, there will be the rehabilitation and upgrading of Linden to Mabura road and construction of a bridge across the Rupununi River at Kurupukari. It is time that we start walking the walk and stop talking the talk. We have been doing this since independence. This Government has decided to walk the walk.

I was amazed last evening to hear one of the speakers commenting that the first phase of the Linden-Lethem road was not viable at this time. I think that was the Hon. Member Mr. Lumumba. It is a shame, Sir, but obviously the people of Regions 8, 9 and 10, I am sure, will judge the party from which that Member is from accordingly in 2020. There are accustomed to empty promises that are not fulfilled. It is time to move forward. The Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) will be responsible for overseeing these two projects and a team from the bank, I am pleased to admit, will be in Guyana from December 12 to 15 so that the formal agreements could be finalised on the two revised projects.

Works Services Group: This group is charged with the responsibility for the execution of all foreign and nationally funded infrastructural projects falling under the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. In regard to the East Bank Demerara four-lane road, this project was finally completed in September 2016 at a total cost of US\$17.171 million. The project, which covers 5.4 kilometres from Providence to Diamond, is now under the defects liability period, which will conclude in September 2017.

Additionally, public advertisements for pedestrian and vehicle overpasses along the East Bank Demerara have been placed in the print media and tenders will be opened on December 20, 2016. Civil works are expected to commence in 2017. Meanwhile, the Sheriff Street–Mandela Avenue Project, funded under the IDB, signed on March 15, 2013, has finally had its project re-scope completed following protracted delays. Civil works will commence in 2017 after completion of the procurement process.

The award of civil works contract for the East Bank Berbice road will now commence in 2017 as the Ministry awaits evaluation from independent evaluators recommended by the Guyana Association of Professional Engineers (GAPE). The Ministry acknowledges that there has been a delay. We would like to apologise to the residents in Region 6. They will have our commitment that we will have the project completed in 2017. Budget 2017 has a provision for \$1.240 billion for these projects.

After considerable delays, the framework agreement with the People's Republic of China for US\$45.5 million concessional loan for the completion of the widening and improvement of the East Coast of Demerara highway was signed by the Ministry of Finance on November 23, 2016. China Railway First Group Ltd. will complete the entire stretch of road from Better Hope to Belfield. Budget 2017 has provision of \$1.4 billion dollars. [Mr. Trotman: The contract

is here already.] I am just being informed that the contract is here already so I would invite you all to come and witness the signing.

With regard to the Vreed-en-Hoop to Hydrone, 30.7 Kilometre, Caribbean Development Bank (CDB funded, the proposed works will improve the section of roadway from Vreed-en-Hoop to Hydrone, West Coast Demerara, approximately 30.7 kilometre long. At the end of November, this project was 58% completed. Its completion date is December 2018. However the contractors are seeking to finish earlier than that. In Budget 2017 a provision of \$2.335 billion has been slated for the completion of these works.

The sea and river defence resilience project outlines the various project components programmed for implementation during the period 2017 – 2018. This is the third sea defence project. This project commenced in the last quarter of 2015 when all the pre-conditions were satisfied. The envisaged benefits include flood protection infrastructure, capacity building within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and community awareness and education. Works will be conducted in Regions 2, 3, 4, and 6. These works include 5.4 kilometre of rehabilitative sea defence at eight sites in the identified regions. For 2017, the budget allocation for the continuation of this project is \$980 million, with a completion date of December 2018.

When it comes to urban and miscellaneous roads in 2016, this year, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, through the Works Service Group (WSG), has been constructing and

rehabilitating roads in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10. The budgeted amount in 2016 was \$1.42 billion and \$1.6 billion respectively. Under this programme 33 new and existing roads in Regions 2, 3, 5 and 6 were rehabilitated.

[**Mr. Damon:** Which part in Region 2?]

Several Sir. Member of Parliament Mr. Rajkumar will willingly carry you, Hon. Member.

For the urban roads programme approximately \$386 million is to be used to construct or rehabilitate 31 new and existing roads in Regions 2, 4, 6 and 10, while the remaining funds are mainly for the completion of the multi-year projects.

4.30 p.m.

Works will include the overlaying of streets, pothole repairs, construction and cleaning of drains, construction and repairs of bridges within communities. By the end of 30th November, 2016, the expenditure on the miscellaneous roads stood at \$1.049 billion while urban roads were \$917 million. Additionally, I was pleased to report that four kilometre of roads to the tune of \$176 million were completed in Leguan in 2016. The Ministry will continue its commitment to have our Mobile Asphalt Plant dispatched to another remote location in 2017 and will bring to the people in those regions things that they only dreamt of.

Budget 2017 has provisions for miscellaneous roads and urban roads to the tune of \$1.15 billion for miscellaneous roads and \$1.03 billion for urban roads. For the avoidance of doubt - and I know that when we come to examine the Estimates, there may be some queries on these things - I want to state now that the allocations for every region and road works in every region have increased significantly in Budget 2017. Hon. Member Mr. Damon, you would probably be pleased to know that the allocation for Region 2 roads has risen by 56%; Region 3 has risen to 23%; Region 5 has risen to 29%; and Region 6 has risen to 22%.

In urban roads, that is, the roads in townships - the Member of Parliament of Region 2 would be pleased to know - the allocation has risen by 33% in 2016; Region 4 has risen by 35%. In 2017's allocation, we have, for the first time, because of the new townships, allocations for Regions 1, 7 and 9 totalling \$370 million where we would be addressing the townships.

On bridges, two rollover bridges at a cost of \$39.8 million were completed. Three bridges in Liliendaal, No. 66 and No. 51 Villages in Corentyne, with a total contract sum of \$169.8 million

were awarded. Works are ongoing. Another 10 bridges with a total contract sum of \$80.8 million have been awarded and are at different stages of completion. The total expenditure at 6th December, 2016 is \$125.4 million. Budget 2017 has provision of \$200 million for bridges.

Under city arches, the Government of Guyana is partnering with Banks DIH Ltd. in 2016 to erect an arch in the southern boundary of Georgetown at the cost of \$20 million. This arch was opened by His Excellency, President David Granger, on 20th May, 2016. It was always this Government's intention to erect an arch to mark our eastern boundary. Within a few months', I am pleased to announce that, with funding from another private sector organisation, in this case Ansa McAl Ltd., another arch would be erected at Cummings Lodge, East Coast Demerara, to mark the eastern entrance of the city of Georgetown. In addition to improving the aesthetics of our city, these arches will be permanently become landmarks for local and foreign commuters visiting Guyana.

The APNU/AFC Government is committed to linking the hinterland to the coastal areas and has given full support to its realisation since our succession to Office. This is in keeping with the promise in our 2015 Manifesto. An improved road network is vital for the extractive industry as well as our eco-tourism industry. The sum of \$1.72 billion was provided for in 2016 and \$609 million was rolled over from 2015 while the 2016 projects totalled \$1.1 billion. Expenditure at the end of November was approximately \$636 million. The pace of implementation in 2016 was not as I would have anticipated. However, we have since improved our capacity. To this end, we have installed and appointed District Engineers and Clerk of Works in all of the regions. They would be supervising all our infrastructure works for the Ministry of Public Infrastructure and would be lending assistance, if needed or if requested, to the regions and the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs).

Budget 2017 makes provision for \$2.3 billion for the continuation of road rehabilitation and construction. At the moment, contracts are out for rehabilitation works along the Bartica-Potaro corridor. Minister Charles-Broomes made reference to this. When completed, this will, once again, provide a direct road linkage between Bartica and Mahdia. Inclusive in this project would be the rehabilitation of the Denham Bridge and the construction of a new bridge at the Cassandra Crossing, once again leading the way, walking the walk.

Under infrastructural development, this component of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure Budget Head seeks to address measures to contribute to the improvement and safety on Guyana Road Networks. Under the 2016 budgetary allocation, a number of significant projects were completed, including the construction of approximately 800 metres of pedestrian walkways in Corriverton and the installation of 331 highway lights on the Corentyne highway and on Ogle, Mocha and Diamond Housing Scheme Access Roads. Works have commenced on the construction of approximately 600 metres of pedestrian walkways along Vlissengen Road to Albert Street on the section of Woolford Avenue and the installation of 77 highway lights and No. 19 Village Public Road between Nos. 50 and 55 Villages, Corentyne. Budget 2017 has a provision of \$601 million for the continuation of the road safety measures.

Our Special Projects Unit, formerly referred to as the Force Account Unit: The sum of \$1 billion was provided in 2016 Budget for this Unit. Works were carried out on 40 roads, totalling 150 kilometres in length as well as 31 roads, primarily in the Georgetown region and the East Bank region. The total expenditure as of 18th November was approximately \$875 million or 84% of our allocation. Supplementary funds were also made available to the tune of \$631.7 million to boost the Unit and to make it more effective in 2017 with the provision of equipment. That is ongoing at the moment. Budget 2017 has provision of \$1.336 billion.

Community Organised for the Restoration of the Environment (CORE): I am pleased to announce that the Ministry of Public Infrastructure will embark upon a new initiative in 2017 that will lend to environmentally sustainable communities. Community Organised for the Restoration of the Environment is a unique initiative that will see the establishment of 20 community groups across all of Guyana's regions. Each region will have two groups, except Region 2 which will have one and Region 4 which will have three.

Some of the identified communities are Moruca, Port Kaituma, No. 51 Village to Moleson Creek, Kato, Mahdia, Bartica, Lethem and Linden. Each group will consist of 10 members, inclusive of a team leader. Employment costs are anticipated at an average of \$7.4 million per annum per group. Tools and safety gears, inclusive of safety boots, reflective vests, shovels, brush cutters and rakes, are included. The entire project is estimated to be \$150 million. The initiative is designed to supplement the work of our Special Projects Unit of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure in such a manner that it provides for the environmental upgrade, drainage,

sanitation improvement and general aesthetics of the works undertaken by the Unit. It is anticipated that the employment of over 200 youths will be under this programme.

Under the Laboratory in the Ministry, the primary aim of the Soils and Materials Laboratory is to facilitate the testing of road building materials, among others, to ensure that those satisfy the required specifications, thus ensuring quality assurance in the construction and rehabilitation of roads throughout the country, as enforced by the Ministry. Materials which do not satisfy the tests are rejected.

During 2016, field and laboratory tests were conducted, totalling 2,413, and over \$21 million in revenue was collected. It is the Ministry's objective to re-establish the position and image of the Ministry's effort in quality control as well as to reintroduce the Ministry as the leading and recognised testing institution.

Under the Government Electrical Inspectorate, this Division continues to carry out its mandate as the industry's electrical safety regulatory body. Over 9,000 certified jobs were done as of November, 2016 and revenues collected up to November, 2016 were \$34.7 million. Meanwhile, the Electricity Sector Regulations Act became law on January, 2016 and allowed for the adoption of the National Electrical Code (NEC).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

Mr. Patterson: I am pleased to announce on the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA), the Corporation recorded 513,444 processed passengers as of November, 2016. That is up compared to 459,346 passengers during last year. The CJIA was twice successfully audited by the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) in 2016. With regard to the expansion programme, I am pleased to report that excavation works were 100% completed; foundations works were 100% completed; the runway works were 50% completed; the construction of a new arrival terminal building has commenced and is expected to be completed in May, 2017.

Relocation of residents: only two residents, as opposed to 2,000 by the previous Administration, have been relocated and we are continuing to...

Under the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA), there is a provision of \$1 billion for renewable energy. The GEA's allocation for this is \$527 million. The GEA has already commenced the process of preparing tender documents for renewable energy projects in 2017.

I would like to speak quickly to the Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL), in concluding. The GPL, in 2016, has taken two propriety steps that were completed and, very importantly, the establishment of our grid code for utility scale generators is above 1.5 megawatts. The grid code provides technical specifications which defines the parameters which any generation facility connected to GPL network must meet to ensure safe, secure and economic and proper functioning of the GPL. This grid code is necessary for our push to have renewable energies onto the grid.

4.45 p.m.

I would like to inform the House, in particular our residents in Region 2, Anna Regina, that the company has invested approximately \$3 million for three 1.7 megawatt generators and these are expected to be commissioned in May, 2017. The new generators will replace the aged Wartsila set and a new set will be incorporated in the planned hybrid power system for Anna Regina, where we will integrate it with a five megawatts renewable solar energy source. And for my Colleagues in Region 7, GPL has invested in, to the cost of US\$250,000, three generators of 0.6 megawatts each. These generators will be installed and commissioned by April, 2017.

Sir, I would just like to quickly...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you must wrap up.

Mr. Patterson: Yes, Sir.

I am pleased to announce the works commenced are about to be completed. For the first time, lights will be in Yarowkabra. This has been promised and should be finished by the end of this year. In next year, we will be powering 50 new areas. These areas include: Friendship Squatting Area, Rosignol Conservation Area, Mainstay Housing Scheme, Mr. Damon's Lot 30 Village and Goedland, Corentyne.

In conclusion, it has been almost 19 months since the APNU/AFC Government has taken over the reigns as Government of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and already there has been significant development, both physical and otherwise, in this short space of time. With an early Budget, there will be ample time to facilitate the timely completion of our projects as set out in this \$250 billion Budget.

Sir, with those comments, I would like to commend this Budget to the House. [Applause]

Bishop Edghill: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I stand to make my contribution to this debate and the first thing I would like to do is to empathise with the Minister of Finance. He has brought a Budget to this House and the last speaker made it 22 of his Colleague Ministers and none of them have sought to defend the 57 measures in the 30 pages of his Budget Presentation. But what they have all sought to do was to explain how they are going to spend the money that they will get. They are not standing with him as it relates to the measures of how he has to collect the moneys to be able to give to them. So, that is the first thing; I empathise with the Minister of Finance.

Secondly, I have a recommendation to make, based on article 106 (2) of the Constitution of Guyana:

“The Cabinet shall aid and advise the President in the general direction and control of the Government of Guyana and shall be collectively responsible therefor to Parliament.”

This Cabinet needs to be fired. They have not given the President of Guyana the best advice. My Colleagues on this side of the House have indicated that every sector of the population has cried out against this Budget and this is the Budget that they have sat, decided and presented to the nation. If there is anything I could thank the Minister of Finance for in this Budget, it is for correctly diagnosing the state of the economy. He has done so very well. This is what he had to say at paragraph 3.1:

“Mr. Speaker, the budget for 2016 projected an overall real growth rate of 4.4 percent. At mid-year, a real economic growth rate of 2 percent was achieved. However, since several industries and sectors including sugar, rice, construction, and wholesale and retail trade, were showing signs of distress, already, the projected growth rate for 2016 was revised

downwards to 4 percent. Since then, several unexpected developments, including the downsizing of Barama and Demerara Timbers Limited's operations in the forestry sector; structural changes and on-going strikes in the sugar industry; and the slow pace of implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) conspired to reduce the real growth rate to 2.6 percent.”

So, we are not talking here only about underperformance in the private sector; the Public Sector Investment Programme is totally under the control of the Government and the Minister has said, in the opening stages of his Budget speech: mismanagement, ineptitude and incompetence have plagued this Government and it has produced underperformance. And I thought my Colleague who spoke before me, the Minister of Public Infrastructure, whose remit really has the hog of the public sector investment money, would have told us about why he underperformed and how he plans to perform. But all he has done is give us a shopping list as if it is a housewife going to the market to buy sugar, flour, butter, rice and oil, all of which will now attract VAT. I am disappointed.

Listen to what is next: agriculture is expected to contract significantly with dismal performance - rice a decline from 12.8%; livestock is expected to contract by 5.1%; forestry is expected to contract significantly – 33.3%. These are all the words of the Minister, not mine. Mining and quarrying is expected to grow by 35.7%. So the Minister has correctly diagnosed the state of our economy. But do you know what the Minister and Cabinet are guilty of? They are guilty of negligence and malpractice because if discovery is made of what the problem is with the patient, then fix it; the responsibility is yours to fix it. They are guilty of negligence and malpractice. Why do I say so? It is because if you discover that gold is what is keeping the economy going, do not punish it; incentivise it so it could do better. We hear from the Guyana Gold and Diamond Miners Association and the Guyana Women Miners Association... I do not need to take up my time to read what they said; it is now known in the House, having been used so often. They have spoken about how they would be stifled by way of this Budget.

The manufacturing sector is contracting; construction is declining from 10.5% to 3.2%. The Budget measures that have been outlined in the 30 pages of Minister Jordan's presentation to this National Assembly will not incentivise any of these contracting or declining sectors or sectors that would have performed terribly. It will make it worse and the one sector that is doing well the

Government has now put a strangulation on it by way of these measures. So, I am saying that the Cabinet that approved this Budget is guilty of malpractice and negligence. And it is on those grounds the Cabinet Members ought to be fired. And if the President does not fire them, the people of Guyana will fire them.

All that was described by the declining in the economy, a growth that was projected at 4.4% and then went to 4% and now we are hearing 2.6%, means loss of jobs. And I would like any one of the speakers coming after me, including the Prime Minister, to tell this nation which part of this Budget will create jobs and how many jobs, because we are searching it. The growing unemployment is leading to increase in crime and other forms of social pathology. In this Budget, there are no new innovative ideas of how to grow and expand the economy in an accelerated and sustainable manner. The Budget must express or show to the nation what the priorities are. And if I read this Budget correctly – the APNU/AFC’s Budget – their priority is taxation.

A Government is supposed to create opportunities for people to prosper in an environment where they are free and where human rights are respected. That is the role of a Government. But do you know what we have in this Budget? It is a Government making money off of the people. The Government is supposed to be providing an environment for the people, the private sector, individuals and families to prosper. But with this Budget, the Government is making money off of the people.

What can we expect? We could expect increase in inflation. This Budget does not inspire confidence. It gives no clear direction as to where this country is going. What is worrying - because all of the 22 Ministers who stood up so far and read out their shopping lists as if that is the ‘good life’... If a husband stops at Bakewell Bakery and buys a loaf of bread and takes it home in the night, that is not the ‘good life’; he is expected to do that. If you build a road, you are expected to do that. If you buy textbooks for schools, you are expected to do that. We were expecting and still are expecting a Budget that tells us how we move from here to the next level of prosperity in Guyana. But we are not moving from here to there; we are moving backwards.

What is more interesting - and I would like the House to listen attentively because numbers are important and people like to cry when they hear numbers - is that in an act of desperation, this

Government, the APNU/AFC Government, has actually cut its own Budget by \$21 billion. Let me tell you how. The Budget is \$250 billion; over \$19 billion is for the payment of foreign debts; it does not come to this House by way of an Appropriation Bill. The Appropriation Bill before this House is just over \$230 billion.

5.00 p.m.

The Minister said that all budgetary and statutory agencies will have to start paying VAT from this Budget. It is in his measures. Take away salaries from recurrent expenditure and one is left with \$118,120,135,000. When someone goes to the market to buy goods and services from all the Ministries and agencies, one has to pay VAT. The VAT that will be paid is \$16,536,818,900 on the Capital Expenditure. One will not pay VAT on the foreign-funded programmes; VAT is paid on local programmes. If one checks the Budget book, one would see that local expenditure under Capital Expenditure is \$34,614,408,000. The 14% VAT this will attract is \$4,846,017,120. The Budget of 2017 is not \$250 billion; it is \$228 billion. That is the first thing that needs to be pointed out. We need to do our homework correctly. In a desperate act of getting resources, they are even seeking to take way \$21,382,836,000 from the budgetary expenditure to go back into the Treasury as VAT, robbing the people of goods and services. The question needs to be asked: where did the money go? Where is the money placed? Let me tell you where the money is placed.

There is a great disconnect between this Budget speech and this book of numbers. This one was written at Congress Place and this one was fixed at the Ministry of Finance. When one reads the book from Congress Place, it is miles apart from the numbers in the book from the Ministry of Finance. I will prove the case to you.

In Budget 2017, the Office of the Ministry of the Presidency has an increased allocation of \$1,100,000,000 more over 2016. I would like the House to hear what Ram & McRae, a sole-sourced forensic auditor, not through competitive bidding, chosen by the APNU/AFC Government to investigate accounts and activities of the PPP/C – no friend of the PPP/C – had to say. The Auditor said that in reviewing the 2016 Budget, we expressed our disappointment on the question of contract employees due to the continued increase in the number and cost. We gave an example of Agency 5, Ministry of the Presidency, which reported a planned increase in

contract employees from 298 in 2015 to 505 in 2016. Fast forward to Budget 2017, the number climbs to 569. Well, well, well...I know my Colleague, the Minister of Social Cohesion, is becoming uncomfortable because there is now a new programme under the Ministry of the Presidency - Social Cohesion. The amount of \$90.129 million is budgeted. Let me tell you how this money will be spent. There would be 10 new staff. Employment cost for that department is \$34,929,000. I do not know that the Ministry of Social Cohesion is the Public Service Ministry which sends people for training. Under the budgetary line training, there is \$30 million dollars. We look forward to the examination of the Estimates. This must be a slush fund.

When it comes to race relations, we need more than just platitudes. We had the consideration of constitutional agencies in this House. Every one of those constitutional agencies had its budget cut or slashed, including the constitutional agency that is responsible for the improvement of race relations in Guyana, the Ethnic Relations Commission. But the Minister found fiscal space to allot a new programme to the Ministry to the Ministry of the Presidency, called Social Cohesion.

I turn my attention to infrastructure. I did tell you, Sir, that this Book was written in two different places. One place was the East, Congress Place, and the other was the West, Ministry of Finance. When we go to the “good life” we are talking about, listen to what we have here. The Minister, in the Budget, said that there would be expanding of road networks and all the linkages. Let the people of Guyana know what is in the Budget. For the East Bank-East Coast Demerara road linkage, the allocation is \$81 million. And what is it for? It is for the provision of studies - two consultants, two jobs. There are no works for the ordinary man who thinks he is getting a gig. Listen to this: Guyana-Brazil land transport link and deep water port. It is laudable. These fantastic ideas, of course, started under the PPP/C. Listen to the budgetary allocation - and that is why I said that the two things were written in two different places - \$42 million for the provision of studies - two jobs. How many jobs have been created so far? Four; and none of them would be Guyanese because you know how these things go. Let us continue. I am glad Minister Patterson is here.

The Minister of Indigenous People’s Affairs this morning mentioned the Linden to Mabura road, building a bridge at Kurupukari across the Essequibo River, *et cetera*. Listen to the budgetary allocation: \$50 million for studies - two jobs. How many jobs have been created so far? Six. This is the major infrastructure development that is taking place in Guyana. Six jobs.

Minister Patterson just regaled this House about the waterfront development and the boardwalk. Listen to the budgetary allocation: waterfront development - \$50 million; provision of study - two more jobs. How many jobs we have? Eight. We continue: central transport planning, \$55 million – provision of studies. How many more jobs do we have? Two. So there are 10 jobs.

Apart from all the fancy talk, the Cheddi Jagan International Airport Expansion Project was a Project started under the Peoples Progressive Party/Civic, which was eventually remodelled. I repeat for emphasis in this House that we are getting less and paying more. The four-lane highway expansion from Better Hope to Belfield: Mr. Patterson regaled this House about it but he should have been honest enough to tell this House that that project was mobilised and set in train by the PPP/C with financing from India. It is nothing new. When one goes to Sheriff/Mandela and to the East Bank Berbice road, provisions are now made but that was already a plan of the People's Progressive Party/Civic with moneys mobilised by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) for funding of these projects. Where are the infrastructure development and the creation of jobs, as are the big fancy talks? It is the same old, same old. Eight jobs on consultants.

Before we left Office, we promised the people of Guyana these things. We were working on the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project; we were working on the deep water harbour; we had done the prefeasibility studies for a fixed-span bridge across the Demerara River; we had the Airport Modernisation Programme; we had plans in place for the Corentyne River bridge, connecting the Corentyne and Suriname; we had the Linden to Lethem and Brazil road corridor, and I could go on and on. I agree that the Linden to Lethem road must be paved; it will help. But if we pave a piece of road from Linden to Mabura and all the other bridges are collapsing when one continues, where is the traffic going. I say nothing further. Whether it was the East Bank road, the East Coast highway or the West Coast road that is currently undergoing works, these were things that were undertaken by the PPP/C. Thanks for continuing them but, please, get some new ideas if you are going to come and talk to this House about infrastructure as a major plan of development.

What we should stop is the fiddling. What is happening, and the nation needs to know, is that when projects that were in train are now advertised and applications are made, at the level of the evaluation, there was fiddling. If they are not getting an outcome that is desirable, as we saw

happening at GPL, for the 10 months the applications were held up, fiddling was taking place. The mismanagement and the political interference in the evaluation process must come to an end. I call upon the Public Procurement Commission to take note and start addressing these issues. We are yet to hear of something which will capture the imagination of the Guyanese people.

There are a couple of other things that must be addressed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you, Sir. This Budget could best be described as atrocious, utterly odious and iniquitous. I will refer to Mr. Christopher Ram, again, on VAT and the impact of it because we are trying to hide this issue. He is no friend of the PPP/C.

5.15 p.m.

He is no friend of the PPP, a sole sourced Accountant and preferred choice of the APNU Government had this to say:

“There is a myth that by making products VAT exempted prices will reduce. Guyanese do not be fooled. In fact, an exemption for VAT means that the tax on inputs is borne by the trader. If that trader sells to the public he must pass on the tax on inputs to the public in his price or cut payments to his factors of production, capital and labour.”

In a simple example the bread manufacturer would have been able to recover input VAT, since its output was zero-rated. Now, that his output is exempted from the tax he must absorb the VAT and could maintain his profitability by passing on the cost to consumers. Bread gone up!

Following the announcement of the changes, the staff of Ram and McRae has applied the new arrangements to a most recent actual shopping list. Listen to this: Post 2017 budget where one paid 14% VAT, which is 2% less, on buying the same items, before VAT, it will add up to \$348,406 and the VAT that is payable is \$37,575 because \$80,011 of that amount was exempted. In the same basket, that will cost, before VAT, \$348,406 because \$253,985 was zero rated and \$3,400 was exempted, with a 16% VAT, one only paid \$14,563. So, the same items are being bought with 14% VAT, after this budget is passed, and if it is passed, but we are calling for its

withdrawal, one would have to pay, in taxes, \$37,575. Before, with the 16% VAT on items that were zero-rated and tax exempted, one only paid \$14,563 in VAT. Sir, do you understand what is happening? The VAT is 14%, but more than double is being spent. When the VAT was 16%, one paid less. Guyanese were better off with the arrangements that were in place, where items were zero rated and exempted with 16%. It is an established fact.

This budget is an assault on the private sector, on young professionals and on the self-employed. The Minister indicated, in his new tax computations, that there will be no need for tax-free benefits. Notice needs to be given to everyone out there that all their allowances are now taxable. That is what the Minister is telling this nation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you need to wrap up now.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I close by the way I started out. This budget should be withdrawn; this budget is not healthy for the people of Guyana. The rhetoric of the speech is not matched with the numbers that are placed in this book. Until we could get the two things reconciled, we need to withdraw this budget. I think that Cabinet needs to take full responsibility for leading us up this road of hardship. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is now time to take the suspension.

There is an announcement, which I wish to make and that is that, Members of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply be reminded that the committee meeting will be held in the Speaker's Chamber during the suspension. I would suggest that we meet after half of an hour would have passed. In other words, first you refresh yourselves and then we meet in half of an hour's time. Thank you.

Sitting suspended at 5.22 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.34 p.m.

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Trotman]: If it pleases you, Sir. I rise to make my contribution to the debate of this 2017 Budget under the theme: *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese*. Without any prevarication or hesitation, I wish join with my Colleagues in this National Assembly in first commending the Hon. Minister

of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, and his team for presenting this budget, the 3rd budget, as we have heard, in 18 month. A budget that is:

“...designed to consolidate the gains we have made since its accession to office, improve economic performance, and define a sustainable pathway to the happiness and prosperity of Guyana.”

Our abled Minister of Finance outlined a number of strategic objectives which included:

“...stabilising the macroeconomic and public finances; preparing for oil and gas production; encouraging and supporting entrepreneurship, in particular those that involve new, green technologies and processes; creating more job opportunities; increasing the focus on innovation so as to increase domestic production and boost exports;... building climate resilient infrastructure for economic expansion and linking the coastland and hinterland; lifting the quality of life and addressing poverty...”

I smile because I recall that the last speaker was numbering how many jobs the Minister of Public Infrastructures was going to create. I believe that he stopped at 10, but they are still 10 more than he has on a Sunday on Durban Street.

This budget is about protecting the well-being of Guyanese through socio-economic growth and the maintenance of the environment, which sustains us. This budget is presented against a backdrop of a global economic downturn, the failing and falling sugar industry, reduced demand prices for commodities such as rice, bauxite, forest products and gold. It is in these circumstances that the efforts of the Minister of Finance and his staff, again, must be complimented.

A Government has a term of five years and it is expected that, during that time, there should be a corresponding number of budgets. We cannot look at one budget, which is actually just a snapshot of a period in time and expect to be fair in its assessment without juxtaposing the budgets that would have passed before, as well as looking at the plans for the future. There is a Chinese proverb that simply states a truism that, “Good medicine tastes bitter”. The Minister of Finance and his staff did not conjure up a budget to harm the country, but to heal it. We all remember that vaccination that we got on the left forearm at an early age of infancy and I was

reminded yesterday, by a doctor, that the earlier the better. I refer to the one that made us scream in pain and anger. We all bear the mark on our arms. Today, we thank our parents and healthcare providers and workers who administered it. It was painful and made little sense to us as babes, but now, we realise that it was that vaccination that protected us for the duration of our lives. This budget is that inoculation that has been administered. It is painful, but it is necessary and it is going to take us well into the 21st Century. Now that we have the chance, we thank the Minister of Finance for his foresight.

One person in the debate yesterday referred to a twilight zone and, indeed, I believe that we are there. Recall that the Budget Director and staff of the Ministry of Finance are the same ones who are advising this Minister of Finance and assisting him in the preparation of the budgets. They were good enough two years ago, but if we are to enter into the imaginations of some, they have suddenly sprouted devilish horns and have lost reason. As they say, *reason has taken flight*.

As we prepare to enter into a new era of plenty we have to bring some discipline to our fiscal arrangements and the best time to do so is now. Trinidad & Tobago is a classic case in point, where some very tough measures had to be adopted this year and last year. Of course, many of the concessions that were given were withdrawn. [Ms. Teixeira: Really?] You did not get your vaccination obviously. Those concessions in Trinidad had to be given because it had to ensure, not only the survival of a nation, but, of course, the viability of that nation for tomorrow. In short, we cannot *put new wine into old wineskins*. Taking responsibility is not about whimpering in times of transition and uncertainty; it is about taking action and staying in motion. My recent invitation to members of the private sector to “get busy” seemed to have raised the hackles of some in and out of this House. It was only an invitation and not a command. It was an entreaty not an instruction. We, as Government, have a duty to prepare the nation and we will do so to the best of our abilities and we will be busy about the people’s business.

On a daily basis, we are receiving scores of applications and proposals from abroad for activities in the extractive industries sector, particularly, in oil and gas. We would like to see more Guyanese involved and this why we have been hosting and facilitating seminars and workshops. We can only invite, again, as I do now, for us to be busy about the people’s business. I trust that, when we bring the suite of initiatives for support and implementation, that it will be forthcoming from the Opposition. I remind the Hon. Member Lumumba and all Members of the Opposition

of our desire to apprise them of our activities going forward. Together, we will have to prepare the country for what is to come, as these resources are not the preserve of one, but of all.

If I may say something about the Ministry over which I have been given some responsibility in association with Minister Charles-Broomes. The Ministry of Natural Resources is continuing the expansion and diversification of the natural resources sector and has commenced a series of critical initiatives to improve management and coordination of this sector in the short, medium and long term. The approach to the execution of these initiatives will reflect an inclusive and collaborative approach with stakeholders across all sectors.

In 2016, the Ministry of Natural Resources underwent some significant changes when we saw the functions of environmental management delinked from the Ministry and placed with the Ministry of the Presidency. This is why the Hon. Member, Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon, was speaking so eloquently about the environment and the greening of the economy. It was necessary following this change for the Ministry to revise its budget programme structure to capture the existing programme areas, the first being Policy Development and Administration, the second Natural Resources Management and the third is now Petroleum Management.

6.43 p.m.

This is because, as we give up Environmental Management, the President remitted to us Petroleum Management. So the work of the Ministry is captured under the first programme, while the regulatory work of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), the Guyana Gold Board (GGB) and the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) is captured under the second programme area. The newly proposed Petroleum Commission would be established in the first quarter of 2017 and will be a part of the third programme area. If I may say, just giving some highlights, given the time that is afforded, I will take us through some of what has been happening.

To support the continued development and implementation of robust policies within the Natural Resources sector, we had been given a generous budget of \$579,779,879,000 to cover Policy Development and Administration. With this, we intend to complete a revision of the Strategic Plan for the Ministry. We will conclude. We have started the revision of the National First policy and this policy is in need of urgent review. An updated Forest Policy will mark a significant shift

in emphasis from the development of the timber potential of our forest to management of the forest, multiple downstream goods and services for national benefit.

We also are completing a revision of the National Log Export Policy. In the interest of strategically enhancing the competitiveness of Guyana's Forestry Sector, in 2017, the Government has commenced the review of the National Log Export Policy to develop new policies for immediate implementation. The current policy of 2009 aims at dissuading the export of logs, while encouraging value added manufacturing of forest products. It is obvious to everyone that this policy was honoured more in the breach than in the observance.

Mining – In this period, we will as well review the Mining Policy. I wish to just add that a team has been appointed to review the future of bauxite in Guyana and, in particular, to report by the second week of February on the feasibility of the resuscitation of the idea of an Alumina plant in Guyana. We are completing a legislative review that will span the entire sector. All of the agencies have been asked to review the laws and regulations which govern them and we are happy to report that this exercise is 90% completed and is ready to be presented in 2017.

I should say something about the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, which I believe the Hon. Campbell-Sukhai should be interested in. This is a grant from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) that is in the sum of US\$3.8 million. When we took office, it was in a moribund and lifeless, in an almost comatose, state. I am happy to report that, with the efforts of the Ministry of Natural Resources, the Office of the Ministry of the Presidency, as well the IDB Secretariat, we have managed to resuscitate the project. It has commenced and it is going to bring benefits throughout the country, but particularly in the hinterland.

The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative - Here again, as we take ourselves into oil and gas production, the Government has frontally and firmly embraced the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. I should add that it has a companion initiative, which the Hon. Prime Minister was a guest speaker, which was the Open Government Partnership. I believe a meeting is now taking place in Paris/France. These seek to ensure that the resources of a country remain in the hands of the people. To this end, Guyana is pleased to announce that, before the end of 2017, which is in a few days, we will submit our candidacy application to the Secretariat in Oslo, Norway and we are very proud that. As we progress, we will do so in a very open and

transparent way seeking to draw on the expertise and the support of those who are with us in this endeavour.

Cooperate Social Responsibility - Much has been said in the House about this matter. In fact, I believe it was the Hon. Member Mr. Lumumba who, last evening, reasoned that enough was not being done. Whilst we would stop short of agreeing with him, we would say, however, that many efforts are afoot. In fact, in 2017, we intend to engage all of the companies, particularly those coming to our shores, to ensure that they are not here to just make a profit, but that they are here to make a contribution to the social upliftment and the well-being of the people of Guyana. To that end, I am happy to say that we have the first draft of our Cooperate Social Responsibility Framework, which has been shared with all of the companies and will be used as a guide. There are four themes which make up the work to be done. These include:

- Greening communities - by creating and maintaining green spaces in conjunction with the Ministry of Communities;
- Youth Development in Natural Resources - this is where we teach youths mentoring, leadership, introducing them to the natural resources sectors so that they could develop an appreciation and love for it, and the environment where these activities take place;
- Land Restoration - by reclaiming lands and planting new trees and ensuring that there is agriculture within the forest;
- Lastly, a Green Business Development Fund - which will hopefully see, at least 15 young Guyanese receiving \$3 million per annum to encourage them with their projects, which are innovative and which tend to be green.

So this is what we are doing.

I should mention as well compliance. It is well-known that we have initiated the process of establishing a corps of wardens to service the sector. These wardens will police the Natural Resources Sector, moving among the Ministry of Presidency, that is the Environment Wildlife or National Parks, as well as looking into matters of violations of the forestry, mining and any other law, which may come up where there is a violation. They will receive training from the Guyana

Police Force (GPF) and will be housed in the interior. Again, we wish to thank the Ministry of Finance and the Minister because provision has been made for us to be able to mobilise. As well, we will be deploying drones to aid the work of this team.

Forestry - This continues to be an issue. We have listened to the Minister of Finance and forestry did not do as well as we had intended this year. However, we believed that we are well-poised to improve our fortunes in 2017. In 2016, we saw the Global Timber Market face serious challenges in maintaining the previously high levels of demand in the pricing for timber, as was the case in 2015. Concurrently, several large forest concessions have been reverted to the State, some by default and some deliberately, where the State have had to intervene for reasons, including expiration, non-renewal and where actions were taken against some of these concessionaires who would have failed to abide by investment agreements.

For areas remaining in the allocation system, there is an overall trend of low levels of productivity from concessions, especially some of the larger ones. There are also some concessions that have shown low or insufficient production for the past five years and we are working with them to increase production.

So I am happy to report that, despite the challenges faced this year, we are expected to have harvested 320,000 cubic metres of logs, representing just a 15% decline from 2015 and which will earn us approximately US\$38–\$39 million. So we have managed to make up for some of the disadvantages faced in the past.

Greenheart - The Minister of Business and the Vice-President with responsibility for Foreign Affairs have all been engaged to ensure that the ban, which was mysteriously placed on greenheart just a few days before the last Government demitted office, that that ban is lifted. We are prepared to travel in conjunction with the private sector and members of the Forest Products Association to London early next year to have that ban lifted.

In terms of forest allocation, we are in the process of making preparations to issue Expressions of Interest for the forest allocations, which have been surrendered by the Barama Company Ltd. We have already received several Expressions of Interest and we wish to formalise that process so that, by the first quarter of 2017, we will see renewed and, in fact, enhanced activity in our forest.

With your permission, I would quickly like to turn to gold. We were set a target by the Minister of Finance in his budget of January of 550,000 ounces. I am pleased to report that, as at today's date, we have not only surpassed that target, but that we have shattered it. Gold declaration, as of today, stands at 641,688 ounces. This is a remarkable achievement for our country; the highest gold declaration ever in our history.

Small and medium scale miners delivered 429,188 ounces, while Guyana Goldfields and Troy Resources delivered 145,236 and 67,244 ounces, respectively. This means that the small and medium scale miners delivered close to 70% of the total. Today, I pause to congratulate them on behalf of His Excellency, President David Granger, to assure them that the APNU/AFC Government will never abandon nor undermine them and their efforts.

We understand their concerns and would be meeting very soon to discuss the way forward, one that is fair and beneficial to all concern. I would be remiss if I were not to pause and mention that these declarations would not stand alone, were it not for the supervision of the staff of the GGMC. I believe that some of them may be here, so I wish to single them out and to thank them for their stewardship. The going is not always easy at the GGMC. The relationship between the Ministry and the GGMC is not always the best, but I think they understand that a higher standard is expected and I am pleased to say that they have risen to that standard and we wish to congratulate them.

This year, in the budget presentation, as I have heard from the Minister of Finance, the target is 694,000 ounces. It is a difficult but not impossible target to reach. As I reminded an audience recently, we are a resilient people and I believe it was said earlier by Ms. Henry. We must have a 'can do' attitude. It may be difficulty, but I am committing to the Minister of Finance that we will make this target, not because he has asked, but, more importantly, because the people need us to produce. Just to take the House through some more activities which are coming.

Before I go into some other activities, just to report that for diamonds, as at the end of October, we had declared, again, a record of 109,651 metric carats of diamonds, earning for the Government of Guyana \$73,277,347 in fees and royalties. Permit me please to revert to gold, to say that the 641,000 ounces has earned Guyana a mammoth US\$730,915,229. So we are just short of a billion United States (US) dollar earned from gold.

For the year, we will be focusing on mines' safety. We have had one too many deaths in the sector. We are focusing as well on Environmental Management, where we will continue to work with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Global Environmental Fund to eradicate the use of mercury and other unfriendly practices which are harming the environment. We will be focusing on land reclamation, as I have mentioned before. We would be focusing on boosting the capacities of mining schools and training centre.

This year we have been able to train over 300 miners and new entrants to the sector. In 2017, we will be collaborating with the University of Guyana (UG) to restructure the mining school and to update the curriculum to integrate bio-diversity management, petroleum exploration and production, emphasising mines' safety and occupational health and safety and building capacity of trainers for the mining school and the regulations' best practices, environmental management and any other aspect of the extractive industries. Five hundred million would be spent on 12 geological projects.

6.58 p.m.

I believe that the Hon. Member, Ms. Charles-Broomes, mentioned some of the surveys that will be conducted. We will, as well, be carrying out 13 field projects on land to the tune of \$36 million; on-shore geo-scientific projects and studies; we will be spending \$314.5 million in the Environmental Division for land reclamation and propagation of seedlings, all of which are for the benefit of miners.

We will spend \$500 million on the maintenance and rehabilitation of the hinterland roads. Permit me, because I believe that my Friend was a bit modest by not calling some of the names. We will be doing, in Region 1, Barabina Swamp Road and the Port Kaituma Road; in Region 7, Karau Village to BuckHall road, Puruni to Papishao road, the Issano Road; in Region 8, Eagle Mountain Foot to Stonehill to Kangaruma Junction; Brian Sucre Junction to Mahdia; and the rehabilitation of sections of bridges and roads in Karasabai and in Monkey Mountain; in Region 9, Mabura Road, Karaudarnau to Parabara, Aishalton Junction to Shea. These are just but some of the roads.

We hear the concerns of miners, but it is an interesting point to be made that all of these works cost money. Some say that there are no concessions to miners, but when one hears what the

Government is investing into mining and are opening up new lands, and I have some of the figures here, for example, to register a two-inch dredge is \$3000 and a ten inch dredge is \$10,000, these costs do not compensate the Government. So, there are concessions being given every day. The Environmental Bond that allows a miner to go on land or in water is \$100,000. It costs more than \$5 million to do just one acre or less. So, the concessions will continue, the value is there and with the new roads, miners will be very busy.

Lastly, I wish to turn to Petroleum Management in the time remaining. In November 2016, the ExxonMobil Corporation and its partners, the Hess Corporation and Nexen Energy and the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) subsidiary Nexen, made Guyanese history again by being the first company to formally notify the Government of Guyana, in keeping with the Petroleum Exploration and Production Act, that the discovery of oil in the LISA Well is of commercial interest. This is something that we knew, but it is now certified. With that certification, it means that Guyana is an oil producing nation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

Mr. Trotman: Very well Sir. So, we will be commencing preparations and to that end, we have started a process in conjunction with our partners and we are revising our Oil and Gas Policy; revising the Petroleum Acts; creating Local Content policies and regulations; creating a Petroleum Commission Bill; reviewing, in conjunction with the Ministry of Finance, petroleum taxation and fiscal legislation, the health, safety and environment legislation; and producing the framework and a bill to provide for a Sovereign Wealth Fund. This will not only have the ability to save for generations to come, but to also assist with budget stabilisation in the lean years, to ensure that there is enough money for infrastructural development, social welfare and to ensure that regions and citizens can benefit and participate directly. So, these are on the way.

I will end by just mentioning that, in this journey, we have several partners and if I may just list them. We have received support from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); the Commonwealth Secretariat which is assisting with the drafting of legislation; the United States Government, through its Energy Governance Capacity Initiative Programme; the Canadian Government; the Government of Mexico; Chatham House, which is associated with the United Kingdom; the Government of Uganda; and, of course, we recently had an engagement with the

donor and diplomatic community. In January 2017, we hope to approach the nation and, of course, the Parliamentary Opposition, as I have said, to take to the people the programme. Not to say that this is the programme, but to say to them that “This is what we have, help us to refine it”.

So, I quote the Minister of Finance who said in his presentation:

“The Government will be embarking on a nationwide outreach programme to enlighten citizens on the implications of the Liza discovery and to present policies and legislation pertaining to the various aspects of the burgeoning oil and gas industry. Apart from covering all ten administrative regions, this outreach programme will engage, also, the private sector, youth, and the diaspora, among other stakeholders.”

So, we acknowledge the role of our stakeholders and partners in supporting the Government in enhancing the contribution of the Ministry to Guyana’s green economy. In 2017, we commit to working closer to secure continued support and to ensure that various efforts are coordinated, complimentary, synergistic and contribute to a collective aim. The Ministry of Natural Resources has a packed agenda and we ask for the support of the House as we unfold it. Guyana must prosper and its citizens must prosper today, tomorrow and for future generations to come. May God continue to bless our dear land of Guyana and guide us on our journey ahead.

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

Vice-President and Minister of Public Security [Mr. Ramjattan]: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. I want to publicly congratulate Minister Jordan and his staff for doing a wonderful job this early, in bringing forth Budget 2017.

After approximately 25 years in this august Assembly, I am well aware of the magnitude of this task. This year though, this task was indeed doubly difficult because of the patently challenging and constraining economic times Guyana, and the world around it, have been experiencing. I have here Sir, an expert’s view out of Harvard University, Professor Lawrence Summer’s has called it the age of secular stagnation in a piece by the same name, *Secular Stagnation, Foreign Affairs, March to April 2016* and he states:

“The key to understanding this situation lies in the concept of secular stagnation... The economies of the industrial world, in this view, suffer from an imbalance resulting from an increasing propensity to save and a decreasing propensity to invest. The result is that excessive saving acts as a drag on demand, reducing growth...”

What he is arguing is that the world seems to be stuck on neutral; it is not reversed; it is simply stuck on neutral.

Then another very important person from the Morgan Stanley Investment Management, an Indian, Mr. Ruchir Sharma, in this same article, mentioned the Demographics of Stagnation because it would appear that it is happening all over, for example, in Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname and Venezuela, which is even worse. He quotes the Demographics of Stagnation:

“In every single region of the world, economic growth has failed to return to the rate it averaged before the Great Depression. Economists have come up with a variety of theories for why this recovery has been the weakest in post-war history, including high indebtedness, growing inequality...”

He also states:

“...the global slowdown in the growth of the labour force.”

These trying times can distract and detract from staying the course, but it will not be so our Minister of Finance, no one is going to detract or distract you. Sir, you have kept your sight on the big picture whilst others have gotten lost in the shrubs. I want to tell you and to state this, because I have noticed it, your keen economic mind have allowed you to rationalise the correct path and trajectory needed at this juncture of our country’s history, and we will forever be proud and grateful for this economic leadership at this time.

There are two especially important issues about this Agenda 2017, as I refer to it, which appeals to me. Firstly, it is the need for tax reform and secondly, in the context of a global climate change and all the articulations of why the need for such special approaches towards sustainable development and the green state development that was mentioned. I wish to treat with these two in the context of the utterances made by my Colleagues over there and some of the social commentators they quoted and even some of the *chatterati* they were quoting. I certainly respect

and understand that there are, sometimes, vivid caustic comments, but in the same breath I certainly, though disagreeing with some of them, hope that they also respect some of my very strong views on this matter.

Tax avoidance and tax evasion have been around ever since authorities began levying taxes, so too have attempts to influence the rules of taxation. This is not a Guyanese phenomenon, this has been worldwide and this troubling state of affairs requires rectification. So, I can see with the Hon. Minister Jordan's arguments for a restoration of the fiscal autonomy and a call for people and corporations in Guyana, to voluntarily and honestly pay their dues. On this score, I want to say that I was present in this National Assembly in April 2005, when that Value Added Tax Bill at that time, together with the Excise Tax Amendment, was being debated. I was over here on the Government's side but it was kind of like a *dog house* at the end of the Government's side after being expelled earlier that year, where we were shifted somewhat to show separation because of that expulsion. I sat there and I watched that debate...

[**Mr. Nandlall:** Who sent you to the dog house?]

The Opposition.

That debate saw Bill No.3/2005 being strenuously argued for by Mr. Manzoor Nadir, the then Minister of Tourism, Commerce and Industry, as the *Hansard* would reflect.

“Value Added Tax (VAT) was to be made applicable as the general rule to all goods and services.”

I have it here at page 5912 of the *Hansard*. I want to quote him. It is so important that we quote these passages:

“Value Added Tax (VAT) is designed to allow for taxation on all forms of consumers' spending in a manner that is even and fair...”

This is page 5915 of the *Hansard* of that debate:

“A full burden on the tax falls on the selling price paid by the consumer and should not be borne by the cost of production...”

This is important:

“Valued Added Tax (VAT) is to be applied to every taxable supply by a taxable person and to every import of goods or services...”

7.13 p.m.

Generally if anybody understands what VAT is it is supposed to be one rate for all goods and services. Indeed it is true there will be for certain necessitous reasons we are going to have it exempted of zero-rated in certain nature. Typically the VAT burden is not to be shifted unto every or any specialised categories and that is the position we have here.

What happened on that occasion is that the Bill, which was brought, never stated a rate. The President in the context of whatever he had wanted then, Hon. Member Mr. Jagdeo - I notice that he is especially absent here - did not want to put a rate in that Bill. He indicated that he would like... He did not want to be here and I suppose that probably it was this reason why he did not want to be here. The Bill on VAT did not have a rate. We were supposed to know what the VAT tax was supposed to replace. At that year 2005, when it was being debated, it was supposed to bring in some \$16 billion. It was supposed to be at a rate that was supposed to bring in that \$16 million. Which rate were we speaking? I was very close to most of the Members of the Government then. Mr. Kowlessar the former Minister of Finance. It was supposed to be 12%.

[**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Kowlessar was not a Minister of Finance.] **Mr. Kowlessar** was the Minister of Finance at that time. Then the former President Mr. Jagdeo and his Government had indicated that the rate would be, in his words, revenue neutral. What we had is the election in 2006, so he did not bother to implement the VAT. The very first thing in 2007 was that he implemented and he put a rate of 16%, which is 4% more than could have made it revenue neutral. There were some persons here saying that what we are doing now is a legal larceny. Well, that was legal larceny when from a rate of 12% it was carried to 16%. The expert recommended 12%.

Let me just quote what Mr. Christopher Ram stated at that time.
[**Ms. Teixeira:** The Tax Reform Committee you set up did not implement any of these things.]
Please, you seem to be getting worried now. The legal larceny was committed then.

On *Focus Guyana's National Budget* by Ram and McRae 2008, page 4:

“Perhaps the most significant item to come out of the speech was the vast windfall generated by the value added excise tax, some \$12.6 billion. It was 49% of the budget. The excise on VAT alone was 76% but because the Government linked the two with excise it committed itself to revenue neutrality.”

That was not revenue neutrality. He stated:

“The surplus is huge and raises question about the thoroughness with which the projections were prepared. It would now be immoral for the Government to renege on its commitment to adjust the rate...”

What we are doing here is that we made a commitment to the people of Guyana in the campaign that we will reduce it to 12%. We have the courage and the strength to start the process of reducing it to 12%. In keeping with the principle of VAT, we also have, when reducing it to 14% and next year or the other year to 12%, to widen the tax base of goods and services because of the fact that we are collecting in VAT about \$34 billion we do not want to reduce it to stop our spending in relation to roads, bridges, and whatever else of services that we have. It cannot be done. Please understand, if you know anything about economics, you would appreciate why it is so difficult that you must not go simply and lessen that base that we have.

The underlying principle of VAT, as I mentioned, and it was stated not only by Mr. Nadir, it was stated by Mr. Baksh who was a Minister,... All of them were talking about this and they were saying whatever the goods and services rule of thumb, VAT must be paid because it is a tax on expenditure and not in the source of production. If you want to save money you have to learn to spend less. That is all. That is what the VAT is all about. To deviate too much will distort this tax. That is what we are saying here. We have to go back now, since we want to get back to 12%, and we have to widen that tax base of goods and services. If a lot more goods would have to be removed from zero-rated, it has to be. We saw, during the course of all these years, from 2007, a number of Orders came in to being, zero-rating this, zero-rating that, and a lot of things, because the rate was so high the PPP Government could have done it. If we want to bring back the rate that it is supposed to be, which is 12% and to which we are going to bring it before the end of our term, we have to widen that base.

This deflection of blame to us that we are being obscene and we are incompetent in this tax regime is mere manipulation. We will not allow this Opposition to cast us a drift in an ocean of lies. The truth and the whole truth must be known. They want the impression to be given...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let us try to keep the language within bound.

Mr. Ramjattan: The whole truth must be known, Sir. I wanted that and I hope that was not unparliamentarily, because I will withdraw it. They want the impression to be given that we will further impoverish the poor with the VAT on electricity and water. The people were obviously impressed by your arguments, which were all false, and if they were not told that... I understand you were trying to get hundreds out here, but you cannot get any to come and march. My colleagues have given the statistics that up to 83% in relation to the category of water and about 90-something per cent in relation to electricity, or probably reverse, they do not have to pay VAT on those two items. The argument is been made. Indeed, there are certain items that have to be now made VAT-able. It is consistent with the original principles of VAT, the original philosophy of VAT, and we are going to further reduce it, so that across the board you are going to benefit from the 12%. I hope that they understand that.

I think I will have to go to my Ministry. I just wanted to clear the air there, and I hope that it was cleared. I want to indicate that we have been doing a wonderful job in the security sector area. It is all expressed in pages 56 to 58 by the Minister as to what we will be doing as an overview for the year 2017. We also have lots more than that. I want to say, in the context of this limited time, that we do have a number of other things which are to build community relations so that we can restore the confidence, so that with that we are going to have more people coming out and speaking to the police. In Guyana, I have come to learn to silence is violence. If people do not come out and speak out against the people that are doing the wrongs to them, as what happened in Berbice... After so many incidents of piracy, we did not understand the pirates were the same *Berbicians* neighbours and their family, but they do not want to speak out. When you start speaking out against your criminal family members, neighbours and community members, you are going to get the thing solved. [Mr. G. Persaud: That is in my report.] Yes. There is a report that was done on Mr. Ganga Persaud on this issue and he was mentioning that. I am adopting some of the advice he gave the Ministry that way.

More than that, we have to ensure the further education of the Guyana Police Force and also giving it the assets. The assets have been given. In the context of the limited resources, we have. If we wanted more assets, I supposed, we might have had to leave the tax rate at 16% and we probably might have got more of the 11% of the budget for the security sector, but we cannot because of the fact that we would like to reduce.

I want to say that some of the colleagues over there made the case as to why indeed we had to widen the base because they wanted everything. They wanted more computerised-assisted testing (CAT) scans in and around the country. They wanted a whole set of thing across the place. Where do you think you will get those things from? You would get it from a revenue stream and if we cannot get it this year we will get it next year. That is why it is so important, but we do have a number of good things happening. We have reinforced the Mounted Branch. We have sent it to Mibikuri. It has now gone to Lethem. The Canine Section, which used to be laughed about, is now also enhanced to the extent that the sniffer dogs and the other dogs are ensuring that criminals are to be caught. We are also deploying additional assets and the set of the additional boats to the marine section, especially to the M.B. Tamakay.

Strengthening and merging of crime intelligence and security, that is another big thing that we have, along with the fact... I am very glad that the Minister of Finance made it available to us to do something about the 911 system that we have been having so much trouble with. We are in the process of moving further ahead and further forward with those things that are on pages 56 to 58 in the budget speech.

We have to train some more policemen. I have been pleading with Members across the floor if they have friends and family who may want to come and join. They said that we are not creating employment, while I am short of thousands policemen. Send some over so that they can be employed.

We are also going to develop the master strategy plan and launch these for drugs and also trafficking. One will be happening on the 16th December, which is the drug master plan strategy, and the trafficking will be in early January. We came out of a tier that is called second tier watch list. We want to reach now tier one. We are going to reach it soon because we have been getting more prosecution successful in that area.

We have done a lot of operations and exercises during the course of the year, as a result of the heightened situation that was there across the country. At one time, when there was the piracy incident at Berbice, we had to send a...Very important we want an elite set of policemen. We are now getting that because of the training the justice education society is giving them and they are being real good, the major Crime Unit. We want to give them a comfort level. We are going to repair and rehabilitate 12 police stations. These police stations, when being rehabilitated, are going to have a variety of rooms within them to the extent that they could take care of domestic violence, and sexual violence cases. There are going to be special facilities for that.

7.28 p.m.

The Guyana Fire and Rescue Service is also an important adjunct of the Ministry and in that sense, we are going to expand both the fire stations and human resources of those fire stations. We would be having four locations, namely Port Kaituma, Mahdia, Lethem and Kwakwani, as having auxiliary arms of firemen who are retired working in those locations. The services would also be extended to Leguan, Wakenaam, Bartica and Linden.

We also would be having more assets for the fire department and assets that are going to be very important is the procuring of a fully equipped fire boat. This asset could provide support to vessels in distress, oil spills, search and rescue and marine emergency. It is a very expensive piece of equipment, but, indeed, we got the moneys out of the Ministry of Finance this year.

We also are going to do a couple of things this year that are more at a concrete level. It was designed level this year, but next year, 2017, there will be the community crime and violence prevention programme under the component one of the Citizen Security Strengthen Programme. Of course, we have to, this year, complete some community needs and asset assessment, so that we could have better parenting education for families that are in somewhat dislocated. Also those studies would be done in relation to violence against women prevention training.

We want to get scientific as against to what used to happen before, anecdotal, and all of that, in our approach in solving crimes, evidence-based approach, and we have got the assistance from the United State of International Development (USAID). Over US\$4 million could come our way. I think it is for two countries, Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana, whereby we are going to do studies to find out. We need the studies to be done. I do not know how Guyanese are so

violent today. Even one, in New York, was caught sawing off his wife's head. What have gone wrong with us as a society? This is not something that I would complain about that is happening. It is obviously a matter of time in which another American who come in... Guyanese would go to the *backdam*, see three innocent men and then shoot them down, as what has happened at Mibikuri, throw them over the board as the incident of piracy, which happened at Skeldon. Some study is required, whether it is a mental disorder or whatever it is. We have to do surveys. Evidence-based approach, then, is required in regard to these matters. More than that, too, there are the at risk youths at the community level. We have selected 20 communities under the Citizen Security Strengthen Programme. From each community, there will be 55 young people who are at risk, becoming troublesome, we are going to pay them some money to go to school, so that they would take their minds off of that idleness. One thousand and one hundred are going to be trained for the year 2017 and another 1,100 in 2018, 2019 and 2020. Four thousand and four young people are targeted. Masonry and fridge repair, the whole gamut, mechanic, whatever it is, we would find a school in and around their area to ensure that they would be redirected there.

We are also talking about conflict resolution and mediation training. We have come to the realisation that in Guyana, law enforcement cannot be the end-all of solving this high crime situation. We have to deal also with social programmes and those social programmes are what I am talking about here. The public awareness campaign, we also want to start something to deal with suicides and that is also training some of the community elders and leaders to identify that for us and phone in, so that we could have the information earlier than getting the information that she or he hanged himself or herself, and so on.

Component two of the Strengthen of Guyana Police Force Crime Prevention, and that is its investigation capacity, we want to train 150 police officers in domestic violence scenario response. That is going to be a big thing because this domestic violence is getting out of hand too. One hundred and fifty police officers are to be trained in community engagement and cooperation, and 240 police officers to be trained on criminal and forensic techniques that would be a continuation of the justice education programme.

We also would want to use technology and the design was put forward this year, we are going to start talking about the smart city programme and there are a lot of big companies that are

interested in it. We have to find a venue for our command centre because the designers are indicating that it would have to be a big piece of land, with a brand new building, and all of that. Also it is training those people that are going to be in that command centre, watching the screens as to the inputs coming in from all the cameras in and around Georgetown. We would do that as the experiment first.

We also had this huge problem at our prisons, in which, obviously, the overpopulation there means that we would have to expand some prisons outside or build a new one. We do not have moneys for a new one and so we are going to expand the prison at Mazaruni this year with almost \$500 million expansion. We would need more housing for the staff members who would have to go there. We would need better quality buildings to house some of the more hard core criminals who we would have to shift from Georgetown, so that would occur this year because we have now have the money for that.

We are also going to conduct a major study on alternatives to incarceration, especially for young people. This is important. It will be under the Juvenile Justice Bill that I would bring here soon. We would have to have, what is called, alternatives and options to just lock them up, but also for adults too. We are dealing with that and it is to design, implement an inmate case management and monitoring system. All of these are there for the security sector, and lots more this year. If we could get the community, police and especially the press, we are going to get to where we would like to have it, and that is, that there will be a situation whereby the crime rates are going to come down.

This, up to the end of November, beginning of December, there were about 3,100 serious offences which is the lowest for the last ten years. Now, a lot of my honourable brothers and sisters over there do not want to believe that, but that is the truth. I could do nothing about that if they do not want to believe it, but it is the truth. We could get it lower even more if we start our little individual endeavours of identifying them.

That being said, I want to commend this budget to this honourable House for its support by all Members and to say what a wonderful job, in some trying times, Mr. Jordan did in getting this budget out.

Thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Nandlall: The pleasure is mine now to make my humble contribution to the Budget 2017 debate. I wish to begin by dealing with two points made by my learned and honourable friend, Khemraj Ramjattan. Mr. Ramjattan advanced two significant arguments in relations to the menu of tax measures about which we are complaining. Mr. Ramjattan's first argument is that they are pursuing a campaign promise and in pursuance, in satisfaction of that promise, they have reduced taxes from 16% to 14%. That is what they promised their supporters and the people of Guyana. In his analysis, what he failed to disclose is that by expanding the number of items that he has included to be subject to that tax, the consumers and the people of Guyana are being taxed more.

We had a hundred and something items on a zero-rated list. They have dropped it from 16% to 14%, but they have removed all those items from that list. The net effect is that they are taxing the population. In order to satisfy a campaign promise, they are deceiving the public by taxing them more.

I want to refer to a gentleman who Mr. Ramjattan, I know, has tremendous respect for, the AFC member Mr. Sasenarine Singh, writing about the budget. He was a candidate for a about two elections with them. He wrote glowingly about Mr. Ramjattan. They may have been founding members of the party. This is what he said in the *Guyana Times*, Thursday, December 1, 2016, "Jordan deceptively gives with one hand, takes more with the other." Sasenarine Singh has answered Mr. Ramjattan.

The other point that I want to make is to remark and comment upon Mr. Ramjattan's new founded knowledge of the benefits of taxation, how important taxation is to the development of this country. Prior to 2015, Mr. Ramjattan never had this knowledge before. Suddenly, Mr. Ramjattan is endowed with a tremendous understanding of the utilitarian value of taxation. I just want to quote briefly from a Bill that Dr. Ashini Singh brought to this National Assembly to impose a \$5 tax on bottles. It is in this budget, but it is a \$10 tax on bottle per unit and we were imposing \$5. This is what Mr. Ramjattan said - I am quoting from the Hansard, Sir:

"We also in the Alliance For Change (AFC) want to say a tax is a tax. That is what is going to happen here. This Government only wants to tax. The tax with which this Bill here is concerned is in connection with extracting from every bottle - or whatever it is package - that comes into this country..."

... a \$10 tax. Well he has \$10 tax, but our own was a \$5. Then he continues:

“That is not how I view an investment climate. I view it as if there is certain percentage that we need for the environment. Let us drop it to that and it will be across the board. It has to be low enough to make accommodations for our businessmen. I spoke to a number of businessmen and they are not in support of this Bill. They are not. None of them are not in support of this Bill. They are saying that it is an additional tax.”

Then he goes on.

“When the Government put that \$5 per bottle of the Guyana’s Manufacturer, do you know what the businessmen told me? They said that it is the consumers that will have to pay more. But they do not want to tell us that... The manufacturing class has all indicated to me that what the implication is, it is that they will pass the \$5 on to the customers...”

Well, we had 142 measures last budget and 52 measures in this budget that would be passed on to the consumer, but Mr. Ramjattan did not see anything wrong with that this year. It is a tax - a tax is a tax.

Let me get to the budget. The Budget 2017, and the Government could say what they wish, the reality out there is that Budget 2017 has stunned the people of this country. Budget 2017 has traumatised the people of this country.

7.43 p.m.

Budget 2017 has sent shock waves through this country. Budget 2017 has invigorated this country with fear and anxiety. So much so that today, again, the front page of the *Kaieteur News* newspaper reads “Banks still claim ‘foreign currency not in abundance’”. Yesterday the headline was “Major foreign currency crisis looms”. All the financial analysts have said that it is because of the budget people are not prepared to invest and spend and they are shipping their money out of this country. People need to understand how to cope with this budget because up to now they cannot understand and they need a coping mechanism. Like my learned friend Mr. Ramjattan who went to the foreign affairs magazine, I also have done some type of historical examination to understand this budget myself. I have come up with a couple of fundamental truths about this

country. I will use this budget to establish the veracity of these assertions that I am going to make.

These truths are that whenever the PPP is in government there is economic growth and prosperity in this country. Whenever then PPP is in government there is democracy and respect for the constitutional rights of the people and the rule of law. Whenever the PNC is in government there is economic decline and suffering. Whenever the PNC is in government there is authoritarianism and violation of the constitutional right of the people of this country. Those are fundamental truths that the quicker the people of this country understand them the better we will all be, because the history of this country will bear me out.

When we left government in 1964, the colony of British Guiana was the richest in the Caribbean. We were the most economically vibrant economy in the Caribbean. We had the largest industrial estate in the Caribbean, at Ruimveldt. We had the only agricultural schemes in the Caribbean – Black Bush Polder, Tapacuma. We had a quarter million acres of land demarcated for large scale agriculture – MMA scheme. We had agriculture stations built in Mon Repos. We had an agriculture school, the only in the region, established at Mon Repos. We were the only territory with a university. We had technical institutes in two of the three counties in our country. We had already negotiated for a hydropower electric plant to be built at Malali Fall. We had US\$32 million secured in a loan. We had already purchased a glass factory from Hungary. We also had an oil brand factory being assembled in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). We were moving in 1964 to industrialisation. That was the state of the Guyana economy when we left it in 1964.

Then the PNC took over and it ruled for 28 years. It ruled and they rigged for 28 years. When it left government the state of the economy was captured by a report done by Sir Allister McIntyre. I have got it the other day from the *Stabroek News* newspaper. “Guyana now ranked below Haiti” in McIntyre’s report of 1989. This was the state of the economy that it left, when it left government in 1989.

It states that people were migrating from this country at rate of about 1,000 per month. The inflation rate was 50% and unemployment was 40%. That was the state of the economy. It is often said that McIntyre’s report states that we were second to Haiti. We were not. We were

behind Haiti. This is the publication from the *Stabroek News*.

[Ms. Teixeira: Below

Haiti.] Yes. We were below Haiti.

Then we come to 2017. We left government in 2015 and the statistics will show that prior to 2015 we had 12 years of consecutive economic growth at a rate of 4.5%. Twelve years, and we endured a world recession of the worst type in living memory and our economy withstood the shock. So much so that the CARICOM Chairman Mr. Ralph Gonsalves said that Guyana's economy was a shining star in the Caribbean. That was the state of the Guyana economy when we left it in 2015. In two short years from 4.5% it is now at 2.6%. That is the statistic from the Minister. There is a decline of 50% in just two years in less than two years. How did we reach this stage?

How did we reach this stage so quickly? From the most vibrant economy in the Caribbean, now we are nursing, we are a sick economic patient. We are a sick economic patient, nursing, and we now have to be supported by massive taxation measures. How have we reached that stage? You know why, Mr. Speaker. It is the neglect of the productive sectors, and spend and spend, as if money is going out of style. Inauguration party, we do not know how many hundreds of millions were spent; inauguration ball at the Pegasus, we do not know how many hundreds of millions were spent; Jubilee Park, we do not know how many hundreds of millions were spent; decoration of arches around the country, we do not know how much money was spent. We had a party for the 50th Anniversary, not only here, but in New York, and in Brooklyn, where we had Terry Gadraju on a truck dancing that he is the best Guyana babu. Mr. Speaker, we had Adrian Dutchin shouting "show me yuh flag". That is why we are where we are.

Fourteen million dollars we are spending to rent a bond that not a tablet is being stored, right at the back here, Sir, to store pharmaceutical - \$14 million a month. Not a tablet being stored there. Mr. Speaker, we are paying out, we are writing off as though we can afford it, hundreds and billions of dollars in taxes. We are writing off as though we can afford this charity to friends and cronies. We are paying judgements when judgements should not be paid. Mr. Speaker, we are settling matters on a mere letter threatening litigation. We are paying hundreds of billions of dollars. [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are not making good progress at the moment. Hon. Mr. Nandlall ...

Mr. Nandlall: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall, would you reclaim your seat for a moment?

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Dr. Norton, you are standing.

Dr. Norton: Yes Mr. Speaker, I stand on a Point of Order, 40 (a).

Mr. Speaker: Please proceed.

Dr. Norton; The Hon. Member said that we are paying \$14 million for a bond in Sussex Street and not a tablet is being stored there. That is misleading the House. I beg that you either withdraw your statement.

Mr. Nandlall: I went there myself. The bridge to that place, Sir, was just repaired, just last week.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, would you allow me to deal with this or would you like to deal with it?

Mr. Nandlall: Sir sorry.

Mr. Speaker: I have not asked you to respond to anything.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, would you reclaim your seat? Hon. Member Dr. Norton, I did not quite follow the Standing...

Dr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member is misleading the House by saying that no medication is being stored at that bond. I ask that that statement be withdrawn.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Dr. Norton, you are saying that medication is stored in the bond.

Dr. Norton: Yes Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall...

Mr. Nandlall: My information, Sir, which is reliable, is that no medication is stored there, no tablet.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let us do it this way. You will bring this back to the House tomorrow. Can you do that?

Mr. Nandlall: Sorry Sir.

Mr. Speaker: You have no proof that anything is stored there. You have no proof or you have proof that nothing is stored there. There are two different things.

Mr. Nandlall: My information is that the bond is not yet used.

Mr. Speaker: Your information.

Mr. Nandlall: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: What Dr. Norton is saying is that your information is incorrect.

Mr. Nandlall: I do not know who will prove what. He is disputing it. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if the...

Mr. Nandlall: I will produce photographs to show that the entrance to the place was just redone, just last week. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Nandlall: Well, let us go and see what is in it. The people of this country want to know what is being stored there because that is also a secret. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Nandlall: Let us go.

Ms. Teixeira: Let us go now. [*Interruption*]

Ms. Manickchand: You forget that a man is before the Committee of Privileges for this same bond, for coming here and lying about it. He is behaving self-righteous. You rent a bond that is going to cost us \$500 million and you are self-righteous about it... [Interruption]

Mr. Nandlall: I am not accountable to the people. You are. The Government is accountable to the people. The population, out there, believes that there is no tablet in the place. That is my position. I am conveying my constituencies... [Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I thought that when a matter was put to the Speaker it is left with the Speaker to treat with it. When any question is raised and it is put to the Speaker, then it should be left with the Speaker. Hon. Members, I know that everyone wants to solve but no one can solve it on the floor.

7.58 p.m.

Let us try and contain ourselves. What we have is a statement made by one Member and what we have is a challenge to that statement by another Member. We can spend the rest of the evening going backward and forward or we can agree that we would ascertain what the truth of it is. That would be done only this time for this occasion and no Member in the House will put to the Speaker, in the future, that he did it on one occasion and, therefore, he must do it again.

This is a matter which has exercised the House for some time and so we will ascertain, at the end of this Sitting, to the satisfaction of the House then, what the true position is. Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall, you may maintain your position and continue or you may withdraw your position until it is solved tomorrow, in which case the Hon. Member, Dr. Norton, will have to explain.

Mr. Nandlall: Sir, I fear that they are going to put things in there tonight. That is a genuine fear that I have. This Minister has already apologised for lying to the House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let us be careful. You cannot have it both ways. Would you like to go this evening?

Hon. Members: Yes. Let us suspend.

Mr. Speaker: We will not suspend that you can do that. We will continue with this and then we will do that. If matters are put there, then, of course, evidence should be there that it is new.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, could I propose that, whilst the House continues to debate, two persons leave with the Clerk or Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly, the bond is opened, we have a cameraman to take the cameras and we bring them back and we continue the debate. I would suggest that two people, one from each side, and one of the Clerks with one cameraman go while we are talking.

Mr. Speaker: I do not know why we need a cameraman. What we need is the proof that will be provided. If you do not trust the person you are sending to represent you, then that is another matter. If you do, then the Members will go in that way.

Mr. Nandlall: May I...

Mr. Speaker: ...and we will continue our business... Hon. Member, just allow me. No; you may after me, but not now. We will continue our business here and then, when we are through, by that time, I imagine that the persons will return.

Mr. Nandlall: The business of the House is long. I withdraw the statement. Let us move on.

Mr. Speaker: I will insist that we ascertain.

Mr. Nandlall: Very well, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Please name someone. The Clerk will go or pick someone to go and then we will have the information available this evening. In the meantime, you proceed with what you are saying. Please proceed, Hon. Member.

[Mr. Speaker in aside with the Clerk.]

Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall or Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, from whom the suggestion came, you would name someone who will be ready to leave immediately and then we will have the benefit of his or her visit before we rise this evening.

Mr. Nandlall: Sorry, Sir. I am prepared to proceed, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, my request is that someone be named.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I nominate, from our side, Hon. Member Irfaan Ali to be on the team.

Mr. Speaker: May I enquire if there is a Member from the Government side?

Minister of Social Cohesion and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Ally]: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I would like to nominate...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall, would you sit for a while?

Mr. Nandlall: Okay, Sir.

Ms. Ally: I would like to nominate Ms. Volda Lawrence to be the Government's representative.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. If it is agreed, we can depart immediately and satisfy ourselves in a matter of minutes.

In the meantime, Mr. Nandlall... *[Interruption]* Are you not going?

[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Clerk, why is Dr. Norton going?

[Mr. Speaker in aside with the Clerk.]

Mr. Nandlall, you will continue.

Mr. Nandlall: The point I was making is that the Treasury is not a bottomless pit. If we continue to spend in an unsustainable manner and our productive sectors are not earning, naturally, we will be in a position where we have to find money from somewhere and the source identified, unfortunately, by this Government is the people of this country. They tax and they tax the people of this country. Rather than the Minister of Finance take some responsibility for the state of affairs, at page 2 of the Budget speech, he blames the economy and the economic model. He said this:

“...the current development model can no longer be pursued... This dated model cannot deliver on our aspirations as a nation.”

This is the very model that delivered on 12 consecutive years of positive growth rate, the highest in the Caribbean. Suddenly, this method has become dated and inefficient. [Ms.

Chandarpal: Bad workman.] As my Colleague is saying, a bad workman always... You know what happens.

I want to go to page 24 of the Budget speech. The Minister has this statement:

“...the Government continues to place the highest priority on the maintenance of a strong justice system, given its role in upholding our civil liberties and maintaining the rule of law.”

Central to any justice system are the judges who are to work in that system and we have a serious shortage of judges in this country. At the Court of Appeal, a Court that has a statutory complement of five Judges, there are only two. When the Court sits as a Full Court, it requires three Judges. What that means, as Your Honour is aware, is every time that Court sits, it has to take a Judge from the High Court, throwing the High Court into problems because the High Court, itself, is overwhelmed with work. We recently had the Family Court becoming operational and we have assigned two Judges, who used to function in the ordinary High Court, away from the High Court into those two specialised Courts, depriving the High Court now of two Judges. We are not replacing them. It is now public knowledge that a recommendation has been made by the Judicial Service Commission (JSC) and no action is being taken on the recommendation. The Constitution is very clear. Article 128 of the Constitution mandates that the Judicial Service Commission’s recommendations must be acted upon. It states:

“The Judges, other than the Chancellor and the Chief Justice, shall be appointed by the President who shall act in accordance with the advice of the Judicial Service Commission;”

Any first year Law student would know that “shall” is command; it is mandatory. It used to be “may” at one point in time in our law. After the 2001 reform process, we changed that deliberately to make the President act upon the Judicial Service Commission’s recommendations. Of course, there is another provision in the Constitution, Article 111, that gives the President discretion to return. If the President does not accept the recommendation, then he must return it to the Judicial Service Commission for reconsideration. If the JSC reconsiders it and sends it

back to the President, then the President shall accept that reconsidered recommendation. We are not even getting to go to that stage because the President is not acting. The President “may” send it back. Once the President receives it back from the JSC, the President “shall” appoint. We are not reaching that stage because there is inaction.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are repeating yourself now. Please, let us move on.

Mr. Nandlall: We cannot speak about the Government’s commitment to getting the judicial system working when we cannot get judges appointed, and, worse yet, when we try to justify it in the public domain by advancing such arguments that the President cannot be mandated, *et cetera*.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let us move on.

Mr. Nandlall: I want to take this opportunity to call upon the Government to act upon the recommendations of the Judicial Service Commission. That is the only way that this statement in the Budget Speech of the Minister will be given any effect or any respect by the people of this country.

There is another statement that I want to make reference to. The Minister said this:

“...the Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana is the bedrock of governance and serves to secure the fundamental rights and establish the rule of law for all Guyanese.”

This is a very high sounding and a very idealistic statement, good aspirations to which we must work towards attaining. What is the reality on the ground? In the very Budget speech, the President has two measures that excite the concern of any serious-minded person in terms of law and the Constitution. It is a measure where the Minister is saying that he will stop persons from leaving the country if they owe taxes and that he will amend the VAT Act to remove a current requirement that states that one can only stop the persons from leaving by getting a court order. The Minister now wants to remove the necessity of getting a court order to stop people from travelling. That is an authoritarian and unconstitutional measure that will be implemented. I ask the Minister to reconsider it. I will offer my little 10 cents advice. I have the book, *Constitutional Law of Guyana*, by S Y Mohamed.

8.13 p.m.

There was a time in our country where the PNC used to stop people from travelling. In this book, *Constitutional Law of Guyana*, by S Y Mohamed, the author lists the instances where persons have been stopped from leaving the country unconstitutionally. And one of those persons is no other than Dr. Rupert Roopnaraine - *Roopnaraine v Barker and another* (1981) – a case reported in the West Indian Report. Let me read the head note quickly:

“The applicant, a citizen of Guyana, was charged, along with two others, with the offense of arson. At his trial, the Magistrate upheld the no-case submission and dismissed the charge.”

The prosecution appealed against the acquittal and shortly afterwards the applicant attempted to leave to go to Trinidad. When he attempted to go to the Airport, he was told that he cannot leave the country.

And the ruling was that you have a fundamental right to travel. Let them show where, in the Constitution, if you owe taxes, you cannot travel. We passed the VAT Act and we put a requirement there that, if you want to stop people from travelling, then you must go to court. That is due process; that is democracy. Why do you want to take that away? So, there is that measure.

Then the other measure is where the Minister wants to go into people’s bank accounts and take their money if they owe taxes.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you, Sir.

The Minister wants to go into people’s bank accounts and take their money, to garnish without going to court. In this age, there is no court of competent jurisdiction that will ever give consonance to this. There must be due process. The Minister cannot commit his Government to respect the fundamental rights of the people of this country, commit his Government to rule of law, and then want to throw the whole judicial system out. He wants the Commissioner General to be judge and jury. The Commissioner General determines how much tax is owed and then,

when he makes that determination, it cannot be challenged in court. He goes into your bank account and he levies on it, using garnishee proceedings. That is against the law.

All we are saying is that we are not against measures to recover taxes; we are against unlawful, oppressive and unconstitutional methods to recover outstanding taxes. And we will oppose it and, if they want, I can assist in drafting of the appropriate enabling legislation.

These are not isolated incidents of violation of the Constitution. I have an entire series here. We have cases where rice farmers' leases have been revoked. They had to go to the court and the court has ruled that they were acting wrongly. And then, of course, we have the seizure of core homes and the courts again. Look at today's *Stabroek News*. When I told them that they were acting unconstitutionally, they told me that I was wrong. They will take back those homes. Today, this is what the Chief Justice ruled. The headline is CH&PA suffers another setback over core homes - judge rules against repossession of Tuschen premises. Judge rules against repossession of core homes.

There is the public spectacle and scandal about the acquisition of private lands at Carmichael and Middle Streets in the *Stabroek News*, where it is covered widely: Gov't to acquire land at Middle and Carmichael for public purposes. There is another heading here from the *Stabroek News* where Cabinet asked the Attorney General to explain the move to take private land, apparently. I do not know what was happening but this is what was reported in the newspaper.

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Williams]: On a Point of Order, the newspaper is erroneous and it is wrong, and I am asking the Member to withdraw the reference to the newspaper, which is inaccurate, because the Member must also put the newspaper which carried that the Attorney General said that it was erroneous; he has to do that.

Mr. Speaker, there is no question that compulsory acquiring the land in question – none whatsoever... And I could give you the reason that was not so. It was purely a PPP exercise and a PPP transmission.

Mr. Nandlall: Are you allowing this, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Williams: Yes, because Mr. Rohee was trying to run Mrs. Reeves' husband out of the country. He gave him 48 hours to leave.

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, where are we going now? I understand that Hon. Members, from time to time, want to take an excursion, but, surely, we are going too far away. Let us try to remain here.

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, with your permission, under Standing Order 48 (a), the statement made by the speaker...

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I was just referred to as a “bitch”.

Ms. Sukhai-Campbell: I was not referring to you.

Mr. Williams: Yes. And everyone heard. I am calling on the Speaker to deal with Ms. Campbell-Sukhai.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, if we are going to conduct ourselves this way, the Speaker will have to leave the chair. It seems that Members have a penchant for making all kinds of statements on both sides of the aisle, and I am not quite sure why. It does not help the debate. I think something we expect Hon. Members to do is, if a Member is making a statement about something, he or she should at least say the statement. I know sometimes we pick what we like and leave out what we do not like. When a Member gets up to challenge that, the other Member could say what it is that is left out. And there is an end to the matter. We spend several hours in this kind of example. So, what we will do, Mr. Nandlall... I see Mr. Rohee has another matter.

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 40 (a): the Hon. Member, Mr. Basil Williams, made a statement to the effect that Mr. Rohee was responsible for running the husband of a proprietor of a piece of land out of this country. Could the Hon. Member provide the evidence to this House that that is indeed so?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, did you say Standing Order 48?

Hon. Members: Standing Order 40 (a).

Mr. Speaker: Let the Hon. Member, Mr. Rohee, tell me.

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 40 (a).

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Member Mr. Rohee, what that requires is that you tell me the Standing Order and state the point that you are objecting to and leave it to the Speaker. As I recall, you were asking for information to be supplied. Your very words were, "Let the Member show the evidence." Could you repeat what it is you are seeking to do?

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Standing Order 40...

Mr. Rohee: Yes. You...

Mr. Speaker: No. Could you please tell me what it is?

Mr. Rohee: You had said, Mr. Speaker, that every Member in this House must be considered honourable. The Hon. Member has made...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Mr. Rohee.

Mr. Rohee: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: We are dealing with the Standing Order. You will quote the Standing Order, tell me what it is and then you will resume your seat.

Mr. Rohee: Mr. Speaker, I quoted the Standing Order already. Would you like me to repeat it?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Rohee: Standing Order 40 (a). The Hon. Member, Mr. Basil Williams, made a statement to the effect that Mr. Clement Rohee was responsible for running the husband of a proprietor of a piece of land out of this jurisdiction. I would like the Hon. Member to provide this House with the evidence to that effect or to withdraw the statement.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you must say why you want him to withdraw. You are saying that he has said something that is not true. Then what you have to say is that that is incorrect and leave it there.

Mr. Rohee: It is a totally incorrect and inappropriate statement, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I thank you.

Hon. Member Mr. Williams, I do not know on what basis you would have said what you said but you can probably tell us all here why you said that. Or else, I would suggest that you withdraw it.

Mr. Williams: Yes, I will explain. I got up on a Point of Order because the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Williams, let us agree that you will just simply withdraw the statement and let us proceed.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I could bring the evidence but, if you are suggesting that we could move on, I will be guided by you. But I will produce the evidence.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, have you withdrawn the statement?

Mr. Williams: Yes, Mr. Speaker, as guided by you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Mr. Nandlall, please proceed.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, I had made a complaint that the Hon. Member, Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai, referred to this Hon. Member as a “bitch”.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if that is, then what we are going to do is refer to the matter of proof which was employed in the instance yesterday. But Hon. Members simply have to understand that we are not excused. We have passed the discretion of being excused because we are adults. In another place, many years before now, we would have been excused.

8.28 p.m.

You might even have been told that that is how persons of that era or that age behaved, but we are adults. Could we not even give ample proof of that? Surely... Hon. Mr. Williams, if you insist, then we will have to await the results of an enquiry based on the evidence to be provided.

Mr. Williams: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I will continue in the interim as they get the tape and so on.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, if he is not withdrawing, then I will make my complaint.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, Hon. Member; you are on the floor.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Dr. George Norton... Sir, I will make this complaint to you separately because I would prefer that the nation does not hear what we have descended into. But everybody on this side saw that the Hon. Member indicated his third finger to me when he was here. Let the video show it, if we are talking about videos.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall, if you wish, the clock was stopped at 28.26 minutes, please proceed and I will call on you when the time is up.

Mr. Nandlall: Sir, I was pointing out the list of allegations of constitutional violations being made against the Government. The Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) is raiding people's homes, as reported in the newspapers. The State newspaper, the *Guyana Chronicle*, indicates that people are complaining of violations of their constitutional rights.

The Government threatened to ban students of the University of Guyana (UG), who defaulted in paying loans, from travelling, but, later, good sense prevailed and the decision was rescinded.

The Attorney General may wish to stand again. In the *Stabroek News*, there is a headline that the AG is accused of discriminating against the new Deputy Registrar.

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 40 (a): Again, I will have to invoke Mr. Rohee. The matter that was just read to this honourable House is a matter that the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, knows is *sub judice*. He ought not to do that. Mr. Speaker, you have indicated that to him on diverse occasions but he is so disrespectful of this honourable House that he insists on breaking the rules. I am asking that the statement be withdrawn.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Williams, I heard a newspaper headline and nothing more. I have not allowed the Hon. Member, invited him or, in any other way, permitted him to go beyond that. I do not think he has.

Mr. Williams: Sir, I ask that the statement be expunged from the record.

Mr. Nandlall: Sir, the AG is accused of discriminating against the Registrar of the Court.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Nandlall, you read that twice. Are we going to stay there or go ahead?

Mr. Nandlall: No, Sir; I am moving on.

Mr. Williams: The case, Sir, is before the Court. That is a matter that the proceedings of the Court have shown that the Attorney General has rejected, out of hand, that allegation. Therefore, the Hon. Member cannot...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you should be careful because you are introducing the case here. It ought not to be a part...

Mr. Williams: Sir, the newspaper reported that it has been rejected out of hand. The matter is not concluded as yet. It is improper for the Hon. Member to abuse the privilege of this honourable House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Mr. Nandlall, please proceed. Are you the Counsel in this case on any side? The House may want to know.

Mr. Nandlall: No, Sir, not at all. I am reading the newspaper as an ordinary Guyanese citizen.

Mr. Speaker: The question I asked is a different one.

Mr. Nandlall: I am not on the case, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Nandlall: Then, Sir, there is the fiasco about the hiring of private prosecutors. We know that the Constitution resides the hiring of prosecutors and the prosecution of criminal offence exclusively within the domain of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). An announcement was made that Cabinet announced that it will hire special prosecutors. That is in the newspapers, again by the Hon. Member.

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

Mr. Nandlall: That was in the newspapers, by Hon. Member Mr. Harmon. Then the Hon. Attorney General was quoted in the press as attempting to explain that the Cabinet, indeed, shall

hire new prosecutors; still it is lost. It is not the hiring of new prosecutors but it is who can hire them. Only the DPP can do that. But we will deal with that when we come to it. The Hon. Member is quoted in the press, *INews*, as saying that the reason they had to do that was because the DPP is uncomfortable when dealing with political cases. Lo and behold, in *Kaieteur News*, Saturday 5th November, 2016, the DPP responded.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am not telling you how to prosecute your case, but I am just wondering whether this is taking us beyond the explanation you gave at the beginning.

Mr. Nandlall: One more quote, Sir. The DPP said, as quoted from the newspapers...
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, you will let the Speaker do this his way.

Mr. Nandlall: Sir, the *Kaieteur News* headline is: DPP says AG lied about State Prosecutors. I gave that litany...

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Nandlall, you have to wrap up now.

Mr. Nandlall: I gave that litany to point out that we cannot make these commitments glibly. We have to match words with conduct. The Minister is saying, in the Budget speech, and quite rightly so, that he is committing to the rule of law and to constitutional freedom. Here it is I have identified a list of differences.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you must stop now.

Mr. Nandlall: Sir, in conclusion, I am saying that we cannot support the 2017 Budget.
[*Applause*]

Mr. Williams: Mr. Speaker, before I congratulate the financial maestro we have on our side of the House, let me say that the overriding principle of this new Government is to restore stolen assets of the State. So we will continue to ensure that all public officers who purloin and extract private wealth from State assets be brought to account. And so, I am saying that the law books taken from the Ministry of Legal Affairs and Attorney General's Chambers must be brought back. Mr. Nandlall must bring back our law books.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Basil Williams, I have requested all Members not to make personal references to others. I believe that you can do that too.

Mr. Williams: Sir, I will bring the newspapers. It is in the headlines of the newspapers.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, no personal references... Please withdraw the personal reference and let us proceed.

Mr. Williams: Sir, I withdraw the reference to the name, but I will call on all who have State assets to return them.

Mr. Speaker, if it pleases you, I wish to congratulate the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston DaCosta Jordan, and his team for crafting this Budget in circumstances, described in the words of President David A. Granger, “where the Government started its mandate with troubling economic and social indicators.”

It must be clear that this one-and-a-half-year old Government inherited a mess of an economy and of a country. The demands of the regime that created the mess and has tried to fix us, this new Government which has accomplished a lot in all the circumstances, with all kinds of allegations of incompetence and the like... It must not be lost on the people of this country and the world that there were 23 years of marginalisation, discrimination, victimisation and outright *murderation* that we have to roll back. It will take some time but it will be rolled back by the APNU/AFC Government.

At page 3 of his Budget speech, the Hon. Minister indicated that Budget 2017 was being presented under the theme:

“Building a Diversified Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese... Budget 2017 is designed to consolidate the gains we have made since our accession to office, improve economic performance, and define a sustainable pathway to the happiness and prosperity of Guyana.”

Upon proper perusal of the Budget, I have every reason to believe him and not the purveyors of obfuscation, gloom and doom. I could not help but notice, during the Budget presentation by the Hon. Minister of Finance, that the Opposition Members were noticeably stunned to silence for

the greater part of his presentation because of the massive infrastructural programme outlined by him for 2017 and the job creation which would flow therefrom. It was only in the waning moments of his presentation, when some mention was made of the 14% VAT, that there was some stirring of life. The Opposition recognised that, once the Budget is executed, once those projects have materialised, it is another 25 years in Opposition for them.

8.43 p.m.

So they came with their scaremongering tactics and made a lot of noise. One would also notice that, during the presentation, the Hon. Members on this side kept, as the facts were churned out, showing to the nation the development plans that this Government has for this country. One would have noticed how the Members were resolved over there. There are no more calls to withdraw the budget. Did you realise that? We have not heard any. It is because the truth is taking ascendancy in this honourable House, with respect to the genuine nature of this budget which will transform this country for the present and the future.

Let me clear up a few matters that were introduced, which were clearly not the truth. It was contended by the Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall that two out of five Judges are in the Court of Appeal. He was suggesting that it was a recent development. It is not. This situation has been like this for well over a decade, where judges have been sitting in the Court of Appeal. Why? It was implied for the reason that there were two persons who are a part of the Court of Appeal acting in offices – the Chief Justice and the Chancellor of the Judiciary.

Since both were acting, they probably thought it better that they could not put the full complement of Justices of Appeal in the Court of Appeal. They did not know how it would have played out at the end of the day. Of course, the appointment of a Chief Justice and Chancellor of the Judiciary is a matter of agreement between the President and the Leader of the Opposition. It is basically a political process. That is why it was like that for nearly a decade. Then, to compound matters, a Justice of Appeal was secretly recruited somewhere in London, brought to Guyana and placed without moor as a Justice of Appeal. No one in the legal community in Guyana knew this person, no one had any idea, and I am talking about senior counsels, as to who the Senior Judge was. The upshot of it all was that it was then discovered that the person who was recruited secretly and placed as a Justice of Appeal in the Court of Appeal, had problems at

the English Bar. I will put it like that to that level. It really turned out to be a great disappointment to Guyana.

That is why we have always insisted that positions must be advertised. There must be transparency in whatever we do. The winds of transparency that have been blowing through this country cannot bypass our courts. So this question about two out of five Judges is not something that was created by this present Government, it is something that was inherited and, obviously, it would be addressed.

Further, the issue of the recommendation by the JSC, the Hon. Member was very confusing. In one breath, he asserted that a recommendation from the JSC was mandatory and that it must be obeyed. Then in the next breath he contended that the President has the discretion. The Hon. Member is ambivalent, he has not made up his mind and there is nothing for me to address. Suffice it to say that, it is the basic structure of our Constitution that is organised on the doctrine of the Separation of Powers among the three arms of the State – the Legislature, the Executive and the Judiciary and not one of them should try to ride roughshod or interfere with the business of the other.

For it to be contended that any provision in our Constitution is designed to compel the Head of State, the supreme Executive authority and Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of Guyana, must be erroneous. Then the semantics with the words “shall” and “may”. Any lawyer, just out of law school, for sure ought to know that the law has travelled such a far way. In the past “shall” was mandatory and “may” was discretionary. Mr. Speaker, you know as an experienced lawyer, that now, depending on its context, “shall” is now interpreted as “may” and vice versa. I would not want to bore the Hon. Members of this House, the people of Guyana and those listening any further in that matter. Safe to say that the President of this country knows his duty, he understands his remit and it cannot be said that his duty is not a higher one. That he is simply to be a robot to sign off on names blindly sent to him by the JSC, without looking at certain *indicia*, competence, expertise, skill, integrity to name some of the *indictum* that must be addressed in the circumstance.

I do not wish to be detained by those matters because I want to be able to show that this Government is up and moving on and that the efforts that are made to obfuscate our actions need to be met frontally.

When this Government took office, it met Guyana in all kinds of holes, grey holes and black holes. We later learned that the holes really had names to them. This Government found Guyana in the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATC) follow-up process, it found Guyana in the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force/ International Cooperation Review Group (CFATF/ICRG) process and it found Guyana in the Financial Action Task Force/International Cooperation Review Group (FATF/ICRG) process. Guyana was a threat, a Pariah State and in the context of the international financial economy - downright dangerous.

As a result, Guyana was prejudice by that status. How did Guyana arrive there? We arrived there not under this new APNU/AFC Government, we met it. That is because the last Government did not have the political will to address the FATF's recommendations. What we found was that, in 2000, the first Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism legislation was introduced. No one was ever charged or investigated under that legislation. In 2009, the Anti-Money Laundering/Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) was introduced. The then Government beefed up the regime and, again, no one was investigated, no one was charged and no one was taken before the courts of Guyana. As a result, CFATF issued three public statements to its Members, indicating that they should take counter measures against Guyana. Guyana did not, again, comply after those statements. As a result, in disgust, CFATF referred Guyana to the FATF. That is what this Government met when it entered office. This Government had to deal with FATF and CFATF.

Having been in office for just about a year and successfully bringing Guyana out of that process, I did a statement as Minister in this honourable House. I did not make these statements that I am making now. I just made a statement and lay the facts out. What did this Government get in return? This Government got in return, a severe haranguing by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition and a deliberate distortion of Guyana's position under the AML/CFT regime.

Mr. Speaker, might I respectfully refer you to a headline in the *Guyana Times* newspapers, dated Friday, 25th November, 2016, on page 5, captioned:

“AG’s mistruths jeopardise fragile Guyana economy as Jagdeo warns nation now subject to more rigorous FATF/CFATF scrutiny”.

We all know that the APNU/AFC Government has taken Guyana out of the Third Round of Mutual Evaluation, which this Government met. The Opposition feels that it could say anything about us. Now, when this article is looked at, it has that the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Basil Williams, has misled the Guyanese nation. We are working hard for this nation and have been successful and they say that we have misled the nation. The Former President Bharat Jagdeo said that:

“...the false sense of security that Williams attempted to foist on the nation could in fact cause the country to repeat mistakes...”

That is a downright and outright mistruth. To deal with that rapidly and get rid of that, Mr. Speaker, might I respectfully refer you to a letter written to His Excellency, Mr. Basil Williams, Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs by none other than Mr. Juan Manuel Vega-Serrano, President of FATF. I read:

It is dated 28th October, 2016.

“Dear Minister,

I am writing to inform you of the discussions of FATF meetings of 16th-21st October, 2016 in Paris, France, with regard to Guyana’s Anti-Money Laundering and Combatting the Financing of Terrorism regime. Thank you for your attendance at these meetings where you reiterated your Government’s commitment to continue implementing AML/CFT reforms. As you are aware, the FATF discussed the results of the onsite visit that was undertaken by FATF representatives of the International Cooperation Review Group (ICRG) to your country on 15th and 16th September, 2016. The FATF welcomed the significant action by Guyana to address the strategic deficiencies in its AML/CFT regime including...”

And they listed what we did.

“On the basis of the onsite visit report, FATF decided that it will no longer monitor Guyana under the ICRG process. This progress and FATF’s decision are reflected in public documents improving global AML/CFT compliance on-going process posted on the FATF website immediately after the plenary.

Again, I congratulate your country on the significant progress accomplished in the AML/CFT field.”

That is the end of the letter. Yet, I am the victim of abuse by non-other than the Leader of the Opposition. The same abuse was attempted a few minutes ago by the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall. We have to put a stop to this because, if the Opposition do not cherish its reputation, we on this side of the House cherish our reputations. I would never be able to smile if people are telling me to bring back the Government books.

Might I move on with more accomplishments of the APNU/AFC Government? Let us deal with the Hague Conference. This was another great success for the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Attorney General’s Chambers. The Conference of International Family Law, Legal Co-operation and Commerce: promoting human rights and cross-border trade in the Caribbean, through the Hague Conventions, held in Guyana, was a resounding success. It was collaboration between the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) Guyana, the Hague Conference on Private International Law (HCCH) and the Government of Guyana, represented by the Attorney General’s Chambers and the Ministry of Legal Affairs.

8.58 p.m.

There was representation from 22 countries, including 12 other Attorneys General, six Chief Justices, 13 sitting Judges from as many High Courts and a number of others of great distinction in academic and other fields. Deliberations centred on various conventions relating to Family Law, Child Protection, Commerce and International Corporation. Two Guyanese Judges were added to The Hague International Network of Judges and follow-up actions included Cabinet’s approval for Guyana to sign on to the Hague Apostille Convention and the expression of interest in joining the Convention from Guyana, given by a representative of the Attorney General’s Chambers and Minister of Legal Affairs at the November, 2016 Special Commission on Practical Operations of the Hague Apostille Convention, in the Netherlands.

Guyana is also interested in signing on to the various Child Protection and Family law conventions and would embark on consultations with stakeholders in 2017, as advised by President David. A. Granger, who declared the conference opened.

If we were to leave this matter as it is, some contentions would have come from the Opposition trying to denigrate the success of this conference. Sir, I would now read to the House an extract from the *International Family Law Journal*. It is an article done by none other than Sir Matthew Thorpe, former Lord Justice and former Head of the International Justice for England and Wales, an Associate Member, who attended this conference. This is what he said and I would just pull out an extract, so that the record could be cleared. He was saying:

“It was an overall extremely successful conference. Why? First, thanks to the synergy between the three partners without funding from United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) the conference would not have taken place, without the expertise and diplomacy of Kristoff Bernasconi, Secretary General, Ignacio Goicoechea, Director of the Regional Office. The programme and its presentation would not have hit all the targets. If a gold medal had to go to one of the partners, I would award it to the Attorney General. His triumphed stage management of the opening ceremony got the event off to a flying start, but his real achievement was in assembling such a large and distinguished audience of participants”.

So this is a measure he is saying of the potential of a conference to achieve good and wide hemisphere acceptance. I hope that, with this record, we would not have somebody coming in the morning to say that the Hague Conference was not successful. We must not hide our encomia under a bushel. A judge of the seventh Judicial Circuit Court of Maryland, in the United States of America, the Hon. Cathy H. Serrette, Judge of that Court, wrote the Hon. Minister of Legal Affairs and she said this:

“Thank you for the invitation to participate in the Hague Convention Conference on International Family Law Legal Corporation and Commerce. It was an honour to present and take part in this lively and thought provoking conversation. As well thank you for the reception at the Umana Yana. What a treat. If I can be any assistance with the Abduction

Convention or otherwise please do not hesitate to contact me. Your gracious hospitality was deeply appreciated.”

In our first year of office, this was a victory for the APNU/AFC. I cannot recall, in 23 years, anything of this nature having been done by the Ministry of Legal Affairs and the Attorney General’s Chambers. That is why I believe we are getting all these problems, now that these things are being done.

Another success for the Ministry in 2016 was the University of Guyana/University of West Indies Counsel of Legal Education Revised Collaborative Legal Education Agreement. The APNU/AFC Government inherited the law students, beset by uncertainty as to whether they could go to the Hugh Wooding Law School to complete their legal education. Compounding their situation was another dubious claim that the PPP/C Government was not offering scholarships or financial assistance to law students destined for the Hugh Wooding Law School.

From the outset in 2015, the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, the Hon. Basil Williams, had to enlist President Granger to get the assistance of the Heads of Government to enable Guyana’s 25 law graduates to enter the Hugh Wooding Law School.

Mr. Speaker: Hon Member, you have been speaking for 25 minutes.

Mr. Williams: Yes Sir. In 2016, a steep increase in the fees for the Hugh Wooding Law School and an upfront payment scheme required added to the problems of our students, again, the Attorney General’s Chambers intervened on their behalf and helped to alter the payment requirement to facilitate them.

Recently, Cabinet approved a 25% total annual fees payment to the Hugh Wooding Law School for 2016–2018 as a contribution pending the expiration of establishing a Law School in Guyana. At the Counsel of Legal Education meeting in Antigua and Barbuda in September 2016, Guyana was able to enter into a new revised collaboration agreement for three years. Therefore, 25 Guyanese law graduates are guaranteed automatic entry to the Hugh Wooding Law School, up to 2019. We are grateful for this. This is another success of the APNU/AFC Government.

His Excellency, the President, addressed the legislative agenda in his presentation to this Hon. House on the 13th October, 2016, under the caption, “Quality of Life: Public Trust and Good Governance in Guyana”, on pages 10 and 11 of his presentation. He said:

“Your Government’s legislative agenda, for the next year, is aimed at continuing our efforts to ensure a ‘good life’ for all. We will protect the interests of Guyanese by strengthening Guyana’s legal architecture”.

“Your Government, in this regard, is committed to promoting standards of probity in public office. We will ensure, also, that those who unlawfully expropriate State property are brought to justice. We will pursue the recovery of all stolen State assets.”

Those are the words of President Brigadier David Arthur Granger.

He continued:

“The Justice Administrative system will be fortified by the promulgation of three important pieces of legislation. The Witness Protection Bill will give effect to the Caribbean Community’s agreement to establish the Regional Justice Protection Programme 1999, which came into force in 2006. The Bill provides for the establishment of a programme to protect certain witnesses and other persons.

The Protected Disclosures Bill, referred to as the Whistle-Blowers Bill, aims at combating corruption and other wrongdoing, by encouraging or facilitating persons to make disclosures of improper conduct.

The Deeds and Commercial Registry Authority Amendment Bill will provide a change in membership of the Governing Board of the Deeds and Commercial Registries.”

The following legislation were passed in 2016: The Constitution (Amendment) Bill No. 2 of 2016; Credit Reporting (Amendment) Bill of 2016; Coroners (Amendment) Act of 2016; Law Reform Commission Act 2016; Firearms (Amendment) Act 2016; Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic (Amendment) Act 2016; Financial Administration and Audit (Amendment) Act; and I could go on.

For 2017, we have the Civil Aviation Bill; Aircraft Accident and Incident Investigation Bill; Local Authorities (Amendment) Bill; Industrial Relations Court Bill; Management (Amendment) Bill; Civil Aviation Rules and Air Regulations; Civil Aviation Granting of Exemption Regulation; Civil Aviation Air Navigation Services Regulations; Broadcasting Regulations; Occupational Safety and Health Regulation and Manufacturing Regulations.

We had consultations on the draft Cyber Crime Bill, State Assets Recovery Bill, Witness Protection and Protector Disclosure Bill and the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) Bill. Our Litigation Division has been active and, as I said, the Parliamentary Division also. The Deeds and Commercial Registry is continuing to provide excellent service to the Guyanese nation.

In closing, I would say that, for 2017, we have 10 consultations. The Ministry would be hosting the Caribbean Action Financial Task Force Plenary and Working Group meetings in November, 2017. There will be countrywide sensitisation workshops on the States Assets Recovery Bill, which will target State agencies and semi-autonomous agencies.

The Government will continue to support Guyanese students at the Hugh Wooding Law School by providing financial assistance towards their tuition. Recruitment and selection of appropriate professional staff to fill vacant positions currently existing at the Attorney General's Chambers to accommodate the increase in workload.

Under a grant by the Canadian Government, which seeks to strengthen the Guyanese criminal justice system, the following activities will be carried out under the grant; training, coaching and quality control assistance of Police Departments, Police Prosecutions, Magistrates and Crime Scene Investigation, Criminal Case Investigation, Forensic video analysis and understanding Trial Management Technique. Pending the approval of an Inter-American Development Bank loan, support for the Criminal Justice Sector Project, the Ministry of Legal Affairs has a number of projects it wishes to implement, once the loan is secured. These are alternative sentencing policy, establishing of a permanent Law Reform Commission, needs assessment for a Probation Department at Ministry of Social Protection and the study for pre-trial detention. To achieve these activities a Project Execution Unit will be set up to spearhead the implementation and monitoring.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you must wrap up now.

Mr. Williams: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank you for allowing me to present our programme as to what we did in 2016 and what we intend to do in 2017 for the APNU/AFC Government, which we know would move from strength to strength and will be in office servicing the Guyanese people for the next 25 years. So without let or hindrance, I commend this budget of Hon. Minister of Finance and his team to this honourable House. Thank you.
[Applause]

Mr. Rajkumar: Thank you Mr. Speaker for giving me the opportunity to make my contribution on the 2017 Budget. I rise in support of the approval of the budget for the Financial Year 2017, as presented to this honourable House on the 28th November, 2016 under the theme: *Building a Diversified, Green Economy: Delivering the Good Life to All Guyanese* by the Hon. Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan.

This is the third budget presented to the National Assembly within the past 18 months by the APNU/AFC Government. It is also the first time in 40 years that a budget is presented to the National Assembly before the beginning of the fiscal year. The Hon. Minister and his staff must be complimented and congratulated for their hard and dedicated work – a job well done.

The 2017 Budget, as presented to this honourable House, has been condemned and criticised by the Opposition. They say that this budget spells gloom and doom for our people and it should be withdrawn, trashed and burnt. They say it has nothing good for the people of this country, but I beg to differ. The 2017 Budget sets out this Government's plan for the continued development of our country and it is a guide towards the continued economic development and delivering of the good life to all Guyanese.

I wish to state from the onset that I support Budget 2017 and commend it for its passage in this House. The APNU/AFC Government intends to spend an estimated \$250 billion in building a diversified green economy, delivering the good life to all Guyanese.

9.13 p.m.

This Government proposes to spend in 2017 the sum of \$43.1 billion on education; \$32.1 billion on public health; \$29.1 billion in our security sector; \$37.2 billion on public infrastructure; and

\$20.6 billion in the agriculture sector. This Government, in demonstrating its commitment to deliver a good life for all our senior citizens, has, within 18 months, increased old age pension from \$13,125 to \$19,000, an increase of 45% which is more money in the pockets of our pensioners.

Our citizens are grateful for the compassion shown by this Government to them over the past months. This Government, in each of its three budgets presented, has made provision for the elderly and also for our less fortunate. Public assistance has also been increased....

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

Mr. Rajkumar: One minute please, Sir. The Income Tax threshold will be increased from \$660,000 in 2016 to \$720,000 per annum in 2017. Persons earning \$600,000 and less will not be taxed. It is estimated that 7,600 workers would be exempted from paying taxes in 2017. Those workers earning above \$180,000 per month, one third of their salaries will be tax free. There is a reduction in the Personal Income Tax Rate from 30% to 28% for persons earning below \$180,000 per month. Persons earning above \$180,000, one third of their salaries will be tax free, then 28% on the first \$120,000 will be taxed, thereafter 40% on the remainder. The effect of this will result in an increase in the workers' take home pay, which is more money for them to spend on themselves and on their families in 2017.

Our citizens, over the years, have been calling for a reduction of the Value Added Tax (VAT). In our campaign, we, in the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), had promised our citizens that we will reduce VAT. This Government has reduced VAT from 16% to 14%. A promise made and kept which will benefit all Guyanese. More money to spend, the reduction of VAT from 16% to 14%, an increase in the list of VAT exempted and zero-rated items, the combined effect of these things will ensure that our citizens are able to purchase more goods and services to satisfy their needs in 2017.

In 2017, the Government intends to allocate \$2.9 billion to the University of Guyana (UG) in support of the University's effort to deliver quality tertiary education to its students. These are some of the things that the Government will be doing to deliver a good life for all Guyanese.

The exciting prospect of developing the solar farms at Mabaruma, Lethem, Mahdia and Bartica, and the installation of the solar energy systems in Government buildings to generate electricity, is a step in the right direction in building a green economy.

This Government has been accused of not doing anything for the youths and, more particularly, for not creating jobs for them. In 2017, \$100 million will be spent on our youths through the Sustainable Livelihood Entrepreneurial Development Initiative, giving our youths an opportunity to be trained and providing them with finance for them to be self-employed. The Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) has also been allocated \$991 million in 2017. This allocation will improve the lives of our hinterland youths.

Further, in 2016, 481 teachers were trained and graduated from the teachers' training college. Four hundred and eighty one qualified teachers were employed in 2016. In 2017, 600 more trained teachers will further be employed, creating jobs for 1,000 teachers to be employed by the end of December, 2017. This is an example of delivering the good life.

I stand here representing the people of Region 2. It is my duty to inform this honourable House of some of the things which were done in my region in 2016 and then highlight some of the benefits which we will have under the APNU/AFC's budget of 2017.

We in the APNU/AFC Government recognise that education plays an integral role in persons' development and is essential for national development. Our Government has been continuously investing in the education of our youths. Education leads to prosperity, investing in education by our Government is paving the road that leads to a good life.

Speaking on the 2016 Budget earlier this year, I had indicated to this honourable House that Government will build new buildings to house the students attending the Aurora Nursery School at a cost of \$114 million. I also spoke about the new nursery school to be built at Akawini in the Pomeroon River and the rehabilitation of the Anna Regina Multilateral and Cotton Field Secondary Schools. I am happy to announce that these projects have been completed. The sparkling new modern buildings at Aurora on the Essequibo Coast and at Akawini in the Pomeroon are testimonies that we, in this Government, are committed to providing a better environment for the learning of our students in our region.

Of the \$43.1 billion estimated to be spent on education in 2017, over \$1.7 billion will be spent to further improve the learning environment, acquiring furniture and equipment for schools and providing educational materials in the region. We have received reports of overcrowding in some of the schools in our region. We also received reports that some schools need upgrading in their facilities. Since this Administration was elected to Office, we in Government have listened to the people. We saw their needs and we are now ensuring that these needs are satisfied.

In 2017, this Government intends to spend over \$130 million for the extension of the Charity Secondary School, the primary school at Suddie, Good Hope and the Kabakaburi Primary Schools. These schools were overcrowded over the years but no one seemed to notice. This Government intends to construct and extend sanitary blocks at the Charity Secondary School, the Mabel Sandy Primary School, the Abrahams Creek and Charity Primary Schools. The Government is committed in improving accommodation and providing a suitable environment for the students in our region to learn and excel.

The children in Region 2 will also benefit from the \$1.9 billion School Feeding Programme and from the \$578 million which will be allocated to purchase text books. This Government must be applauded and congratulated for its efforts to provide quality education for our students in Region 2.

Infrastructural Development: In delivering a good life to all Guyanese, this Government intends to spend in 2017, an excess of \$162 million on the rehabilitation and upgrade of streets in our region. This signifies a \$92.3 million increase from the sum of \$70 million spent in 2016. Be assured that the streets in Good Hope, Pomona Housing Scheme, Johanna Cecelia, Perseverance, Queens Town, Reliance, Lima Sands, Dartmouth and Airy Hall, which are scheduled to be rehabilitated and upgraded in 2017, will be completed. The town of Anna Regina will also see its roads and streets being upgraded at an additional cost of \$60 million. Let us not forget the roads that are upgraded and rehabilitated in 2016. The Caricom Rice Mill Street in Anna Regina, the Mucandar Street in Reliance, John Street in Danielstown, School Street in Westbury, Middle and Cross Street in Charity, Mandir Street in Pomona and streets in Adventure and Dartmouth have been resurfaced and asphalted. The citizens welcome and appreciate the development in their communities. The Government must be applauded for its effort in delivering a good life for us all.

In 2016, our sea defence was reinforced at a cost of \$160 million. Works were done at Cullen, Perseverance, Bush Lot, Spring Gardens, Charity and Aurora. All these works have been completed. No flooding was reported from overtopping or from a breach of the sea defence, in 2016 so far.

In 2017, the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) Incorporated will be installing three new generating units of 1.7 megawatts each at Anna Regina at the cost of US\$3 million. These sets are scheduled to commence in May, 2017. These new sets will replace the much used and worn sets of the Wartsila Operation Guyana Inc. Within a few months, by May 2017, this Government will alleviate all electric shortfalls in the region. Additionally, our region will benefit from the development of a solar farm built by GPL, producing five megawatts of electricity which will be commissioned before the end of December, 2017. These projects will increase the supply of electricity leading to the development in our region, and households which were not supplied with electricity will now be supplied.

This Government will be repairing and upgrading the now dilapidated Supenaam Stelling, a sum of \$130 million will be spent towards this end. The increased spending on infrastructure in our region will have a spinoff of creating more jobs for the people in our region. These are some of the infrastructural works which will be done in 2017 in our region, in delivering a good life for our people.

Some people have eyes but they cannot see. The citizens of Region 2 have eyes and they can see what the APNU/AFC Government has done for them, and we in Region 2 are assured of the continued development in our region under this Administration.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have been speaking for 15 minutes.

Mr. Rajkumar: Most grateful please Mr. Speaker.

Agriculture: We all know that the majority of our citizens living on the Essequibo Coast are rice farmers and the region depends heavily on rice production. Speaking on Budget 2016, earlier this year, I had indicated to this honourable House that rice farmers received between \$1,000 and \$1,700 for a bag of their paddy that was earlier this year. Paddy for the last crop, in Region 2,

was between \$2,200 and \$2,500 per bag. I also reported to this honourable House that the farmers were owed by the millers...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Rajkumar, just claim your seat. Hon. Member, Mr. Damon you have been interrupting the proceedings of this House. If you continue you will have to leave this Chamber. Please take your seat. Mr. Rajkumar, go ahead please.

Mr. Rajkumar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The farmers were owed by the millers for their paddy sold and there was a delay in payment. I also reported that farmers were forced to purchase fertilisers on credit from the millers at a higher price. I have spoken to farmers from New Road, Sparta, Devonshire Castle, Reliance, Cullen and Johanna Cecelia.

9.28 p.m.

I have been told, and I very well believe, that all the farmers have been paid by the millers for the paddy for this crop. The farmers were promptly paid for the paddy. It was the first time this has happened in a very long time. They were able to liquidate their debts and avoid increase in interest payment. Fertiliser has been exempted from VAT. Farmers will now be able to purchase fertiliser at a cheaper cost.

This Government will spend \$326.1 million in 2017 in maintenance of drainage and irrigation canals and structure, maintenance of roads, accessing the back land and construction revetment Huis t' Dieren and Riverstown. Checks at Better Success and culverts at Hampton Court will be built in 2017 to enhance the drainage and irrigation structures.

Development transformation has been taking place in our regions. Parks are taking shape. Our town is being converted from a litter dump to a garden town. The planting of palm trees, croton and fern has beautified our town in Anna Regina and has been admired by many of our citizens. Our road parapet is no longer overridden with bushes and tall grasses. From Charity to Supenaam, the parapets are cut and clean. They are cut in a regular interval. There is no question that development in our region has been taking place and will continue to take place under APNU/AFC administration.

Under these circumstances with our firm plan for the continued development of our region and hence our country at large, I have no alternative but to support this budget for the financial year 2017 and commend it to this House for its approval.

I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have come to the end of our business tonight, except the unfinished matters which are two. One concerns an allegation which was contained in an exchange between the Hon. Member Mr. Williams and the Hon. Member Ms. Sukhai-Campbell. That will be treated in the same way as the allegation that was made yesterday, which is to go to the proof as provided by the recording. I was informed by the officer, who conducted the enquiry, that he was unable to discover with clarity who may have said what. If it is the wish of Hon. Members that they may wish to hear that, then, of course, I will request that it be brought here. As I did last evening, we found nothing. It is the same on this occasion, but if Hon. Members would wish to hear it, because it is their right then, certainly I can arrange for that to be here. If not, then that particular matter must fall away. No further action can be taken on it since there is no proof that can be provided by the only reliable means which we can find.

Mr. Williams: As guided by you, Mr. Speaker, we would like to proceed to the more weighty matter.

Mr. Speaker: I take it Hon. Minister you have withdrawn...

Mr. Williams: By all mean, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, that matter is no longer before us. It is not only because of the absence of reliable proof, but because the Hon. Member has withdrawn the allegation.

The second matter relates to a question of fact. The Hon. Mr. Nandlall in his presentation said that the bond was an empty bond. Hon. Mr. Nandlall, would you remind us with what you said? If you cannot, then I am sure we can get that recording because your light was on.

Mr. Nandlall: My recollection is that I said that there is not even a tablet in the bond. I mentioned the word “tablet.”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Dr. Norton, it would be good for the House to be reminded of what you said.

Dr. Norton: I was asking the Hon. Member withdraw his statement since the bond was being utilised.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, my recollection is slightly different. The last part I did not recall hearing that, but you may have said it. I think what we would do is to get the tape in respect to that. I had however requested a visit to the bond. Both sides, I requested the Hon. Members Mr. Ali and Ms. Lawrence to visit in the company of a representative of the Parliament Office. The Deputy Clerk attended and I have received information from one person. The Deputy Clerk has provided a report to the Clerk who has now given it to me. I have not received a report from Ms. Lawrence but I have one from, it states, Ms. Teixeira, but I do not know that Ms. Teixeira went. I did not ask Ms. Teixeira to go to the bond and she did not go to the bond. It would be good to know... Hon. Member Mr. Ali, did you visit the bond as you were asked to do?

Mr. Ali: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Do you have report for this House?

Mr. Ali: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Then, I would wish to have it.

Mr. Ali: Sir, I can do so now with your permission.

Mr. Speaker: Ms. Lawrence, did you visit the bond?

Minister of Social Protection [Ms. Lawrence]: Yes Mr. Speaker. I did.

Mr. Speaker: Do you have a report?

Ms. Lawrence: I am prepared to provide an oral report.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Ali, let me hear your report.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker, would you permit me to say a few things before the report?

Mr. Speaker: Let us not do that. Let us just have the report on your visit to the bond.

Mr. Ali: When I arrived at the bond there was a large delegation of the media there. We waited for about 40 minutes. I waited for before the bond was opened. The Permanent Secretary arrived with the keys. He opened the bond. We were instructed that the parliamentary team would proceed first in the bond then followed by the media. When we went...

Mr. Speaker: The media, I specifically said the team that I requested to attend the bond was to be there.

Mr. Ali: Sir, I do not control the media.

Mr. Speaker: I know that, but please go ahead.

Mr. Ali: There was much more than the media that I would want to tell you about.

Mr. Speaker: Can you give me the report about the visit to the bond?

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker, on a next occasion, such as this, I would ask you to kindly provide us with security when we go on these aspects.

Mr. Speaker, when we arrived at the bond, as I said, I waited there about 40 minutes and we were then escorted into the bond. There were a lot of empty shelves and a lot of enclosed boxes. I told the Ministers and the media that I recall the Hon. Member was saying that there was not even a tablet and I would like to see one table. It was just to show me one tablet in this bond and the matter is over. A box was opened not containing any tablets. We were told that the bond stores condoms, lubricants and umbilical cord clamps. I then said that we would like to see tablets. Someone, who I did not recognise, said tablets were not stored there. It was some technical person from the Ministry of Health. It is a secondary bond and tablet are stored somewhere else.

We were then taken to a ground floor. Again, I asked the question. I went to the Deputy Clerk and I said Mdm. Deputy Clerk our task here is to see one tablet. I would just like to see one tablet because I recall the Hon. Member saying, “not even a tablet.” I requested again to see a tablet. The Hon. Minister Dr. Norton said tablets are stored there.

In the lower floor there were some empty refrigerators. I do not know the technical names for those. There were a scanning machine and some other machines in the floor downstairs. We have not seen a single tablet.

Mr. Speaker: Was the bond in use?

Mr. Ali: I cannot say that.

Mr. Speaker: Can you say that?

Mr. Ali: No.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Ali: For a bond that is in use...

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Ali.

Mr. Ali: I have not completed...

Mr. Speaker: I cannot enter in disputation about a bond in use or not in use. I will not do that. If you are finished with your report,... If not, please continue your report.

Mr. Ali: Mr. Speaker, as I said, we asked specifically to see tablets and no tablets were shown to us. When we were coming out of the bond there was a loud noise outside. There was a big mobilisation, and threats were hurled at another Member of Parliament and I.

Mr. Speaker: Was this after you have finished with the bond?

Mr. Ali: Yes. This is when we were exiting.

Mr. Speaker: Could we stop there for a while and let me deal with the rest of it?

Mr. Ali: Okay Sir. Thanks.

Mr. Speaker: Ms. Lawrence, may I hear your report?

Ms. Lawrence: Sir, I arrived at the bond in Sussex Street and we waited for the Permanent Secretary, who we were told, was on his way with the keys. Both the Permanent Secretary and

the Deputy Permanent Secretary arrived and he proceeded to have the door opened. It was then decided that the staff from the Parliament Office would have entered first and then myself, Mr. Ali and the Ministers, because Minister Cummings was there, and Hon. Member Bishop Edghill would have gone in, and then the media would have followed after us. When we entered the bond the Mr. Thomas, the Permanent Secretary, indicated that he would have taken us to the upper floor first. We all proceeded to the upper floor where there were several aisles containing boxes that marked medicine on them. They were other list on them. They were all wrapped in plastic, and so on. It was decided that Ms. Gilgeours, the Deputy Clerk, would have chosen which box she wanted to open since she was representing the Speaker and that was done.

9.43 p.m.

Mr. Ali and Hon. Member Bishop Edghill witnessed that opening. When that was finished, we were told that we could have proceeded downstairs. We went downstairs and that part was opened. The Permanent Secretary explained that in the lower flat it is very cold because the equipment stored there had to be stored at a certain temperature. Within that space he explained to us what the several machines were for and he also took us into another room that he said there is the large walk-in freezer where they would be storing some other medication, antibiotics and others, which he called - I cannot remember the names - which would have arrived very shortly.

Mr. Ali was insisted that he wanted to see a tablet. I could remember very clearly saying to him that he should speak to Ms. Gilgeours and she would have decided whichever box they wanted to open. We left the bond and we came back to the Parliament Office.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it was a bond that was in use. I have received from Ms. Gilgeours a report. This report describes the visit upstairs where it states several boxes containing a number of items, which she listed there and downstairs, medical equipment including, again, some items listed there. I was informed by the Permanent Secretary that all the boxes could not have been opened because the supplies would be damaged.

Hon. Members, Mr. Ali seemed to recall only a reference to a tablet, which is an unusual approach, but he seemed to recall that. I am sure if I ask other persons they would recall the same thing. I am not going to the tape as they say. We are not going to go to the tail of the tape unless we have to.

Ms. Lawrence gave a description which seems to me, Mr. Ali, could not have any questions with her. Do you have questions as to what Ms. Lawrence said? My question is on Ms. Lawrence's description to the visit when you were present.

Mr. Ali: Two things. The Hon. Minister did not say what the content was of the box that was opened, one. Two, I went to the Hon. Minister and I said just show me one tablet, arrange for one tablet to be shown to me. The Hon. Minister referred me to Deputy Clerk. I went to the Deputy Clerk. I am very concerned that aspect was not included in the Deputy Clerk's report. I went to the Deputy Clerk and I said "Madam Deputy Clerk, could you arrange for me to see one tablet, just one tablet?" That is all I asked and I got no response.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Ali?

Mr. Ali: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Is there anything else in the report apart from the fact that the Deputy Clerk did not record that you asked her to arrange for you to have one tablet, site of one tablet?

Mr. Ali: Just the incident outside...

Mr. Speaker: I am talking about the visit by yourself and Ms. Lawrence.

Mr. Ali: There is nothing else I wish to add in relation to inside the bond.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Ms. Teixeira, you wish to speak.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes. Thank you Mr. Speaker. Unless we have different interpretations or why we went to the bond in the first place,...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are...

Ms. Teixeira: Sir, could you just allow me to...?

Mr. Speaker: No. You are entering into the...We have not settled this yet.

Ms. Teixeira: It is a very important issue. The purpose of going to the bond was that Mr. Nandlall said there was not even a medication in the bond. The Hon. Member Dr. Norton got up and challenged that and said that there was medication in the bond. Mr. Speaker, medication - I

was a Minister of Health too - is not umbilical clamps, condoms and lubricants. Medications specifically are talking about medication that you take in many cases orally or by syringe. The point of Mr. Ali asking for a tablet was to do with the point of why they were at the bond in the first place. Therefore it is not a question whether the bond was being utilised or not. That is not the issue. The issue was that the Member said there is medication in the bond.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Gail Teixeira, I bounded to tell this House that my understanding was that the visit was intended to ascertain whether the bond was or was not in use. Now, having said that, whatever else other Members understood to be the case must be taken into consideration. That must certainly be a part of it.

I think what we would do is if the Hon. Nandlall maintains his position, Hon. Member Dr. George Norton, could in fact, in providing his answer, enlarge the answer to include what it is that he is saying. The fact is that I thought the persons here went to see what was an empty bond, but what Mr. Ali wanted to see was a single tablet.

Mr. Nandlall, I do not think that either you or Dr. Norton is in a position to really convince the House as to what you said or did not say. We would need to listen to the recording and satisfy ourselves with that.

Hon. Members, we would await the arrival of the recording. We are still in the chamber. I believe any matter of discussion or proof that could not be settled in here should go through that door and have a conversation, but in here we must conduct ourselves. The recording would be here shortly.

Audio recording played.

Hon. Member, there is a difference between “the bond was not in use” and “show me a tablet”. My understanding, and I repeat, was when we left here, when I requested a visit to the bond, it was to ascertain whether the bond was occupied, in use or not. That point of view was a simple fact, it is or it is not. The term medication or tablet would have been introduced by Mr. Ali....

9.59 p.m.

[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, could I hear it again please?

Audio recording played.

Hon. Members, it is now approaching 10 o' clock we must have a motion for the continuation.

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: Mr. Speaker, I move that the session continues until the resolution of this matter that is engaging the attention of this National Assembly.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members who are speaking should not speak now. There is a motion before the House that we continue to sit until this matter is resolved.

Question put, and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, it is if I could be of some assistance in real terms. In view of what is happening and the plugging back and the re-forwarding and the going back - at least I speak here for myself - it is if we could have here by tomorrow morning a transcript of that two or three minutes or whatever it is, if it is four minutes or five minutes, that are captured when you then instructed people to go. It is if we could have a transcript, an accurate transcript, and then you decide, having got the report from Minister Volda Lawrence, this issue. This is because we are not going to have any final resolution, and we want finality here. We cannot have it tonight. Could I kindly propose that the officers do a transcript and you, who are taking the report, be as a judge and make your decision?

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. That is one proposal before the House.

Minister within the Ministry of Public Health [Dr. Cummings]: Mr. Speaker, just to make a statement that I also had visited the bond and it is operational, and that medication ... Just following up on the...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Dr. Cummings, the Speaker did not request that you go to the bond. For the moment, I will not ask for supporting comment on the visit. I will keep the visits confined to the reports I received from three persons. That is how I would treat this at this time.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I wish to support the Prime Minister's motion that the matter continues for discussion until resolved, or the phrasing that which the Prime Minister put to the House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, thank you. Hon. Members the Hon. Vice-President Mr. Ramjattan has made a proposal Hon. Members are in agreement, we can tomorrow have sight of the transcript and at a convenient point in our sitting of tomorrow, examine it. All are in favour of this?

Ms. Teixeira: No. Opposed.

Bishop Edghill: Unless the motion is proposed you cannot speak to the motion.

Mr. Ramjattan: [Inaudible]

Bishop Edghill: You have to speak to the motion.

Mr. Ramjattan: You do not speak to any motion.

Bishop Edghill: Why?

Mr. Ramjattan: That motion is...

Bishop Edghill: There was a motion. We can speak to the motion.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Edghill...

Bishop Edghill: Yes Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I have not given you the floor nor have I given Vice-President Mr. Ramjattan the floor and I am not sure why this crosstalk is taking place now. We are trying to solve something here. Members are not helping when they try to become combative. Why that should be so, I do not know. Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, you said you opposed the motion.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I said that I supported the motion of the Prime Minister to address the matter until finality. Therefore that was the first motion on the floor. The second was one that I believe the Hon. Mr. Ramjattan was putting it was to have the transcript be written, circulated

and, sometime, dealt with tomorrow. I am supporting the first motion that was put to this House by the Hon. Prime Minister, the leader of this House.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. Hon. Members we have before us a motion. Is there another motion? Is there a motion from Mr. Ramjattan? There is a motion from the Hon. Prime Minister which was seconded by Ms. Teixeira. That is the only motion before the House right now.

Mr. Nagamootoo: Sir, if I may. I interpret the intervention of my honourable colleague Vice-President Mr. Ramjattan to suggest that we would need to have a transcript of the relevant proceedings in order to determine whether or not the matter could be resolved at this point in time. Just for Your Honour's information, I was trying to prod even the Clerk of the Assembly, not to draw the Clerk into any debate in this matter to find out if the transcript, even a draft, could be made available. When I move the motion, I was moving the motion on an understanding that the Hansard Division is working on a transcript. The Clerk is here. That is what he indicated to me, that they were working to get that, but if it is not available then I would subject myself to the amendment proposed by Vice-President Ramjattan as a better way to go.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Ms. Teixeira...

Ms. Teixeira: Sorry Mr. Speaker. My thoughts were somewhere else.

Mr. Speaker: What was your intention when you said we should continue to the end, when in fact the recording, which we are hearing, is not as clear as it should be?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, the recording, in my opinion, is very good, very clear, much better than last night when we heard the section of the one to do with the accusation against the Hon. Member Ms. Amna Ally. This is much easier to hear, to understand and to comprehend. It starts from the first statement that Mr. Nandlall made when he was speaking, the intervention by Hon. Member Dr. Norton, then the sequential issues where you asked Mr. Nandlall exactly what he said. What we have not heard is the part where you decided to send the Members out. For me, it is very clear that what was the issue was to do with medication, and the word "tablet" was introduced. Unlike medical supplies, medication is referring particularly to drugs and I think the matter is clear. It is regrettable that this House...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I was just trying to get what you meant.

Ms. Teixeira: That is what I meant, Sir. To me, the recording is very clear and it is clear enough for people to comprehend what happened. The interpretation and the decision of the House, or you, Sir, may not be that clear. For us listening to the tape, the tape is very clear in the sequence of event or what you call audiological levels.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. The fact is that all Members of this House are involved in this. I, as the Speaker, can hear much of it, but I am bound to say that I did not hear all of it. That is why I believe that a transcript or some other means of amplifying that could place me in a position to hear what was said.

We have had a reference to a tablet. We have had a reference to medication and I think at some point there was a reference to the words “in use”. What a transcript will do is not to allow us to selectively recall things but rather to see everything there and then to make sense of it. I am not sure how the speaker came up with the thought that the bond was empty. That is what we were going to ascertain, but clearly nobody said that, because that is what I am understanding now. Let us have the transcript then we will know tomorrow.

Mr. Nagamootoo: If you will kindly permit me, I have been informed by the Clerk of the National Assembly that the staff is working on the transcript. They have not guaranteed that they could do a professional and perfect job if they rush it. I concur with that view because it is a very delicate as well as important issue before us. I just want to say this, Sir, not as Prime Minister or Leader of the House, but as a Member of this Assembly, that I heard the tape. I heard what was purportedly said but I cannot say that I heard clearly what was being said, hence the fall back on a secondary proof. I cannot share the view of the Hon. Member Gail Teixeira in what she is saying to this House as the reason for supporting the motion, because it was clear in my mind of what was said that “there was nothing in the bond, not even a tablet”; that “the bond was not yet in use”. That is what I heard from the tape.

10.14 p.m.

I would like to move that we conclude. We heard what we heard; that is that the matter be set aside until everybody is allowed to make a speech. If the Speaker says that I can say what I am

saying and that I have the right to, I will. I can now move that the matter be deferred until tomorrow, pending the supply of the transcript, so that we do not make premature conclusions at this point.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are going to wait until tomorrow for the transcript, if we are going to treat this matter to conclusion. We will wait and give everyone an opportunity to know as clearly as everyone who said they have heard it. Ms. Teixeira said that she heard it clearly. We will give everyone an opportunity to see the transcript and, if there is something in the transcript that the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, does not recall he said, then he is free to say that too. I do not know where it will take us but there you have it.

Tomorrow, we will meet. At our next sitting and at an appropriate time, we will treat with this matter to conclusion. Hon. Prime Minister, we will move to the adjournment.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Nagamootoo: Mr. Speaker, I move that this House be adjourned until tomorrow at 10.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10.00 a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 10.15 p.m.