

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015-2017) 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

71ST Sitting

Thursday, 2ND November, 2017

The Assembly convened at 2.02 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Welcome

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I welcome you back to this first meeting after the recess. I hope that we have returned refreshed and fully ready to do our duty to Guyana.

Address by His Excellency the President

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am informed that His Excellency, the President, David Arthur Granger, M.S.S., will attend and address the Assembly at today's Sitting. The Sitting will be suspended, at a convenient time, to receive His Excellency.

Leave to Member

Mr. Speaker: Leave has been granted to the Hon. Member, Dr. Bheri. S. Ramsaran, from today's Sitting.

Deaths of former Members of Parliament

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, you are all aware of the deaths of Mr. Mooneer Ahmad Khan and Mr. Simon Hilton Ngseequan. Mr. Mooneer Ahmad. Khan, a former Member of Parliament (MP), who died on the 14th September, 2017, in the United States of America, was 87 years old having been born on the 15th December, 1930. Mr. Khan came from the People's Progressive Party (PPP) from 1961 – 1964 when the Chamber was called the Legislative Assembly and Senate. Elections were held on the 21st August, 1961 and Mr. Khan became a Member of the Senate from the 5th October, 1961 to the 24th September, 1964. From 1964 to 1966, the Chamber was called the House of Assembly. Mr. Khan was also a Member of the House of Assembly in that period. From 1966 – 1968, the Chamber was called the National Assembly of the First Parliament and elections were held for the first time under the system of Proportional Representation (PR). Mr. Khan became a Member of the National Assembly of the First Parliament of Guyana on the 9th July, 1965 and he served until the 4th November, 1968. Mr. Khan, ceased to be a Parliamentarian from the 5th November, 1968.

Mr. Simon. Hilton. Ngseequan, a former Member of Parliament, died on the 21st October, 2017 after a brief illness at the Diamond Diagnostic Centre, in the emergency unit. He was 79 years old, having been born on the 2nd of February, 1938. Mr. Ngseequan came from the People's National Congress (PNC). Elections were held on the 5th October, 1992, the Sixth Parliament commenced when the National Assembly first met on the 17th December, 1992. Mr. Ngseequan first became an ordinary Member of Parliament, in the Sixth Parliament from the 24th November, 1992. Mr. Ngseequan worked from that date continuously until the Sixth Parliament was dissolved on the 29th October, 1997. Mr. Ngseequan ceased to be a Parliamentarian from the 28th October, 1997.

Hon. Members, let us stand and observe a one-minute silence as a mark of respect for the late Mr. Ahmad Khan and Mr. Simon. Hilton. Ngseequan.

[The National Assembly stood to observe one minute of silence]

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Papers and Reports were laid:

(1)

- (i) Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of Guyana and on the Accounts of Ministries/Departments/Regions for the fiscal year ended 31st December, 2016, Volumes I and II.
- (ii) Report of the Auditor General on the construction of the New Access Road to the Cheddi Jagan International Airport.
- (iii) Special Report on the Public Procurement Commission's investigation into the procurement of Emergency Drugs by the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation
- (iv) The Report of the Presidential Commission Inquiring into the conditions of Veterans from the Guyana Defence Force, the Guyana People's Militia and the Guyana National Service.
- (v) Report of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into Persons, Places, Time, Circumstances and Events by and through which allegations and reports came to be made of an intention or a plan to assassinate the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.
- (vi) Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the collapse of a Mining Pit at Rock Creek, Puruni, Region No. 7, resulting in the death of Mr. Keon Wilson.
- (vii) Report of the Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into all the circumstances in which a Foreign Aircraft entered into the territory of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and was discovered on the ground near to the village of Yupukari, in the Rupununi (Upper Essequibo-Upper Takutu) Region No. 9.
- (viii) The Commission of Inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the death of Antonio George and Joshua George on the 7th July, 2016, at the Drop-In Centre.
- (ix) Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Camp Street Prison disturbances and resultant deaths.

2018 Budget Proposals Of Constitutional Agencies

- (x) Parliament Office – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$1,739,832,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.
- (xi) Office of the Auditor General – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$844,422,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.
- (xii) Public and Police Service Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$158,709,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.
- (xiii) Teaching Service Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$125,158,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.
- (xiv) Guyana Elections Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$3,715,210,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.
- (xv) Supreme Court – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$2,753,863,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.
- (xvi) Public Prosecutions – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$223,882,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.
- (xvii) Office of the Ombudsman – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$64,098,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.
- (xviii) Public Service Appellate Tribunal – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$105,550,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.
- (xix) Ethnic Relations Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$142,269,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.
- (xx) Judicial Service Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$10,020,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.
- (xxi) Indigenous People’s Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$27,372,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.

- (xxii) Human Rights Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$31,113,000 for the period 31st December, 2018.
- (xxiii) Rights of the Child Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$53,805,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.
- (xxiv) Women and Gender Equality Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$45,997,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.
- (xxv) Public Procurement Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$251,912,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2018.
- (xxvi) In accordance with section 3B(2) of the Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Act 2015 – Act No. 4 of 2015, present to the Assembly the recommendations and comments of the Minister of Finance on the Annual Budget Proposals of Constitutional Agencies for 2018.

[Speaker of the National Assembly]

2.17 p.m.

(2)

- (i) Financial Paper No. 3/2017- Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling \$2,976,237,426 for the period 2017-01-01 to 2017-12-31.
- (ii) Annual Report of the Dependants' Pension Fund for the year 2016.
- (iii) Subscription Agreement dated August 8, 2017 between the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana (as Issuer) and Republic Bank Limited (as Arranger) for the amount of US\$17,306,964.12 for the purpose of restructuring the existing debt of the Atlantic Hotel Incorporated (Marriot Guyana) which has been transferred to the books of Central Government. The Government proposes to issue up to US\$17,306,964.12 Fixed Rate Bonds maturing in 2032 to be constituted pursuant to the Trust Deed.

- (iv) Trust Deed dated August 8, 2017 between the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana (as Issuer) and Hand in Hand Trust Corporation Incorporated (as Trustee) for the amount of US\$17,306,964.12 to assist in the restructuring of the existing debt of the Atlantic Hotel Incorporated (Marriot Guyana) and to secure such borrowing by the Trust Deed and the Schedules and by the issue and sale of Fixed Rate Bonds.
- (v) Paying Agency Agreement dated August 8, 2017 between the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Guyana Americas Merchant Bank Incorporated (as Paying Agent) comprising up to US\$17,306,964.12 to assist in the payment of principal and interest in respect of the Bonds. The Guyana Americas Merchant Bank Incorporated shall undertake the duties and responsibilities of Registrar on behalf of the Government in respect of the Bonds.
- (vi) Bond No. 001 issued on August 8, 2017 between the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and Republic Bank Limited for the amount of US\$17,306,964.12.

[Minister of Finance]

- (3) Annual Report of the Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Fund Committee for the year 2015.

[Minister of Social Protection]

- (4) Audited Financial Statements of the Maritime Administration Department for the years ended 31st December, 2004 and 2005. *[Minister of Public Infrastructure]*

[Interruption]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am sure that we can do much better than we are doing right now. We will now take the suspension to await the arrival of His Excellency the President.

Sitting suspended at 2.21 p.m.

Arrival of His Excellency the President, David A. Granger, M.S.S.

IN PARLIAMENT CHAMBER

Sitting resumed at 2.40 p.m.

Remarks by the Speaker

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, His Excellency the President is visiting the National Assembly. His Excellency will address us. Please take your seats as I invite the President to address us.
[Applause]

Address by His Excellency the President of the Co-Operative Republic of Guyana to the National Assembly

[Members of the Opposition displayed placards.]

His Excellency the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana [Brigadier David Granger]: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Hon. Moses Nagamootoo, Vice-President and Prime Minister; Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, Leader of the Opposition; Hon. Dr. Barton Scotland, Speaker of the National Assembly; Justice Yonette Cummings-Edwards, Chancellor of the Judiciary; Vice-Presidents and Ministers of Government; Hon. Justice Roxanne George-Wiltshire, Chief Justice; Members of the National Assembly; Members of the diplomatic corps; heads of the disciplined services; Clerk of the National Assembly; distinguished guests, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my honour, in the exercise of my privilege enshrined in the *Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana*, at Article 67 (1), to address you today, as I have done before at every new session of the National Assembly. The *Constitution* states:

“The President may, at any time, attend and address the National Assembly.”

Having opened the Eleventh Parliament on 10th June, 2015, I addressed the National Assembly on 22nd October, 2015, and again on 13th October, 2016, at the start of the 17th and 43rd Sittings of the National Assembly, respectively. I do so again today, on 2nd November, 2017, at the start of the 71st Sitting. I addressed the National Assembly, also, on the special occasion of our National Jubilee, on 14th January, 2016.

The *Constitution*, at Article 50, designates Parliament, the President and the Cabinet as:

“The supreme organs of democratic power.”

The National Assembly’s deliberations and decisions should be aimed at exercising sovereignty for the common good. It is altogether fitting, therefore, that the elected representatives of our people in this National Assembly should be informed of the state of the nation and of the economic plan and legislative agenda for the new financial year and the future. All parties assembled in this honourable House bear this responsibility to the nation. They are obliged to participate meaningfully in its deliberations in order to be better informed and better able to discuss, debate and decide on programmes to be adopted for the common good.

The *Constitution*, at Article 65 (1), enjoins Parliament to, and I quote:

“...make laws for the peace, order and good government of Guyana.”

The nation continues to consolidate this happy state of comity which it has enjoyed over the past 30 months.

A multi-party Coalition assumed Office and ushered in an opportunity for consensus-based politics. This form of government wrested the nation from the vice of divisive and destructive winner-takes-all politics and laid the basis for a system of inclusionary democracy, which is the form of governance prescribed by the *Constitution*, at Article 13. This is the form that seeks cooperation for the ‘common good’ rather than one that fosters confrontation and chaos.
[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, your Government, ever mindful of its duty to secure our territorial integrity and protect national sovereignty, has been engaged in various, vigorous diplomatic initiatives.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the strong support of the Opposition over the past 30 months, has aimed these efforts at reaching a peaceful resolution to the territorial controversy which arose out of the contention by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, that the arbitral award of October 1899 was null.

The controversy was placed before the Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN), in accordance with the Geneva Agreement of 1966. Mr Ban Ki Moon demitted the UN *Secretary-Generalship* since my Address to the National Assembly last year. He delegated responsibility for continuing the process to his successor, Mr Antonio Guterres. I met the incumbent UN Secretary-General (UNSG) on 25th September in New York and his Personal Representative on 11th April in Georgetown.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs has met the UNSG's Personal Representative on several occasions. We are engaged, at present, in a renewed 'Good Offices' process. We are confident that the common commitment of the Government of Guyana and Opposition will eventuate in strong national support for a juridical settlement of this controversy, a controversy which has impaired the development of our nation.

Mr. Speaker, Guyana's natural resources are also part of our patrimony. We must protect and sustainably manage these resources. The institutional capacity and the adoption of an appropriate legislative and regulatory framework for the sustainable management of the nation's natural resource sector, including the emergent petroleum sector, are being strengthened through the efforts of the Ministry of Natural Resources.

The Ministry will deploy a Corps of Wardens to enforce laws, regulations and codes of practice in the mining and forestry sectors. The capacity of the Petroleum Department, which was established this year, is to be strengthened.

The Ministry, at the policy level, is aligning the mining sector with our national 'green' development agenda. It is promoting biodiversity-friendly practices, low-impact prospecting, the use of efficient technologies and the phasing-out of mercury use in the gold-mining sector.

The Forestry Plan and Policy has been revised in order to place greater emphasis on the management of the forest's multiple, down-stream goods and services. The Guyana Forestry Commission, monitors deforestation and forest carbon change. It has been promoting the utilisation of less-used local timber, in the construction sector. The petroleum industry will become another pole of economic diversification. The oil and gas sector is going to provide resources to transform the country's development. We intend to align that transformation with

the objectives... *[Interruption]* What about some courtesy? We intend to align that transformation with the objectives of Guyana's 'green' development agenda.

Your Government is seeking the best vehicle...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

...And is laying optional plans for the development of the petroleum industry, including the establishment of a Sovereign Wealth Fund.

2.50 p.m.

We have tabled the Petroleum Commission of Guyana Bill. The Ministry of Natural Resources is preparing a suite of other legislation and regulations to support the development of the incipient petroleum industry. Consultations will continue on these draft documents, including the Petroleum Act, Environmental and Occupational Health and Safety Regulations and the Local Content Policy.

The nation's economy has been prudently managed over the past 30 months. This has allowed for moderate economic growth of 3.1% in 2015 and 3.3% in 2016, despite the unfavourable external environment. Gold was the main contributor to this growth, with 712,707 ounces being produced last year, the highest in our country's history.

Economic growth would not have been possible without the achievement of macroeconomic stability. The Ministry of Finance has acted to create a favourable environment for business development, to protect investments, to moderate inflation and to maintain a stable exchange rate.

Your Government has adopted measures to improve the living standards of workers. The minimum wage of public servants has increased by over 50%, from \$39,540 to \$60,000, within the past 26 months.

We have reduced the income tax rate and increased the income tax threshold by a minimum of 20% – measures which boosted our working people's disposable income.

National competitiveness has been enhanced by the reduction of the corporation tax rate for manufacturing and non-commercial companies from 30% to 27.5%. The Value-Added Tax (VAT) was reduced to 14% and the VAT threshold increased from \$10M to \$15M.

Intensifying the focus on food security under the theme *Food for all*, a slogan inscribed on the iconic 1970 ‘Cuffy Dollar’, the Ministry of Agriculture has been building a more resilient agricultural sector. It has supported the production of traditional crops, diversified production and improved agricultural infrastructure. [Interruption]

Investment in agricultural infrastructure has been effective through the rehabilitation of major farm-to-market roads in the Essequibo Islands-West Demerara, Demerara-Mahaica and Mahaica-Berbice Regions. These investments have reduced post-harvest losses and led to lower commodity prices.

‘Water harvesting’ is being promoted in the Rupununi Region in order to ensure that adequate amounts of water are available during the long dry season. Farmers are benefiting from improvements in drainage through the installation of pumps in the main agricultural regions – Pomeroon-Supenaam, Demerara-Mahaica, and East Berbice-Corentyne.

Hinterland agriculture is being catalysed and diversified through increased adoption of agro-processing. Your Government is promoting the cultivation of spices in the Barima-Waini Region, tomato production in the Potaro-Siparuni Region and cashew and peanuts in the Rupununi (Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo) Region. We are promoting agro-processing as a means of increasing production and farm earnings and of generating employment.

Your Government will continue to support the traditional sectors of the economy, particularly the sugar industry. We have provided \$31 billion to support the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GUYSUCO) in order to protect the livelihood of workers and to arrest the corporation’s financial haemorrhaging. [Interruption]

The sugar industry is being consolidated; it is not being closed. We will explore all options in the new financial year, 2018, to ensure a viable industry, mindful of its impact on the nation’s rural economy and its residents.

Measures have been taken to improve the business environment. These include, reducing the processing time for investment agreements; implementing a trusted-trader programme, establishing business registration hubs in the Potaro-Siparuni and the Rupununi (Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo) Regions.

The Ministry of Business has been working to improve national economic competitiveness. The national 'green' development strategy will promote a range of options aimed at providing reliable and renewable energy – a key measure for improving competitiveness.

Your Government has been promoting increased investment, improving the business environment, increasing value-added production and exports, and developing the tourism sector. The Guyana Office for Investment (GOINVEST) has facilitated, since May 2015, 240 investment projects valued at \$187 billion. The tourism sector continues to show promise with a 14% increase in tourist arrivals between 2014 and 2016. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

We also are rebalancing the economy, horizontally, through our support of the micro, small and medium-scale enterprise sectors, mindful of its tremendous potential to generate local employment. Loans and grants have been issued under the Hinterland Employment Youth Scheme (HEYS), the Linden Enterprise Network (LEN), the Micro and Small-Enterprise Development (MSED), the Sustainable Livelihoods and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED), the Women of Worth (WOW) initiative and the People Of Worth Entrepreneurial Resources (POWER) initiative.

Two new business incubators are also being developed at Belvedere in the East Berbice-Corentyne Region and in Lethem in the Rupununi at a cost of \$263 million to further boost small business development and to stimulate job creation. *[Interruption]*

Your Government has issued 2,727 loans and grants valued at more than \$825 million for small business development and its concomitant multiplier effect on job creation.

The enactment of the Telecommunications Act 2016 and the Public Utilities Commission (Amendment) Act will provide greater impetus to the liberalisation and regulation of telecommunications. The Ministry of Public Telecommunications has been strengthening the

regulatory framework of the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector, digitising education and establishing ICT hubs. *[Interruption]*

The Cyril Potter College of Education, the Carnegie School of Home Economics and 88 schools are among the educational institutions connected to the national network. Nine thousand laptop computers have been distributed under the One Laptop per Teacher Programme, launched on World Teachers' Day on 5th October, 2016.

The Ministry of Public Telecommunications is collaborating with the University of Guyana to expand the University's Campus Area Network (CAN). It expects to commission a Centre of Excellence in Information Technology at the Turkeyen campus in February 2018.

Communities that have been provided with free internet access at schools and key strategic locations include Aishalton, Annai, Bartica, Bamia, Baramita Iwokrama, Lethem, Linden, Mabaruma, Mahdia, Masekenari, Matthew's Ridge Orealla, Paramakatoi, Port Kaituma, Santa Rosa and Waramadong. More communities are scheduled for early implementation in financial year 2018. *[Interruption]*

The Ministry of Public Telecommunications, also, has established 53 ICT community hubs across the country and facilitated ICT sector investment. This will further boost the competitiveness of firms and accelerate the delivery of ICT-related services.

The country's transportation network of aerodromes, bridges, roads, stellingings and wharves has been improved. The Iwokrama aerodrome has been lengthened from 762 metres to 1219 metres. More than 30 hinterland aerodromes have been rehabilitated and maintained. The Ministry of Public Infrastructure has completed the first phase of the upgrading of the Bartica Town stelling.

The four-lane extension of the East Bank Demerara Public Road has been completed. Village roads, extending over 100 km, have been constructed or repaired, including laying asphaltic cement pavements at Leguan, Lusignan and Victoria.

The country's first pedestrian overpasses have been installed across the East Bank Demerara Public Road. *[Interruption]*

The new capital towns – Bartica, Lethem and Mabaruma – and other hinterland communities have benefitted from the repair of 801.2 km of roads. The rehabilitation of the Vreed-en-Hoop to Parika road is being completed. Urban roads, extending over 58.3 km in Georgetown and the capital towns of Linden and New Amsterdam, were repaired.

Your Government has fortified the nation’s climate adaptation infrastructure. Flooding in our national capital has been reduced as a result of the dredging of major drainage canals and repairs to sluices and pumps.

3.05 p.m.

Sea defences, extending 92 kilometres along our coastline, were bolstered while sea defence structures between Kingston and Ogle have been rehabilitated. *[Interruption by Opposition] Y’all getting tired, nuh?*

Your Government has also addressed the nation’s power-generation needs. New power-generation sets, with a combined capacity of 14.2 megawatts, were procured for the towns of Anna Regina and Bartica and Canefield. Solar energy systems, with a combined output of 3.35 megawatts, have been installed at various locations, including the Mabaruma town.

Your Government has been most diligent in fortifying the rule of law, despite the lawlessness. The Ministry of Legal Affairs has strengthened the financial regulatory framework in order to insulate our economy from the proceeds of illicit activities.

The promulgation of the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Amendment) Act 2015 and the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (No. 2) Act 2015 provide greater safeguards and stronger enforcement, all aimed at ensuring the integrity of our country’s financial system.

Your Government has strengthened the country’s legal administrative system. The commissioning of a new, modern and improved headquarters of the Deeds and Commercial Registries is aimed at preserving, protecting and promoting property rights.

The support for the establishment of a Family Court will enhance the justice system. The creation of the Upper Demerara Magisterial District brings judicial services closer to the people and reduces inconvenience.

Your Government has re-established and made appointments to institutions decreed by our *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana*. A Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) and an Ombudsman were appointed. Acting appointments were made to the highest judicial posts.

A Public Procurement Commission has been established, a Public Service Appellate Tribunal re-established and the Judicial Service Commission reconstituted. These appointments manifest your Government's commitment to abide, at all times, with the *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana*.

Your Government has restored the people's participation in local decision-making. Local Government Elections were reinstated after your Government piloted the passage of the Local Government (Amendment) Act 2015, the Local Authorities (Elections) (Amendment) Act 2015, and the Municipal and District Councils and the Local Authorities (Elections) (Amendment) Act 2015. This legislation allowed for the historic holding of Local Government Elections on 18th March 2016.

The establishment of three new towns – Bartica, Lethem and Mabaruma - further solidified our system of local democracy. The creation of new capital towns is driving the decentralisation development, moving authority away from the centre and placing power directly in the hands of the people.

Your Government, over the past 30 months, has begun the process of incubating the development potential of our regions. We have been ensuring that our regions are developed on the basis of action plans which are crafted collaboratively by the regions themselves and which involve the main stakeholders.

The Ministry of Communities, in this regard, has established a National Regional Development Consultative Committee (NRDCC) to promote collaboration, cooperation and consultation within and between Regions.

Plans of Action for Regional Development (PARDs) are being developed for each region. Regional Agricultural and Commercial Expositions (RACE) are catalysing agriculture and agro-processing. Twelve Neighborhood Democratic Councils, so far, have developed local area action plans (LAP).

Your Government's housing policy is focused on affordable housing solutions to low-income workers and State employees. It promotes a holistic approach to community development through the provision of recreational, educational and sports facilities in addition to basic infrastructure services such as electricity, telephones, roads, solid waste disposal and pure water supply.

Work has commenced on the first batch of duplexes in the rural housing programme. We are expanding the Hinterland Housing Programme. Houses have been constructed at Sebai, Whitewater, Kwatamang and Massara.

The provision of water and sanitation services must become an entitlement of every citizen. We have expanded the provision of water to unserved communities and improved the quality of service. The commencement of the Water Supply and Sanitation Improvement Programme (WSSIP) will benefit more than 50,000 consumers through the construction of three new water treatment plants at Uitvlugt, Diamond and Sheet Anchor.

Your Government is committed to working with the Guyana Teachers' Union to solve problems and to improve the conditions in the public education system under which students have to attend school and teachers study, work and live.

The Ministry of Education, over the past 30 months, conducted a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) to better comprehend the challenges affecting the system. Teachers are the foundation of any educational system. Improvements in educational attainment require investments in teachers' training. Your Government has trained 668 teachers over the past two years. The number of trained teachers in our schools has increased over the past two years and now stands at 77%.

Your Government has embarked on a policy of *Every Child in School* (ECIS) with the objective of improving access to schools, improving attendance at schools, improving educational attainment and reducing the incidence of dropouts from primary and secondary schools.

The *Every Child in School* policy has been supported by the presidential initiative under which 21 school buses, 10 school boats and hundreds of bicycles have been distributed to support children's attendance at school, thereby saving parents millions of dollars every month for parents to augment household incomes.

The Ministry of Education has been providing school meals as another way of encouraging increased attendance and improving classroom performance. The Hot Meals Programme was extended over the past two years from 110 to 172 schools and from serving 16,000 students to now serving 23,392 students. The Breakfast Programme now serves 119 schools and 14,161 students in three Administrative Regions. It would be extended to other regions in financial year 2018.

Your Government has also boosted Information and Communication Technology (ICT) within our schools. All 112 secondary schools now possess computer laboratories and enjoy access to the internet. Tablets have been distributed to 2,010 students and 109 teachers in pilot schools in four Administrative Regions.

The Ministry of Social Protection has been in the forefront of efforts to empower individuals, families and communities, to reduce poverty, to eliminate sexual and interpersonal violence, to protect children from neglect and abuse and to assist the vulnerable in society. The Ministry continues to make interventions to address social problems such as drug abuse, suicide, teenage pregnancy, school drop outs, rape and incest and to protect our children. The Ministry has assumed responsibility for the New Opportunity Corps in keeping with the Government's thrust to offer protection rather than punishment for students of that institution.

The Sustainable Livelihood Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) Initiative, administered by the Ministry of Social Protection, aims at economically empowering vulnerable young people. The SLED Initiative has funded more than 20 projects, so far, including a sheep-rearing project in Nappi in the Rupununi Region.

Old age pension has increased by almost 45% over the past 30 months, moving from \$13,125 per month to \$19,000 per month, benefitting more than 50,000 older citizens. Public assistance has increased by more than 27% and now stands at \$7,500 per month.

The Ministry of Public Health has been working to provide accessible and quality healthcare to all Guyanese, to prevent, reduce and treat the spread of communicable and non-communicable diseases, to promote physical and mental health and to ensure food safety.

The past 30 months have witnessed the upgrading of the physical infrastructure of hospitals and health clinics, the provision of medical equipment and the deployment of medical personnel across the regions. *You are getting tired.*

Preventive health care has been a priority of the Ministry. The past 60 months have witnessed the upgrading of the physical infrastructure of hospitals and health clinics, the provision of medical equipment and the deployment of medical personnel across the regions. Preventive healthcare has been a priority of the Ministry. Mass campaigns to prevent filariasis and cervical cancer have been launched. Medical outreaches have brought healthcare directly to citizens. The passage of the Tobacco Control Act 2017 is aimed at protecting present and future generations from the harmful effects of tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke.

A modern laboratory for testing food and food products is being established to ensure food safety. A telemedicine initiative, utilising ICT to diagnose and treat persons in remote areas, will be implemented in five rRegions in financial year 2018.

The Ministry of Social Cohesion, in pursuit of the common good, continued to realise the vision of a nation in which diversities are embraced, differences respected and conflicts resolved.

3.20 p.m.

We have developed a National Strategic Plan to foster greater social harmony. The designation of Chinese Arrival Day, Indian Arrival Day, Portuguese Arrival Day and Stephen Campbell Day and the observance of other historic events that are of significance in our multi-cultural society attest to our respect for biodiversity. These observances should not be ignored. They should be used to educate children and promote respect for each other's cultures and to appreciate, rather than deprecate, the nation's diversity. Your Government's promotion of diversity and inclusivity is intended to ensure that everyone feels a sense of belonging to our unique society.

The Ministry of Citizenship has improved the reach, quality and administration of passport, immigration, birth, marriage and death registration services. We have reduced the processing

times for the issuance of passports. The long lines outside our passport offices have disappeared and the service is being systematically decentralised to Linden, New Amsterdam and other capital towns. The security and integrity of birth records will be improved by digitisation. It will facilitate an improved service to the public as records will no longer need to be manually retrieved. Your Government's intention is to eventually assign a single unique identification number for every citizen from birth to death.

The Ministry of Citizenship has also assumed responsibility for remigration services, from a building relevantly renamed 'Stephen Campbell House' in honour of the nation's first Indigenous Parliamentarian.

The reduction of economic and social disparities between the coastland and the hinterland and between social groups is necessary to the promotion of greater inclusivity and equality. Your Government, in August, 2015, proposed to the National Toshias Council, a 10-point plan to promote identity, inclusivity and prosperity for Guyana's Indigenous peoples. We are empowering the National Toshias Council by providing land for the construction of its headquarters.

The Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs has been supporting the development of Guyana's 215 Indigenous communities. These communities are being encouraged to craft village improvement plans to guide their developments. They have benefitted from a range of community support initiatives, including presidential grants, the distribution of school uniforms, the construction of community centres and the provision of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), boats and outboard engines.

The security Forces are gradually recovering from the damage and demoralisation caused during the 'troubles' of the early years of this century. **[Opposition Members: No more rigging.]**

Do you see where it came from?

Your Government has embarked on a process of reform and is revamping the national security architecture. Your Government, with the assistance of the Government of the United Kingdom (UK), will establish a Department of Security Sector Reform in the new financial year.

The Ministry of Public Security has promulgated a National Drug Strategy Master Plan (NDSMP) and established a National Anti-Narcotics Agency (NANA). The results of these initiatives are clearly and daily visible. The Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU), now under NANA's judicious management, has succeeded in seizing over 290 kilograms (kg) of cocaine, 65,000 kg of cannabis and 1,600 kg of heroin this year. Your Government is dismantling the transnational narco-trafficking superstructure. Light aircraft, believed to be associated with transnational narco-trafficking gangs, were seized by national law enforcement agencies in the Rupununi Region.

The National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA), is reconstructing district, regional and central information architecture to guide the operations of the security Forces. The National Security Committee (NSC) keeps Cabinet informed of changes in the security landscape. The country's archaic and dilapidated prisons are being refashioned to ensure safety and compliance with internationally acceptable standards.

The Ministry of Public Security is retooling the Guyana Police Force in order to improve human safety and public security. Horseback patrols are being mounted in Corentyne and in the Rupununi to reduce crime. The manpower needs of the Force are being addressed. The Emergency Response System is being rehabilitated and expanded to an additional 52 stations. Police stations are being rehabilitated under the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme. The Guyana Police Force will take delivery of several billion dollars' worth of equipment donated by the People's Republic of China to assist in law enforcement.

[Opposition Members: No more rigging.] Despite the lawlessness, we shall continue to introduce reforms aimed at professionalising our security Forces. We shall add equipment to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

The timely delivery of quality public services requires a professional Public Service, one that is staffed by competent professionals. The Department of the Public Service of the Ministry of the Presidency is dedicated to ensuring the development of a professional Public Service. The Public Service Staff Training College will serve as an institution which will provide training, at all levels in the Public Service, so that a professional core of public servants will be available to deliver quality services to citizens.

Your Government will pursue, through this National Assembly, a vigorous legislative agenda for the remainder of this year, and in 2018. The focus of this agenda will be mainly, but not exclusively, on six principal areas. We shall aim, first, at finalising Bills which have already been introduced into the National Assembly. We shall proceed with the further stages of a number of Bills which are already before the House for consideration, some of which are before Select Committees. These include the Cybercrime Bill 2016, Food Safety Bill 2016, Civil Aviation Bill 20107, Constitutional Reform Consultative Commission Bill 2017, Petroleum Commission of Guyana Bill 2017, and the Animal Welfare Bill 2016.

Secondly, we shall strengthen anti-corruption legislation. Corruption is corrosive to the common good. It subverts institutions, inflicts injustices and impairs good governance. Your Government intends, with the support of this House, to enact legislation aimed at strengthening our anti-corruption effort. We also shall pursue regulations intended to fortify our system of local government.

The Protected Disclosures Bill 2017 is intended to combat corruption and other wrongdoings by encouraging and facilitating disclosures of improper conduct in the public and private sectors. We will also amend the Integrity Commission Act to ensure the independence of the Integrity Commission.

Thirdly, your Government aims at modernising and updating existing legislation to align it with international best practices. The National Assembly will be asked to approve legislation to modernise our defamation laws to include, *inter alia*, defamation *via* online internet sources of communication.

The Guyana National Bureau of Standards (Amendment) Bill will promote a modern framework to enhance the functionality of the Guyana National Bureau of Standards, thereby resulting in improvements in the quality of goods and services to consumers. A Solid Waste Management Bill will be laid to promote the modernisation of the regulatory framework for solid waste management.

The outdated Antibiotics Act of 1951 will be upgraded to cover both medical and non-medical use of antibiotics. The Nurses and Midwifery Bill will replace the archaic Nurses and Midwifery Ordinance of 1951. The Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance will be repealed and the functions and

licencing of pharmacies will be incorporated into the Food and Drug Acts. A Health Information Systems Bill will be introduced to regulate electronic information storage, and retrieval of personal and medical data. It also is proposed to replace the Public Health Ordinance of 1934 with a Health Promotion and Protection Bill.

Your Government also aims at improving justice administration. The justice administration system will be improved with the passage of the Witness Protection Bill, which will provide for the establishment of a programme for the protection of certain witnesses and other persons and to provide for related matters, and the Juvenile Justice Bill 2017, which will make provision for the establishment of facilities for the custody, education and rehabilitation of juvenile offenders.

The Guyana Prison Service (Amendment) Bill will allow the Guyana Prison Service to transition from a primitive, punitive force, into a rehabilitative and correctional service.

We will also be improving the regulatory framework of our economic sectors. Legislation will be introduced to support the regulatory framework for Guyana's incipient petroleum sector. The Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Bill will replace the 1986 Act of the same name. A raft of regulations will also be made to support the emerging petroleum industry.

The institutional framework of the mining, telecommunications and business sectors will be enhanced. The Mining (Amendment) Bill will amend the Mining Act of 1989 in order to provide for improved and sustainable management of the mining sector. The passage of the Guyana Gold Board (Amendment) Bill is expected to improve the regulatory framework of the Guyana Gold Board and result in improved price recovery and increased gold declarations.

Your Government will continue to work towards enhancing the business environment. Trade facilitation and the regulation of electronic commerce (e-commerce) are expected to be boosted by the passage of the Electronic Single Window System and E-Commerce Bill and the Electronic Communications and Transactions Bill. The importance of small businesses to Guyana's development will be emphasised by amendments to the Small Business Act, which will allow for small businesses to benefit from all types of Government contracts.

The Co-operative Republic of Guyana is obliged to ensure compliance with international treaties and agreements. Guyana has acceded to and is signatory to a number of international agreements

and conventions. Guyana is required to take legislative action to comply with our obligations under these agreements and conventions.

3.35 p.m.

The Draft CARICOM Consumer Protection Model Bill is intended to promote consumer welfare and protection. Cabinet has approved of Guyana's accession to the 1951 United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, including its Protocol of 1967. This accession requires Guyana to enact legislation to treat with refugees.

Your Government, also, would be promulgating legislation to prevent the trafficking in weapons of mass destruction and to fulfil our obligations under international trade agreements, including those between the Caribbean Forum (CARIFORUM) and the European Union.

We share a common home - Guyana. We yearn for a common destiny - the good life. Ours is a Nation in transition to becoming a 'green' State. We established the Department of the Environment on 1st October, 2016 to coordinate and regulate the national effort in this thrust.

We have begun to place emphasis on the preservation of our biodiversity and the protection of the environment. Our protected areas system would be expanded by an additional two million hectares. We are placing emphasis on ecotourism and eco-educational tourism. Government buildings, increasingly, are going to be powered by alternative sources of energy, as part of our renewable energy agenda.

Guyana is a beautiful, blissful and bountiful country. Let us now, next year and in the future work together to protect and preserve the green State for generations to come and may God bless you all. [*Applause*]

Opposition Members: No more rigging.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members...

Opposition Members: No more rigging.

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

I thank His Excellency for the message which he has delivered. We look forward to your visits to the National Assembly, please, Your Excellency, and we hope that you would find it convenient to visit us on another occasion. Thank you very much.

The Sitting is suspended for a short while, while His Excellency leaves, and then we would resume.

Sitting suspended at 3.38 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 4.06 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this brings us to an end of our work for today. I would invite the Prime Minister to move the adjournment.

ADJOURNMENT

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of this House to the 17th November, 2017 at 2.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. The Sitting has adjourned to the 17th November 2017 at 2.00 p.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 4.06 p.m.