

Official Report

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2015-2018) 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

92ND Sitting

Thursday, 19TH July, 2018

The Assembly convened at 2.18 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

Birthday Wishes

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, it is my distinct pleasure to wish one of our Hon. Members, the Hon. Gail Teixeira, happy birthday. Thank you.

ORAL QUESTION WITHOUT NOTICE

ADDRESSING GROWING FEARS WITH THE CRIME SITUATION

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have received one oral question without notice. The question is in the name of the Hon. Clement Rohee and it is for the Hon. Minister of Public Security.

Mr. Rohee: The questions to the Hon. Minister of Public Security are:

The latest figures released by the Guyana Police Force for the first half of the year, show an increase of reported crimes: 9% increase in robberies, 2% increase in robberies with firearms, and a 9% increase in the number of rape, could the Hon. Minister inform this National Assembly as to the following:

(i) What precise plans and interventions he intends to implement to reduce the increase, in

particular, of the number of robberies, robberies with firearms and rape?

(ii) What precise plans he intends to implement to address the growing drug trade which the 2018 International Narcotics and Control Strategy published by the US State Department recognized as a major threat?

(iii) How does the Minister intend to address money laundering which the same report referred to in (ii) cited “government corruption” as a major source of money laundering?

(iv) Is there a lack of confidence in the Government's ability to address crime?

(v) What measures has or will the Minister put in place to build great trust and confidence in the capacity of his Ministry to address the crime situation?

Vice-President and Minister of Public Security [Mr. Ramjattan]: Thank you very much. These are very broad and wide-ranging questions asked by the Hon. Member, Mr. Rohee. I hope I get the very first one correct. It is in relation to the precise plans and interventions which I intend to implement to reduce which he indicated correctly were the percentage increases in robberies and rape.

The crime prevention strategies that are continuing and are a work-in-progress have to do with use of information and intelligence to conduct covert and overt operations to get to these persons who are committing these robberies. They include: sting operations, snap and deliberate road blocks and random stop and search. It also includes, based on the intelligence received and information given by members of the public, raids in areas that have been mapped and have realised high crime persons living there. They also include high visibility patrols, cordon and search operations in certain areas and robust investigations once, of course, those things happen and persons are arrested.

In relation to these matters of crime and the fear that it bring, we also have the maintenance of certain social crime prevention and community relations programme, especially focusing on at-risk youth. That has been happening at all Police Divisions because we feel that law enforcement must be the primary pillar, but there must be some secondary pillars which have to do with social crime prevention, especially at that youth level.

There has been collaboration, also, with appropriate and relevant stakeholders and these include private security firms, which have been established under the Security Act, and community policing groups, which have been very instrumental in catching certain criminals, carjackers and robbers. Of course, a final one is open-source monitoring of the print, electronic and social media to get information as to where these offences might be committed.

I want to say that, notwithstanding the increases that were mentioned in that very first question, that was a separate one from the others, though there is this increase of 9%, 2% and another 9% in the increase of rape, in relation to rape, lots more persons are also making reports. That, of course, is not something that would happen normally. People are coming forward and I feel that it is because of the new confidence they have in the Police Force to ensure that crimes are going to be thoroughly investigated and the culprits are going to be caught.

I must say that, for larceny from the person, there was a -26% reduction; in robbery with aggravation, another category of robbery, there was a 10% decrease; and in the category of robbery under arms without firearms being used, there has been a 26% reduction.

There is a lot more use of weapons in our country and it is obviously because of the porous borders and the weapons being brought from across the borders. We live in the vicinity of where guns are produced and because of our neighbours, especially the western neighbours, guns are becoming far more accessible to criminals.

By the way, I want to indicate, in addition to the answer to that question, some of the plans in relation to driving these statistics downwards. We feel that one such would be better facilities for our policemen, and we have had a number of police stations being rehabilitated and remodeled under the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme (CSSP) and the Police Force's allocation under the regular capital works budget.

I want to make some announcements in relation to that. In relation to the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme, the police stations at Port Kaituma and Mabaruma in Region 1, Aurora and Suddie in Region 2, La Grange in Region 3, Cane Grove in Region 4, Mibicuri and Issano have all been completed based on this year's allocation. Aishalton and Annai Police Stations are going to be soon completed. This is because the finishing works were

delayed by the weather and the destruction of the road prevented some vital pieces of equipment and furniture from being taken in. In Region 10, regarding the Kwakwani and Mc Kenzie Police Stations, the Kwakwani Police Station has been completed and the Mc Kenzie Police Station would soon be completed.

In relation to the rehabilitation under the regular police force's capital works, there was the rehabilitation of the Springlands Police Station; that contract was awarded recently and would be completed in four months. The contractor is doing his mobilisation works right now. It is similarly so for the Lethem Police Station. The contract for the rehabilitation of the New Amsterdam Police Station was awarded recently, 28th June, 2018. There are a number of others. The rehabilitation of the La Parfaite Harmonie Police Station and the Matthew's Ridge Police Station are all ongoing. We have good news in relation to the Brickdam Lockups. That one was completed and there would be a handing over ceremony to effectuate the use of it thereafter.

I also want to say this: as part of our larger plan and strategy, we have certain training programmes going on with the police that we are certain are going to help in the reduction of crime since a more professional and better trained police force is going to ensure that more criminals are caught. Also, it might help in the prevention of crimes, especially, robberies, rapes and robbery with firearms.

Presently, there is an expert who is doing some work to ensure a review of the recruit training course and making recommendations in relation to course syllabus. This has not been done for a number of years. The expert would assess the current of training approach, including methods of instruction, to bring it up to the Systematic Approach to Training (SAT) Programme, which is an international standard.

2.33 p.m.

He would review selection of the instructors at the Police Training Centres at Suddie, Georgetown and at Adventure and also give appropriate, standard manuals for the policemen who would have graduated, so that they could have the document with them. That is in relation to what I would regard as an answer to the very first question. Those are some of the plans, interventions and strategies.

In relation to the growing drug trade, which the 2018 International Narcotics and Control Strategy, published by the US State Department, recognised as a major threat, that is an important one in which we feel that we have to understand the area that we are from, and that is that we are not very far from the biggest producing -cocaine area and an area that also produces a lot of cannabis in the South American Region, Latin American Region and the Caribbean. So, this increase of what we may call “cocaine interventions” by National Anti-Narcotics Agency (NANA), the Police Force and even the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) is as a result of the strategy that is ongoing. And that has to do with an aggressive posture as it relates to intelligence-gathering and surveillance activities.

The Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU) was able to conduct operations since January in the Pomeroon River, which resulted in four Columbians and three Guyanese being arrested. There was also international cooperation with the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) In a number of these activities - not only that one but a number of others which saw narcotics coming from the Andean countries and entering Guyana’s waterways, coming through the high seas and all of that. We have managed to catch a number of persons who have been hiding them underneath cars and in boats. You would have seen all of that in the newspapers. It is because of this intelligence- gathering and surveillance activities.

What we have also done, as a major strategy and plan to ensure that this set of drug dealers are caught, is integrate the efforts of the various units. Prior to that, some years ago, we had each separate unit: the GRA’s Law Enforcement Section that deals with the wharves, the CANU and the Police Narcotics Division. The efforts of all three units have now been integrated under NANA, which is led by Major General (Ret’d) Michael Atherly.

We are also requesting assistance and getting the intelligence from other countries, especially the United States of America (USA), but inclusive of Brazil and, on occasions, Suriname. We are getting the cooperation to ensure that we can follow those suspects that are coming into the country and going into other countries.

We have seen, as a result also, certain surveillance that we would have done in relation to aeroplane surveillance, which has helped in that regard, ensuring that we make the interdictions that are going to help in the drug trade.

Apart from that too, we are also trying to take away the profits from those drug dealers and the big Mafiosi by cutting the profits from their trade. And so, we have started some money laundering offences, seizure of their motor cars, valuables and cash that they were found with. That is helping, although we feel that lots more could be done in that regard.

All three units, which I mentioned, are doing good work in addressing the growing drug trade. The growing drug trade, if I may say this, and for those who might not know, is as a result of the cessation of spraying of cocoa plants in Colombia after the legitimate farmers that plant non-cocoa crops were saying that their health and so on were being affected. Workers complained that the chemical used to destroy the cocoa plant was affecting their crops and also their health. The security forces have stopped fumigating as a result and that has allowed a lot of other cocoa cultivations to go on. What is more is that we have noticed, also, that these cocoa planters from Colombia are using improvised explosive devices, rather than spraying the fumigants, when the soldiers go to uproot those plants. This has resulted in serious injuries and the law enforcement officials there, who would have prevented cultivation and the manufacture of cocoa coming to this end ... **[Ms. Manickchand: Answer the question.]** I am giving an answer to say what has caused the trade, and a lot of it has to do with the fact that a number of things are causing it in a big way.

We have also sought an intervention in relation to having better surveillance out of the satellites to see when aeroplanes are going to land in our jungle. We have managed, through assistance, to have gotten at least three planes, thus far, which have landed at airstrips. That is where the international cooperation with the DEA is working. We prefer to get some more in relation to that.

I think the other question has to do with how to address money laundering, which the Report referred to and cited "Government corruption". I read the Report and I think the "Government corruption" they were mentioning there was that of the last Government, the Peoples Progressive Party (PPP) Government.

The mandate of the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) is to investigate money laundering and terrorist financed investigations referred by the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU). There is a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to that effect. For 2018, there were nine money

laundering referrals to SOCU. These are being investigated. SOCU also received eight referrals from CANU for money laundering investigations, with the predicate offence being narcotics trafficking.

The Unit received no referrals referring to Government corruption in 2018. The Government corruption that we are talking about was as a result of the forensic audits that found corruption in those units that were there. These involved more than 300 separate investigations, of which 60 investigations have been completed, resulting in 142 criminal charges before the Court. There are a number of court challenges with respect to SOCU investigations, too, which have created some challenges for that Unit in relation to money laundering. These are with respect to the production of banking information and materials. Particularly, the Guyana Bank of Trade and Industry (GBTI) has filed several applications contending that the proviso in Section 24 of the Anti-Money Laundering/Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) Act, Chapter 10:11, does not provide for the production of bankers' books.

Additionally, there were some court rulings at the High Court, which has ruled that a magistrate has no power to make and order to inspect and take copies of entries in the bankers' books. This, of course, is another big challenge. The production of bankers' books is necessary for the investigation of money laundering offences, as you would appreciate. We feel that there may be a need, depending on the upper court's ruling, because there have been some appeals, I understand ... Depending on whether we can get certain amendments under the Act, there might be another plan and strategy to get money laundering probe going.

Is there a lack of confidence in the Government? Absolutely not! Lots more crimes are being discovered and solved. We are catching the criminals, even the white collar ones that arose out of the forensic audits. And so, even though the rate of solving the crimes and charging people and prosecuting them for white-collar and blue-collar crimes, in relation to money laundering, has its challenges, people have tremendous confidence. The confidence is also seen by lots more people coming forward to give the information as to where these things are happening. That is an important thing.

That also answers the question in relation to whether we have to put strategies in place to build greater trust and confidence. Yes, indeed. The fact that we are having training sessions all the

time with young people in the various communities, under the auspices of the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme, whereby we have at least 1000 at-risk youths trained, by now, in a nine months' programme to become auto electricians, *et cetera* is helping in building trust. Training in relation to understanding what is anger management, training them in relation to stopping the violations of their ethics and behaving themselves in relation to when they are asked by their parents to abide by certain rules. It is very important because we feel and we know, in relation to the statistics, that the crimes are being committed by young males. So, we feel that is enhancing the capacity of the Ministry to address the crime situation.

Apart from the fact that we have seen lots more assets being given by our friendly countries, China, USA and the United Kingdom (UK), a big strategy document is being done as well as getting supporting personnel. One such person came here to give some training to parliamentarians about money laundering, Dr. Sam Sittlington, as we know, and there was another one, Mr. Russell Combe. [Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: They wanted to lynch him]. Yes, they wanted to lynch him. Effectively then, we are having a lot going to build confidence and to also ensure our ability to address crime.

Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Mr. Gill, you do not have a question on notice.

Mr. Gill: A follow-up question.

Mr. Speaker: A follow-up question. Proceed.

2.48 p.m.

Mr. Gill: I thank the Hon. Member...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are asking a follow-up question from the question put to this House by the Hon. Member Mr. Rohee and the answer is given by Minister Ramjattan. Am I correct?

Mr. Gill: That is correct.

Mr. Speaker: That is the only reason you would stand, naturally. Please proceed.

Mr. Gill: I thank the Hon. Minister for his response. Could the Hon. Minister explain despite, being presented to His Excellency the President about seven months ago, why is it that the Security Sector Reform Programme (SSRP), a strategy that was touted to end all crime in Guyana, has not yet been presented to this honourable House? Could you say, Sir, when this Combe's Report can be expected to be presented to the Parliamentary Oversight Committee on the Security Sector for scrutiny?

Mr. Ramjattan: That will be communicated with the President, in relation to the answers to those questions, and, as fast as possible, it is to communicate the answers to you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Rohee, do you have a supplementary question?

Mr. Rohee: Yes Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Very good. Thank you.

Mr. Rohee: The Minister spoke very extensively and exhaustively in response to the very straightforward and simple question that was posted. The Minister, however, did not say when he spoke about the firearms issue, about the number and the huge quantities of firearms that are pouring across our borders, buckets of rounds that are pouring across our borders. What is the Government doing to stop this large amount of sophisticated firearms that are coming across our border, buckets upon buckets of rounds that are coming with them and are not being stopped? What are you doing about this because the Minister himself admitted that it poses a threat to the life of many Guyanese?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have asked the question.

Mr. Ramjattan: It is an extraordinarily difficult thing because of the length of our borders and, of course, if as Mr. Rohee is giving the impression, he seems to know a thing or two about the people having the buckets. I want the information. We have been asking those persons and citizens at the border area to give the information and that intelligence has been gathered. That is why we are catching so many people with the firearms, in cars and in their homes and other places.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Rohee, you are allowed two follow-up questions. You have the last one now.

Mr. Rohee: Yes. It is a follow-up question. The Minister spoke in glowing terms about improvements, quote and unquote, in law enforcement, but what the Minister did not tell the House is about the level of political interference in the Guyana Police Force, instructions being issued almost on a daily basis to the force headquarters...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Rohee, you must ask the question.

Mr. Rohee: I am coming to the question, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Well, let us not...

Mr. Rohee: I am framing the question so that the Minister could answer properly.

Mr. Speaker: Let us not have too many speeches so address the question.

Mr. Rohee: When would the Government and the Minister stop interfering in operational activities of the Guyana Police Force and in giving directions to the past Police Service Commission?

Mr. Ramjattan: I totally differ with the Hon. Member in relation to interference. There is absolutely no political interference by the Government. In relation to the Police Service Commission, that would soon be constituted. You know about the Committee on Appointments last week gave certain names. I understand the President is supposed to meet with the Leader of the Opposition today in relation to... [Ms. Teixeira: It is done.] Well fine. You seem to know a lot more than I do.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[Oral Reply]

RECRUITMENT OF PERSONS INTO THE GUYANA PEOPLE'S MILITIA

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there is one question on today's Order Paper...

Ms. Teixeira: Can I seek your clarification. There were three questions, “Oral Questions Without Notice.” Normally, you would allow the persons to read their questions without notice and then you would say that they are being disallowed”. Would that be allowed? Are you doing that?

Mr. Speaker: Those questions, Hon. Member, have already been disallowed. I know that you have been informed.

Ms. Teixeira: You are not allowing those to be read in the House.

Mr. Speaker: No Hon. Member.

Ms. Teixeira: Are they properly disallowed?

Mr. Speaker: There is no point to that.

Ms. Teixeira: It has been the practice, Sir, that is why I am asking.

Mr. Speaker: Maybe the Speaker is introducing a new practice.

Ms. Teixeira: Noted.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are dealing with Questions On Notice. There is only one question on notice today and it is for oral reply. The question is in the name of the Hon. Member Gail Teixeira and it is for the Hon. Minister of State.

Ms. Teixeira, please ask your question.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, thank you, Sir. This question regards the recruitment of persons into the Guyana People’s Militia. I beg to ask the Minister of State Question No. 1 standing in my name.

On January 3, 2016, the Chief-of-Staff of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF), Brigadier Mark Phillips announced that the Guyana People’s Militia (GPM) has been re-activated with effect from 1st December, 2015 and that it had hoped to recruit an additional 1,500 persons as reserves. “These are not full-time, these are part-time soldiers. The whole concept is to have a small regular army and a larger reserve that could augment the regular army,” he said. Mr. Phillips explained the advantage of having the GPM as a separate entity rather than being part of the

GDF as the second infantry battalion since August, 1997. “They will have a separate budget and a separate organizational structure, greater involvement at the regional and community levels in defence and security activities, not to mention training and employment activities,” he is reported to have remarked. The Commander-in-Chief stated at the 2016 Annual Officers’ Conference that, “The ‘reserve force’ – the Guyana People’s Militia – is being rebuilt in every administrative region. The militia is an essential arm of the regional system. Each regional capital town will have its own unit, eventually, to enable to respond more promptly to render assistance to residents in the event of emergencies.”

During the annual budget of the 2016 Budget Estimates, 15th February, 2016, the Hon. Minister Harmon informed the House in response to questions that the Guyana People’s Militia was as in the past situated within the Guyana Defence Force as the 2nd Infantry Battalion Reserve and its budget was included within the GDF budget and administration.

Could the Hon. Minister provide this National Assembly with the following information:-

- (i) The criteria and methodology of recruitment of persons into the People’s Militia?
- (ii) The number of persons who have been recruited into the People’s Militia in the last two (2) years?
- (iii) By what means have these persons been recruited; via public advertisement in the media, in the social media, or any other means?
- (iv) The number of persons by regions who have been recruited?
- (v) The type of training that the recruits are being given and for how long?
- (vi) Are recruits receiving stipends, salaries or any other benefits?

Thank you Sir.

Minister of State [Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon]: I thank the Hon. Member for her question and in addition to the answers which I had provided at the consideration of the budget estimates in 2016, I now provide the additional information which the Hon. Member asks for.

The Guyana People's Militia aims to provide a first response and augmentation to the regular force in the execution of military and civil defence missions. Persons who are recruited into the militia from 2016 to date were recruited at varying levels and for various purposes. Males and females between the age 18 and 35 years who are physically and mentally stable, and possess a clean criminal record, are eligible for recruitment into the Guyana People's Militia. I think you are a little over the age, Hon. Member. You cannot make it. Special consideration is also given to highly skilled retired military personnel and skilled professionals.

The number of ranks recruited into the Guyana People's Militia over the past two years would be a total of 1,608 reserves. The means by which these persons were recruited are as follows: recruitment teams are deployed to various regions to sensitise and recruit personnel in the Guyana People's Militia. Persons are recruited using advertisements in the print media, on television and aired on the radio. Advertisements are also placed on social media sites such as the Guyana People's Militia Facebook page and the Guyana Defence Force Facebook page and website. Flyers were also utilised to attract the interest of persons and persons have increasingly been expressing interest online.

The number of persons by regions who have been recruited are as follows: Region 1 - 36, Region 2 - 0, Region 3 - 154, Region 4 - 365, Region 5 - 204, Region 6 - 405, Region 7 - 93, Region 8 - 42, Region 9 - 45 and Region 10 - 264, a total of 1,608.

The type of training recruits are given and for how long are as follows: Training of the reserves is continuous within the regions and culminates yearly with a two week concentrated training; reserves are also afforded the opportunity to attend specialised training offered by the GPM and training is done three times per week in the regions and focuses on the following areas:

- (i) personal drills
- (ii) field craft
- (ii) map reading and navigation
- (iv) jungle operations
- (v) open country warfare

- (vi) weapon training;
- (vii) first aid;
- (viii) disaster relief operations;
- (ix) internal security,
- (x) national policy
- (xi) academic upliftment.

Are recruits receiving stipends, salary or other benefits? Yes. Recruits are paid a stipend for attendance at regional training and whenever they are required to participate in regional or national activities. Processing of payment of stipend is ongoing in keeping with the register of attendance for training or in accordance with the requirement of the Ministry of Finance. Pay is fully administered by the Guyana Defence Force Finance Department. The stipend is \$2,829 per day.

Point to note here, is that after a hiatus of about ten years, the Reserve Officer Training has recommenced with Reserve Officer Course No. 16. Upon graduation, these persons will be the officers providing leadership for the different groupings. The course would conclude in June of 2019.

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

Mr. Rohee: I wish to thank the Hon. Minister for the very useful information but I have a question to the Hon. Minister.

3.03 p.m.

The Hon. Minister spoke about the mental stability of persons recruited. Is there a psychologist that is included in the training programme? Could you say, what is the percentage of wastage, dropouts, from courses and from individuals who have been recruited?

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: There is a process of recruitment which requires all recruits to subject themselves to medical evaluation, psychological evaluations and psychical assessment. These are

done even before the recruits actually go on to the training. The reservist training is not concentrated and it is over a long period of time. Sometimes it is one week or two weeks at a time; that is the most. It is during that period that the recruits or the reservists that are evaluated and based on an evaluation, which is done, the information is then provided to the medical corps of the Guyana Defence Force that supervises this and it will make an assessment.

Wastage: I cannot give you an accurate figure on that, because it is not like the regular force where there is an intense period of physical training. These are people who are actually taken over a long period and therefore the wastage level would be very low. That is all I could say, Sir.

Ms. Teixeira: The whole purpose of the Guyana People's Militia conceptualised many years ago is to augment our country in terms of being able to defend and to deal with emergencies. I am kind of befuddled by the Minister's response on the recruitment. It is because Region 2 is zero, why would Region 2 have no recruit whatsoever and some of the border areas which are critical have very low recruitment? I know the Minister said advertisement, and so on, I have not been privy to been tracking this as efficiently as I probably should have. It appears to me as if the political party in power seems to be assisting rather aggressively with the recruitment into the Guyana People's Militia. If I look at Region 4 and Region 10, for example, but Region 1, which is a bordered community, Region 9, 7 and 8, are not given the same attention. I would think with your stipend and your training it would be rather attractive, Sir.

Is the political party in office using their political apparatus to mobilise people as was done in the previous time, pre 1992?

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Let me say that I said that this was a voluntary process that there is a whole range of advertisements that went out, people responded. There was no coercion that actually went out there to bring people in. People were responding. As I said, the interest is building. In some of the frontline villages, which our Excellency the President spoke about, we have also emphasised the development of militia units in addition to the other Government services which are provided in those frontline areas, particularly, along the borders with Venezuela, Brazil and Suriname. It is important for us to understand that. We cannot coerce people. We do not force people to join the Guyana People's Militia. As I said, this is an ongoing exercise. These were the statistics given at a particular point in time.

If in fact Region 2, the turnout of the arrangement the figures are low, I would encourage my colleagues on the other side to encourage those persons over whom they may have some influence to join the Guyana People's Militia. I will encourage you to so.

Ms. Teixeira: I am referring to an article written.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, you have the second question.

Ms. Teixeira: *The Guyana People's Mission History* written by David Granger in 2008 is a very good factual report. You pointed out that the Minister was issued with SKS and semi-automatic 7.62 mm rifles as well as Kalashnikovs – AK-47. You had mentioned that they are getting weapons training, including anti-craft machines guns and this is what his article points out.

In your answer you said they are getting weapons training. Are these people being trained in the use of these weapons at this time?

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: There are two timelines that we are looking at here. One that was in 2008. What we are talking about is the reestablishment of the Guyana People's Militia. That is what the Chief of Staff spoke about in 2016. It is the re-establishment. What I read for you are the subjects which are thought these reservists. We do not have anything such as anti-aircraft guns training for them and Kalashnikovs, and all of that. We are basically looking at a response mechanism on our borders. We are looking at assistance in Civil Defence Commission and we are looking at augmentation of the regular force in the event that there is need for that. The training is very rudimentary and it will build up based on our own assessment of what the threat is.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS, INCLUDING POLICY STATEMENTS

CLARITY ON ISSUE REGARDING 366.9 M CONTRACT

Minister of Public Health [Ms. Lawrence]: Mr. Speaker, I wish to provide clarity on the issue regarding the \$366.9 million contract awarded to New York-based HDM Labs Inc. on 31st August, 2017 for the supply of emergency, pharmaceutical supplies for regional and for clinical services.

I wish to state that according to National Procurement & Tender Administration Board (NPTAB), all the relevant procedures were followed by the Ministry of Public Health in accordance with the procurement Act of 2003. I wish, therefore, with your permission, to provide all the facts concerning this issue to this honourable House. On April 28, a request for restrictive tendering was made to NPTAB for procurement of emergency pharmaceutical supplies from the following six companies: ANSA McAL Trading Limited, Caribbean Medical Supplies Inc., Global Healthcare Supplies Guyana, International Pharmaceutical Agency, HDM Labs Inc. and Meditron Inc.

Standard bidding documents were approved on May 3, 2017 and tenders were opened on May 23, 2017 of which only three bids were received. On June 19, 2017, the NPTAB recommended that no award be made to any of the three bidders as all bidders had failed to meet all the evaluation criteria at the preliminary stage.

On June 29, 2017, the Ministry of Public Health sought permission from NPTAB and restrictive tendering for the retender was approved on June 30, 2017. All six companies which had submitted bids in this process were then asked, by email on July 12, 2017, to resubmit and only one company HDM Labs Inc. responded when bids were opened on July 18, 2017. On August 16, 2017, the evaluation report for retender was received by NPTAB with recommendation that the sole bidder be awarded the contract.

I wish to emphasise that NPTAB recommended that the contract be awarded to the sole bidder, HDM Labs Inc. On August 29, 2017, a memorandum was submitted to the Cabinet to this effect and Cabinet noted NAPTAB's recommendation. The award by NPTAB was addressed to the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Public Health on August 31, 2017.

I wish to remind this honourable House, that in 2017 it was under this Government that the Procurement Department within the Ministry of Public Health was established to ensure that there was segregation of duties, transparency and accountability in the procurement of items and services for the Ministry of Public Health, while ensuring that the Ministry followed and adhered to the regulations and the procedures stipulated by law.

The Ministry of Public Health is happy for the demonstration of interest and monitoring of the system. The Ministry welcomes and respects person's right to do so. However, it would be

appreciated that this is done in a sensible and appropriate manner, avoiding sensationalism and misrepresentation of facts.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank you for allowing me to share this information with this honourable House and to clarify this issue pertaining to HDM Labs Inc. contract. Just to remind this House that the Ministry of Public Health does not grant advance payment to companies without any order, without any Combined Requisition and Issue Voucher (CRIV) and without any contract. That was what happened in the past, not now.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

REQUESTS FOR LEAVE TO MOVE THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY ON DEFINITE MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

STATE OF INTERIORS ROADS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there is a request by the Hon. Gail Teixeira for leave to move the adjournment of the Assembly on definite matters of urgent public importance. I have granted the request. I invite the Hon. Ms. Teixeira to make her formal request for leave.

Ms. Teixeira: I thank you very much, Sir. Regardless of birthdays or not, we are working for the people of this country. Sir, thank you very much, for approving.

“WHEREAS the main arterial road connecting Georgetown to Lethem via Linden with connections to Bartica and Mahdia has deteriorated remarkably in the last six months;

AND WHEREAS this is the main "life line" that brings...”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: I think there is a process which we must follow before we get there.

Ms. Teixeira: Please guide me.

Mr. Speaker: There is a request to the House for Leave. The House approves that request. The Speaker had given his approval, but, the House supports that request and then we will proceed to this part. Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: This is something new too, because I know...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please.

Ms. Teixeira: It shows you are never too old to learn.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Please resume your seat for a moment.

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Members, the request to which I referred, I have granted the Hon. Member, if the House has no objection, then, I will invite her to read the motion.

Ms. Teixeira:

“WHEREAS the main arterial road connecting Georgetown to Lethem via Linden with connections to Bartica and Mahdia has deteriorated remarkably in the last six months;

AND WHEREAS this is the main "life line" that brings badly needed goods and services to the residents in Administrative Regions Nos. 7 and 9 and brings out major and brings out major foreign currency earning goods for export such as gold, timber and support for other industries such as tourism and trade;

3.18 p.m.

AND WHEREAS frequent users of this road have said that this is the worst condition that they have seen it in for many years with many vehicles being completely damaged and urgent supplies of food and fuel being unable to reach the communities in these areas;

AND WHEREAS, the internal roads in the Administrative Regions 1, 7 and 9 have deteriorated to such an extent that thousands of people in villages in those Regions are cut off because the roads and bridges are either impassable or washed away;

AND WHEREAS, as a result, the cost of fuel, transportation, food stuff and essential items have increased substantially for this population already under duress and whereas, small, medium and large scale logging and mining companies alike are experiencing significant losses of revenue as result of the deplorable Interior roads.

AND WHEREAS, according to the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association (GMSA's recent statement that the state of the roads is a result of the failure to maintain the Interior roads prior to the commencement of the rainy season; it noted that the deplorable condition of the road is affecting not only the Forestry Sector but the Mining Tourism and Trade Industries as well.

AND WHEREAS the situation has caused revenues in many Timber Companies to decline by 50 per cent with an adverse effect on employment resulting in skilled workers being sent home, a work force being downsized due to the worsened conditions of the roads. The hardest hit are the small scale loggers

AND WHEREAS, according to the GMSA, at least 100,000 cubic metres of logs destined for delivery to markets cannot be transported and as a consequence many value-added manufactures are complaining about the lack of raw material which in turn is effecting exports.

AND WHEREAS, in the light of this dire situation which has national repercussions on the economy as well as on the conditions of life for Amerindian Communities and Interior residence the Government has not acted.

BE IT RESLOVED:

That the National Assembly is calling on the Government to urgently take the following measures: bring relief to the interior communities by flying in needed food stuff and goods at reduced prices with the removal of VAT on air travel and on goods. Allow Lethem and bordered communities to purchase fuel from neighbouring countries until the

roads are repaired, meet with the logging and mining companies to discuss forms of assistance during this period in order to save jobs and reduce impact on these sectors and on the economy and I take urgent action to repair and maintain interior roads with a comprehensive annual programme of ongoing road maintenance.”

Thank you Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I consider the motion being proposed by the Hon. Member Gail Teixeira, and I am satisfied that it qualifies as one before properly be taken on an adjournment motion. I will ask the Assembly’s agreement to this.

Question put, and agreed to.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read for the first time:

ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING AND COUNTERING THE FINANCING OF TERRORISM (AMENDMENT) BILL 2018- Bill No.10/2018

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Act.” [*Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS

MOTION

REESTABLISHMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR TO ITS PRE-2015 STATUS

WHEREAS there existed a Ministry of Labour before the General Elections of May, 2015;

AND WHEREAS after General Elections of May, 2015, the Government of Guyana established a Ministry of Social Protection, headed by a Senior Minister;

AND WHEREAS on the establishment of the Ministry of Social Protection, the Ministry was reduced to that of a Department within the Ministry of Social Protection and headed by a Junior Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection;

AND WHEREAS on May 1, 2018, at the joint rally of the Guyana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) and the Federation of Independent Trades Union of Guyana (FITUG) the call was made for a Motion to be laid in this National Assembly in relation to the re-establishment of the Ministry of Labour,

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly calls on the Government of Guyana to support the call of the joint trade union movement and restore the Ministry of Labour to its pre-2015 status, as soon as possible.” [Ms. *Burton-Persaud*]

Ms. Burton-Persaud: I rise to speak on the motion before us here in this honourable House that stands in my name. At this year’s May Day rally, the joint trade union movement via its leaders requested that a motion be brought to this Hon. House calling for the reestablishment of the Ministry of Labour.

This request is not an extraordinary one, since prior to May 2015, there existed a Ministry of Labour with a designated Minister with the gazetted responsibility to look after industrial relations issues. As a matter of fact, such an arrangement existed since the days of slavery. History will show that there was always need for conflict resolution between employer and employee, at that time slaves and planters, and unattended issues usually escalated into disturbances known today as ‘strikes’. Examples of which are the 1763 Berbice Slave Rebellion that was headed by *Cuffy* and the 1823 Demerara Rebellion that was headed by Jack Gladstone, the son of Quamina, which were in protest against inhumane treatment of slaves.

Then also there was the legendary waterfront water strike of 1905 known as the Ruimveldt Riots and the 13 days of strike in 1917, both led by young Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, the founding father of trade unionism in Guyana. These strike actions sought to have addressed the need for reduced working hours, increased wages and better benefits and working conditions. There was the historical but tragic Enmore strike of 1948, where five sugar workers lost their lives while

taking part in a protest for increased salaries and better living and working conditions and the right to choose the union of their choice.

Over the decades, labour issues were addressed and resolved by various agencies at one time or the others, such as the Court of Policy, the Combined Court, the Colonial Office and the Legislative Council and later the Ministry of Labour. As early as 1938, based on the visit by the Moyne Commission and the labour adviser to the Colonial Office, Major Browne, systems were put in place to ensure that there was a separate agency along with a designated officer to manage the affairs surrounding labour.

It must not go unnoticed that the victories of emancipation and independence were attained from the struggles championed by the working class population and their leaders. In 1926, Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow commenced the struggle for universal adult suffrage better known as one man, one vote here in the then British Guiana. In 1943, Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow became the first labour leader to be on the Legislative Council now known as the National Assembly. In 1964, after years of struggle by Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, universal adult suffrage was attained and what became known as the Representation of the People Act of 1964 came into being, paving the way of us, Members of Parliament, to be here today and for the rank and file to be treated as equals.

However, after the coalition took office in 2015, there was the establishment of a Ministry of Social Protection headed by a senior Minister and the Ministry of Labour then became a department within the said Ministry headed by a junior Minister within the Ministry of Social Protection. Not only was the then Minister's status reduced, but so was the functioning position of the person who heads the now department. Such developments can be seen as a slap in the face of the leaders of the trade union movement and the workers of Guyana, including every one of us here in this honourable House and, may I say, Mr. Speaker, yourself, since we are servants of the state and are paid by the state. Last but not least, the legacy of Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, whose statue adorned the forecourt of these hallowed walls.

It is not by accident or for window dressing that labour always stood separate and apart from any other Ministry. It is a known fact that the philosophical position of the head of any agency takes precedence and in this case Ministry of Social Protection carries the responsibility for women

affairs, men affairs, child protection, senior citizens, old-age pensions, social assistance, disabled persons, difficult circumstances, homeless persons, child adoption and child delinquency.

It must be highlighted that labour is one of the four subheads under which the ten principles of the United National Global Compact are set out. The other three being human rights, environment and anti-corruption. The four principles under labour are:

- (i) business - business should uphold the freedom of association and effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
- (ii) the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;
- (iii) the effective abolition of child labour; and
- (iv) the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment occupation.

These are all important facets of labour that will arise from time to time and that must be addressed whenever and where ever they arise. Of the four principles, numbers one and four are the ones most prevalent in Guyana and the Ministry, more often than ever, has to be the monitor and mediator on these issues. It must also be noted that social protection is one of the tenets of labour and it is not the other way around.

When the call for the reestablishment of the Ministry of Labour was made some two months ago, the current administration stated that it would be too costly to do so and that there is no need or intention to create new Ministries, but it must be noted that no moneys are needed since there is already present buildings, office furnishing and equipment and human resource manpower. However, what is absent is a Minister with the gazetted responsibilities and an agency separate and apart any other. After May, 2015, there were new Ministries created but it was only the Ministry of Labour that was reduced from a Ministry to a department. There is no known Minister under whom the portfolio of labour is gazetted, hence, it can be said that labour has been miniaturised to being a task and not a substantial responsibility. If we pay attention to or understand the function of labour, we will appreciate its major importance in any society.

The challenges faced by the labour sector are numerous. If we look at 2015, 1,972 Amerindians Community Support Officers (CSOs) were terminated in July of 2015. In 2016, 1,700 workers of

Wales Sugar Estate were terminated in December, 2016 and 600 persons lost their jobs with the closure of Barama. In 2017, 5,000 sugar workers were terminated bringing the total to 7,000.

3.33 p.m.

In 2018, BEV Processor Inc. closed and 300 workers, along with an unknown number of fishermen and sailors were terminated. Discrepancies are some of the challenges that are faced by the current Department of Labour; misguidances in relation to the payment of severance pay for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) workers; many unresolved issues reported to the Department of Labour by aggrieved workers; disregard for the collective bargaining process for public servants; nonaggressive approach in the handling of occupational health and safety issues at various agencies, both Government and private; and outstanding issues of the teachers. Hence forth, in the absence of such a Ministry, who will represent the Government on labour related matters in a court of law should the need arise? Let it be known that, in the absence of a Minister with the gazetted responsibility and in like manner, a Ministry with the gazetted functions, any attempt of representation can be deemed as fraudulent and illegal.

A Ministry of Labour is of mega importance in Guyana. Labour ministries, by their mandates, look after the social wellbeing of the employed and the unemployed. Labour ministries play a major role in conflict resolution when it arises between the employer and the employee, inclusive of governments as it relates to negotiations, collective bargaining, occupational health and safety, matters of arbitration and conciliation, job recruitment, training opportunities and labour surveys. Many Bills which were passed after May, 2015, in this very National Assembly, have direct influence on workers across the length and breadth of Guyana. Such Bills are what we commonly call the Protected Disclosures (Whistleblower) Bill, the Public Utilities (Amendment) Bill, and the Public Telecommunications (Amendment) Bill.

Labour ministries are the monitoring mechanisms that ensure the proper documentation of wages and salaries and working conditions. It is this mechanism that allows for the support to the relevant agencies such as the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), in ensuring that payments to these agencies are made by way of deductions from the wages and salaries of workers. It is these deductions of taxes from workers' salaries that pay the salaries, stipends, allowances, overseas health insurance contributions, overseas and local

travel expenses, among other benefits, for those of us who sit right here in this very National Assembly and for other executives at home and abroad. It is these deductions that pay for the new Ministries and agencies established after May, 2015. So, why is it so impossible for the workers' money to be used to finance such a critical Ministry and not a department that will overlook and ensure that their interests are taken care of? Denial of this Ministry is to deny and discriminate against ourselves in this honourable House and those at the highest level of Government, since we are all employees of the State. Who is the State? The State is the citizens and the workers of this country, who by casting their votes on elections day made it possible for all of us to be here in this National Assembly. These persons are our employers, the very people who, *via* their representatives, the trade unions, are requesting that they be given the due respect, acknowledgment and recognition by restoring their one agency of representation to a Ministry.

The demotion of the Ministry of Labour has stripped every worker and trade unionist of the dignity and relevance of making a valuable contribution and representation. It has diminished the lofty position and recognition of Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow, who in November, 2005, in this very National Assembly was raised to the level of being a National Hero. In like manner, the Minister who also now heads this department is himself a victim of employment discrimination and victimisation meted by the very Government he serves. In common terms, he has become like a *toothless poodle*.

Once again, I state that there has been a Ministry of Labour under every Government of this country up until 2015. Hence, we have nothing to lose with its re-establishment. However, to disregard the call by the workers and their representatives for the re-establishment of the Ministry of Labour, separate and apart from the Ministry of Social Protection or any other Ministry, is an outright pronouncement by this Government that it sees labour and workers' rights as non-important and irrelevant to Guyana's development and sustainability. Let us remember that workers' rights are human rights and it is they who keep the wheels of industry turning. We will always need workers and no country can survive without the working class population as its main support base. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that the offices and agencies that represent their interest are paramount in our operational structures.

Once again, I lay before this House the workers' demand to elevate their agency from the status of a department to a re-established Ministry of Labour.

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

Ms. Selman: I rise to support the motion standing in the name of the Hon. Member, Mrs. Gillian Burton-Persaud. The human resource of country is the most important resource and as such, the rights and interests of workers must be treated as top priority. The key role of the Ministry of Labour is to regulate the labour laws and policies, occupational health, safety and welfare of workers, including, of course, child labour. The Ministry of Labour also plays an integral role in the adjudication of industrial disputes. It is therefore hard to understand, why a Government, which professes to have workers' interests at heart, would have any difficulty in supporting this motion, which calls on the Government to support the call of the joint trade union movement in restoring the Ministry of Labour to its pre-2015 status as soon as possible.

We are all aware that workers are confronted with various challenges on a daily basis. Not to mention the fact that Guyanese workers are finding it more difficult to survive on the wages they earn, due to the rising cost of living and all the new taxes they are forced to contend with. By relegating the Ministry of Labour to a mere department, workers have been made to feel that their contributions to the development of Guyana are not important. It is my view that, without the Ministry of Labour, there is bound to be a lack of proper support systems for our workers, especially those who experience various challenges in their working environment. If the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) coalition Government really cares about our workers as it claims, then it will not hesitate in supporting the motion before this House in its entirety.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Chand: Comrade Speaker, I rise to support this motion that I consider important and this motion that I expect the other side – the Government's side – will support.

The call for us to have, once again, a Ministry of Labour is widespread. All the trade unions in this country, and I am certain every worker, are fully behind this motion. It is sad that we have to place a motion to have a Ministry of Labour in this country. It is sad that a party that talk so much about labour and workers has denied this right. So many of them on the other side, who had expressed and claimed to have working class credentials, I do not want to call their names, but I can look at their faces and feel so embarrassed that they are denying the workers of their country and the people of this country the right to have a Ministry of Labour.

The heckler must advise... [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let us stay within, we are losing time.

Mr. Chand: ...how much money he owes workers. I want to emphasise a Ministry of Labour should be automatic and should not require sustained calls since the last election to now. We hope that this will be the last call and that this matter would be put to rest.

What we have today is a Department of Labour headed by Minister Keith Scott. Unfortunately, he has not been given the opportunity to speak on this motion. He should be given the opportunity to speak and he should have been allowed to say what he has done. My Fellow Colleague, Ms. Burton-Persaud spoke to the incompetence that is taking place at that place. He should be given the opportunity to speak. Unfortunately, he has been denied this right. I am saying that we have come back to where we were before the 1953 elections. Before that election, we had a Department of Labour, so we have gone back so many decades after. The late Dr. Cheddi Jagan led Government had established a full-fledged Ministry of Labour and it was called the Ministry of Labour, Industry and Commerce, headed by veteran trade unionist and a veteran attorney-at-law, who has recently celebrated his 90th birthday, Comrade Aston Chase.

3.48 p.m.

Could you imagine what might be going through that man's mind at this age today? What has this A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government done?

The 1953 Elections were held under a universal adult suffrage, a call that was ignited by the trade union movement. For the first time, every citizen of Guyana, at age 21, was allowed to vote. There was no longer a restriction. The trade union movement had played its part in initiating this attainment of universal adult suffrage. A calling as I said that was ignited by the trade union movement.

Over the years, all the Governments from 1953 had seen it fit and proper, to have a Ministry of Labour. I mentioned Mr. Ashton Chase and you have other names like Ms. Janet Jagan, former Minister of Labour, Mr. Ranji Chandisingh, Mr. Winslow Carrington, Mr. Kenneth Denny, Ms.

Rabbian Ali-Khan, Dr. Henry Jeffrey, Dr. Dale Bisnauth, Mr. Manzoor Nadir and Dr. Nanda Gopaul. I could continue and call the others.

The point too is that there is somebody heading a Ministry who is supposed to be looking into labour matters, but knows nothing about labour, has no interest about workers and is unsympathetic to the workers' cause. I am telling you from my experience, they do not have a Trade Union Recognition and Certification Board in place. That is the kind of disrespect that we have for the working people of this country. Not only is there not a Ministry of Labour, but those who head the Ministry of Social Protection, clearly, are not helpful to the workers on labour matters.

Indeed, the workers in this country are voiceless and that has been made possible by this Government over the past three years. Soon we would be celebrating a century of trade unionism in this country. It was on the 11th January 1919 that Mr. Hubert Nathaniel Critchlow established the first trade union of Guyana, the British Guiana Labour Union (BLGU). Today, we are quarrelling for something that one would have expected us not having to be burdened with, to fight for and demand.

In fact, this country stands in the minority of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) with not having a Minister of Labour. Imagine, one of the founding countries of CARICOM is today standing in the minority because we do not have such an important Ministry?

While we do not have a Ministry of Labour, we have established a Ministry of Business. There is no balance. Minister Mr. Basil Williams, at the May Day Rally, had expressed his respect and support to workers. When we asked him whether his support and respect had to do with the past or the present, he did not answer. At the last May Day Rally, there were numerous calls for the re-establishment of the Minister of Labour. After the rally, the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, *threw a wet blanket on the cow* and said it was too costly to have a Ministry of Labour. Without giving it a thought and sincere consideration, the matter was cast aside.

I wish to point out that the relegation of what used to be a Ministry of Labour, to a Department of Labour, sends a signal to employers as to the Administration's respect for labour. That is why we have situations of many employers doing what they want in this country.

Before the last elections, labour attracted a lot of attention. Labour's vote in this country, constituted to a high number. In fact, the then Leader of the Opposition commented at one time that the year of the last elections was deemed the 'Year of the Workers'. At the Labour Day observances both the President and the Prime Minister, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, committed to safeguarding labour. They said so many wonderful things about labour and workers, but a mere few days after the elections, the new Government disbanded the Ministry of Labour, throwing away decades of history. It must be a shame.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Nagamootoo, in the APNU/AFC's Manifesto, spoke of the need for partnerships with the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Business. As soon as he got the position as Prime Minister, the Ministry of Labour was diluted - he and his Colleagues.

In the last three years, this Government has advanced no labour legislation to enhance workers' rights. This is a serious indictment that a number of parties, some of them without any followers, made a lot of promises, came together in a coalition and cannot respect the rights of workers.

Look how they are treating this Parliament. They promised the workers and the people. As of the other day, only five Sittings of the National Assembly were held for this year, in the month of May.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will remind you to observe the relevance of what we are talking about, this motion. Let us please stay with it.

Mr. Chand: Alright Comrade Speaker. For the record, I want to say that Guyana stands in the minority of CARICOM with so many States having Ministries of Labours. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel]

We used to be at the front. **[Mr. Ali: Number one.]** We used to be number one, setting the pace, but unfortunately, we are being relegated to a position where we are behind many States.

What have we demonstrated? Here we have set up a Ministry of Business and at the same time the importance of the workers is relegated. It is most unfortunate. I spoke on the point of us

having no labour legislation for the past years in this country. I spoke about the few Sittings of the National Assembly that we are having.

4.03p.m.

There is indeed the absence of a Minister of Labour which is also being connected and must be seen in the context of this Government' approach to labour. Not having a Minister responsible for labour is also demonstrating that point.

President Granger, so often, would say that his doors are not close to labour, yet to respond to a labour request to engage him and his Government, has never materialised. The Trade Unions Congress (TUC) was told to meet the Minister of Social Protection. I do not know if she understands what it relates to really. With all respect to the Minister, she is totally unable to comprehend matters concerning labour.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Chand, I would very strongly suggest that you avoid references to your Colleagues in the Chamber.

Mr. Chand: Thank you Cde. Speaker. An important question was the promise of collective bargaining in the public sector. This is a big issue. It is not respected or followed. Workers were promised better treatment and respect and it turned out to be a false promise and undertaking. That is why, today, the working class people in this country, their condition of work and pay levels are very much below what it ought to be. There may have been increases over the years, but it has been easily eaten by the high cost of living and the taxes that we are having. Today, collective bargaining that was promised is not followed.

Public Servants were promised higher pay. We have the case with the teachers. There is a team that the Government has representatives on, and even the recommendations given have been so far ignored and they are talking about the consequences were you to pay the increases that the team has recommended.

The sugar workers are lost people in this country. In 2015, they were denied increase in pay. If I were to call names over there, but you have said to avoid that Mr. Speaker. Promises, about 20% increase to the sugar workers had not been fulfilled. Not only that it was it not fulfilled, but in 2016 and 2017 they were denied increases. What will be the faith for this year? So far, there are

no expectations from the utterances that we are hearing from the Government. It promised the public servants, teachers, sugar workers and other members of the working class and it is disrespecting and cannot be bold enough to hold to its promise. It is a shame to have denied the working people of a country their rights and benefits. They are an important group; they are the producers of health.

The promise of collective bargaining in the public sector remains unfulfilled and seems like a mirage. Promise of higher pay for the public servants only apply to the Government, who got a 50% pay hike after getting into office, as well as a plethora of benefits. We want them quantify to all of those benefits - half a million dollar house rent which some of them are able to benefit from. They should voluntarily reduce their pay since... [*Inaudible*] and benefit from all those perks that... [*Interruption*] while you are starving the working class people. You are denying the workers their benefits and rights. The Government is unconscionable.

Productive Worker – Workers who are providing services to the country. Teachers are all treated the same way. A lesson must be drawn here by the working class people that they should understand how they are treated by their bosses and whether whichever political party they support, when crunch time comes, they will get the same treatment as other workers will get. We are seeing that today – we must understand that.

In their manifesto they promised to have a dignified labour movement. Today, what we have is workers being treated in the most undignified manner by the Government and followed suite by many private owners because if the Government can do it, then why can we not do it? So one could understand what is happening to the workers and people.

I want to remind the Government that labour is the most critical factor of production and, therefore, the script for labour must be accorded. It is important and let us not be told that it is a cost factor.

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

Mr. Chand: Okay, Cde. Speaker. This Government had setup the largest bureaucracy this country ever had since it took office three years ago. Yes, a large bureaucracy spending billions and there is no creditability of this Government when all of this is taken into account *vis-a-vis*

the treatment of the working class people. The cost of the bureaucracy went up by 29% in 2018, when compared to 2017. Are we getting value for this massive expenditure which is \$54 billion?

Social protection is a component of labour, not the other way around, as the Government want us to believe. When one looks at the 100 odd International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions, social protection was referred to a mere 17 or 18 times. Many of the ILO Conventions, if one uses that as a yard stick, demonstrate the importance of labour. If we talk about the ILO, for three years now labour has not been represented at the ILO. The Government has, also, disregarded the ILO. I understand that at one time, the junior Minister in the Ministry of Social Protection was on his way to the ILO. [Mr. Dharamlall: Did he have to turn back?] Well, he had to turn back.

Our past leaders must be turning. [Mr. Neendkumar: In their graves.] Well, I do not know if I must say grave because all of them were not buried, but they must be turning when they see what this so call working class Government is doing to the workers in this country. Workers who struggled to bring so many changes. The Trade Union Movement that has been behind the struggle for adult suffrage, independence and an end to force labour and many other proud realities of life, today, how are they treated?

The importance of labour is recognised constitutionally. We should no longer diminish labour. Let us end that exercise today by establishing a Ministry of Labour in the first step of moving in the direction of recognising the workers contribution towards our society and nation.

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

Mr. Chand: One second Cde. Speaker.

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

Mr. Chand: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now take the recess and we will return at 5.20 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 4.15 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.33 p.m.

REQUESTS FOR LEAVE TO MOVE THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY ON DEFINITE MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

STATE OF INTERIOR ROADS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, in accordance with our Standing Orders the adjourned motion will now be considered. Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, you may proceed.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. This motion that is before the House is an extraordinarily important one. If we look at the geography and map of our country, we will understand why. From Georgetown into the depths of the interior, there is basically one artery that takes us into the heartland of Guyana and that heartland of Guyana has populations that are Amerindians and other residents that are Guyanese of other ethnic groups. It is also the areas of Guyana which brings out gold, diamonds, timber, opportunities for tourism, manganese and a whole range of other things, including uranium, titanium and so on. The state of the interior roads is not a fickle issue. It is not an issue that can be fixed by whimsical manners. It has to be dealt with in an organised, planned and be pre-meditated manner.

That is the concern of what this motion is about that it is not only the suffering of people in those communities; it is also by allowing the interior roads to become into such deplorable conditions that people, businesses and the economy are suffering.

5.36 p.m.

I have read, in the newspapers, a number of statements that have been put forward by the manufacturers, the private sector, loggers, timber companies, mining companies, *et cetera*, with regard to the state of the interior roads, particularly the key artery which is the Linden/Lethem road link.

For those of us who grew up in the days when cattle were trekked from the Rupununi to Georgetown so that we could eat beef know that by the time the cattle reached Georgetown, they were ‘*magga*’ since they had to trek hundreds of miles in terrible conditions.

That same trail or a trail along similar lines became the main artery as Guyana moved forward. I remember, after 1992 when we got into Government, how bad the roads were. In fact, at that

time, it took almost three days to get from Georgetown to Lethem. It took a lot of work and a lot of cost and investment to try to bring those roads to a better condition. The roads are not asphalt or concrete. I do remember that, by 2006, one could have driven from Georgetown to Lethem for Rodeo in 14 hours, which was a good pace. It was an indication of the state of the road. Today, it takes about two days to move from Kurupukari to Lethem in that stretch.

Everyone in this House has seen the photographs in the media of vehicles overturned, stuck or fallen onto bridges. I have heard the response by Government Ministers that the reason the road is in such bad condition is because of truckers and loggers carrying too much weight. I have heard and read, also, that, as a response to the statements by the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association (GMSA) and other private sector bodies, contracts have been awarded and work will start as soon as the rainy period ends.

If we all agree in this House that the main artery of Guyana that connects the coast and interior is that road that branches off and connects with all the different regions in the interior, and that this road is our lifeline for exports and foreign currency earning, as well as our social, moral and political responsibilities to people living in these interior regions...

Certainly, we know that the rains come. With climate change, we can say that there are unpredictable weather patterns. Nevertheless, we do know that we basically have two rainy seasons in a year. We have a relatively small window in the beginning of the year and a relatively small window somewhere around the third quarter of the year to get roads done, particularly in the interior.

We sat in this House, in December, 2016 and 2017, for debates for early budgets. The reason given by the Government is that it is a good intervention and innovation because it allows for 12 months of implementation of its capital projects and its public sector infrastructure programme.

However, we are now in July and we are now reading in the newspapers that contracts are being awarded and work will start after the rainy season. This is a sign of ineptitude and incompetence. I have seen one of the Ministers make a comment in the newspapers that they would get it better next year and they will fix it for next year. That is very nice that you would fix it for next year, except let us look at what is really happening. Clearly, somewhere along the line, I believe that

the Government or the Cabinet is either not properly apprised or informed or they believe that some issues and statistics are of no importance.

The deterioration of the roads did not start because of the rain in the season. The maintenance problem was already a problem in 2017. The End of Year Outcome 2017 was tabled in this House and issued on 12th April, 2018. Let me read from page 6, paragraph 3.3 of the Report:

“... significantly lower declarations in the gold industry and other mining; growth in each industry fell by 8.3 percentage points and 4.9 percentage points, respectively. Gold declarations maintained a steady performance in the first three quarters of 2017, when compared with the same period in 2016. However, gold declarations plummeted in the last quarter of 2017, over the same period of 2016. Among problems experienced by the two foreign-owned companies were lower grade ore and unscheduled maintenance. In the case of small-and-medium-scaled miners, the decline was due to multiple factors, including higher fuel prices and deteriorated roads. The decrease in other mining was due to a 62.7 percent lower declaration of diamonds, the lowest level since 2012.”

In the document presented, I believe, by the Minister of Finance, there are figures to show the decline of small and medium-sized miners from what was the projection, in 2017. It was stated in *Budget 2018* that it would be 482,613 ounces but the actual production, in 2017, was 419,538 ounces. It showed other declines with Troy Resources Limited whilst Guyana Goldfields Inc. increased.

The next paragraph, paragraph 3.5, deals with the construction sector which includes and is dependent on sand and timber to be able to function. The construction sector was 2.1 % points lower, below the level projected at the time of the presentation of the Budget in 2018. When you read this and you go to the table that is on page 7, table 3, it shows that gold declined by -8.3 %, as of February, 2018, for the year 2017.

When we say that that road is a “lifeline”, it is not a rhetorical issue. It is a real, hard economic fact in our country. When we say that the road is a lifeline, I am not talking literature. I am talking about that road being the lifeline to the Guyanese economy, to the healthy well-being of our nation and our economy.

Those terrible photographs that you have seen in the various newspapers give you an idea of how awful it is. Vehicles are up-side down. We have been extraordinarily fortunate, “knock wood”, so far, that we have not lost lives. How could you look at these graphic images of how men and women are trying to make a living? I have heard about all sorts of things coming through the roads. The majority of people on the roads are trying to make a living – businesses, loggers, miners, bus men and transportation people. When they have to go through these horrendous conditions to deliver goods to the interior and/or to bring goods out of the interior for export or for use in our country... It has been going on for quite a while. This is not something that started yesterday.

Sometimes the rains come early, sometimes the rains come late and sometimes the rains last longer but you cannot forever make the rains an excuse. You passed the Budget in December. The whole idea was to go straight to award of tender. Yet, we know, in 2017, the Minister of Finance confessed, in the mid-year report, publicly, that only 35% of the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) had been implemented. I see that the Minister of Finance had to call a meeting recently to “crack the whip”, as they say, and to put manners on a number of Ministries which are underperforming in terms of their capital programmes.

The purpose of this motion is to bring to the Government’s attention how dire the conditions are and how dangerous it is for our country, not just interior residents, not just miners, not just loggers, but the country.

When you look at the aggregate performance of key traditional sectors in this country, we have seen declines in sugar, rice, forestry and bauxite as compared to 2014. The way in which this Government is running this country has cost our economy approximately \$46.11 billion in economic stimulus. You tax everything. The country is dependent on gold and yet you bring onerous burdens on the gold industry. You brought onerous taxes and burdens on the transportation people – the truckers, the minibus operators, *et cetera*. If it is that you are going to *sit on your laurels*, my good friends, and satisfy yourselves that it is the truckers fault or somebody else’s fault but yours, then you would have the privilege, Sirs and Ladies, of overlooking the complete decline of our economy.

You could *sit on your laurels* and pat yourselves on the back and believe that everything is not your problem but that it is somebody else's problem. The problem right now is that your economy is in trouble. The economy is dependent on those same goods coming out on the same roads to come to the coast. You could blame all that you want and you could go home and feel very happy that you have satisfied yourselves that it is someone else's fault.

The problem is that the GMSA has made a statement, the private sector has, the miners have, the loggers have, the Amerindian communities have, the National Toshias' Council (NTC) has and even the Regional Toshias' Conference (RTC) in Region 9 has done so. Ask Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, Mr. Allicock. When the first opening strike of the RTC in Region 9... In fact the gentleman, who spoke first, is now the new Chairman of the NTC, Mr. Fredericks – not the previous Fredericks but Mr. Nicholas Fredericks. He opened the Conference and he said to the Minister, "How are we to get to the NTC? The roads are so bad."

What was the response of the Hon. Vice-President and Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs later when he spoke? This is a sign of caring of your Government, of course, because the Hon. Vice-President said, "let us see what calibre of men we have as Toshias, whether they would use spades to get their way through the roads. [Mr. Allicock: I did not say that.] Am I lying on you, Hon. Minister? [Mr. Allicock: They are here now.] You brought them by aircraft because you recognised that you could not bring them through the roads. That is why you spent all that money to bring them by aircraft. If you did not do that, you would not have had the NTC, which you controlled. They could *sit on their laurels*. I did not say anything wrong. Laurel is not a bad word, as far as I know. [Ms. Ally: Why did you walk out from Region 9?] I never walked out. Whoever wrote that is wrong. Our delegation never walked out. I know who told you that, but I would not believe that person if I were you. I know exactly who it is because that is the person who turned off the microphone when Ms. Campbell-Sukhai was speaking.

5.51 p.m.

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, could we confine our remarks to the motion?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Do not engage other Hon. Members while you are on the floor. Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: I would not do that, Sir, and I look to you to protect me from the Chief Whip on the other side.

Mr. Speaker: My difficulty is that I cannot see your face when you are speaking.

Ms. Teixeira: Oh, I am sorry.

Mr. Speaker: I would be able to protect you better.

Ms. Teixeira: I would try to manoeuvre. Thank you, Sir.

Again, you have to look at what is the... [Ms. Ally: Ms. Teixeira, who turned off the microphone?] It was one of your advisers. I will tell you who it was in the corridors after.

The aggregate loss of foreign exchange is not something we should dismiss. Some US\$509 million was lost in foreign exchange. What were the sectors that we lost the money from? Sugar – US\$111 million; rice –US\$227 million; forestry – US\$49 million; and bauxite –US\$120 million. In other words, in 2017, the overall level of gold production dropped by 8.3% with small and medium scale miners, most of them operating in the interior, of course, by 13.1%; again, the reasons were high fuel prices and deteriorated roads.

The situation has to come to national levels, such as the National Assembly. You could go all around the interior and Toshaos in villages are talking about their villages and children not being able to go to school; about bridges being broken; about roads being washed.

People are trying to get stuff in or out. You have made it more difficult for people to move goods and services in the interior. You have put Value-Added Tax (VAT) on airline travel into the interior, therefore increasing the cost of food, goods, *et cetera*, being taken into the area.

What we are seeing is that the economy is declining. The earlier speakers on the motion on labour talked about sugar. What you have done with sugar is not only unconscionable, but it is also putting an enormous dent in the economy and foreign currency. You are treating the rice farmers like second-class citizens. Bauxite is in trouble. You seem to be disinclined to address

some of those issues that the industry is having. Then, there are the timber and mining sectors, mining with gold, diamond, manganese, *et cetera*. [Ms. Ally: *Inaudible.*] Mr. Speaker, I ask you to protect me from that noise all the time.

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Thank you, Sir; it is much appreciated. We are seeing this demise. The road becomes an example, a symbol almost, of the deterioration that is going on, of lack of care and of ineptitude in addressing these issues. Some of the Hon. Members have not been on the road and some of you may have been. We know that in certain places in which you went to open places and give out buses and so on, seven aircraft were sitting on the airstrip in some of the interior villages. I do not know why seven chartered aircraft had to go into the interior for Ministers to just cut a ribbon or hand over a bus.

Seriously, where are the priorities of this Government? Some \$640 million is to do these roads and, as I said, we have read that the contracts are been awarded and that works would start after the rainy season. If that is so, the rainy season should be winding down now, but we are still getting rain. You are talking, maybe, about August and then they would start work September, and the rainy season would come back, again, before the end of the year. People are being paid and people cannot get work done; these are the contractors who you are hiring.

In addition, you had the money from December, 2016 and December, 2017 and you have failed to use that money, in the earlier part, at least to protect the roads. If you want a pristine road and if you want a road that perfect, you cannot have industries and business in Guyana. Until Guyana is able to get an asphalt road, for which we have been in talks with the Brazilian for couple years with a deep water harbor...I believe that Hon. Minister Greenidge and Hon. Minister Patterson recently met with the Brazilian Foreign Minister to talk about some of that. But for three years you did not do anything.

Until we are able to afford, as a country, an asphalted road, we have to be able to keep that road in working condition because that road works for us, that road brings us dollars to be able to have money for healthcare, education, pay our debts, build houses and a range of things, other than pay your salaries. That road is a symbol of the heartland of Guyana and it is a symbol of the

vibrancy or the potential vibrancy of this country. You are just treating it as a stepchild. You are treating it like it is somebody else's problem.

If the figures I am giving do not mean anything, the issue is that our foreign currency reserves are falling. I go back to same 2017 and 2018 documents, which the Minister of Finance has produced, mid-year reports and the other reports from which I just quoted. What is going on? We are not manufacturing figures. We are using the Government's figures and these are worrying.

The projection for mining and quarrying was for it to grow by 0.7%. In fact, it contracted by 8.8% at the end of 2017. Net foreign assets, which is where we get our money from revenue when we sell things abroad, dropped by US\$13.2 million to \$580 million, when, in fact, the projection, when we met for budget debate, in December, was that we were going to go up by US\$20 million to \$613 million. Our foreign currency reserves have declined. We raised some of this at the last Sitting when we were dealing with the financial Bills. The Minister of Finance thinks this is very amusing. I really must say that I suggest to the Hon. Ministers, in particular those who are Cabinet members, that you should do some of your research. Do not depend on just getting guidance from one side, but go and do your own research.

The funny thing is that you have also been collecting more and more taxes. You calculated, in 2017, that you would have gotten \$162.5 billion in taxes. In fact, you did very well. You had a \$171.2 billion or \$8.7 billion more in taxes, and yet, you are worried and concerned about why people are not producing more and doing more. Well, you have to be able to facilitate growth. You cannot have growth just by telling people to go and do something.

The rice farmers need help to have their dams, bridges, roads and farm to market roads at some level. The miners need the main arterial roads for the interior to be under some manageable level and so do the loggers. That is a responsibility of the Government. When you build your asphalt road, then things would be different, but the cost for that is phenomenally high. Maybe, instead of going into a bond of \$30 billion for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), when you are not clear what you are going to use it for because you do not have any designs or feasibility studies, you should consider using some of that on the road as a start of a major public infrastructure programme for the country.

This Government, really, I think has become divorced from what people are going through. The 200-plus tax measures introduced in the Budget in 2017 cost the nation \$20 billion. By the end of 2018 that figure is expected to increase by another \$10 billion to \$30 billion. The issue is: how are you to have growth if you are taking away people's purchasing power? The money they would use to invest; buy a new truck, buy a new excavator, buy a new combine and whatever they need to produce more and to do it more efficiently? You have taken away some of the concessions from people, and yet, in the April report, gold declined and it is because of fuel prices and deteriorated roads.

One of the recent reports in the newspaper pointed out that a gentleman who I do not know, I do not have an idea who he is, from the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) pointed out, in the *Stabroek News*, 13th July 2018, that:

“I recommend a change in policy that sees government embracing the full continuous maintenance model on corridors shared by multiple road users”.

“The key areas he recommended are Linden to Lethem, Linden to Kwakwani, the Puruni Road, M4 to Noseno, M4 to Arakaka, Five Star Road, Matthews Ridge to Port Kaituma and Lethem to Karasabai.”

I hope that the Government would support the recommendations we have made in this motion. They are not accusatory; they are patriotic and they are nationalist in context. It is saying to the Government, get your act together on behalf of all the Guyanese, regardless if they voted for you or not. That is basically what it is saying. It is saying that, certainly in this House, we must have some issues that are partisan. Partisan in what way? Partisan for our country and not partisan for a political party.

I have spoken already about the strategic importance of this road and I cannot underline enough how strategic and important it is to our country. I have used the symbol or the description of “lifeline” or “artery” because if you sever an artery, then you damage it and the person could haemorrhage. So could our country.

My concern is that the Government has kind of played footsy with this issue. In the Budget debate, there were questions, when we came to the estimates, about the state of the roads and we

were told all sorts of things. It produced zero; it produced naught. I believe that the Government does not quite recognise that, by 2015, the number of vehicles plying that road was over a 1000 vehicles per day; that is a conservative figure. It was anything from cars to minibuses to buses.

Why has the bus service that used to be done by a company that had nice big buses, air conditioned and very comfortable been suspended? Why has that service being suspended? It is because the roads cannot be used by those vehicles without threatening the safety of the passengers and increasing liability for the companies that are fetching people.

6.06 p.m.

We have to have a vision. I hope that the Ministers who will speak have a vision and they will not just get up and blame the truckers, as was done at the Regional Toshao's Conference where the truckers were blamed for the state of the road. We have to deal with what interventions the Government has, in the long-term, to ensure that the artery of Guyana, the lifeline of Guyana, is able to become a thoroughfare that could benefit not only us in Guyana, but Brazil and other countries, once it is that it is our sovereignty, and, we are able to exploit it in a joint partnership with another country.

I have read two different statements that are conflicting. I have read the Hon. Minister Greenidge's statement of his Ministry after the visit with the Brazilians. As typical foreign affairs, it is measured and very careful in not being elaborate, sticking to basic facts. I have read the reports in the papers from the Hon. Minister of Public Infrastructure, which gave the impression that the design will be done and the road will start and stuff like that. And that is not so.

I was hoping that Minister Greenidge would have been on the list of speakers to be able to really share with us the Cabinet's vision for the road. What do you want to do? Where do you want to go? Are we going to, every year, be *gotaying* as they say, this issue in this House about how the road is bad, money not spent or money wasted and that the truckers are blamed - the people using the road are blamed? Are we going to go through this masquerade? We went through this masquerade in 2016, we went through it in 2017 and we are going through it again in 2018. I hope that we will see that we have to deal with these issues. Our recommendations are very simple. I hope they are not controversial in the "Be It Resolved Clause".

To bring relief to the interior communities by flying immediate food stuff and goods, and that includes drugs for the hospital, medicine and medical supplies for the hospitals at reduced prices, and to have a temporary removal or lifting of the Value Added Tax (VAT) on air travel and on essential items, so that people can move stuff in.

Maybe because we live in the capital, we do not understand or appreciate that when one gets sick in these areas, it is an awfully long trip to get to the nearest health centre or health hut, much less a hospital. When one gets to that, one then finds that stuff is not there. **[Hon. Member: Time.]** I think there is only one Speaker in the House that I recognise.

The second recommendation is: allow Lethem and the border communities to purchase food from neighbouring countries until the roads are repaired. So, if my projection is right, and maybe you will say that my projection is wrong, no work is going to start on the road until September and they will be hitting the rain sometime December, we need to have a period where the Government recognises that the people need help.

One, therefore, deals with air travel and essential goods. Even when the water goes down in the Savannahs and so on, the roads will be ruined. The bridges have been washed away in many areas. As I said earlier, it took two days to get from Kurupukari to Lethem. That was recently, just a few days ago. So, you have to have stop-gap measures. You have to have an interim way of dealing with this reality and not say to the Guyanese people, “Well, the contracts are awarded and we are going to spend \$640 million as soon as the rain stops.” Full stop. That is not good enough, my dear friends. It is not good enough for our people. It is not good enough for the people and children in those communities. It is not good enough for the workers who are losing their jobs because logging and mining companies cannot get their work done. It is not good enough.

It was done in the past when there were difficulties with getting fuel into these areas. The Regional Democratic Councils (RDC) of Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9, for example, were able to buy across the border for the communities that were nearby. It was legally done. They were not smuggling, as they are forced to smuggle sometimes.

At the time of the Regional Toshias' Conference, there was one gas station alone in Lethem that had fuel. One! When that finished, that was it, because the other trucks were stuck on the road and could not come forward.

We are putting forward recommendations; we are not just bashing you. We are making constructive criticism. Bring relief, allow the communities to buy fuel, temporarily, across the border.

The third recommendation is so simple. It is so logical that it cannot be a problem, can it be? Meet with the logging and mining companies, face to face, to discuss forms of assistance during this period in order to save jobs and to reduce the impact of what is going on in these sectors on the economy. Because of not doing enough or anything at all in the first half of this year, and not being able to get anything started until near the last quarter of this year, you now have to take remedial or emergency measures to be able to assist.

The simple recommendation is that you meet with these companies, who have admitted in the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Limited's (GMSA) statement, and it is in the motion before you....The GMSA said – I saw it in the newspapers – that the situation has caused revenues in many timber companies to decline by 50% with an adverse effect on employment, resulting in skilled work being sent home or workplaces being downsized due to the worsened conditions of the road. The GMSA also said that at least 100,000 cm³ of logs destined for delivery to markets cannot be transported. As a result, many value added manufacturers, I assume furniture people and so on, have a problem and are complaining about the lack of raw materials.

The recommendation, the third one, is a very simple one. Sit with the companies, find out what it is that they urgently need so that they can still move their goods and they can still continue to operate with some support from the Government. To facilitate this, in other words, you are “shoring” them up, temporarily, until you get your contracts out, the contracts have being done, the road is levelled off and more passable and bridges are fixed.

I hear discussions of roads, but there are a number of bridges that have collapsed, whether it is because they have been there for a long time, whether it is because the workmanship was poor, whether it was because of heavy load or whether the rivers came up high and washed them. There are four or five different variables and not just one. You have to sit down and talk to

people, face to face, and see in what way, as the Government, you can help them. It is because if you do not, your artery is cut. The amount of gold you would be able to produce and sell would continue to decline. The number of diamonds will continue to decline; the amount of timber would continue to decline; and your foreign currency earnings will continue to decline. Do you want this country to go in this direction?

The last recommendation is what the GMSA and the private sector said. This is not what Gail Teixeira wrote, but I believe that it is so *commonsensical* that it should not even be here, but we put it here because, maybe, there is a difficulty in planning.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you. The last recommendation is that you take urgent action to repair and maintain the interior roads with a comprehensive annual programme of ongoing road maintenance. It was done before and it can be done. If you have the same staff or you have fired all of the people, I do not have a clue.

The issue is that you have put the productive sector of this country under duress. Rice, sugar, gold, diamond, forestry are all under duress. Most of it is as a result of your policies and your ineptitude. That road, even with your taxes and even with your price, could have kept some of the production up. What you are doing now is saying “hands off; you are not responsible”. We now have to wait until, hopefully, September when some of the work will start.

Now, tell me, in my closing remarks, what do you tell the people in the interior areas? *Hold strain? Bind yuh belly* until September, when they cannot get basic food stuff, basic drugs and fuel? Is that what you want to tell the people of this country in the interior, “*Bind yuh belly* and wait for September or whenever the road is finished”?

I am very passionate about this issue because I believe the Government is behaving like ostriches with their heads in the sand, and in the meantime, the country is going down and people are suffering.

Thank you very much.

Minister within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure [Ms. Ferguson]: Mr. Speaker, I rise, this evening, to make my contribution to the motion moved by the Hon. Member, Gail Teixeira. Before getting into my actual presentation, allow me some time to set a few comments, we were regaled with not so long ago, right.

We have heard that, for the past three years, this Government has not done anything for the Linden/Lethem stretch. I will get into that in a short while. We heard that we are treating the Linden to Lethem stretch as a stepchild. This is not so. We were told that this is an uncaring Government, but sometimes we need to go back a bit to the past. The previous Administration did not show any care, especially for the people in Region 7. It is because there were....
[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, a debate is going on a matter which I believe is of interest to all of us and we should allow each speaker to be heard.

Ms. Ferguson: We heard, also, that it seems as though the Government lacks vision. In my presentation, I will share with the Hon. Members some of the visions we, through the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, have for the people in Guyana. In my presentation this evening, I will give a background as to what the Ministry of Public Infrastructure has been doing over the past three years. My colleague Minister would give more details in his presentation. But let me set the record straight.

6.21 p.m.

We all agree or we all know that the rainy season is between the month of May and July within the year. However, that particular stretch would have deteriorated during that period, but these are some of the interventions that the Ministry of Public Infrastructure would have done. From the year 2015 we expended the sum of \$122,535,000; in 2016 - \$168,986,000, in 2017 - \$106,550,000 and in 2018, just before the rainy season came, we expended in excess of \$53 million. In 2017... *[Interruption from Members of the Opposition.]* Since you want to know exactly where these works were done it is as follows: maintenance of Rockstone to Mabura, maintenance of Kurupukari to Annai , and this is in Region 9, maintenance of Annai to Lethem, Region 9, maintenance of Lethem to Ituni, Region 10 and maintenance of Ituni to Kwakwani, Region 10. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I would not wish to name Members, but we are getting perilously close, if Members are not respectful of what their places here represent. Please proceed Minister.

Ms. Ferguson: Just before June 2018, the Linden to Lethem corridor, we did maintenance work in four areas, as I said before, Rockstone to Mabura, the contractor was International Imports and Supplies and the contract sum was \$12,964,000, Linden to Lethem and Rockstone to Mabura, Lot 3, Adam Newton Holdings - \$13,485,000; Linden to Lethem Road, JR Ranch Incorporated - \$13,820,000, timber bridge, Mabura to Kurupukari corridor, Mekdeci, Machinery and Construction Incorporated (MMC) for a total sum of \$1,626,000 and Lethem roadway between Wisroc and Rockstone junction, International Imports and Supplies - \$11,996,000.

Between January and June of 2018 the Ministry of Public Infrastructure would have expended in excess of \$53 million to maintain the stretch of roads between Linden and Lethem. However, as I said in my earlier remarks, prior to May of 2018, Cabinet took a decision on the 24th November, 2017 to have the maintenance of the Linden to Lethem stretch maintained by the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC). I must say that prior to these works being handed over to the GGMC, we had started the process at the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. After Cabinet's decision, we handed over all the tender documents along with the list of the contractors who were shortlisted for them to continue with the procurement of services. The GGMC would have awarded contracts on 15th May, 2018 and these were done to the following contractors: MMC Incorporated maintenance of Rockstone to Mabura - \$140 million, that was at Lot 3; maintenance of Kurupukari to Annai - MMC Incorporated - \$131 million, maintenance of Annai to Lethem and the contract has been awarded to D&R Construction and Machinery Rental for the sum of \$139 million; maintenance of Linden to Ituni, International Imports and Supplies - \$120 million and maintenance of Ituni to Kwakwani, International Imports and Supplies.

Mr. Speaker, let me just make that clear. The areas that I have just highlighted to you and to the honourable House are being done in lots. The contractors are currently mobilised. I can safely speak as I am on my feet here this evening to say that that is one particular area that I am aware of where works are currently being executed. We must take into consideration that we are in a rainy season and these will be major challenges for the contractor. To come to the House and say to the House or to the Hon. Members that the Government is not doing anything or we have not

started doing anything, this is not a fair statement to say, because the contracts have been awarded and works are being executed.

I would like to say at this point in time we are hearing that the Government has no vision, but let me share some of the visions we have as a Government through the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. The Ministry of Public Infrastructure endeavours to take the following actions to avoid a reoccurrence of this level of deterioration in 2019 through the following measures: one, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure (MOPI) will undertake full responsibility for the funding and execution of routine maintenance in advance of the wet rainy season from June, 2019. Two, the MOPI will privatise the use of chemical stabilisation in fair weather road construction to ensure that our primary corridors have greater climate resilience.

This is not news; it is out there in the public domain that the United Kingdom-Caribbean Infrastructure Fund (UK-CIF) funded study for Lethem to Mabura is currently being evaluated and where the existing feasibility studies are being reviewed. The Government of Guyana continues to advance bilateral discussions with the Brazilians and would also finalise the consultancy from Lethem to Mabura.

In closing, I just want to say to this honourable House and to our brothers and sisters in Region 9 and also those who are constant users of that corridor that the Ministry extends its sincere apologies to all the commuters and residents who have been affected during the period that the road continues to deteriorate. This is what I want to submit to this honourable House.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Charlie: I rise to join my colleague on this side of the House in adding my contribution to the motion.

I listened attentively to the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Public Infrastructure who outlined in her presentation the corrective measures that would be taken in 2019, but the vision is still lacking. I have not heard the vision other than the corrective measures that would be taken.

The Minister intends to blame the rains for the deplorable state of the hinterland road. Blame it on the rain, but remember in every year we would have two budgets. Budget 2018 was read in 2017 which gave lenient time for maintenance in the hinterland regions. It is unacceptable now

in this House for the Hon. Minister to mention that awards have been given out to execute road maintenance in the middle of the rainy season.

From my perspective, hinterland roads make a crucial contribution to the development and growth and bring social benefits, but it seems in this Government does not seem to understand this. In the hinterland regions of Guyana we have seen the neglect of almost all the hinterland roads, Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. It is time for this Government to go to the hinterland regions and I invite you, young and old, to take a first-hand look at the deplorable state of the roads in Region 1. The residents of Waimong Village are calling on this Government to come and see the state of their deplorable roads. You, the new coalition Government over there, promised the residents of South Rupununi that when you get in power, you will be constructing an all-weather road from Lethem to Achiwuib and if you cannot fulfil this promise, the people of Region 9 would hold you accountable, and in 2020 you will see the results.

The deplorable state of the Linden to Lethem road, I do not know what word to describe the state of the road at this time, but it is a nightmare. What use to take hours, it is now taking weeks.

Here we have a Hon. Member saying it is because of the rains. If you had your house in order, and I am talking to the Government, this motion should have never been made in this House.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, address the Speaker or the Chair.

Mr. Charlie: It is through you, Mr. Speaker. We, under the People's Progressive Party (PPP) under our administration, had a hinterland road programme. Why I am saying this, it is because I worked with the Ministry of Public Works and we had road maintenance for two years.

6.36 p.m.

Two road maintenance in one year, one before the rainy season and one after the rainy season. Mr. Speaker, if you check on social media to see the many pictures of the state of the road from Linden to Lethem, you will understand what I am saying. It is a livelihood. The road is our livelihood, in all the hinterland regions.

I hope this Government takes our recommendation and take it seriously. This is serious business because our residents in the hinterland region depend on the road. Our internal roads, village

roads, are in a deplorable state; schoolchildren have to traverse on those deplorable roads. Never before our roads were as this. Now we are seeing it. We are seeing the true competence of this Government. The entire hinterland region is now saying that this Government is incompetent.

I now turn my attention to Region 8. Region 8 residents complained bitterly too. They have seen the neglect of this Government. At the opening of the National Toshias Conference, we heard the Ministers mentioning about the “good life” the residents now enjoy. The Ministers failed to address the state of the roads in the hinterland regions. It is a sad time. It is a sad situation. I hope this Government see the importance. I know the Hon. Minister will outline... [Mr.

Mustapha: The vision.] ...the vision, yes. Come 2019, we will correct this and we will correct that. Every year you had a budget that catered for road maintenance. Road maintenance was done, but the question is: Was it done to the standard? All what we have seen are grade and shape, the rain come and we are back to square one.

In the 23 years, I could allude to this that we have a successful track record. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Charlie, allow me. You will reclaim your seat for a moment. Hon. Members, we are going backwards. We must allow the person on the floor to be heard. I did not hear anyone speak, but, it seems to be that there is a belief that one side of this chamber is responsible for it or another side is not. What I would say is that all has sinned and fall short. Let us now try to redeem ourselves, let us hear the Speaker. Hon. Member Mr. Charlie, you have the floor.

Mr. Charlie: I continue, under the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) tenure we had a road programme. We had a road programme which we maintained and we have a track record. Our truckers and other road users could attest to this compared to now. I ask this Government to consider seriously. The people put you there; take good care of them because with your pace and because of your incompetence, you will see the results in 2020. Get your act correct. Put your act together. Put your house in order.

As I take my seat, I would ask this Government as you talk the talk, you walk the walk. Do not fly into the interior with seven aircraft, travel the road, you will see it. The Hon. Vice-President, the fourth Vice-President, knows what I am talking about. I ask this Government to consider the

recommendation for the betterment and development for the lives of the residents of the hinterland regions of Guyana.

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

Minister of Public Infrastructure [Mr. Patterson]: Let me first start off by wishing the mover of this motion a very happy birthday. I do hope that you would enjoy the rest of the day. I know you would have preferred not to be here on your birthday. I do hope that you do find time to enjoy the rest of your day. Having said that, I would like to say to the mover of this motion that you are correct, this Government does acknowledge the state and the condition of the road. I think the Speaker as well. I think that is why the motion is being debated here.

We do acknowledge that the state of the road is not optimum and it could have been in a better position at this particular point in time. There were certain statements made here by the Members of the Opposition which I need to have addressed before I even go into the vision and the way forward. The Hon. Member Gail Teixeira accused the Government of doing nothing in three years in Government for this particular road. If what we have done could be deemed nothing, I do not know if there is any such word such as minus nothing for the 23 years in which you were there. I would like to assume that. Twenty-three years the PPP/C was in Government and it had this stretch of road. There were all sorts of excuses about why the road, this important corridor, could never be asphalted or ever taken part of what it is now. It was just a fair weather road when the weather is fair. The most telling one, I think, was given by the Leader of the Opposition as it was not economically feasible. In three year, this Government, as we have done on the East Bank Berbice road, as we are going to do now, we are making all things, that they deemed economically not feasible, very feasible, and very practical on our plate, and we will be doing them. We make the not feasible, feasible. That is the vision in which we have.

I will explain if the Members would give me a chance and listen. I will enlighten, not only this House, but, the... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I heard a voice on my left. I am wondering if there is a Hon. Member who wishes to speak to address this House, if not, I really should not be hearing voices as loudly as that on my left. Proceed Minister.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. Thank you for your protection. The Hon. Member Gail Teixeira also read a letter from an employee from GGMC, who she claimed she did not know, which is true. I know the gentleman. However, the stranger part of the letter, she started in the middle of the paragraph and omitted to mention what he stated in the first part of his letter. Allow me, I would not read the whole letter. Madam Teixeira started from the words “I recommend a change”, but she omitted to say the young man from GGMC started off his letter by stating, “the maintenance of interior roads being left to large forest concessionaries have proven not to work...”

Then he recommended that we do changes and he recommended that we do all the stretches that the Hon. Member has made. Of course, Madam Teixeira, that is why I stated earlier we will do things differently. We have heard those recommendations and we will be implementing those recommendations.

Let me address the issue of the Linden to Lethem road. I want to start at the beginning. The local materials in which we utilise to maintain this corridor for a fair weather road, and the remained material being laterite, are very susceptible to water and could be easily compromised during rainy seasons. That is one of the flaws of the issue of the road. The indigenous materials are very clay based and they are very susceptible to water. That has been the method of construction for these interior roads from time immemorial and we have copied it. Knowing that it is very susceptible in the rainy seasons, in 2015, 2016 and 2017... I am hearing a voice in the wilderness. That is all right. I know if there is any person who would be glad that the roads are impassable at the time are the mothers of young ladies because of a particular voice in the wilderness accessible in that inaccessibility.

Knowing that there is laterite pits and knowing that the laterite is very susceptible to rainfall, we started as a Ministry, a maintenance programme which was done in the old days during the dry seasons. We started stock piling laterites along the roadways that is in addition to the regular road maintenance and those things such as that. The idea has been that during the rainy seasons or when you do have to make emergency, the materials would be easily accessible. That work was done in 2014, 2015, 2016 and in 2017, small lots along that road corridor. We had about 15 different small contracts for small contractors to dig laterite pits to put them at the side. Therefore we could have quick intervention. It worked well. This is the third year we are here. It

worked well for those three years. I do think and I do stand here and apologise. I do think we dropped the ball because we obviously thought that having established a good model to keep the road up and running that it could be done with by road.

As the Hon. Minister indicated, in 2017, we have already prepared our tenders and those things like that and we give it another agency. Unfortunately that is where there was a bit of delay and that is where we are at the moment.

6.51 p.m.

I am pleased to say that that withstanding as Minister Ferguson has indicated the contracts are up. The contractors are mobilised and those things such as that. Sir, the problem is that it is drainage. It is not the rain. The drainage issues is the entire area surrounding. The roads are obviously flooded so there is nowhere that we can drain the roads off at the moments, so that is what it is. I have been informed up to this morning that the stretch between Linden and Kurupukari is okay. We have to work on the other stretch. Obviously, it was progressive.

Minister Ferguson may have indicated that the contracts are for one year. They were always supposed to be for one year. The contracts will run from May, 2018, to May, 2019 and we will ensure in June of 2019 that there is a continuous programme so obviously what is intended is that they would go to two dry seasons and two rainy seasons to ensure that it is. The Ministry will augment the work that we did the last two years with the compiling of laterite, so that we can easily access it.

Sir, there have been some statements which I probably would need to address. There is a question of buying fuel in Brazil. The Hon. Member Charlie, I noticed that he did not address that because he knows even with the road as it is, fuel in Lethem is still cheaper than fuel in Brazil. He knows that and he also knows that there is no impediment once you pay your taxes from importing anything from Brazil over to Guyana. He knows that. I do not know why he allowed the Hon. Member. Sir, I checked three gas stations, two have fuel and the third said that they are running low there. The fuel rose when the fuel prices in town rose, it was not due to the road. I thank the Hon. Member Charlie for addressing that.

I am pleased to say that I checked under Lethem Power Company, obviously, there is obvious use of fuel in Lethem and I am pleased to say that the power company has not experienced a fuel shortage. However, it said that transportation time has been increased from one day to two days. It is not weeks or not months. Sir, I checked that. I also checked because and I do not want anyone to interpret what I am saying, to say that the road is not at its optimum place as not bad. We have been too empathised, and I do humbly offer my apologies.

I checked on the bus services and persons are still travelling. Sir, I was going to tell the Hon. Member Mr. Charlie, but as the Member prompted me, I would like to say that he is speaking about us that we should travel the road. Sir, I can say this without no fear of successful commendation other than save and except Vice-President Allicock. I can say that I have personally travelled that road more times more than any other Member in this House. Sir, some of these persons here would not even know what the old Ikrong trail was. I could say that without successful contradiction. When the Member made mention that we should travel and see the roads, I smiled to myself because that is my passion - it is my hobby. Unfortunately I do not get to go as often as I used to but I have been travelling these roads way long before this particular job.

Sir, I will adjust it a bit but I want to say this: the Hon. Member Alister Charlie made mention about internal roads and I almost fell off my chair because I know that no one in the Opposition has probably gone to anyone of these outlined areas. I do not know when last you went to Mahdia. When last did you go to Mahdia? When last any of you went to Mabaruma?

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Minister will address the Chairman.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Speaker, when last did you go to Mabaruma, Sir? Port Kaituma, when last did you go to Port Kaituma, Sir? Lethem, it is the same Lethem, and obviously, they are spiting themselves to say that they do not see the road works that is going on in Lethem. Lethem is not Region 9. That is what the gentleman said. Sir, I am obviously speaking to the wrong crowd but I know Sir, that you know that Lethem is in Region 9.

The Hon. Member Gail Teixeira would have liked to give the impression that all we speak about is designs. She even asked the Hon. Vice-President Carl Greenidge what the status is of the proposed Linden to Lethem road to be upgraded into asphaltic concrete and to be better. Thank

you for raising it. I have the opportunity to enlighten the House and probably the public. The tenders for the first 120 kilometres, which is from Linden to Mabura, are being evaluated right now. That is for the completion for the designed works which are slated for eight months. I will tell you why we are still with the designed works. It is because when we submitted we said that Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the UK-CIF probably knowing under whose tenure the feasibility studies were done in in the past - they did not trust them there of course - decided that they needed to have a fresh cover. We thought that what we needed to do was to take the existing feasibility study and go straight out to tender. They said “no”. They were well aware of who the authors are and who were in control before. That is why we are at this stage.

Not only that, Sir, as I speak, we are setting up a yard and our Members of Parliament would want to know this. We are looking for a stockyard to start the first six kilometres which is in the Linden township and obviously what we will do is launch from there. We will do the first six kilometres. Sir, we are on track. Six kilometres we will be doing with my Ministry just as how we did the six kilometres for East Bank Berbice that is the exact same six kilometres. I know that the Hon. Member was in finance so he does not know the implications and the benefits of six kilometres of road would be. [*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, please for some protection. That can be excused.

I want to also mention a couple of things before I take my seat. We have been accused of doing nothing. We were being ostriches, but I want to say this: Sir, there was a bridge along that Linden to Lethem trail - it is still there - every year because of the design it claims several lives, particularly persons who are unfamiliar with that trail. The former President Jagdeo’s advanced security guards in the SUV unfamiliar blazing down the trail and it claimed their lives. Sir, that is no longer the case. This Government that you claim has no vision fixed it and resolved that and straightened it. Mr. Charlie that is a loving and caring thing that we did. For 23 years there were two lives a year. You never thought of doing that, but we did it in the three years. There is another stretch which causes a lot of road accidents and fatalities, the Manari Bridge. We are doing that as well as sharing that out. That is what a caring Government does. Not only that we try to keep the roads up, we try to actually ensure that lives are saved.

Minister Ferguson highlighted some of the issues that we will like to do going forward and I would like to endorse all that she would have said. I would like to assure the persons of Regions 9, 7 and 10 that we do understand the plight. We do know our obligations.

I would also like to say that I just recalled that there are a lot of talks about the loggers; there are a lot of talks about the gold miners. Sir, I am not blaming anyone. The only person I blame is the previous administration, and that is why we are here.

There is what we call a Hinterland Interagency Committee which comprises several different agencies. The Members are the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, Ministry of Natural Resources with the GGMC, Guyana Forestry Commission, the Ministry of Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs, Ministry of Communities, Guyana Gold and Miners Association, Guyana Women's Miners Association, the GMSA and the Guyana Water Inc. Every year, as we did in 2017, as we are doing now as we speak, we asked them, what they need from the Ministry. It is what they need from the Government. On 28th August, we got this from the GMSA, signed by the president and it highlighted about ten road and these roads, Linden to Kwakwani, Linden to Mabura, Mabura to Mahdia, Mabura to Lethem and Bartica to 72 Miles Potaro and Buck Fall to Cuyuni.

Sir, I am pleased to say all of these, the first four made it into Budget 2018. The roads that we did as a Ministry are not plucked out. They are done after consultation and we have it here. The Gold and Diamond Miners Association gives 14 roads Kururu to Blue Mountain, Puruni to Itaballi, Puruni to Pappy Show Landing and Issano road. Seven of the 14 made it into our Budget 2018. Sir, I would like to say that we do acknowledge that the situation in the Hinterland roads along this stretch.

In closing, I want to say that this year, I agree and I do not want to blame the weather, but we should also know... I have here from the Hydrometeorological Service that the rainfall in April and May has been the highest nationally.

7.06 p.m.

Sir, in respective of that, I want to assure the persons along these regions that the contractors are mobilised. What we will do is our best to keep the stretch operable. We will maintain it to a standard, the contractors will be there. The contract is for one year, therefore, we envisage that

we would not have a repercussion of this through the May/June or the December rains because the contractors will be mobilised and on-site. The Ministry will do whatever it takes, along with the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) and the rest of forestry to augment those contractors on the ground. We will address the method of which we will be procuring these later. We do acknowledge the plights and we have put things in place.

I would like to thank the mover of the motion for the opportunity for me to highlight some of the issues that we have and to dispel some of the misconceptions. I would have thought that the Hon. Member Charlie would have, at least, acknowledged some of the progress we would have made in his region – Region 9. We are a Government that keep our promises. There is a commitment to do work going into the South and Deep South, including some bridges and we will. This Ministry and Government will keep all our promises.

Also, I will end on a promise, Mr. Charlie, 2020 will come and the results will be the same or even better as it was before.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have passed the 7 o'clock hour. I would suggest that we take the recess now and return at 7.40 pm.

Ms. Teixeira: Sir, not to disagree with you, but as it is the only the last wrap up, which is mine and then the vote, that we conclude that. When we come back from the break, we can go back to the motion on the Re-Establishment of the Ministry of Labour to its Pre-2015 Status, if you would consider that.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, do you wish to speak to me?

Ms. Teixeira: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I had not given you the floor just now, so, I wondered whether you would want to speak to me.

Ms. Teixeira: I recognised that afterwards. Sometimes, I do think you listen to me, but then I am not always sure you are. Anyway, I did want to say to you that, as it is, there is only one more speaker and I guess a vote on the motion. Maybe we can conclude this matter, have a break and

then come back for the motion on the Re-Establishment of the Ministry of Labour to its Pre-2015 Status, which we have suspended, and conclude, if that would be acceptable to the House and to you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I believe that there are some Members who are complaining about the space that is developing between their back and abdomen, or is it the stomach, I am not sure which. But, the majority seems incline to let us proceed and I will go with the majority in this manner. The next speaker is the Hon. Gail Teixeira. You have the floor.

Ms. Teixeira (replying): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I am very glad to have heard the two Hon. Ministers acknowledge that there is a problem and promised to do better in the New Year. I am a little disappointed that this was seen mainly as a road issue and not as a developmental issue. I missed the contributions of some of the Colleagues on that side that would bring that comprehensive view to this problem. I recognise a number of issues that the Hon. Ms. Ferguson referred to and, clearly, there have been shifts in decisions which I believe, without the Minister saying, show that this has caused delays. The decision that she referred to in November, 2017, that it would now shift to the GGMC to maintain the roads, probably created vacuums and confusions of who is in charge of what. Then the reversal or whatever happened to end up with the May, 2018 contracts done by the Ministry.

Just a comment of a person who has been in Government for a little while, is that it is very easy to destroy and I hope that you on the other side of the House are learning that it is easy to destroy things. You have thrown out a lot of the People's Progressive Party (PPP) programmes because you have castigated them publicly so many times and then it is very difficult to recreate, construct and bring in new ones because that takes time. It is not just money, it takes time and to have the resources.

Road maintenance is always an issue that has challenged us and it is an issue for Guyana in terms of what is the road as is. However, there are structural issues that we tried to deal with and, obviously, it is the same kind of problem we are having in health. If we look at the budget and planning as if it is only a 12-month planning, instead of what is rolling over so that we have a two or three-year programme, for example, the Lethem/Linden Road and the budgetary things. This is so that we are rolling over from year to year, instead of just dealing with things in a very

constraint calendar-month arrangement. But, I am not here to talk about \$53 million going into a road. These roads are expensive to maintain. I tend to have a view that we have a responsibility and if you are in Government, it is to make sure and to try to make things work as much as possible.

The Hon. Minister, Mr. Patterson, basically, said that in the three years they did more than we did, we did nothing, *blah blah blah*. I do not even want to get into that because I know and there are people in this House on all sides who have driven on that road in hours – 14 hours to Lethem; the tour guides under the Tourism and Hospitality Association of Guyana (THAG); and the miners that were going through that road, for rodeo, for investments, and, all sorts of things. So, I know that the road was a challenge. It always gave us headaches. There is a rain issue and a drainage issue, but they were issues which we tried to resolve with different technologies. Yes, with laterite and all of that, but there was a South African company mixing different things with laterite to make the road hold stronger. I believe that was experimented on the Linden/Ituni Road and that helped.

The other issue is drainage. Yes, but there were what you called ‘sinkholes’ which were created to help drain the road and so on. Unfortunately, sometimes one of the problems for Government and new Governments is that they think that everybody who are there must be gotten rid of. Sometimes you get of people who have institutional memory in the public service. That is why maybe Mr. Greenidge has been rather careful to hold onto some of the people in his Ministry because he needs institutional memory of a lot of staff in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Maybe he recognises that.

The issue is the technology used in the road maintenance areas, where a number of people were either given up, left, fired *et cetera*; you lost a lot of the institutional and technological memory that were there, in terms of a range of ways of dealing with drainage. I do not want to get into those technical areas, but just to advise the Ministers who I believe may wish to do more research on that.

The main issue this motion tries to bring is that, when I listen to the debates in the United States (US), I hear the present President of the United States. Anything that goes wrong he blames poor Obama. Sometimes when I listen to you on that side, I hear you say the same thing - you know

PPP. Even when we were not around, you still blame us. I mean you can do that and then I will answer. When you do that I will then be forced to say, in 1992, when we won, we took over a country that was bankrupt. Therefore, yes, Mr. Patterson, we could not do your asphalt road. It took us years to reduce the debt. By the way, the debt that we reduced is now going back up my dear Friends. You are sending it back up. It means that, in 2020, when we have elections, we will have to come back in and start all over again and fix back everything all over again. I promise you we will do that.

My Friend, Mr. Allicock, who will tell us about 'let us see what kind of men and women you are, to get your spades and go through the Linden/Lethem Road'. I will say to my dear Friend on that side, let us see how fast it will take us to get through the road. It will take us 12 hours by vehicle and not by spade as you told the people to find what kind of calibre these Toshias were. It is insulting.

If there is anything that this motion has done, it is to try to bring to the attention of the House that we have problems. Although I believe that Ministers Mr. Patterson and Ms. Ferguson genuinely dealt with what was the sphere of the roads. However, no one on that side dealt with the big picture issue – the big picture. When we were in Government, the Head of the Presidential Secretariat (HPS), Dr. Luncheon, would many times say to us as Cabinet Colleagues, and we would sometimes be fretting about little things, he would say "Colleagues, keep your eyes on the big picture". The big picture is development, investment, expansion, diversification and efficiency. These are the issues and the road, with all the best intentions or reasons given for why things did or did not happen, impacts on the economy. It impacts on miners, mining companies – small, medium or large. I thought Ms. Charles-Broomes might have spoken because she has been very vocal on the syndicated groups and the difficulties that have been experienced.

The issue is, we can talk about the \$53 million here, the \$100 million here and a \$50 million there, there has to be a programme of how we do it. And, yes, it is challenging. I do not know about your Cabinet, Mr. Rohee was reminding me that, in our Cabinet, many were the times that the then President raised, whoever was the President, whether it was Dr. Cheddi Jagan, Prime Minister Samuel Hinds, Mrs. Jagan, Mr. Jagdeo or Mr. Ramoutar, at almost a level of statutory, issues would be raised about the road. The road was just not about making sure it was passable. It was about the whole big picture of how it connects with the vision of where you want to go.

So, the two Ministers gave a vision. In fact, it is a vision to do with their jobs and their portfolio. It is not a vision of how Guyana is going to do it – the developmental issues.

I am glad my Colleague, Mr. Alistair Charlie, spoke because we were only recently in the interior and so I know what I said about certain things because that was what we had experienced. Whether the Colleagues believe us or not, is a different issue. The point is that the cost of living is going up. What you have done with the fuel - fuel prices went up because the cost on the World Market went up and so on. In the time of three months, whether fuel prices have been at \$247, *et cetera*, per litre, the world price of fuel has dropped to US\$70 odd per barrel. The generosity of your Government is that you have given \$4 per litre deduction. The world price has dropped below what it was three months ago and you have made no concession. The big picture issues: the road, fuel – fuel is critical for people to produce, to travel and transport. How do you as a Government facilitate that? Yes, Mr. Patterson and Ms. Ferguson will do what they have to do as best as they can do with Government deciding what they want to do.

7.21 p.m.

It is the issue of your policies. That is why the recommendation, which neither one spoke of, except Minister Mr. Patterson, to say, yes they had this annual meeting with stakeholders to look at... Well you said before the budget that some of these proposals came in the budget. I am talking of not what may be regular because you are treating this as business as usual. It is not business as usual, my Friends. The road is in the worst condition it has ever been. If you do not believe me and this side of the House, go and do a ‘man of the people’ thing - go and check on Facebook.

There are people who are residents of these areas, people who have done business for 20 or 30 years on that road and they are saying it is the worst it has ever been. If you believe them, which you do not need to, you could live in a cocoon and say these people are all lying on you. If you believe that is a problem, then you need to address it. You need to say to people, it is going to take us five or six months to really unfold all of these contracts and be able to make a different.... What kind of measures? Is it a short-term one so that you could bring relief to the loggers, manufacturers and miners? What kind of relief could you give to the border areas or to some of these far off areas? That is all. You could defend it.

Yes, they have two days fuel and stuff like that. That is the problem of the fluidity of the situation, which you are not appreciating. Today, you could be in Lethem and a truck comes in that has two days of fuel. The next truck coming behind falls off the bridge or gets stuck there for two, three, four days or more and so no fuel comes in. All that we are saying is to explore these opportunities to help people. You could tell me about the power company. That is very nice to hear, Mr. Patterson. I do not want to put my *bad eye* or *bad tongue* on things, but the day that the fuel does not come through and your power company does not have enough fuel to go, it would affect the hospital. The main thing is the hospital. I hope that Minister Lawrence is concerned about what is going on on that road too.

We have tried to make a case here that what happens on the road is critical to the residents in the interior. It is critical as a life wire for the survival and development of those communities. It is also a lifeline for Guyana – all of our country and our economy. We have put forward four simple, rather, what do you say, not earth shattering, recommendations and we ask that the Government support the motion in the interest of our country, the economy and the people in the interior. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for her statement. This brings to an end the discussion on the motion, for a Request for leave to move the Adjournment of the Assembly on Definite Matters of Urgent Public Importance - State of Interior Roads. It is now almost 7.30 p.m., and so we will return at 8.00 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 7.25 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 8.06 p.m.

CONTINUED DEBATE ON THE RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR TO ITS PRE-2015 STATUS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the debate on a Request for leave to move the Adjournment of the Assembly on definite matters of Urgent Public Importance - State of Interior Roads having been concluded, we now return to the incomplete debate on the motion standing in the name of the Hon. Ms. Gillian Burton-Persaud. We have had three speakers so far, Hon. Ms. Gillian Burton-

Persaud, Hon. Ms. Africo Selman and Hon. Mr. Komal Chand. The fourth speaker is the Hon. Mr. Adrian Anamayah. You have the floor.

Mr. Anamayah: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Good evening to the House. I rise to make my contribution on the motion standing in the name of my Colleague, Ms. Gillian Burton-Persaud. The motion is for the ‘Re-establishment of the Ministry of Labour to its pre-2015 status.’

The 11th May, 2015 was indeed a dark day for the Ministry of Labour and workers in this country. The entire country was blind-sided when this Government saw it fit to downgrade and diminish the Ministry of Labour as a whole to a mere department, devoid of any real powers. It was amply described by my Colleague as a *toothless poodle*. This is from a Government that campaigned on jobs. There is still a billboard in New Amsterdam with those slogans about jobs and the creation of them. [Mr. Patterson: I will take it down.] It has to come down because that is another broken promise.

This coalition Government, bloated as it is, with over 27 Ministers and Vice-Presidents, *et cetera*, yet there is no room for a substantive Ministry of Labour and a Minister with the powers that could really make a difference to the workers and the labour force in this country. It is strange that, as soon as the Government took Office, the Ministry of Labour was on the chopping block. Also on the chopping block was the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. These were clear indications of the coalition’s attitude, towards labour, workers and youth as a whole, in this country. That attitude has manifested itself over the last three years.

Before I go further into what is happening, I will touch a bit on the People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s (PPP/C’s) working class credentials. It is no secret that the PPP/C has stood with the Ministry of Labour and workers from its very inception. It was at the graveside of the Enmore Martyrs’ Monument that the founding Member of the PPP/C, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, made that pledge to dedicate his entire life to the cause and struggle of Guyanese people, against bondage and exploitation. That was since 1948. Even before that, Dr. Cheddi Jagan was a fierce advocate for sugar workers. He fought for a Wages Board and Contributory Pension Scheme to be established, in the colony of British Guiana. It was under his... [Mr. Mustapha:

Vision.] That was his vision. It was real vision. It was under his leadership that the famous Labour Relations Bill was introduced in 1953. From this struggle, the PPP/C was

birthed. We have always had, and will continue to have, a close enduring, lasting relationship with labour, trade unions and trade unionists because our foundation was the working class people; representing the voices of those who are being abused, victimised and who did not have the power to speak up on their own behalf.

It was the PPP/C that fought for the recognition of the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU). As a country, under the leadership and stewardship of the PPP/C, we signed on to almost all the international conventions on labour and the protection of workers' and human rights. What is very interesting is that, even during the height of Mr. Burnham's dictatorship, there was still a Ministry of Labour. As Hon. Member, Mr. Komal Chand, indicated, it had been there before colonial times and was started by the PPP/C.

The importance of having a designated Ministry for Labour, instead of a mere department, cannot be overstated. Such a Ministry's role as a mediator and protector of workers' rights against excesses, have never been more relevant than today. We only have to look at the atrocities that have been committed by this Government against the workers in our beautiful country in every sector. The other speakers have alluded to them. There were the 7000 sugar workers from four estates who were dismissed with no alternative made for them. They are in Court fighting for their severance packages. There are issues with their pensions, those who are receiving pensions from the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). There is no guarantee that they would continue to receive those pensions in the near future because of the mismanagement of the entire GuySuCo and the affairs of these workers by this Government. There are 1972 Amerindian brothers and sisters whose services were terminated and in the Forestry Sector there are thousands of others. We also have the Barama Company Limited, Bai Shan Lin Forest Developers Inc., and the local millers, operators and loggers throughout the country. The Fisheries Sector has also seen losses in the labour force and the list goes on.

That underscores the need for the protection of workers because of what is playing out in our country right now. Even the teachers have to go and fight for it now – the teachers are in Court and they are being told that they have to be patient. They have the Government in Court because they want increases in their salaries. They have not had an increase since 2015. All of these are issues that could have been addressed by a Ministry. Any substantial increase in 2015 could have been addressed by a Ministry of Labour, but we have none. The entire workforce and nation are

at the whims and fancies of the Government. If the Government wakes up tomorrow and says it wants to dismiss 7000 workers, as has happened in the sugar industry, who would stop it? What is to stop it? This would not have happened under any other dispensation, but it is happening here. It has happened. That is the legacy of the coalition Government.

Over the past three years, in our estimation, over 25, 000 persons have lost their jobs. The rights of workers in every sector are being trampled upon and labour is being systematically dismantled and decimated, as a matter of fact. These are human beings; these are Guyanese men and women and they are being robbed of their dignity and stripped of their rights. As Hon Member, Ms. Africo Selman, said, the country's human resource is its greatest resource. It is indeed. I agree with that statement. It is a country's greatest assets and should be cherished, nurtured and developed. Instead, here in Guyana, we have a Government that is reducing them to *mend the fences*.

8.17 p.m.

What is astounding is that, throughout all of this that has been happening in the various sectors, Hon. Members, on that side of the House, in particular our Hon. Prime Minister and Vice-President Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, sat idly by and made no interventions or representation to alleviate the plight of these workers. This is from the Hon. Member who would invoke the name and legacy of Cheddi Jagan...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am reminding that you are speaking on the motion for the re-establishment of the Ministry of Labour. I say that only because it seems as if there is a little gap between my understandings of what this motion is seeking to do and what you are presenting to the House. It is only a reminder.

Mr. Anamayah: Thank you for your reminder, Mr. Speaker. Members on that side of the House boast of their working class credentials, but they all did not notice that they have none.

Minister, we have a situation where the rights and recognition of trade unions is at its lowest in our history. We have a situation where the entire workforce in this country is in turmoil and there are individuals on that side of the House enjoying the trappings and perks of office, living the

Cadillac lifestyle and are oblivious to the plight of these 25,000 plus workers who have been relegated or confined to a *donkey cart economy*. This is the legacy of the coalition Government.

The PPP has had longstanding and good relations with trade unions in this country and we stand here as their voices. At the recent rally that Hon. Members attended, the unions, that is the Guyana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) and the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Guyana (FITUG) called for the re-establishment of the Ministry of Labour. It is them who made that call and Members of the Government were also present at that gathering when the call was made and nothing was done. We have seen it fit to represent the issue here and we have brought a motion asking the Government to have this Ministry re-established. This is a joint call from the trade unions. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that, the trade unions obviously see the need to have it done and there can be no barriers, which I can see preventing the Government from acceding to the wishes of... Even if they do not want to listen to the Opposition fine, but listen to the joint trade unions. Listen to them who represent thousands of workers because they are calling for this.

On that note, I will ask that good sense to prevail and that the Members on that side of the House vote with us and have this motion carried.

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

Minister of Social Protection [Ms. Ally]: Mr. Speaker, as I read this motion as presented, I see a sense of political mischief coming from the Opposition benches. As I reflect, I hear voices from the other side, 'If only I knew', but, today, I proudly stand to edify my Colleagues by restating the facts.

Before I do so, let me thank the Hon. Gillian Burton-Persaud for the historical struggle she outlined. Regrettably, her presentation lacked the facts, truth and was completely distorted. Let me also tell the Hon. Member, Mr. Komal Chand, that the Minister who heads the Department of Labour could never be a *toothless poodle*. This is not the PPP/C Government, as that can only be so if it were the PPP/C. This is A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC), solid in its demonstration for good governance and faithful to its workers.

This evening we had to endure by listening to how much this Government is not doing for workers. I want to ask the Hon. Komal Chand, this leading trade unionist, where was he when his Government gave a 5% across-the-board increase to workers and continuously? I would like the Hon. Member to tell us why his Government did not address the debauching issue of our teachers. Why were the sweeper/cleaners not treated like workers under the PPP/C Government and the very sugar workers they profess to so love? Why did they start the closure of sugar estates?

Let me proceed with the *meat* of the motion. This motion, calling for the re-establishment of the Ministry of Labour to its pre-2015 status, is unwarranted. I wish to remind the Hon. Members of this House that there is no pre-2015 status of the Ministry of Labour. Prior to 2015, there was a Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security. Further, prior to the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security function, there was not an independent and distinct Ministry responsible for the labour function of the Government in the recent past. Labour was combined with other functions such as health, housing and water. Therefore, there is nothing new to have, the labour function being carried out by the Ministry of Social Protection.

It may be interesting to note that since labour became a subset of social protection, industrial relations or labour management relations have improved significantly. In 2015, the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security was renamed the Ministry of Social Protection under the APNU/AFC led Administration, with the Labour Department embodied within social protection.

I wish to note that Article 107 of the Constitution empowers His Excellency, the President, to appoint Ministers with responsibility for any department within the Government. Further, by Executive authority vested in him under Article 99 (1), His Excellency is authorised to name the Ministries which shall constitute the Government. A reading of Article 99(1) clearly states that it is only His Excellency who can name the Ministries of his Government. Hence, his naming of the Ministry of Social Protection, Ministry of Social Cohesion and the Ministry of Citizenship is the sole reserve of the President and stands outside the scope of what this motion insidiously seeks to achieve.

In essence, the motion constitutes a veiled attack on his office and we will not be part of any process which is designed to undermine the authority of the President in the execution of the functions of his office. The records will show that, with the introduction of the Labour Act Cap. 98:01 and 19:42, a Department of Labour was established and so renamed until today.

[**Mr. Seeraj:** Good point.] You better learn the facts. This is not rice and paddy. At least from 1992-2015, there had been in existence a combined Ministry which executed the functions of labour and that combined Ministry was the Ministry of Labour, Human Services and Social Security, which was headed at different times by Dr. Henry Jeffery, Dr. Dale Bisnauth, Mr. Manzoor Nadir and Dr. N.K. Gopaul. [**Mr. Nandlall:** Do you hear how many doctors there are?] That is why they cannot cure your illness.

In 2015, the APNU/AFC Government continued with the combined Ministry in the form of the Ministry of Social Protection, which in no way has affected the existence or the execution of the Department of Labour or the labour function of Government. The new direction of the Ministry is in keeping with the outlook of the International Labour Organization, which, at a 104th session in 2015, stated and I quote,

“In the International Labour Organisation on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation Social Protection comprises of two pillars, social security and labour protection”

8.32 p.m.

These are the same two pillars on which the Mission and functions of the Ministry rest, thereby justifying the name change to the Ministry of Social Protection.

The change has not, in any way, altered and/or taken away from the authority of the Department of Labour to efficiently and effectively carry out its mandate in keeping with its Mission, which is:

“to contribute to the economic and social development of Guyana by executing appropriate policies and programmes that contribute to maintaining a stable industrial relations climate;

enhance the safety and health of workers by ensuring that working conditions are improved in workplaces;

develop a social compact aimed at increasing the productivity and competitiveness of enterprises in the production and service sectors; and

provide various services to employers, trade unions and employees.

Inherent in the Mission is the regulation of the relationship between employers and employees' trade unions.”

The labour administration services of the Ministry of Social Protection, within the wider framework of the National Decent Work Agenda, has undertaken a number of strategies aimed at the promotion of decent work throughout the country and at the improvement, growth and protection of the rights of citizens.

Labour administration services have been enhanced and several achievements have been realised over the past three years. These include: the Decent Work Country Programme for Guyana which covers a five-year period - from 2017 to 2021. The Decent Work Country Programme is a tool that could help to ensure integration of economics, social and environmental interests through a continuous process of social dialogue as it integrates concrete actions that would foster social cohesion in Guyana.

Transitioning from informal economy to formal economy with assistance from the International Labour Organization (ILO) - This guideline has been developed for labour administration and labour officers to promote and implement the extension of labour administration services to the informal economy in Guyana. This is a direct response to the recognition of the deficit in decent work that exists within the informal economy. This is undertaken within the wider framework of the National Decent Work Agenda and strategies aimed at the development and protection of the rights of all citizens.

I want to now call my Colleague, the Hon. Member Komal Chand's, attention for him to listen to some of the achievements under the Ministry of Social Protection. A Draft National Child Labour Policy, which aims to eliminate that scourge, was prepared through a consultative process. Amendments to labour laws – the Department has commenced the process of amending several labour legislation, namely, the Termination of Employment and Severance Pay Act 1997, the Holidays with Pay Act 1995 and Revision of the Occupational, Safety and Health Act 1997.

There has been acceleration in the revitalisation, growth and expansion of cooperative societies, especially the regional unions, in all administrative regions.

The Department has been registering groups that are Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) beneficiaries. A National Policy on Occupational Safety and Health has been developed in collaboration with social partners and key stakeholders.

The National Advisory Council on Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) was resuscitated after being dormant for a number of years. The Council has also resuscitated the Annual Awards Scheme and has been advising the Minister on OSH matters.

In addition to that, the strength of the Department of Labour has been enhanced with the addition of 11 officers. The services have been de-centralised in Regions 3, 5 and 10, while there is a continuous process to further de-centralise to cater for the needs of employees and employers in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9.

The Labour Department has been able to improve the relationship between employees and employers through interventions, such as increased work site visits, to resolve labour matters and ensure compliance with labour practices. Statistics have shown that the annual number of work stoppages was alarmingly high, reaching as many as 400 in some years. However, between 2015 and 2017, the annual number of strikes declined by 45%. Further, during the first quarter of the years 2014 to 2017, the number of strikes was 55. However, our statistics have revealed that, for the same period in 2018, that is January to March, the number of strikes has been significantly reduced by 84%. This is the manifestation of the excellent work done by the Ministry of Social Protection, in general, and the Labour Department, in particular.

We are fulfilling our mandate, emanating from the highest political level and within the laws, to maintain a stable industrial relations climate.

There was an improvement in the Minimum Wages Order which effected an increase in private sector minimum wage from \$202 to \$255 per hour. Of special note is the resolution of the outstanding differences which existed between the management of the Bauxite Company of Guyana , Inc., RUSAL and the Guyana Bauxite and General Workers Union (GBGWU).

The relation between the parties has improved to the extent that the Ministry was able to convince RUSAL to sign unto a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), proposed by the Government, to pay all weekend overtime earnings free of income tax. Further, the Ministry successfully executed a poll which conclusively proved that the GBGWU is the majority-recognised union.

The Ministry also created an enabling environment and brought the parties to the bargaining table and set the framework for a new comprehensive and collective labour agreement between them. The Labour Department must also be lauded for these key achievements and the high level of commitment to enhancing the rights of workers.

I wish all Hon. Members of this House to note that a simple... [Ms. Teixeira: *[Inaudible]* General Secretary?] Is it bothering you? You would not reach that stage. You have to stay where you are. You cannot reach to the stage of General Secretary. I wish all Hon. Members of this House to note that a simple name modification has in no way impeded the work of the Department of Labour. We still have a Minister specifically designated to handle all labour matters. Therefore, this motion that has been brought by the Opposition to this House is baseless since it is just a matter of name modification in the Ministry only.

Evidence has shown that there is a clear nexus between social protection, quality job creation and sustainable economic growth. This is perfectly laid out in the ILO Social Protection Floor Recommendation 2012, No. 202. Sit, listen and learn. [Ms. Teixeira: Do you think this is a classroom?] Yes, for you. It identifies social security as an important tool to prevent and reduce poverty, inequality, social exclusion and social insecurity to promote equal opportunity and gender and racial equality and to support the transition from informal to formal employment.

There is particularly strong emphasis on the coordination of social protection policies with the promotion of productive economic activities and formal employment. Policies that could be conducive to these purposes include Government-quadded provisions, labour inspection, labour market policies and the promotion of education, vocational training, productive skills and employability. So, labour and social protection go hand in hand.

The ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalization 2008 reaffirms the four equally important strategic objectives through which the Decent Work Agenda is expressed, namely the

promotion of productive employment; the development of social protection; the promotion of social dialogue and tripartism and the realisation of the fundamental principles and rights at work. These four strategic objectives are inseparable, inter-related and mutually supportive and their promotion is part of an ILO global and integrated strategy for decent work.

Furthermore, such a normative approach is usually routed in well-known international instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966.

8.47 p.m.

This Coalition Government is cognisant of the benefits of incorporating the Department of Labour within the Ministry of Social Protection and the significance of the interconnection between these two vast areas that contribute to the human development. We would not lose sight of our vision to move this nation forward by the continued unsubstantiated claims by the Opposition Members of this House.

Sir, this motion, as presented by the Hon. Gillian Burton-Persaud, cannot be supported by this Government as we believe it lacks integrity and cannot withstand the rigours of good governance. I, therefore, urge the Hon. Members on the other side to withdraw this motion and let good governance prevail.

I thank you.

Ms. Burton-Persaud (replying): In my response, I would like to say that I heard the Hon. Minister of Social Protection, in her opening comments, state that the motion is filled with political mischief, it lacks truth and it is completely distorted. I listened to those words and comments and I would like to remind the Hon. Minister that this motion, which stands in my name, comes on behalf of the workers and the workers' representative of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana.

I would like to say that, as I listened to the Hon. Minister's presentation, it was filled with political drama, grand standing and was a great attempt to pussyfoot around the real issue in the motion. The call by the unions for the reinstatement of the Ministry of Labour is stated as unwarranted. I want to remind the Hon. Minister that the workers of Guyana, thousands of them,

are listening, and that their call for the reestablishment of their ministry is being labelled as unwarranted.

The Hon. Minister stated that, in the past, there was always a Department of Labour. I want to remind the Hon. Minister, yes, there was always a Department of Labour, but, as against today's situation, those responsibilities and that of the Minister were gazetted. I am yet to have the Hon. Minister point me to where, in the *Official Gazette*, are the responsibilities and functions of the Ministry of Social Protection and the Department of Labour, as it is now diminished to.

The Hon. Minister has stated that labour relations have improved significantly, but I want to state here that I am overburdened daily with the number of issues that come to me as it relates to labour and that, to date, many of them remain unresolved. The Hon. Minister also stated that it is only His Excellency who could name the ministries, but I want to remind the Hon. Minister that His Excellency is surrounded by many advisers who should advise him accordingly.

The Hon. Minister of Social Protection announced the various labour policies, but as I listened to them, they are like back in time Concheros. There is nothing new I am hearing. It is all what has been there some time before. There is nothing forthcoming, proactive and projected where labour is concerned.

The decline of the industrial actions, Hon. Minister, is nothing to shout about because the lack of industrial actions is a manifestation of the lack of workers who have been terminated in today's work environment; so, there are no workers to do so. It is a manifestation of a dying labour sector.

The Hon. Africo Selman did allude to the expanded role of the Department of Labour and, as she stated, she found it hard to understand why the Government would want to demote a ministry of labour. But when you listened to the comments from the Hon. Minister and some of the heckles that we heard from the other side of the House, it leaves us not wanting to wonder why that Ministry has been demoted to a department. The Hon. Komal Chand spoke to the fact that there were no labour policies to advance workers' rights in the last three years.

Unlike the Hon. Minister, I have worked actively in the field of labour and so I am fully aware of how workers and labour leaders feel at this point in time. As I seek to echo their sentiments in

the way in which they feel disrespected and disregarded at this point in time, I cannot help but notice, as I looked on the other side of the House and I saw the Minister of Social Protection speak to this motion, that the Minister under whom the responsibility of labour falls is very silent and has not risen to speak on this motion. That, in itself, tells me that the Hon. Minister is there for window-dressing and because he has been so muzzled, he is not allowed to defend the very Labour Department for which he has responsibility.

The motion is here before us and, despite all that would have been said, despite all the grandstanding and all the shunning of the comments, the interjections, the pleas and cries from this side of the House on behalf of the workers, this motion was put on a very important day, workers day, Labour Day, 1st May, 2018 and I would still hope that the Hon. Members on that side of the House would find it relevant and important enough to support this motion. This motion is not the Opposition's motion in context. It is a motion that we presented on behalf of the workers and labour movement of Guyana.

Thank you.

Question put.

Mr. Speaker: The ayes have it.

Ms. Teixeira: Division.

Mr. Speaker: A division is called.

Division bell rang.

The Assembly divided, Ayes 25, Noes 33, as follows:

Ayes

Mr. Bharrat

Ms. Veerasammy

Mr. Gill

Mr. Anamayah

Mr. Charlie

Mr. Damon

Dr. Mahadeo

Mr. Chand

Mr. Neendkumar

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks

Mr. G. Persaud

Mr. Mustapha

Dr. Ramsaran

Ms. Burton-Persaud

Mr. Hamilton

Dr. Persaud

Mr. Seeraj

Bishop Edghill

Mr. Lumumba

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai

Dr. Anthony

Ms. Manickchand

Mr. Nandlall

Ms. Teixeira

Mr. Rohee

Noes

Mr. Rutherford

Mr. Rajkumar

Mr. C Persaud

Mr. Figueira

Mr. Carrington

Mr. Allen

Mr. Adams

Ms. Bancroft

Ms. Wade

Ms. Patterson

Ms. Henry

Ms. Charles-Broomes

Dr. Cummings

Mr. Sharma

Ms. Garrido-Lowe

Ms. Ferguson

Ms. Hastings-Williams

Mr. Holder

Mr. Gaskin

Ms. Hughes

Mr. Patterson

Ms. Lawrence

Mr. Trotman

Mr. Jordan

Dr. Norton

Mr. Bulkan

Dr. Roopnaraine

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon

Ms. Ally

Mr. Williams

Mr. Ramjattan

Mr. Greenidge

Mr. Nagamootoo

Motion negatived.

9.02 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. I shall ask the Prime Minister to move the adjournment.

First-Vice President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: A pleasure, Sir. Perhaps belatedly, I would like to be associated with the sentiments expressing happy birthday felicitations to my dear friend and colleague, Gail Teixeira.

In saying that, it is my duty to move the adjournment of this House until tomorrow, Friday, 20th July, 2018 at 2:00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: This House stands adjourned until tomorrow. I hope Hon. Members would allow the Speaker to complete what he should respectfully say to the House before Members demonstrate the haste to leave this place. We are leaving very early tonight, so let us take the time. This House stands adjourned until tomorrow, Friday, 20th July, 2018.

Let me have the last word in wishing Ms. Teixeira a happy birthday for the rest of the night.

Adjourned accordingly at 9.07 p.m.