

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

97TH Sitting

Thursday, 18TH October, 2018

The Assembly convened at 2.07 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Welcome

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I welcome you all back to the Assembly at this the first Sitting after our recess. I trust that all Hon. Members had an enjoyable holiday and we all feel ourselves ready to start the business for which we are gathered here in this National Assembly. I say welcome back to all Hon. Members.

Address by His Excellency the President

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

Leave granted to Hon. Members

Mr. Speaker: Leave from today's Sitting has been granted to the Hon. Raphael G.C Trotman, Hon. Winston G. Felix, Hon. Ms. Africo Selman and the Hon. Mr. Cornel Damon. Thank you.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Report and Papers were laid:

- (i) Report of the Auditor General to the National Assembly on the Public Accounts of Guyana and on the Accounts of Ministries, Departments and Regions for the fiscal year ended 31st December, 2017.

2019 Budget Proposals of Constitutional Agencies

- (i) Parliament Office – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$1,845,416,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.
- (ii) Office of the Auditor General – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$894,241,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.
- (iii) Public and Police Service Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$155,596,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.
- (iv) Teaching Service Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$113,362,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.
- (v) Guyana Elections Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$6,368,100,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.
- (vi) Supreme Court of Judicature – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$2,801,373,767 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.
- (vii) Chamber of the Director of Public Prosecution – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$219,824,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.
- (viii) Office of the Ombudsman – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$74,223,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.
- (ix) Public Service Appellate Tribunal – Current Estimate totalling \$62,828,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.
- (x) Ethnic Relations Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$278,163,678 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.
- (xi) Judicial Service Commission – Current Estimate totalling \$10,020,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.

- (xii) Indigenous People's Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$30,743,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.
- (xiii) Human Rights Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$47,378,000 for the period 31st December, 2019.
- (xiv) Rights of the Child Commission – Current Estimate totalling \$47,469,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.
- (xv) Women and Gender Equality Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$45,292,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.
- (xvi) Public Procurement Commission – Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$276,775,000 for the period ending 31st December, 2019.
- (xvii) In accordance with section 3B(2) of the Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Act 2015 – Act No. 4 of 2015, present the recommendations and comments of the Minister of Finance on the Annual Budget Proposals of Constitutional Agencies for 2019.

[Speaker of the National Assembly]

- (i) Annual Report of the National Insurance Scheme for the year 2015.
- (ii) Financing Agreement Credit No. 6286-GY dated July 27, 2018 between the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and the International Development Association (IDA) for SDR 24,400,000.00 for the purpose of providing financing in support of the First Programmatic Financial and Fiscal Stability Development Policy Program.
- (iii) Advance Agreement No. V2160 dated July 18, 2018 between the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and the International Development Association (IDA) for US\$1,600,000.00 for the purpose of facilitating the preparation of the proposed Guyana Oil and Gas Capacity Building Project designed to enhance legal and institutional frameworks and strengthen the capacity of key institutions to manage the oil and gas sector in Guyana.
- (iv) Financial Paper No. 3/2018 – Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling \$7,584,274,488 for the period 2018-01-01 to 2018-12-31.

The Minister of Finance named 31st October, 2018 as the date for consideration of the financial paper.

- (v) Framework Agreement No. 09/01/1440/H dated September 1, 2018 corresponds to the Agency Agreement No. 19/09/18/G between the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) for an amount of US\$20,000,000.00 for the purpose of financing the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) Power Utility Programme. The Framework Agreement, which constitutes an integral part of the Agency Agreement as detailed below, sets out the parties' common understanding with regard to the implementation of the Project. In keeping with the Framework Agreement, the IDB has agreed to participate in the financing of certain Assets pertaining to the Project through the Instalment Sale Financing Facility.

- (vi) Agency Agreement No. 19/09/18/G dated September 19, 2018 between the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) is for an amount of US\$20,000,000.00 to finance the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) Power Utility Programme. Under this Agreement, the IDB financing will facilitate among others: (1) the rehabilitation of 153 km of GPL's medium voltage and low voltage network and 6,941 smart meters, including transformers, service lines and distribution boxes; (2) the Electronic Power Control (EPC) works related to the 69 kV and 13.8 kV substations at Kingston and Vreed-en-Hoop, respectively. [*Minister of Finance*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly will now take a brief suspension to receive His Excellency.

Sitting suspended at 2.21 p.m.

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

Sitting resumed at 2.46 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Your Excellency, on behalf of the Members of the National Assembly and on behalf of our citizenry and well-wishers of Guyana here assembled, I welcome Your Excellency to today's 97th Sitting of the National Assembly of the Eleventh Parliament.

2.47 p.m.

Under article 67 of the Constitution, Your Excellency may, at any time, attend and address the National Assembly. Your Excellency has expressed a desire to address the National Assembly and it is my honour and privilege as Speaker of the National Assembly to invite Your Excellency to address the Assembly. *[Applause]*

**ADDRESS BY HIS EXCELLENCY THE PRESIDENT OF THE COOPERATIVE
REPUBLIC OF GUYANA GOVERNMENT'S DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMME**

His Excellency the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana [Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Moses V. Nagamootoo, First Vice-President and Prime Minister; Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, Leader of the Opposition; Hon. Dr. Barton U.A. Scotland, Speaker of the National Assembly; Members of the Government, Members of the National Assembly, members of the Diplomatic Corps, distinguished guests, members of the media, ladies and gentlemen.

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

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

I do so today. Presidential Addresses are not ceremonial events. They report on the state of the nation and the intentions of the Government. They attest to the recognition of this Assembly as a supreme organ of democratic power.

Presidential Addresses promote understanding between the Executive and the Legislative branches by enunciating Government's strategic vision, prioritising policies and explaining the main elements of the legislative agenda. They provide opportunities, also, to report to the Assembly and the nation on matters of national importance.

I restate my Government's vision for Guyana's development and the means through which we shall achieve our objective.

The State's principal objective is to secure the 'good life' for all. The 'good life' entails providing every citizen with opportunities to be the best that they can be. The 'good life' is

about securing sustained economic prosperity, ensuring citizens' access to quality public services and promoting social cohesion.

The 'good life' involves eliminating extreme poverty and removing social, ethnic and geographic inequalities. The ultimate indicators of the 'good life' are happy communities, happy households and happy people.

Your Government has chosen a 'green' pathway to guide it towards achieving the 'good life'. The economy, for too long, has been dependent on the production and export of primary commodities, all of which are vulnerable to exogenous market shocks and natural hazards.

A 'green' pathway allows us to benefit from our country's abundant natural resources. A 'green' development trajectory will ensure a diversified and resilient economy, promote sustainable development, social cohesion and good governance and protect the environment while generating wealth and employment.

The Green State Development Strategy (GSDS) is our roadmap for the transition towards the 'good' life. The Strategy is being crystallized and will be tabled and debated in the National Assembly.

The social programme

The provision of social services – education, health, housing, sanitation and water – is key to ensuring happy households and happy communities.

Your Government, in pursuit of the good life, will continue to eliminate the endemic problems within these sectors.

Public education

We inherited, in May 2015, a crisis in the public primary and secondary education system with over half of our students failing the National Grade Six Examinations.

Your Government is creating a 21st century nation. Our educational policy aims at providing students with the knowledge, skills and values to become productive citizens in the economy of the future.

Your Government has prioritised educational access, attendance and achievement. The Public Education Transport Service (PETS), popularly known as the 3 B's Initiative, was born out of

the recognition that many parents found it costly to send their children to school. The Service has distributed 1,254 bicycles, 28 buses and nine boats. The Service is saving parents money and, more importantly, it is getting our children to school without expending a dollar from the Government's coffers.

We are taking steps to improve the performance of all learners. A menu of measures to enhance the quality of education is being implemented. Some of these measures that have yielded the most success, especially at the primary level, include teacher training, the provision of resources and targeted interventions.

Over 3500 primary school teachers have been equipped with the necessary pedagogical skills for quality delivery of the curriculum. The Ministry of Education, recognising that the use of resources is integral to enhancing achievement of learners, has procured resources for all primary schools. These resources include textbooks, musical instruments, micro-science kits, and toolkits for Mathematics, Literacy and Social Studies.

Targeted interventions, especially in numeracy and literacy, have resulted in improved performance in the National Grade Six Assessment Examination. The percentage passes in English moved from 42%, in 2016, to 60% in 2018; Mathematics moved from 14%, in 2016, to 38% in 2018; and Science from 28% to 46%.

Public health

Guyana's public health system, in the past, was plagued by inadequate infrastructure, high maternal mortality rates, weak disease prevention measures, poor emergency health response and constraints to access to health services, particularly for hinterland residents.

Your Government has continued, over the past year, to address these deficiencies. Health infrastructure is being improved. A river ambulance was provided recently for Orealla Village to transport and provide medical interventions for pregnant mothers and other emergency cases en route to the nearest health facility.

Access to public health services is being improved. Maternity Waiting Homes have been commissioned to make accommodation for high-risk pregnant mothers, particularly those from the hinterland regions. We will upgrade, next year, the Maternity Unit of the New Amsterdam Hospital in order to improve maternal services further.

The Ministry of Public Health is in the process of mapping the proximity of health facilities to communities to ensure that, as far as possible, a health facility is located within five kilometers of every community. Plans are on stream to upgrade health centres to polyclinics, especially in large catchment areas.

Preventative treatment will be intensified. A programme for the screening and treatment of eye diseases in children and providing them with low-cost spectacles is one of the many interventions that will be undertaken.

The 2018 work programme for sanitation management includes promotion of effective management of solid waste across communities. The Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill Site has been upgraded to include a leachate treatment facility.

The access road at Rose Hall to the landfill facility is 40% completed. Designs for sanitary landfill sites in Bartica, Lethem and Mahdia will be completed in November this year.

We propose, in 2019, to develop a landfill facility at Bel Vue in East Berbice-Corentyne to allow for the closure of the Esplanade dumpsite in the same year.

Housing

Many new housing areas were bedeviled by low levels of occupancy and abysmal infrastructure. Poor solid waste management created insanitary conditions.

Your Government will continue to expand access to housing and improve infrastructure within housing areas. The housing solutions model has seen the commencement, over the past year, of 250 housing units – of which 163 were completed. Development works have been carried out in both new and existing housing areas, including in Amelia's Ward, Farm, Herstelling, No. 76 Village, Perseverance, Zeeburg and Zeelugt.

Roads have been improved in Perseverance, La Parfaite Harmonie, Westminster and Amelia's Ward. Electrification services were expanded to Zeelugt, Covent Garden, Peter's Hall, Barnwell, Eccles and Hope.

A spatial development plan has been completed for Sophia and similar ones will be undertaken for Bartica, Lethem, Mabaruma and for the lower East Bank Demerara.

The Ministry of Communities proposes to undertake infrastructural works, in 2019, in 9 new housing areas, the upgrading of three recreational areas, the consolidation of 18 existing areas,

the installation of electricity in eight communities and the completion of 450 housing units. It will offer full-house subsidies in the Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo Region.

Water

Your Government's programme in the water sector, for 2018, was aimed at increasing access to safe water and reducing the disparity in service between the coastland and hinterland. An estimated 7,903 households with more than 31,600 persons have benefitted from access to potable water for the first time. Work is being advanced on the construction of three new water treatment plants at Uitvlugt, Diamond and Sheet Anchor to provide improved access to potable water for more than 50,000 persons – a project that will be completed in 2019.

A cooperation agreement with the Federative Republic of Brazil is witnessing the installation of eight new wells to provide potable water to more than 4,800 persons in eight indigenous communities in Shea, Maruranau, Awaruwaunau, Bashaidrun, Achiwuib, Karaudarnau, Aishalton and Churikadnau.

The Ministry of Natural Resources, in collaboration with the residents of Nappi, Haiowa and Parishara and other villages in the Rupununi and a local contractor constructed one of the first water catchment areas planned for that Region.

The catchment area is approximately 3 kilometers in length and the dam is 800 meters and is estimated to hold approximately 3 million cubic meters of water at full capacity.

This Water Catchment Area will serve as a model to demonstrate how employing long-term solutions to water management can help communities to become more resilient to the effects of prolonged drought and El Niño spells and climate change.

Social protection

Your Government will continue to bring relief to senior citizens. It has already increased monthly old-age pensions by 48.6% from \$13,125 to \$19,500. It has also increased public assistance by 35.5% from \$5,900 to \$8,000. One hundred and fourteen persons with disabilities are currently being trained in computer and other skills.

The Central Recruitment and Management Agency, since January 2017, has found jobs for a total of 1,869 job-seekers.

3.02 p.m.

The Ministry of Social Protection, in 2019, will place emphasis on enhancing youth employment, the development of a national sexual harassment policy, reducing violence in schools and promoting the welfare for the aged.

Economic growth is necessary to sustain and improve the delivery of social services. Budget 2019, which will be tabled in National Assembly next month, is expected to be based on the theme of *Transformation for Sustainable Development and Green Growth Towards Achieving the Good Life*.

This budget will be presented in a less than favourable international economic environment. Global economic growth has been revised downwards due, largely, to the negative impact of trade tensions and higher oil prices.

Guyana's economy has not been immune to these exogenous influences. The threat of sanctions against RUSAL, a major multinational in Guyana, has created uncertainty in the bauxite sector. The spike in oil prices has impacted adversely on the production costs and on output in key sectors of our economy.

The economy, despite these risks, but thanks to Government's prudent management, is expected to enjoy moderate growth this year.

Your Government will continue to place emphasis on building greater economic resilience through economic diversification, strengthening the traditional sectors and by catalysing and building capacity in new and emerging sectors such as agro-processing, information communications technology and ecotourism.

Visitor arrivals this year, as at August, showed a 15.23 per cent increase over the corresponding period for 2017, adding an estimated US\$94 million to our economy for the first eight months of this year.

Agriculture is still a mainstay of our economy, constituting 16.6 per cent of our gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017. It is the largest employer, accounting for 17.8 per cent of our labour force.

Your Government will continue to build a more resilient agricultural sector through various measures, including improved drainage and irrigation, the introduction of high-yield crop varieties and encouraging integrated pest management.

We intend to reduce crop losses and damage due to flooding by increasing the coastland's drainage coefficient from 1.5 inches to 3.5 inches per 24-hour period, within the next three years.

The Ministry of Agriculture, this year, installed drainage pumps at Three Friends, Buxton, Lusignan, Enmore and Friendship-Vigilance. New pumping stations will be established at Hampton Court, Devonshire Castle, Den Amstel, Hope, Nooten Zuil, Mora Point, Trafalgar and Rose Hall Town, in 2019, serving an additional 50,000 acres of land.

The Guyana Rice Development Board, this year, released 15 new high-yielding varieties of rice with the potential of yielding an average of between 7 and 8.5 metric tons of rice per hectare or 45 to 55 bags per acre. New high-yielding, salt-tolerant and aromatic rice lines will be released in 2019.

Your Government, through agro-processing, is promoting increased agricultural output, reducing crops losses, stimulating village enterprises, economies and generating employment.

The Regional Agricultural and Commercial Exhibitions (RACEs) demonstrate the positive impact of this policy. Exhibitions showcase the industry of hundreds of small agro-processors and farmers engaged in producing and packaging a wide variety of products, including cashew nuts, cassareep, cassava bread and flours, cereals, chocolate sticks, coconut water, coconut oil, coffee, condiments, confectionary, copra, crab oil, dried peppers, essence, farine, fruit juices, honey, jams, jellies, pickles, peanut-butter and many other goods.

Your Government inherited a sugar industry which was in dangerous decline. Unsustainable and prohibitive production costs, declining production and unsound investments had placed the industry in a perilous state.

Your Government recognises the importance of the sugar industry. We are restructuring the industry. The measures which have been taken, including estate consolidation and workforce downsizing, were necessary to save the industry. We want to see a sustainable and viable industry – one that will contribute to national development and to the workers' well-being.

The Guyana Sugar Corporation has installed a board which met representatives of the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL). A plan is being developed between them to boost production in the remaining East Berbice, West Berbice and West Demerara

estates. We have begun to provide training to sugar workers to become self-employed in various fields.

Sugar workers have not been abandoned to an uncertain future. The divestment of some of the sugar estates, which is expected to occur as early as the first half of 2019, will see some of the displaced workers being afforded the opportunity to regain employment.

We will continue to work diligently to ensure that displaced workers are provided with opportunities to participate actively in other sectors of the economy, such as the production and processing of rice and other crops, livestock, fisheries, construction, manufacturing, services and mining.

Youth unemployment, when my Government assumed office, was pervasive and persistent. A Caribbean Development Bank study, dated May 2015 and entitled, *Youth are the Future: The Implications of Youth Employment for Sustainable Employment in the Caribbean*, estimated Guyana's youth unemployment rate at 40 per cent.

A recent labour force survey found that 35.2 per cent of our young people, aged between 15 and 24 years, were not in education, not in employment and not in training.

Your Government has launched a number of initiatives aimed at stimulating employment, including youth employment, through the promotion of entrepreneurship, self-employment and skills training.

The Hinterland Employment Youth Service (HEYS) provides Indigenous youth with opportunities to acquire income-earning skills. A total of 3,941 youths, between the ages of 18 and 35, benefit from this programme which has created 2,051 businesses over the past two years.

Your Government has provided community skills training in electrical installation, food preparation, information technology, leather craft, plumbing, poultry-rearing and other skills to our youth.

The Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training Programme (YEST), since September 2017, has trained an additional 721 youths attached to the Sophia Training Centre, the Kurukuru Training Centre and the Vryman's Erven Training Centre. These programmes complement the other technical and vocational training programmes being provided by Government and which also benefit young persons.

Small and medium-scaled Enterprises (SMEs) are key to sustaining growth and generating employment, particularly for young people. Your Government will continue to promote initiatives aimed at strengthening the SME sector in order to stimulate entrepreneurship and promote job creation.

Your Government will continue to remove constraints to SME development and, in particular, access to government procurement, access to finance and access to business registration. We will activate the 20 per cent minimum quota for small businesses within public procurement.

Cabinet has approved the Small Business Procurement Programme which will see mandatory set-asides for approved small businesses and set-asides for subcontracting. All Government agencies are expected to participate in the programme. Your Government is proud of its efforts in providing access to finance for small businesses.

The Small Business Bureau has granted 45 loans valued at US\$618,000 and given out 158 grants valued at US\$237,000 through which more than 500 new jobs were expected to be created.

- The Linden Enterprise Network (LEN), the Micro and Small-Enterprise Development (MSED) project and the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) have together provided \$1.2 billion in grants and loans to more than 3,000 entrepreneurs, including first-time business start-ups.
- The Sustainable Livelihoods and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) initiative is helping to support sustainable economic ventures which boost household incomes, especially for women. The initiative has funded 49 projects valued at \$230 million and has benefited 530 households.
- The Women of Worth (WOW) and the People of Worth Entrepreneurial Resources initiatives have disbursed \$8.8 million in loans to single women, single males and couples to engage in economic ventures.
- The Ministry of Business, in 2018, established three additional business registration hubs at Lethem, Mahdia and Rose Hall Town. These hubs allow businesses in remote areas to be registered without the principals having to travel to some distant administrative centre. Seven small business enterprises help desks were set up in six regions across Guyana.

- The Hinterland Employment Youth Service (HEYS) programme will continue in 2019. The programme provides Indigenous youths with opportunities to acquire income earning skills. A total of 3,941 youths, between the ages of 18 and 35, from 215 Indigenous communities and villages have benefited from this programme over the past two years.

Your Government will continue to attract and facilitate increased investment and trade. The Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest), in the first half of 2018, facilitated 57 projects with a proposed investment value of \$10.4 billion which were expected to create 696 jobs.

The Guyana Trade and Investment Exhibition, held only last month, which saw the participation of 113 buyers and 56 exhibitors, provided a platform for local export-ready firms to engage international buyers.

Your Government is developing the capability to effectively manage the oil and gas sector. We established, on the 1st August 2018, a Department of Energy to ensure that a sound organisational, administrative, legislative and regulatory framework would be put in place for the management of the sector in accordance with international best practices. The ‘Department’, whose remit includes renewable energy, has commenced its work.

Oil production is expected to begin in 2020 and will be the most transformative economic development in our recent history. Your Government is taking steps to ensure that the revenues which accrue from the sector will not be squandered but, instead, will be invested strategically in building human and institutional capacity, addressing our infrastructural deficit and providing economic security for future generations.

Your Government is committed to transparency in the management of this sector. We have made public the petroleum contracts signed between investors and the Government of Guyana.

Work is continuing, also, on the Petroleum Commission Bill which has been redrafted and forwarded to the Department of Energy for review. Other legislation which the Department of Energy is reviewing includes amendments to the Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Act and regulations.

Your Government will ensure that oil revenues are prudently managed for the present and future generations, in accordance, with our objective of securing the good life for all. We shall do this through a Natural Resources Fund which will be established before first oil in 2020.

Priority will be given to investments in human capital, particularly our public education system and key catalytic infrastructural projects that improve productivity and bridge the divide between the coastland and hinterland.

3.17 p.m.

We laid a Green Paper on Natural Resources Fund, before this Assembly, in August. This action is consistent with our conviction that the people should fully understand the implications of the fund and that they will be involved in the discussions concerning its establishment and management.

The legislation, as it stands, meets 21 of the 24 Santiago Principles with the other three principles being met once the legislation comes into force. It is being reviewed by Cabinet and the revised legislation will be laid in the National Assembly next month. This legislation is comprehensive and will ensure that revenues from petroleum are managed in a transparent and accountable manner.

We have already begun to build the capacity of key agencies concerned with management of the Natural Resources Fund and have developed an implementation plan to ensure that the fund is fully operational in 2019 prior to first oil.

The mining sector is being aligned to the objectives of Guyana's Green State Development Strategy. A 10-year strategic plan for the sustainable development of mineral resources of Guyana is being drafted and is expected to lead to a National Minerals Sector Policy Framework (NMSPF) and a National Minerals Sector Action Plan.

Your Government is also improving forestry management. A new Code of Practice and Forest Regulations were introduced in the National Assembly in May this year and have enhanced the governance architecture of the forestry sector. They have allowed Guyana to move closer towards a Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with the European Union under the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (EU-FLEGT) programme. A National Log Export Policy has been drafted and approved by Cabinet. Implementation is envisaged for 2019, after review and sector sensitisation.

Your Government took steps to protect the local timber industry. The new import requirements for the importation of pine lumber have led to a 78.4 per cent reduction in pine lumber imports and have increased opportunities for local saw millers and loggers.

The Constitution of Guyana is supreme. Your Government has re-established and made appointments to institutions decreed by the Constitution. The Ombudsman, Police Complaints Authority, Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission, the Public Service Appellate Tribunal and Police, Public and Teaching Service Commissions have been appointed.

Your Government is empowering Indigenous peoples to better manage their communities. Village Council elections were held in 116 villages, 46 satellites and 47 Community Development Councils. Toshias from all of the 215 villages, communities, satellites and Councils attended the 12th Conference of the National Toshias' Council (NTC) in July 2018.

It was at the 10th Conference of the NTC in 2016 that I made a call for the development of Village Improvement Plans which would create a roadmap for improving the delivery of public services in Indigenous communities. I am happy to note that 57 villages from the Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo have completed their plans.

Presidential Grants have been used to strengthen Indigenous village economies and finance community projects including rearing cattle and small ruminants, furniture-manufacturing and sawmilling.

Your Government is expanding ICT access across the country. The National Data Management Authority (NDMA) currently provides internet connectivity for 175 primary schools, 108 secondary schools and 34 tertiary, technical and vocational institutions. The digital divide is being closed.

Free internet access is being provided to more than 11,000 users in remote, underdeveloped and hinterland communities through 130 ICT hubs and 79 Public Internet Access Points. One hundred and sixteen Government agencies and Ministries have been connected to the eGovernment network.

The Ministry of Public Telecommunications, next year, will implement a US\$37.6 million National Broadband Project which will see improvements and additions to online Government services, including admissions to nursery and primary schools, old-age pension and public assistance and applications for birth and death certificates. An additional 20 hinterland communities, also, will be connected to the internet.

Your Government has established a constellation of public broadcasting services at Aishalton, Bartica, Lethem, Mahdia, Mabaruma and Orealla which, along with Radio Paiwomak, is

according citizens the right to information and the right to be heard. Public broadcasting services can be used to provide critical information, including warnings and alerts of the threat, or the occurrence, of natural disasters or emergencies.

Public broadcasting services can be used to summon help and relief. They can be utilised to provide advisories which can save lives and protect citizens from harm.

Your Government is proud to have restored local democracy on 18th March 2016 after a twenty-two-year hiatus. Those historic Local Government Elections have created a democratic dividend. Municipalities, including the newly-created towns Bartica, Lethem, Mabaruma and, more recently, Mahdia and Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) are being energised and revitalised. Residents are taking a greater interest in the well-being and development of their communities.

The Ministry of Communities is supporting the work of local democratic organs. The 2018 subvention programme is fully disbursed in accordance with the Fiscal Transfers Act. The local democratic organs are focused on completing their respective programmes by year's end 2018.

Local democracy is a means of citizens' empowerment. Your Government will ensure that respect is paid to local democratic organs. We will strengthen their capacity to deliver effective and efficient public services. The first National Conference of Local Democratic Organs (NCLDO), held in June 2018, was aimed at fostering cooperation and collaboration between and among local democratic organs and with regional administrations and central Government.

Government has signed a G\$26.2 million contract to execute a pilot project in New Amsterdam for the modernisation of its property assessment and valuation system. This is the first part of a national assessment that will enhance the Valuation Division's capacity to provide more effective valuation services to local democratic organs.

Local Government Elections will be held next month as due under the Constitution and will incorporate one new municipality and eight new NDCs for the first time.

The security of our citizens is paramount. Your Government is reforming the security sector to ensure safer communities and to protect investments. We do not underestimate the seriousness of the public security challenges which we face but, equally, no one should underrate our resolve to make our country safer.

The security sector has not yet fully recovered from the damage done during the period which I refer to as, 'The Troubles'. Your Government is committed, through security sector reform to restore integrity to the police force.

Security sector reform, with the support of the United Kingdom, has started. A new force directorate, established in accordance with the Constitution, is in place. A new Commissioner of Police and four Deputy Commissioners of Police have been appointed.

Police administration is being decentralised with the alignment of divisional boundaries to regional boundaries. The Commissioner and his team will be given the support to correct the abuses which have hitherto afflicted the force.

We have committed, thus far, close to G\$1.7 billion dollars for the construction, refurbishment and renovation of police stations in order to provide a comfortable working environment for policemen and policewomen, to improve services to citizens and increase crime-prevention capabilities.

The force is being retooled with equipment and vehicles, some of which are being provided by friendly governments such as the People's Republic of China.

Security sector reform extends to the management of our prisons. Our prison system has become unstable because of past failures to implement security sector reforms in a timely and comprehensive manner.

Your Government is transforming the prison system from being primarily penal institutions to one that is correctional in character. We will promote successful offender reintegration into society and rebuild public trust in the Guyana Prison Service.

Work will continue, in 2019, to improve prison management. The expansion of the Mazaruni Prison and the reconstruction of the Georgetown Prison will reduce overcrowding and improve prison safety.

Your Government will continue to ensure security and safety on both land and sea. We will launch a Commission of Inquiry into the tragic incidents which occurred, in Surinamese waters during the period 27th - 28th April 2018 and again on the 3rd May 2018, when our fisherfolk were attacked and some of them murdered.

Your Government is relieving citizens, who live outside of Georgetown, of the frustration and high costs associated with obtaining passports. The service at the Central Passport Office in Georgetown is now more people-friendly and efficient. The Department of Citizenship is decentralising the service in order to make it more accessible to persons residing outside of Georgetown. Passport offices have been established at New Amsterdam and Linden. We will establish additional offices in Anna Regina, Bartica and Lethem.

The Department of Citizenship, also, has been involved in addressing the influx of migrants from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The crisis in that country has created challenges for our small state and has led to an estimated 2,500 Venezuelan migrants seeking refuge, mainly in our frontier communities.

Your Government will provide, within its means, humanitarian assistance, including food and medical treatment and temporary settlement to these migrants. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs collaborated with the Department of Citizenship and the Ministry of Public Security on the development of new procedures whereby Venezuelan migrants, including undocumented migrants entering Guyana, would be registered and issued with a three-month permit of stay which could be further extended.

Your Government has a packed legislative agenda to bring before the National Assembly in 2019. It is beyond the scope of this address to describe fully the legislation likely to be tabled but I would like to highlight a few.

- The Public Debt Management Bill, addressing reforms of our procurement system, as well as for improved expenditure planning, management and execution of the public sector investment programmes, will be introduced to ensure improvements in Guyana's financial management.
- The Natural Resource Fund Bill will be introduced. The Bill will place the administration of the fund under the Bank of Guyana and will require parliamentary approval for withdrawals.
- The Mining Act and its regulations are being comprehensively overhauled to ensure that mining is better regulated to ensure safety, efficiency and environmental sustainability.

3.32 p.m.

The Mining (Amendment) Bill and its companion regulations will be introduced in the National Assembly in the first quarter of 2019. Amendments will also be tabled in respect of the Guyana Gold Board Act and its regulations. New regulations to reduce the use of mercury in the mining sector and to ensure better environmental practices on land and water resources will be introduced in 2019.

- The Judicial Review Bill aims at providing the courts with gatekeeping functions to distinguish between frivolous or vexatious applications.
- An Intellectual Property Rights Bill will be brought before the House to upgrade Guyana's intellectual property rights legislation.
- The Integrity Commission (Amendment) Bill will amend the schedule of declarants so as to more accurately reflect today's range of senior public officers.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been in the forefront of efforts to protect our national patrimony, to secure our vital interests and to promote international economic cooperation.

The United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres on 30th January 2018 informed the Cooperative Republic of Guyana and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela that, since significant progress had not been made toward arriving at a full agreement for the solution of the controversy between the two states, he had "chosen the International Court of Justice as the means that is now to be used for its solution."

This decision was in accordance with the view by Guyana that a judicial settlement was the best means of achieving a final and definitive settlement of the long-standing controversy.

Guyana, in accordance with this decision, filed its application with the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on the 29th March 2018, requesting the court to adjudge and declare on several issues, the foremost being that the 1899 Arbitral Award is valid and binding upon both Guyana and Venezuela.

The President of the International Court of Justice convened a meeting with Guyana and Venezuela, on 18th June 2018, for the purpose of ascertaining the views of the parties with regard to questions of procedure in the case. Venezuela, in response, issued a communiqué which indicated that it would not participate in the case, alleging that the court did not have jurisdiction.

Guyana, therefore, is in the process of preparing its Memorial on Jurisdiction to the court to be submitted on the 19th November this year. The court has established the 18th April 2019 for the submission of the Counter-Memorial by Venezuela.

Guyana, in the meantime, continues to sensitise the international community about the Secretary General's decision and the actions taken thus far by the ICJ and Guyana in so doing has obtained support for the judicial process from several international organisations.

Your Government, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has signed international cooperation agreements with a number of countries, including the People's Republic of China, Japan, the Republic of India, Republic of Korea and the Republic of Turkey. Guyana, this year, joined the International Solar Alliance.

Your Government, as you are aware, signed the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Government of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana on the Cooperation within the Framework of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative. A paved road link, between Linden and Lethem, is under active consideration as part of that initiative.

Guyana, under the Caribbean Single Market and Economy, is forging close ties and cementing stronger economic cooperation with Barbados and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago and other states of the Caribbean.

I attended the 9th Meeting of the Prime Ministerial Sub-Committee Meeting of the Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) in Bridgetown, Barbados in September 2018 and later held important discussions with Prime Minister Mia Mottley.

Prime Minister Dr. Keith Rowley of Trinidad and Tobago also came to Guyana in the same month and, together, we signed a Memorandum of Understanding for Cooperation on Energy and discussed wide-ranging areas for possible cooperation.

Mr. Speaker and Members of the National Assembly, a great deal of work lies ahead of this House in this session. You can rest assured that your Government will support the Assembly in providing oversight over the work of the executive and in the debate and passage of key pieces of our legislation agenda for 2019.

Guyanese could expect confidently that, by the end of 2019, they would be able to live in a state with more secure borders; in communities that are safer; in an economy that is more

resilient; in a society that is more cohesive; with public services that are more accessible and constitutional agencies and institutions which enjoy the confidence and respect of the public.

This is the country which will provide Guyanese with the good life. This is the society at which we aim. This is the future which we seek.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Your Excellency, on behalf of the Members of the National Assembly, the citizenry and well-wishers assembled here, I express our deep appreciation and profound gratitude to Your Excellency, for the address which Your Excellency has just delivered. Thank you.

Hon. Members, the Assembly will be in suspension for ten minutes to allow for the withdrawal of His Excellency from the chamber.

Sitting suspended at 3.39 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 3.49 p.m.

ADJOURNMENT

First Vice-President and Prime Minister [Mr. Nagamootoo]: Mr. Speaker, I move that this House be adjourned to Wednesday, 31st of October 2018 at 2.00. p.m.

Ms. Teixeira: I wish to raise two issues. One is that we have a motion before this House for A Request For Leave To Move the Adjournment of the Assembly on Definite Matter of Urgent Public Importance. We have not heard your ruling in regard to that request to you.

Secondly, there was a tradition that was started by Speaker Trotman, when Mr. Ramotar was President, that immediately after the conclusion of President Ramotar's speech, the then Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Granger, was allowed to speak. We, therefore, seek to evoke that tradition that was brought in by Speaker Trotman in the Tenth Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member for what she has said. The Hon. Prime Minister is being invited to adjourn this sitting and we will proceed in that way.

Ms. Teixeira: The first question is on a matter of a Request for Leave To Move the Adjournment of the Assembly on Definite Matters of Urgent Public Importance. Sir, we had put this motion to you and it is supposed to be reported to the House or to us, as the movers, as

to what is the position or it is by the silence that we have been denied. Is that how I should interpret it, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if this matter comes before the House in the order of matters before the House, it will be dealt with on that occasion.

Ms. Teixeira: Are you saying that we have to wait until the 31st October, 2018 to have this matter be heard? Is that what you are saying? It is because the Hon. Prime Minister has adjourned to the 31st October, 2018, not for us to go and have supper. Are you saying, Sir, that we cannot know whether the request for leave to move an adjournment motion on as definite matter of public importance regarding the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) and irregularities is not of public importance and urgency in this country today?

Mr. Speaker: I thank the Hon. Member. Hon. Members, the House stands adjourned until the 31st October, 2018.

Adjourned accordingly at 3.52 p.m.