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[OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT]

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MOTION:

Debate on the 2026 State of the Nation Address [SoNA]

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1. Prayers

The Assembly met at 10:30 a.m. in New National Assembly Building, Reginald Pye Lane, Banjul.]

[The Speaker, Hon. Fabakary Tombong Jatta, reads the prayers.]

[The Speaker, Hon. Fabakary Tombong Jatta, in Chair.]

The Assembly was called to Order.

2. Corrections and Approval of the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Tuesday, 24th March 2026

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Tuesday, 24th March 2026, is before us for consideration and adoption. Can any Honourable Member please move that the said Record of Votes and Proceedings be considered and adopted? Yes, Honourable Member for Illiassa.

HON SANKUNG DAMPHA [ILLIASSA]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I so move the motion.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member for Illiassa. Any seconder, Honourable Members? Yes, Honourable Member for Sanimentereng.

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I so second the motion.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member for Sanimentereng. It has been moved and seconded, so I now put the question.

[Question Proposed]

Honourable Members, I think we all have copies of the said Record of Votes and Proceedings. As usual, we will look through it page by page beginning with Page 1 to be followed by your comments and observations. Yes, Honourable Member for Wuli East.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Yes. Just the Motion on 'Africa Mineral', it is *"Africa Minerals Strategy Group."*

THE SPEAKER: Go ahead, Africa Minerals*… [Paused]*

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Yes, and wherever it is because it is in*… [Interrupted] …*

THE SPEAKER: Mineral Strategy, okay.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: And wherever it is*… [Interrupted] …*

THE SPEAKER: And wherever it occurs?

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Yes. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Under Motion Number 4, the second line 'Africa Mineral' the word 'Mineral' should be plural. Please, add "s". Thank you, Honourable Member for Wuli East. Any more on Page 1? All right. Honourable Members, we move to Page 2. Yes, Honourable Member for Nianija.

HON AMADOU CAMARA [NIANIJA]: Yes. On Page 3, I saw my name listed under those present, but I was absent with permission. That was the very day I left.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable, which page? Is it Page 2?

HON AMADOU CAMARA [NIANIJA]: Yes, I think. If you look at Page 3, Number 15… *[Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: All right. Okay.

HON AMADOU CAMARA [NIANIJA]: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: Just hold on until we get to Page 3.

HON AMADOU CAMARA [NIANIJA]: Ah! Okay.

THE SPEAKER: All right. Honourable Members, note it. On Page 2? All right. We can now move to Page 3. Yes, Honourable Member, you said what happened?

HON AMADOU CAMARA [NIANIJA]: Sorry, my name was listed under those present, but I was absent with permission. That was the very day I left for an official trip to Cotonou, the Republic of Benin. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Nianija, thank you very much, because it is not usual for Members to say that they were not present. His name is captured at Number 15 and should be removed from those present and listed as absent with permission, Honourable Amadou Camara, huh. Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Nianija

Honourable Members, any more on Page 3? We now move to Page 4. All right, Honourable Members, we can now move to Pages 5, 6 and 7. Honourable Members, let us now move to the last page, Page 8. Yes, Honourable Member for Sabach Sanjal.

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Yes, Honourable Speaker. I just want to bring to your attention that the bell is still ringing calling for quorum, so you can ask Table Office to switch it off, please. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Table Office, please switch it off. Honourable Members, no more on Page 8? Thank you. I will now put the question.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Tuesday, 24th March 2026, be adopted with amendments.]

Clerk, may we proceed?

3. Corrections and Approval of the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Thursday, 26th March 2026

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sitting of Thursday, 26th March 2026, is before us for consideration and adoption. Can any Honourable Member please move that the said Record of Votes and Proceedings be considered and adopted? Yes, Honourable Member for Nianija.

HON AMADOU CAMARA [NIANIJA]: Honourable Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor. Honourable Speaker, I so move the motion.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member Nianija. Any seconder, Honourable Members? Yes, Honourable Member for Lower Baddibu.

HON KEMO GASSAMA [LOWER BADDIBU]: Thank you very much, Honourable speaker. I so second the motion.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member for Lower Baddibu. Honourable Members, it has been moved and seconded, so I now put the question.

[Question Proposed]

Honourable Members, I think we all have copies of the said Record of Votes and Proceedings. And as usual, we will look through it page by page beginning with Page 1 to be followed by your comments and observations. Yes, Honourable Member for Busumbala.

HON MUHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I have realised it. It is all right.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. Thank you. Any more, Honourable Members? Yes, Honourable Member for Wuli East.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Yes, thank you. Page 1, the motion after *"Communication from the Chair,"* the first line is *"State of the Nation."* No, that one is correct. You go to *"Notice of upcoming business"* on the first line *'State of the Nation';* the article "the" is missing. Have you seen it *"Notice of upcoming business"*, the first line in that paragraph at the end?

THE SPEAKER: The motion, it should take article "the" and wherever it appears. Thank you, Honourable Member for Wuli East. Honourable Members, we now move to Page 2. Yes, Honourable Member for Wuli East.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Yes. On Page 2, 2nd Paragraph, 2 Line, *'…allow Honourable Members...'* The word "to" is missing. We should put 'to' before 'thoroughly' as in *"…to thoroughly examine the President's Speech."*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, it reads *'30th March, 2026 to allow Honourable Members thoroughly examine the President's Speech.'* He wants it to be read as *"…to allow Honourable Members to thoroughly*

examine the President's Speech." Is this one not, correct? Yes, Member for Wuli East, go ahead.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: No. I am saying when you are speaking, you can say it the way it is written. But if you are writing, you need to put "to" there. That is the grammar.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, Honourable Member for Busumbala.

HON MUHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. That was my observation, but when I cross-checked it, found out that this is also acceptable in grammar.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, Honourable Member for Sanimentereng.

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I wish to align myself with the suggestion that the Honourable Member for Wuli East made; "to" should be added. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: There are two sides to the coin: some believe that it is correct as it is, and others believe that "to" should be added. The Honourable Member for Wuli East said it is good when we are speaking, but it is preferable to put the "to" when writing.

What is your final decision, Honourable Members? Yes, Honourable Member for Jarra Central, was your tag up? Ah! Okay. You have no comments or no sides on this one. Yes, Honourable Member for Niamina West.

HON BIROM SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: Yes, Honourable Speaker. I agree with the Honourable Member for Wuli East to add "to". Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, Honourable Kebba, Nominated Member.

HON KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]: No. Honourable Speaker, I am just saying Honourable Member for Wuli East is the Editor-in-Chief, so we just have to align with him.

THE SPEAKER: We add "to" to it. Okay, *"…to allow Honourable Members to thoroughly."* Honourable Members, any more on Page 2?

Honourable Members, we move to Page 3. All right. Honourable Members, we can now move to Page 4.

Thank you.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That the Record of Votes and Proceedings of the National Assembly Sittings of Thursday, 26th March 2026, be adopted with amendments]

4. **Motion:**

Debate on the 2026 State of the Nation Address [SoNA] *[By His Excellency the Vice President of the Republic, Muhammad B.S. Jallow]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, as we are about to commence the debate on the State of the Nation Address, I would like to thank all Honourable Members of the Assembly for your support and collaboration in making the 2026 State of the Nation Address a great success.

Let me also, on your behalf, welcome His Excellency the Vice President and Cabinet Ministers to this august Assembly. Your Excellency, your presence today to attend and partake in the debate on the motion on the 2026 State of the Nation Address is both timely and deeply appreciated. It underscores the strong spirit of collaboration and mutual respect that

exists between the Executive and the Legislature in advancing national interests.

Honourable Members, I equally want to remind the Assembly that the President has outlined in his address the Government's policies, programmes and the state of his administration for our consideration and scrutiny.

Notwithstanding, he has entreated us to continue to work together in the best interest of the nation for peace and stability amidst the difficult security and socio-economic challenges we face today as a country.

Therefore, let me reiterate that we must nurture our young democracy for a peaceful and prosperous Gambia. And in so doing, I kindly urge all Honourable Members to reflect and debate on the address with diligence.

Honourable Members, may I request that any Honourable Member who wishes to take part in the debate to raise his constituency tag to be recorded and given the floor?

However, before giving any Honourable Member the floor, may we remind ourselves to respect the rules of the debate as enshrined under Orders 29[1] and 30[1] of our Standing Orders? I, therefore, call on all Honourable Members to respect and observe the rules as indicated.

I thank you, Honourable Members. I now invite the Honourable Member for Upper Saloum.

HON ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I just also want to thank the President for fulfilling his constitutional obligation; that is coming to the National Assembly to address the nation on various issues across the country.

Honourable Speaker, like the President mentioned, that was his 10th address to the nation, and I think the points raised sector by sector were really very spot on because of the fact that somebody was able to go out there to verify those figures.

Honourable Speaker, my intervention would only be very specific to the economy and then allow others to dilate on other things, but we really need to look at things in perspective.

Now, from the President's speech, Honourable Speaker, you can clearly see that he has mentioned the growth of the economy. Now, when you talk about the growth of the economy, you are referring to the growth of the Gambian economy, but that cannot go in isolation with the economic growth of the continent and the world at large.

So, to have a clear understanding of the economic growth that talks about The Gambia, there is a need for us to have the perspective of looking at the regional, continental and global levels. That would give a clear understanding of exactly where we are as a country.

Honourable Speaker, if you look at the growth of the Gross Domestic Product [GDP], which is essentially the value of all the goods and services produced in a particular country for a particular period of time. You see, that it is actually increasing from 5.8 to 5.9.

Looking at inflation from 2023, in fact, if it was 17.3, now it moves down to 10.2. And in 2025, inflation was 6.6. The inflation has actually moved from double digits.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable, when you are quoting, make reference to the relevant paragraph.

HON ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]: Honourable Speaker, that would be very difficult for me because I read it and took notes. I do not have any particular page. It will be very difficult to do. *… [Murmuring from the audience] …* Exactly.

So, in general, one would realise that from 2023 inflation was in double digits in many parts of the world, including The Gambia, and that was 17.3. Now, in December 2025, we are talking about 6.6. You can go to Page 4, the economy. I am dealing with only the economy for now.

THE SPEAKER: Members will be free to look around because you have not made or noted any reference point. Go ahead.

HON ALHAGIE MBOW [UPPER SALOUM]: From Page 4, like I said earlier, inflation across the globe has been in double digits.. That is the reason you say these or those things are expensive. I know in The Gambia right now if you speak the truth, the price of commodities, like rice and oil, has gone down drastically. That is the reason inflation actually has gone down from double digits to single digit [6.6] by December 2025, and this is across the globe.

Actually, for those of us that frequently travel, you would realise that the cost of food or essential commodities across the globe has gone up drastically. But in The Gambia, it has started to go down, and we hope that trajectory is maintained by the Government.

These things, Honourable Speaker, do not happen by accident and not by coincidence. Things must have been done; policies must have been in place to ensure that this actually happens. And that is the reason we consistently and continuously see the Minister of Agriculture and the

Minister of Trade ensuring that the local produce and industries are promoted.

When we promote local industries and produce on our own, be it meat, chicken, eggs, etc., the prices ought to go down. That is what is happening in this country. If you observe properly, the amount of chicken or eggs we used to import has drastically gone down if you are very observant. *… [Desk thumping] …* These things are policies that do not come by accident, it must be deliberate from the various Ministries like the Ministry of Trade and the Ministry of Agriculture.

Now, when you look at the revenue of Government, Honourable Speaker, I want to also refer our Members… And you know, sometimes it is good to make comparative analysis. When you talk about revenue of Government, you are talking about ***50 billion***. But let us rewind a little bit to 2015, 10 years ago, Government revenue was about ***8 billion***.

Today, we are talking about a revenue of ***50 billion***. Have taxes increased? The only things we can see tax has increased are alcohol, cigarettes, maybe lottery and betting. Those ones are increased not because of revenue but to serve as a deterrent for the population to move away from them.

Now for the past 10 years, if you are able to get revenue that actually has increased even in the private sector from 8 to 50, how many percentages point is that? When the taxes actually have not been increased, except in a few areas; that is cigarettes, alcohol, betting and etc and those ones are meant for deterrent and not to increase the revenue.

Honourable Speaker, that is the reason it has always been good to be truthful when you analyse. When you try to distort facts, you become

untruthful because they can always be verified figuratively. Do you remember few weeks ago when the Minister of Finance came? He has gone beyond the approved revenue we had here by over ***1 billion***. That does not come by accident. But efficiency and investment in technology that allow Government to be able to mop up revenue from across all sectors.

When you look at debt to Gross Domestic Product [GDP] ratio, I think, Honourable Speaker, we need to be very objective when we look at those things here. Yes, The Gambia is heavily indebted, but what has caused that as a country?

Honourable Speaker, the debt of the country… and I think we have said these many times here. All debts in The Gambia are not denominated in Dalasi. They are denominated in the currency that we took them. If we took that debt in Dollars, the denomination would be in Dollars; if we took it in Pound Sterling, it is going to be in Pound Sterling; if we took it in Euros, it is going to be in Euros; if you took it in Saudi Riyal, it is coming in that denomination.

So, what happened? If those currencies move against the Dalasi, our debt actually increases. I remember in 1994 when I was working in a bank, the Dollar rate was ***D8.50***. And during that time, one of the first loans taken by the previous Government in 1994 was from the Taiwanese Government. How much was that? It was almost ***$30 million***. At the time, the Dollar was about ***D8.50***.

Today, we are paying for that debt. How much are we buying the Dollars to pay? Are we not buying about ***74*** or ***D75*** to pay for a debt that we took for only ***D8***? What has accounted for that? Is it as a result of money

we have taken? No. It is not that. A big chunk is as a result of the devaluation of the Dalasi. But any country whose currency only worth in their own country, they will face the same issue.

And that is the reason why, Honourable Speaker, we must work together as a Continent to ensure that we have our own currency, where we are able to stabilise and fight to ensure that this thing does not happen. When you go to Nigeria [Naira], Ghana [Cedis], and Sierra Leone [Leone], there is same issue.

Unless and until we work together as the African Union to create our own regional currencies or African continental currency, we will be having issues of debt. Because the money that we have taken, we are going to end up paying 6, 7 or 10 times of it because of the devaluation of our own currency. So, that is why it is important, Honourable Speaker, when we analyse, we must tell our citizens the truth. If we distort it, we become untruthful.

Honourable Speaker, let those of us that were here in 2017 not forget what happened. Our account at Central Bank of The Gambia, which is a Consolidated Revenue Fund, that actually holds all the revenue of Government was negative. What does that mean? It means that there was no money in that particular account, but Government was spending.

You remember when we paid for Gambia Groundnut Corporation [GGC] when they were unable to service their debt. We approved over ***420 million*** to pay for them. You remember Central Bank of The Gambia needed to augment them, and we ended up paying… how many hundreds of millions… we do that.

Also, at the time, Honourable Speaker, there was a big issue because some State-Owned Enterprises had loans and overdrafts in the commercial banks, and that all ties back to the revenue of Government. They were unable to pay, so we paid for them.

In fact, if you go deep and find out the ***30 billion*** we have on bonds at the Central Bank of Government right now came as a result. Government tried to stabilise the economy because the Government did not have any money to close all those gaps in the commercial banks and also to be able to support the State-Owned Enterprises.

So, if you look at the debt of the Government in totality, you would realise that a big chunk was as a result of the devaluation of Dalasi, and some were not reported by previous Governments. That was the reason, Honourable Speaker.

If you look at the revenue of the Government from 5 or 10 years ago to now, you would see that there is a big increase in the revenue, and this thing did not come by accident. It came as a result of tighter Government policies and also use of technology to ensure those gaps are closed. And I want to also commend the Minister of Finance for that.

If you remember, we always talk about revenue assurance. We all believe there is money, but where is the money going to? They created a directorate called Revenue Assurance; that actually helps them to ensure that they look at where money is coming from and then tighten their belts to ensure we have it. When was the last time we approved a loan here?

So, something is working, and whatever the Ministry is doing in ensuring that they have revenue for the Government, they need to tighten up and ensure we are pushing those that are supposed to pay. Let them pay.

On a final note, Honourable Speaker, I want to say this for a reason. The Government could not have increased salaries from 110% to over 300% in this country without the increment in revenue. Can we remember in 2017 when we came here as Members of the National Assembly, how much were we paid? Some of us were here. We were paid below D20,000. Where exactly are you today? The civil servants from 2017 to now, some are earning more than 200% increment in their salaries. Some have minimum of 110% increment. This does not happen by way of taking a loan to pay. Let us speak the truth. When things work, let us say it has worked. When there is a challenge, yes, let us mention it objectively and proffer solutions to those things.

On a final note, I say if you want to distort the truth, you become untruthful. Thank you very much. *… [Desk thumping]*

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member for Upper Saloum. Honourable Members, I have got signals here that whether we will want to time ourselves, giving each Member a number of minutes, because every Member wants to talk, and we should give every Member an opportunity to talk if the person wants to talk.

I… pardon? I cannot hear you. Use your microphone. I have not given you the floor, but if you are talking, you can use the microphone. *… [Laughter]*

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: No. I am saying that we have two days allotted for this debate because it is very important.

THE SPEAKER: Some Members also believe that, yes, we have two days, but Members want to maximally use the second day. Otherwise, we may have challenges of getting this thing... This is the information I am getting

at my table. If you choose that we continue as normal, I have no objections. Yes, Honourable Member for Bakau.

HON ASSAN TOURAY [BAKAU]: I want to propose 10 minutes if that is okay with Members. I would not be speaking for 10 minutes.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, two things Honourable Members, one is a proposal on the table. If you believe that we should give it time, then we go by one of your proposals. If we think we will leave it as the Honourable Member for Wuli East said for us leave it open, then there will be no need for us to propose time. Yes, Honourable*… [Interrupted]*

HON AMADOU CAMARA [NIANIJA]: Honourable Member for Wuli East have agreed, I think 10 minutes.

THE SPEAKER: So, you have agreed to give it time and then we give each Member a maximum of 10 minutes. Yes, Honourable Member for Banjul North.

HON MODOU LAMIN B. BAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I propose for us to be given 15 minutes instead of 10.

THE SPEAKER: If we have to give 15 minutes, let us not time it. *… [Laughter] …* Honourable Member, I sincerely believe so far, it is not 5 minutes; in a parliamentary debate, usually maximum is at 10, 7 or 5 minutes. But if we… because I took… the Honourable Member for Upper Saloum did a wonderful job in a limited time.

So, are you in agreement that we give you 10 minutes? *… [Yes!] …* All right, 10 minutes. The list I have here itself… Every Member in the room… I think the name is here because we have 20 something names.

All right. I now invite the Honourable Member for Busumbala.

HON MUHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. We sincerely thank and appreciate the Executive including the President for giving this 2026 State of Nation Address [SoNA] a great significance.

Honourable Speaker, my interventions will basically be on human capital, which is education and health and also security. Briefly on human capital, Honourable Speaker, this National Assembly deemed it necessary and recognises the importance attached to these particular sectors.

Honourable Speaker, Page 23 on Paragraph 70 under Human Capital, Education and Health, if I may read? *"Honourable Speaker, my government continues to prioritise Human Capital Development with 2026 budget allocation, at least ten billion five-hundred-million-dalasi [D10,500,000,000] to it. This represents 17.7% of total expenditure to education and health."*

Honourable Speaker, these are very important sectors. We believe the growth of every nation highly depends on its human capital. And human capital, like education sector, needs to be prioritised so that we can have a better product. When I say better product, I mean qualified individuals to partake in these sectors so that it can yield better professional products to the community, which in essence is going to enhance growth and development of our nation.

Honourable Speaker, we have seen in his address that significant money has been allocated into these sectors/areas. But we have seen that most of these monies allocated in his speech is utilised in the construction of schools, buildings and other essentials.

Honourable Speaker, we want the Government also to focus on the development and welfare of teachers because we believe before you can give a productive learning environment for teachers to excel, they must have that mind of stability and you cannot have a mind of stability if your pocket is empty.

On that note, Honourable Speaker, we still appeal for the increment of emolument of teachers so that this sector can be better utilised. We believe they are responsible of the development of our country through giving relevant and standard education to our children, who obviously are the future leaders of this country.

Honourable Speaker, after that education, we moved to Health sector. We have seen, through the National Assembly, that a lot of funds has been allocated to this sector also. It was not by mistake; it was by choice because we understand that health is another critical component that is very crucial to our national development.

All of us are here because we possess that healthy body to stand and debate for our people. In the same vein, we should make sure that health sector is vibrant to make sure citizens and non-citizens residing in this country can have a better medical attention. How can we do that? It is by prioritising the health sector. That is why the Assembly is cognizant of this fact and allocated almost ***3.1 billion*** to the health sector for primary health care and upgrading of health facilities and improving service delivery.

Honourable Speaker, we have seen of recent the Government has undertaken, you know, building modern structures in our health facilities, which is okay. We appreciate that, but also we want the health personnel

to be trained to be professionals so that they can give better service delivery to our people, which is very important.

[Point of Order]

THE SPEAKER: Who is standing on the point of order? Yes, Honourable Member for Sabach Sanjal.

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I am rising on Order 17[f] *"while a Member is speaking, all other Members shall be silent and shall not make unseemly interruption."* The Member for Latrikunda Sabiji is interrupting the Member for Busumbala.

THE SPEAKER: I am really disappointed. I think the Honourable Member for Latrikunda Sabiji should be one that we should look up to. But when he was around, he was giving us a lot of problems. I thought with his change he would have amended. Honourable Member for Latrikunda, please allow Members to talk. When your time comes, you will not want anybody to disturb you, please.

HON YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Honourable Speaker, in fact I was not interrupting.

THE SPEAKER: The Honourable Member for Sabach Sanjal noted you, and even the person speaking, Honourable Member Busumbala also acknowledged the fact that you disturbed him. Yes, Honourable Member for Busumbala, you can continue. I think… how many minutes were left? One. We will give you two minutes to roundup.

HON MUHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. Having said that on Health and Education, I will rush to Security.

Honourable Speaker, Mr. President in his address made mention of The Gambia being the safest country within the sub-region, particularly West Africa, I do not know where they obtained that data or the methodologies they used to drive to that conclusion.

But, Honourable Speaker, we would have said that if The Gambia is the safest country in West Africa today, we would not have experienced or be witnessing the presence of ECOMIG forces in this country.

Honourable Speaker, you cannot play politics in this particular sector. Security is very crucial to our national growth and development, so we will advise the President to be truthful next time he appears*… [Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, that was a very harsh statement. Yes, because His Excellency the President gave statistics and made comparisons. You talked out of the blue, and you want to say that he should be truthful. You can disagree with him, but that does not mean*… [Interrupted]*

HON MUHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: Honourable Speaker, I made research; that is why I was talking in that aspect.

THE SPEAKER: But you have not given us*… [Interrupted]*

HON MUHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: That is not wrong. I am not saying that he lied before us. I am saying that he should be truthful.

THE SPEAKER: He should be truthful; means, he is lying.

HON MUHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: No, if you want to interpret it that way, then fine.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, let us not argue about this. Please, listen carefully. If you have done your statistics and got your figures, you can let us have them.

HON MUHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: No, if you want to interpret it that way, then fine.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, please be quiet!

HON MUHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMALA]: Yes, I am lying, but you are also lying.

HON YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA SABIJI]: Honourable Speaker, please put your house in order. This Honourable Member for this place… how to call it?*... [Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Busumbala, please be orderly. Let us go by the dictates of our own Standing Orders.

HON MUHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: Can I rephrase that statement? He should be factual next time when he appears before us.

THE SPEAKER: Okay, all right. But what I am saying is that let us be patient and obey our own regulations. Let us never be emotional to go outside the law.

HON MUHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: There is no way I am emotional on this, Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: I heard you telling somebody "You are lying".

HON MUHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: I did not say he was lying. That was not the exact word I uttered.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Busumbala, who is the man sitting next to him? Honourable Member for Janjanbureh, please allow him. Honourable Member for Busumbala, I myself heard you.

All right, I said, please, let us not be too emotional to go outside our own Standing Orders. This what I am putting to you. Please, you are emotional by what you said. You should not have said that. You do not shout on people in the hall.

HON MUHAMED KANTEH [BUSUMBALA]: Honourable Speaker, where did I shout? Honourable Speaker, wait, wait!

THE SPEAKER: You are disobeying the Standing Orders. When I am talking and you are not given the floor, do not talk. Honourable Member, let us not go beyond the mark. When I am talking, you have no ground to talk whether I am right or wrong. It is not your prerogative.

Honourable Member, do not push me to the wall, please. I am trying to be less emotional like you. So, please, do not respond to Honourable Members. Do not talk!

[Point of Order]

HON KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]: Point of order, Honourable Speaker.

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Point of order, Honourable Speaker.

HON KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]: Point of order, Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Nominated Member, I am coming to you. Honourable Member for Busumbala, all what you are doing now is illegal. You have no right to open your mouth to speak without my permission. Note whatever points you have, and stop talking please! I am appealing to you, avoid talking please.

Yes, Honourable Nominated Member, Kebba. Yes, I have given the floor to this guy then you.

HON KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]: Honourable Speaker, I am rising on 21[f]. Yes, but I will start with 21[1].

THE SPEAKER: 21?

HON KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]: 21[1], and I will read both 21[1] and 22[f] together. 21[1] reads*… [Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: Just a bit. You are at 21[1]? Go ahead.

HON KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]: Order 21, Discipline and Suspension of Members, 21[1] reads:

> *"The Speaker or Chairperson, after having called the attention of the Assembly or Committee to the conduct of a Member who persists in irrelevance or tedious repetition either of his or her arguments or of the arguments used by other Members in debate, may direct the Member to discontinue his or her speech."*

And Honourable Speaker, on 21[f] it reads, *"persistently or wilfully disregards the authority of the Speaker."*

Honourable Speaker, you have called the attention of the Honourable Member for Busumbala; he has made unsubstantiated statements, he did not give us any proof and wilfully he is defying your orders. So, my request

is, if he persists, let us go for disciplinary actions. Thank you, Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, I think your standing point… I was trying to exercise maximum restraint to allow everybody to partake. Sometimes, I understand that Members would go out of these things… politicians, but we should, as Honourable Members, try as much as possible to respect our own Standing Orders, to respect each other, and above all, to respect the order and the decision of the Speaker. You cannot be talking or shouting as if you are in a "Bantaba". We are an organised institution, please.

I know that sometimes people go out and then they will… I will note that down. That is not abnormal, but it can be acceptable. What is the tag for? a point of order, observation or what? What do you want?

[Point of Observation]

HON YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA]: Observation, Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Observing?

HON YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA]: Honourable Nominated Member, Kebba Lang Fofana because what I want to say…

THE SPEAKER: No, you cannot observe him because he rose on a point of order.

HON YAHYA SANYANG [LATRIKUNDA]: Yes, he got the point of order all wrong. *… [Laughter]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, please, take your seat. He rose on a point of order, so you do not observe a point of order. What we are

waiting for is the Speaker's decision on that point of order. So, Honourable Members, as I said, let us exercise patience as much as possible. I will now call the next speaker, Honourable Member for Niani.

HON OMAR JOBE [NIANI]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor.

Honourable Speaker, first of all, I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to His Excellency for fulfilling his constitutional mandate, under Section 77[1] of the 1997 Constitution, of addressing this Nation.

Honourable Speaker, projects mentioned in this book are concrete facts that no one can disagree with. If you look at the areas of infrastructure, that is Page 9 of 47 where the President mentioned, "*Mr. Speaker, my administration continues to work tirelessly to close our infrastructure gaps. Since 2017, the government has constructed over 1200km of weathered roads.*"

Honourable Speaker, if you move to the next point, we have seen where he made mention of the Hakalang Road where you know that each and every Gambian should commend him for that because that is the road mostly used by students whenever they want to visit the Kunta Kinteh Island. Therefore, that development must be recognised.

Honourable Speaker, if you also look at Number 29 of the next page, that is 10 of 47, where he made mention of the 700km additional roads about to be constructed. In this regard, I can say that my constituency, Niani, is about to benefit almost more than 100km of these roads. So, we must commend him for that. *… [Interrupted]*

Honourable Speaker, on the side of energy, most of those talking here are enjoying cold water today because of this rural electrification. *… [Desk thumping & laughter]*

Honourable Speaker, we can claim that it is our right today when the sign of democracy is open to us. We can claim that it is our right today when we have the power and the mouth to speak, but in those days where you know that even if we are to speak, we have to isolate ourselves to find out whether we would be reported or not. Therefore, we must thank him for that democracy.

Honourable Speaker, on the rural electrification that is Page 14 of 47 where you have seen that over 90% of the Gambian population have access to electricity, the rural Gambia is living in a life this year that we have not experience. In those days, we were buying ice block for ***D70***, ***D50*** and ***D40***. But come this year, you will even see someone going with his bucket selling an ice block for ***D10***, and he will not have someone to buy it. So, we must thank him for that. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, Page 22 of 47 where he talks about cluster boreholes, access to clean drinking water, I am always surprise to ee some opposition parties that have been existing since before 1996 and they have not dug even a hole of an ant in this country. Therefore, we must give the devil his due.

Honourable Speaker, concerning the area of Health on Page 26 of 47 where he said major infrastructure investment progress at the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital, Kanifing General Hospital and selected regional health in 2025 *… [Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, can you lead us to where you are? Which paragraph?

HON OMAR JOBE [NIANI]: Page 26 of 47, Number 80.

THE SPEAKER: 80, okay.

HON OMAR JOBE [NIANI]: 80, yes.

THE SPEAKER: Okay.

HON OMAR JOBE [NIANI]: Where he made mention that in 2025 there was major infrastructure investment progress at the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital, Kanifing General Hospital and selected regional health centres and Kuntaur where I come from is among. If you go to Kuntaur Health Centre right now, there is massive renovation going on.

Honourable Speaker, there is a Member who made mention of our trained personnel. If you go to Page 27 of 47, Number 82, *"at the same time, expanded postgraduate training for health professionals is strengthening the national health workforce and contributing to a more resilient, people cantered health system. Quite notably, for the first time in the history of The Gambia, dentists and pharmacists are being trained in this country, with the inaugural cohort expected to graduate this year."*

Therefore, it will be very much misleading if a Member should take the platform and say that we are not training our personnel.

So, Honourable Speaker, with those few remarks, I thank you very much for giving me the floor.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Niani. I now invite the Honourable Member for Niamina West.

HON BIROM SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I will also join my colleagues to thank His Excellency the President of the Republic for giving such an enormous speech during the SoNA. Though this is the last speech for this election year, but it shall not be our last or his last to come in this building, 'insha'Allah'. *… [Desk thumping]*

I will take you through his speech. You can look at Paragraph 14 where he stated that the Government remains firmly committed to reforming and restructuring our State-Owned Enterprises [SOEs] to improve performance, strengthen governance, and reduce contingent liabilities. Now, this reminds us the nature and the way State-Owned Enterprises were running in the last 2 years in this country. They were not returning to the Government; they were liabilities.

But today, as you can see through his speech on Paragraph 16, where there is a return of at least around… where it says that the sector achieved a historic consolidated and profit of ***2.5 billion***. This is a very good return, and this would not have happened without the reforms and the new policies that this Government had embarked on. The Government sees that these sectors should not be liabilities, so they are supporting the SOEs so that they would bring back profit to the Government. So, that is a laudable effort through this Government.

And we also look at Paragraph 24 where he mentioned irregular migration. The Government is now trying to restore it so that our young ones and the brains of the future would settle in this country and be productive. In that effort, the Government has come with a lot of reforms in the technical sector. As we know in the Education or training, the TVET system has

come out with a lot of reform programmes and training centres throughout the country. One of them is in Kansala and the other in Foni Ndemban. We are all a living witness to this.

This national Assembly has played a vital role to see that these training institutions are being installed and start operating. These are measures to see that the youths are being engaged, given opportunity for skills, and they can have their own jobs within the country to become productive so that it can be a mitigation for the attraction of the Europe backway too.

I also want to take you through Paragraph 27, where it reads, *"By the end of 2026, my government will have added an additional three hundred and seventy-five kilometres (375Km) of paved roads to the overall network."* This is talking about infrastructure with the OIC completion. The Government is still committed to put in resources, that is from the local resources, through this humble Assembly to see that 375 other networking roads along the OIC roads are been completed. These are all efforts of this Government.

Now, on Paragraph 30, *"Furthermore, with funding from the World Bank-supported GIRAV Project, …"* that we are living witnesses. Today, the President and Ministers are out to commission some roads. These are the roads he was talking about. The GIRAV Project through the World Bank and through the Ministry of Agriculture is commissioning 200-kilometre roads throughout the length and breadth of The Gambia.

So, most of us are becoming beneficiaries because the Ministry of Agriculture has installed five-hectare gardens, which are very big, throughout the length and breadth of the country. So, to each of these gardens, there are feeder roads reaching the gardens for easy

transportation and for engagement of youths and women. So, we say bravo to the Government and the Ministry of Agriculture for giving this support to the farmers.

On Paragraph 34, which says *"In line with the Government's liberal air transport policy, The Gambia and Senegal have agreed to domesticate air services between the two States."* This is very important. In fact, to an extent, I wanted to bring the air transport The Gambia between Senegal here as a matter of the day at some point because Air Senegal has a lot of difficulties, delays and problems. Air Senegal would go up to the air and be suspended there and then turn back to base. So, that was alarming. I am sure that with this will address a lot of air transport challenges. Even by road, there are a lot of challenges but when the two countries come together, we can mitigate them.

Also, Paragraph 35, *"In addition, my Government is working on an Airport Modernisation Project that includes the construction of an ultramodern..."* This is very important because as we are expanding and as the world is moving, we believe that our airport cannot accommodate most of the big flights and many other international operations. So, coming up with a modern airport will definitely help. We also applaud the Government for having that initiative, and we wish to witness the plan. I think they will have the support of this Assembly.

On Energy, Mr. Speaker, he said, *"Mr. Speaker, my government has made decisive reforms, …"* and in short, like my colleagues mentioned, most of our areas here especially in my constituency, Niamina West, have never experienced any electricity supply. Just last month, electricity has been installed.

So now, it is very important and heart touching because for how many years since colonial era they could not electrify my village and my constituency? *… [Desk thumping] …* Are we not Gambians? We are equally paying revenue, but today, through this Government, we witnessed the electrification, and that is a big thing for me and my people. *… [Desk thumping] …* So, I commend the Government through the Ministry of Energy for definitely coming to our aid and seeing ourselves being part and parcel of those accessing electricity in The Gambia, which is very important.

On digital communication, The Gambia for the first time has come with a Data Protection Privacy Act 2025. This is also very important because we are living in a digital world and people have been bullied digitally. People's private information is being misused, and today people are fighting through this digital space. So, it is very important to come up with a policy or a law, and it has come at a right time. So, I commend the Government and the Ministry.

Finally, I would also commend the Ministries of Fisheries and Agriculture, especially the Ministry of Fisheries for coming up with a revenue of ***D234 million***. It is a laudable effort. I think other Ministries will emulate. I also commend the Ministry of Communication and the Ministry of Energy for definitely standing for us at this right time.

For now, I beg to take my leave. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *… [Desk thumping]*

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Niamina West. I now invite the Honourable Member for Kiang West.

HON LAMIN CEESAY [KIANG WEST]: Honourable Speaker, thank you very much. It is good to be back again. Sometimes, I wonder and ask, if some of us are living in Gambia and others are living in The Gambia? *… [Desk thumping & Laughter] …* No, sometimes, I ask that question because when I hear remarks from some people, maybe they are referring to Gambia, not The Gambia.

Honourable Speaker, it is important we look at issues genuinely. Honourable Speaker, when it comes to economy, of course, we have people who deliberated on that, and the President has talked about that extensively. Honourable Speaker, when you talk about economic improvement, you have talked about GDP, reduction of inflation and all of that as well as how efficient our Government is in terms of resource mobilisation domestically.

The fundamental question is, how has that impacted the lives and livelihood of the people? How affordable are the health care, the education, and the social services? How affordable are all of that? How is the Government's performance in terms of poverty reduction? We have not seen President given us the statistics of reducing poverty. At what level do we have poverty in this country, and at what category of the people do you have poverty more common? Is it among the youthful population, or is it among the women? Obviously, we need to know that. Statistics needs to be given to that effect.

Honourable Speaker, this is very real. On the eve of 'Koriteh,' my kid brother was bitten by a dog. 'Walahi,' we rushed to all the Government hospitals for injections, but we could not get it. I was able to get it from Africmed for ***D14,000***. If that had happened to a poor farmer in Wuli,

Kiang, Jarra and Foni, he/she could have died. *… [Desk thumping] …* The Government should put attention to some of these realities. We cannot politicise those things. These are realities happening on the ground.

Honourable Speaker, let us look at corruption. On the 4th of December, 2025 on this very floor, we approved an establishment of an Anti-Corruption Commission. It is four months today down the line. How serious can you be as a government if that commission is still not operational? It is not operational because there is no commitment or political will as Government has no interest in dealing with corruption.

The fact is that today, anytime I take this floor, I talk about corruption. I said that. Go to NDMA, the report consistently and constantly comes on this floor to say ***D100 million*** worth of goods was not delivered to people from the Covid Response Fund. And today, that Executive Director is still at NDMA, every day at State House. So, President cannot tell us he is serious about fighting corruption.

And of course, recently we are looking at a report of the Committee that we ourselves sanctioned some time ago to look into the affairs of the disposal, management of the fund and assets of the former President. We have seen everything: disregard to the laws, corruption; all of those things were done under the watch of the same President. *… [Desk thumping] …* Still dealing with corruption, if you look at 2019 report, even newspapers have written ***about 22 million*** funds unaccounted for under the Ministry of Justice from Jammeh assets proceeds. That was in the report.

Honourable Speaker, when you talk about employment, the past two batches that graduated from The Gambia College, each batch produced nothing less than 3,000 young people, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary

education is shortlisting today, and they are to take only 700 people out of the 6,000 young people. Honourable Speaker, where are you dealing with employment, you cannot still give us statistics of the 150,000 jobs that you wish to create. *… [Desk thumping]*

How much have you created? How much has the private sector consumed? You cannot still give us that because you do not have the data. Where are the rest going, the students that graduated from the Gambia College? Several days I was with one of the university graduates, who told me that he/hse was applying to be a receptionist at one of the hotels, a degree holder. Some of them have written consistently seeking for a job because there is no job. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, the Government must be serious dealing with issues of this country. When you talk about electricity, some people are saying that they have never seen electricity since they were born. We are saying that on the floor of the National Assembly when countries are 20, 30, 50 years ahead of you. We are talking about the number of people you have employed. What is the per capita income of the people of our country? How are the health care services in our country?

Honourable Speaker, when it comes to road construction, the least quality work, infrastructure development you have seen in this country cannot be overemphasised. If you say you are constructing roads, the roads should lead to economic activities, not a dilapidated hospital or school. That is what the economy is about. If you build an infrastructure, it should connect economic activities.

Honourable Speaker, when you say security, does it really mean the mere absence of war? Is that what security means? How many people are going

to bed hungry? Is that security? How many people can afford health care? Is that security? How many people can afford the social services in this country? Is that security? *… [Desk thumping] …* But I am not surprised that some of you are looking at it at that level because that is what you can see. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, it is important and it is high time we are ready and serious to tell the Government the fundamental truth. This country needs better. What we fought for in 2016 is not really this. We fought for the rural poor in this country to have sustainable and affordable livelihood activity.

Honourable Speaker, let me conclude with Agriculture. We have cancelled an input subsidy on this floor to put ***300 million*** on recapitalisation of the GGC because the Government refused to do it. And on President's report, he said that my Government has committed this, but they refused to do it. *… [Desk thumping] …* It is this National Assembly who has done that because the Government refused to do that. You have talked about 189 tractors. How many tractors were delivered to the people or farmers? You can report that also. Honourable Speaker, this Government must be serious in dealing with the affairs of this country, but time will tell.

Honourable Speaker, thank you so much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Kiang West. I now invite the Honourable Member for Brikama South.

HON LAMIN J. SANNEH [BRIKAMA SOUTH]: Thank you so much, Honourable Speaker. I also want to thank His Excellency for meeting his obligation to come and address the National Assembly on the status of

the affairs of the country, the policy directions and the situational report of development in this country.

Honourable Speaker, without wasting much time, I want to go straight to the economy. In the economy, I want to go to Page 6 where we have the aggregated financial position of SOEs. Honourable Speaker, I think this is a very important part of the report where the President made a statement in request for the 2024 SOE… recorded a loss of ***D2.6 billion***.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, help us with the relevant paragraph.

HON LAMIN J. SANNEH [BRIKAMA SOUTH]: That is Paragraph 16. The SOEs collectively lost about D2.6 billion, and this was overturned in 2025. From a loss of ***2.6 billion***, they were able to maximise a profit of collectively about ***D2.5 billion***, which represents ***D5.6 billion*** or a percentage of 196%. And this is possible as this National Assembly enacted the SOE Act, where the Commission was established. They also conduct oversight on all the 14 SOEs in the country and help the Government to sign performance contract.

In the 6th Legislature, we have approved 2019, 2021 and 2022, and most of the issues contained in the report are more of governance issues. The recommendations and resolutions that we are making have significant improvement to the extent of making this improvement.

So, to be very honest with you, I really want to thank the Government. *… [Desk thumping] …* But one thing I want to emphasize is the issue of privatisation. I think we need to maintain these SOEs. They are equally very important. We have to understand the reason they were established, more especially if you come to the service delivery so that the citizens of

this country can access those services at affordable prices, which is extremely important.

But the private sector invests to maximise profit, and this affects the end users; that is, the ordinary citizens and all of us. So, it is important for us to maintain… even whereas Government will be subsidising to make sure that the SOEs improves significantly upon their liquidity positions.

And one thing that is also on the… this SOE directions. I vividly remember in 2023 budgets, SOEs cumulatively contributed to ***250 million***. After that, they did not come in 2024, but we can see what is happening in 2025. In fact, we believe 2026 is going to be more than this.

But the fast tracking of the Dividend Policy is also missing. We all gave our inputs so that the Dividend Policy can be out, and you can treat SOEs as per their scope. So, that will be very important to know how much are they liquid enough or how much are they going to pay as far as dividend is concerned.

Honourable Speaker, still, I want to go to Land Administration and Regional Governance on Page 13. If you look at Paragraph 40, the Ministry has also initiated a housing programme that will target Gambians and offer a flexible instalment option. I think this is very important. Honourable Speaker, people work in this country as civil servants for completely 30 or 40 years, they cannot even build a house upon retirement.

I think the idea of initiating this particular programme would be on a superhighway. We try everything humanly possible to make sure that they mobilise funds for this initiative. *… [Desk thumping] …* It is very unfortunate, and that is why if a civil servant is due for retirement, he/she

always keep looking for contract because if they retire, which means we are sending them to early graves because the retirement benefit is even very small. *… [Desk thumping]*

But if a house is provided within their period of 30 years as a civil servant and be paid by instalments, they will not feel it. In fact, if you have a house or a roof on your head with your family, you are secured. But we find it difficult to address these types of issues.

And again, I want to go to Paragraph 41, that is talking about Department of Boundary Management under the Ministry of Lands. I think this is very important. There are a lot of conflict in this country relating to district boundaries, not even our border boundaries in the country. These are serious issues, and there was a matter of the day brought here on this.

We have seen our people displaced in border villages, and they had to migrate from their original villages. An institution is calling that they are in foreign villages, which is very unfortunate. It is important for us to identify which communities belong to us, especially this border lines. These are issues. I have been singing this song from 2017 up till date, and it still remains a major problem. People are seriously confronted with this.

Without wasting more time, I want to come to the other area of communication of digital economy. I think this is also important. If you look at Paragraph 54 that is talking about the *SOEs' reform agenda which is ongoing with Gamtel and Gamcel.* I think this is extremely important. We talking about Gamtel in to the PPP arrangement, which we have to look at critically. If you look at the first phase of this arrangement, the staff redundancy went up to 642, and we have second and third stages.

I want to inquire from His Excellency whether actually that is also going to affect another staff reduction. Because if we remove all these staff, how are we going to transfer knowledge because after 6 years Gamtel is going to be turned around and handed over to us? Who is going to implement if all the staff are laid off?

I think it is very important to look at the second and third stages. Let us make sure that those staff are retained so that knowledge transfer can be done. After it is sent back to the Government, they can start implementing, and we recruit more. This is extremely important and I really want to put that across.

On that note, Honourable Speaker, I want to take my seat and thank the Government for coming out with this report. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Brikama South. I now invite the Honourable Member for Jimara.

HON ESSA CONTEH [JIMARA]: Honourable Speaker, thank you so much for giving me the opportunity to look into the State of Nation Address delivered by His Excellency the President of the Republic of The Gambia. We want to thank him for fulfilling his constitutional mandate to come to the National Assembly and address the nation on issues affecting the Government.

Honourable Speaker, before us today, we have the State of Nation Address that has been delivered by the President. From this State of Nation Address, I want to look at only two key sectors that I think have really done well during the course of the year. That is, the Agricultural Sector and also the Energy Sector.

Honourable Speaker, the administration of His Excellency President of the Republic of The Gambia, Adama Barrow, has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to Agriculture. If you look at Agriculture, where the President has highlighted their achievements during the course of… I just wrote something, but I am not following it.

Honourable Speaker, let us look at the results here. This is a government that is putting its money where its mouth is, by allocating over ***D703 million*** for seeds and fertilizer subsidies. Honourable Speaker, this is a direct and impactful intervention that reduces the cost or burden on farmers.

Honourable Speaker, the support has yielded tangible outcomes, a total cereal output has increased from 124,337 metric tons in 2024 to 131,793 metric tons in 2025. Honourable Speaker, to me, this is remarkable. Critically, we see growth in staple crops like rice, which is up to 9%, and also maize 5% which are essential for national food self-sufficiency. Furthermore, Honourable Speaker, if you look at it, growing production has shown an increase of 16%.

Also, I want to take the opportunity to thank the Minister of Fisheries through the dynamic leadership of Honourable Musa Drammeh. You know, this particular sector was able to generate ***D234 million*** revenue just in the first quarter of this 2026. This holistic approach provides or proves that the Government's strategy is working, and Agriculture is a powerful engine for economic growth, contributing over 22% of GDP and securing national food feature.

Honourable Speaker, we look at the Energy sector also. I highlighted a few areas that I wanted to deliberate on that the President has delivered

on in the SoNA. That is the administration allocated ***D397 million*** in the 2026 budget geared towards addressing the rural electrification project. That is ongoing and the most satisfying thing is the announcement of 90% of the population being electrified. And we believe by the end of 2026, the remaining communities, almost about 27 or 24 to 27 communities which include my constituency, will be electrified, 'insha'Allah'.

Honourable Speaker, just to conclude, the 2026 State of Nation Address provides compelling evidence that the Agricultural sector and that of Energy are not merely surviving but are being transformed through targeted subsidies, infrastructure development, and strategic investment. The present administration laid a solid foundation for food self-sufficiency, food security, economic stability, and universal access to electricity, charting a clear path towards a more resilient and prosperous Gambia.

Honourable Speaker, sometimes I also get baffled if I hear some Members or some people, you know, trying to make somebody as if the person is God, he should know everything, and He has to do everything at the same time. Governance is an ongoing process.

Honourable Speaker, yes, The Gambia College graduated a lot of students this year or last year but no government in this African Continent is able to consume all the graduates into the governance system. Let us limit it to our own region; that is Africa. You know, Yaya Jammeh has never done it. No, no.

Anyway, that is my understanding. No government can employ all the graduates from the universities, colleges or other tertiary institutions into the government sector. You know, the reason we are sent to school is not

for us to be employed by the Government. It is for us to be creative, determined and create jobs so that we can also create employment*. … [Desk thumping]*

So, Honourable Speaker, some of those comments, I think we just want to play to the gallery to make the Government look like they are not doing anything as far as employment is concerned. You know, Honourable Speaker, we want to thank the Government, especially the President, you know, for not only coming up or fulfilling his constitutional mandate but also the Standing Orders. It has to be in the first quarter, and this time around, it has happened.

So, we want to thank them for that and also thank the Speaker and Office of Clerk for always following up with the Government. This is why we are called organs of the government. We work together hand in glove to make sure that what is to be done is to be done at the right time and in the right manner.

Honourable Speaker, with these few remarks, I want to thank you and thank every Member for their kind attention. I would like to take my seat, 'insha'allah'. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Jimara. I now invite the Honourable Member for Sanimentereng.

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. We observe the importance of fulfilling the mandates vested in the President to deliver his statement on 2026 State of the Nation Address.

Honourable Speaker, looking into the 2026 State of Nation Address, I will have to deliberate on a few points that I have actually observed and felt we should either update with the status or upgrade an institution with regard to development in our country.

Honourable Speaker, having said that, I will have to go straight to Page 26, Section 9, on health. Honourable Speaker, 79, on Page 26, where you have… sorry the medication… where the President has already delved on medication… sorry, the improvement on the health sector either by construction or other improvements with regard to health facilities.

Honourable Speaker, just to cut it short, the President has already deliberated on development on health sector, yet we are still having challenges with regard to medication as a country. I would take, for example, Ndemban Clinic… Yes, Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital is still under construction, but medication is a problem.

And of course, as I said, I would take example from Ndemban Clinic. The situation in Ndemban Clinic is really sad as a country. It is an optional facility with regard to health care. There was a point in time that I raised a question with regard to Ndemban Clinic, "why were patients lying on the floor of Ndemban Clinic at the Emergency Ward?" The response from the Minister then was capacity. Is capacity still not resolved? I want His Excellency the Vice President to respond, please.

Moving forward, Honourable Speaker, we would like to know now at what percentage is the major infrastructure investment progress at the Edward Francis Small Teaching Hospital, which the President has also explained on Section 80 of 2025?

Honourable Speaker, moving forward with regard to employment, I would also like to know the status because both the President and the line ministry have explained the creation of 150 jobs that are to be established in this country. So, we would like to know the status. How many percent were achieved and how many is still not achieved, Honourable Speaker?

Honourable Speaker, on Page 27 which is Section 10 regarding the Youth, Women and Social Protection, where you have Section 84 Women Enterprise Fund, the President has already explained that ***D12 million*** was disbursed to 112 women groups, and over 10,000 women benefited from this.

Honourable Speaker, we are in 2026 Election Year. This is a year that we will hear, see and dream a lot because we want people to vote for us, but we are not here to deceive people.

Honourable Speaker, the amount is huge. The figure I would say is huge. The number of people… I do not like the sound that I heard. Honourable Speaker, with all due respect, I am free to say whatever I want to say as long as it is in connection with our Standing Orders.

THE SEPAKER: Excuse me, Honourable Member for Sanimentereng, what do you mean?

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: I heard a sound that I do not like.

THE SPEAKER: You had a sound where?

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Let me just move on.

THE SPEAKER: No, you cannot move on.

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Let me just move on.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you cannot move on.

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Honourable Speaker, I heard it in this Chamber. I do not know where, but I heard it in the Chamber. And I said, I do not know where.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, if you do not know where, do not mention it.

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: But it is in the Chamber.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, but you do not know it is who*… [Interrupted]*

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Please, let me not distract.

THE SPEAKER: No, you are distracting yourself. Do not make statements that you cannot prove out.

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: I heard it.

THE SPEAKER: You said you heard it. Where?

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: In this Chamber.

THE SPEAKER: Where? From who?

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Is there any other Chamber different from this one?

THE SPEAKER: Where in the Chamber, I mean?

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: I said I heard it in this Chamber.

THE SPEAKER: Then it is not true. If you cannot justify it, then do not talk about it. I will not allow you until you say something that you can prove.

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: With all due respect, can you allow me to move on, please?

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, when I am talking, please keep quiet and sit down.

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: I am asking you*… [Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: I am asking you to sit down, please.

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Please.

THE SPEAKER: No. when I am talking, sit down and put off your mic. Please, do not make statements or allegations that you do not want to state or you cannot prove. You said that you heard, … You see, when I am talking, Honourable Member, do not talk until I give you the floor. Please, do not be arguing with me.

Honourable Member, you have a right to say anything within our own Standing Orders but when you say something and make an allegation, you must tell us who and where! When you cannot say who said it or where it is said, then it is not true.

I will not allow you until you note those things. You do not say something that you cannot prove. Listen! Please, do not talk! Honourable Member, this is your last chance. When I am talking, do not talk, please!

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: *… [Inaudible]*

THE SPEAKER: No, I do not want you to be talking when I am talking. That is your last chance.

Honourable Member, please be quiet. You are just coming into the Assembly and… Honourable Member for Central Baddibu, I can be as worse than you. No, you cannot come… Please, be quiet, Honourable Member. If you do not keep quiet, I will send you out. You are a long-time Honourable Member, a so-called Minority Whip, and you are always disturbing. I will not tolerate it, Honourable Member. If you talk again without my permission, I will get you out. Honourable Member, once again, if you talk without my permission, you are going out. Probably, you want to go home because you are just coming in.

All right, Honourable Member, what I am saying is do not make statement that you cannot substantiate. If you make a statement in the hall that something is happening, I will ask where and who is doing it? If you do not know, then continue your speech. You cannot make us petty. Please, be quiet!

Honourable Member, you know, I am just being lenient because you are a woman, but I can… Your behaviour is very bad; you cannot be challenging me. If you want to continue to do that, I will come in a different way, please. With all due respect to you, please.

Okay, you can continue.

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. We are in an election year. I said, and I repeat that 2026 is a very important year for the Gambians. Therefore, we cannot be deceived.

Honourable Speaker, we need to be very much clear about statements with regard to Women Enterprise Fund, the ***D12 million*** disbursed to 112 women groups, not individuals. Honourable Speaker, We want to be

really clear with the 10,000 women that benefited from this. Where are these 10,000 women that benefited from this Women Enterprise Fund?

Furthermore, expected grant of ***D117.2 million***… after their graduation this year [i.e., 2026] 1,702 adolescent girls are to be supported through financial literacy initiatives. Honourable Speaker, we want to know this grant to be given to 1,702 adolescents. Who are conducting the literacy initiative? We want to know the source of that particular funding.

Moving forward, Honourable Speaker, the 102 businesses supported as alluded in the SoNA by the President, I ask what and where are these businesses? Honourable Speaker, on essential commodities, it was clearly stated in the SoNA that prices of essential commodities are reduced … *[Interrupted]*

[Point of Order]

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Excuse me.

HON KEBBA LANG FOFANA [NOMINATED]: Point of order, Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, Honourable Nominated Member.

HON KEBBA LANG FOFANA[NOMINATED]: Honourable Speaker, I am rising on Order 17[d], Behaviour of Members, During a sitting, *"Members shall not read newspapers, books, letters or other documents except when making reference to such parts therein as may be directly connected with the business of the Assembly and with the permission of the Speaker."*

Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Member is reading from a written script. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, your citation is correct. You cannot make written statements to be read during a debate, but you can make relevant inferences or quotations with the permission of the Speaker. You can in brackets quote somebody or something, but you do not prepare written statements to be read during debate. Yea, go ahead.

HON FATOU CHAM [SANIMENTERENG]: Honourable Speaker, thank you very much. Honourable Speaker, this is in fact the Order Paper that we had, and I jotted down some points that I am to deliberate on clearly. This one is the SoNA, and this is the record book that I have already jotted down some points. So, I want Member to show me the other documents privately that I am quoting from. Honourable Speaker, thank you very much.

Honourable Speaker, moving forward on reduction of the prices of essential commodities as mentioned in the statement by the President and a Member, yes, it is a fact that the prices of some essential commodities have already reduced. But for some other commodities, it has increased. A kilo of meat is D500 in The Gambia as I speak.

Honourable Speaker, it means a poor man or woman like me will not benefit the good health or vitamin in meat for maybe the whole year, depending on if I can buy or afford it. So, it is very important that when we speak, we also look into detail of some areas, not this side and then live in the other side.

Honourable Speaker, on the issue of illegal migration, probably, Gambians are working legally in Europe or the diaspora as quoted by the President during this SoNA, when Gambians are being deported to this country day in, day out. I think the Government or the Executive needs to look into

this to make sure that our people are stable. I sold my land for my son to go for a greener pasture; my daughter sold her land, to go for a greener pasture; a colleague sold his land for his son to go for a greener pasture, these are just examples, Honourable Speaker.

In a broad day light those particular children would be brought back to this country. No doubt that we have a lot of youths being mad. Some are killing their parents because of the situation that they are currently in.

Honourable Speaker, it is very important to explain clearly the idea behind legally deporting our brothers and sisters who live in the diaspora for greener pastures to this country.

Honourable Speaker, on sand trading, what are those communities, sand is being taken from, benefiting? Honourable Speaker, as alluded by the President in this SoNA, we would like to know the 82,000 people benefiting water access*… [Mic switched off]*

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Sanimentereng. I now invite the Honourable Member for Illiassa.

HON SANKUNG DAMPHA [ILLIASSA]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. Honourable Speaker, first, let me thank His Excellency the President for his dynamic leadership.

Honourable Speaker, before going further, if you would allow me, I want to give a piece of advice to my fellow National Assembly Members here. Honourable Speaker, Members should comport themselves diligently when they are in this very important National Assembly. *… [Desk thumping] …* Anytime we are speaking, we should know that the whole world is watching. So, we should try and mark our words. This is very

important. You cannot stand here and say whatever you feel like. Sometimes, it is embarrassing. We should endeavour to stop such actions in this Assembly. Thank you very much. *… [Desk thumping]*

Let me just continue. Honourable Speaker, let me start with agriculture. The ultimate aim and objective of this Government is to have food-self-sufficiency. So, in doing that, I think it is better for Gambians to grow what we eat and eat what we grow. This is very important. But how can we realise that? We have to go to the farm. Let us avoid sitting at the ghettos or bantabas talking about politics, Honourable Ousainou Darboe, and His Excellency Adama Barrow. We should try to go back to the land. I think this is very important. So, I am calling on the Gambians to be very serious and know what we are doing as far as yearning for food-self-sufficiency is concerned. We have to go back to the land.

Honourable Speaker, the Government is putting a lot of efforts as far as agriculture is concerned. Government is providing tractors, power tillers, to name a few. The reason the Government is doing that is for farmers to boost their food productivity. So, I think definitely the Government is doing a lot, and we should also try to make sure what Government is aiming at is achieved.

Honourable Speaker, if you allow me, I will read Page 20 of President's speech, that is Paragraph 61:

> *"Crop production recorded strong gains, with total cereal output raising one hundred and twenty- four thousand, three hundred and thirty-seven (124,337) metric tonnes in 2024 to one hundred and thirty-one thousand, seven hundred and ninety-eight (131,798) metric tonnes in 2025."*

This is a significant gain, to be honest. I am calling on the farmers to concentrate on growing food crops so that we can attain what we are looking for as far as food crops is concerned.

Honourable Speaker, again, let me go to Page 27; that is youth, women and social protection. Honourable Speaker, if you will allow me? Here in the 2025, under Women Enterprise Fund, over ***D12 million*** was disbursed to 112 women groups. This benefit over 10,000 women. An additional 1,702 adolescent girls and young women were supported through Financial Literacy Initiative.

Furthermore, they will receive a total grant of ***D117,200,000*** after their graduation. Honourable Speaker, this is development as far as this is concerned. It has definitely catapulted the financial status and the livelihood of women and the youths of this country. *… [Desk thumping]*

So, I will definitely say this country is very serious and has concern for women and the youth of this country. So, definitely, we should thank the Government for that effort.

So, Honourable Speaker, with these few remarks, I thank you very much for giving me the floor.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Lower Baddibu. I now invite the Honourable Member for Bakau.

HON ASSAN TOURAY [BAKAU]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I will also take the opportunity to thank the President for fulfilling his constitutional obligation.

Honourable Speaker, I will be very brief and precise. I observed that the statement, instead addressing the nation's problem, looked like a political propaganda. … *[Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, I am very much glad that the President has finally addressed the Nation and I thank him very much for that. According to what I observed from his statement, this is his final statement because come December 2026, we will have a new President, 'insha'allah'. … *[Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, having gone through the Speech, the President emphasised on building roads across the country and electrifying 90% of the country. Honourable Speaker, this is wonderful but what is the impact on ordinary Gambians? How many jobs were created during this process? We want to know as citizens of this country.

Honourable Speaker, the President emphasised that 90% of the country has been electrified whilst businesses are struggling. Honourable Speaker, how do you take this Government seriously when the Government failed to address burning issues of this country?

When it comes to youth migration, the Government has no programme to solve this problem. Honourable Speaker, When it comes to youth unemployment, the Government has no programme to address the issue. How do you expect us, Gambians, to take this Government seriously when it failed in all his its obligations?

Honourable Speaker, every day cost of living is getting high and Gambians are starving. Whether you like it or not, this is happening. The Government has no programme in addressing this problem. How do you expect Gambians to take this Government seriously?

Honourable Speaker, having said that, the statement indicated that Gambia is the safest country in Africa, so how do we justify this when we still have the ECOMIG and Senegalese soldiers present in our country? *… [Desk thumping] …* If this is factual, why are we still keeping these soldiers in our country?

Honourable Speaker, having gone through the speech, I have decided not to even say a word, but it will be unfair on the side of my people. So, I said even if I am given a minute to be heard, I will be very much pleased about that.

So, Honourable Speaker, by giving me the floor and the opportunity to be heard, I thank you very much. I also thank my colleagues for that. *… [Desk thumping]*

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Bakau. Honourable Member for Lower Baddibu, I must apologise for your name was next. I skipped it. You can take the floor now.

HON KEMO GASSAMA [LOWER BADDIBU]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, I hope and pray you will give me extra minutes on top of the one allocated to me since I have been putting on your colour from top to bottom, from my head to toe. *… [Laughter & Desk thumping]*

Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. The President's State of Nation Address has touched several key areas, among which is, of course, economy. He spoke about economic growth. He reported about the 5.9% GDP growth rate and decline in inflation, 10.2% from December 2024 to

6.6% in December 2025. He also mentioned that the Gambian Dalasi is getting stable against major trading currencies.

Honourable Speaker, as I am speaking to you today, ***1 U.S. Dollar*** is ***D73.70*** and ***€1*** is ***D85***. This is black market and ***1 British Pound Sterling*** is ***D97***. The stability of our currency as being claimed by the President should reflect on the prices of commodities in the market.

Honourable Speaker, today you can visit all the markets, especially construction material. A bag of cement is costing more than ***D400***. My problem on the stability of Gambian Dalasi is that, if that is the case, that would have translated on the price of basic goods in our markets, but this is not the case in the markets.

We are all market forces; if you are not a buyer, you are a seller. We are interacting day in and day out. There is nobody here who will tell me that he is not part and parcel of Gambian market. We are saying that let us try and reflect on the realities and speak on what is prevailing in our country. Gambian Dalasi or the inflation in this country is not declining.

Honourable Speaker, why is it that the prices of both imported and local commodities are still increasing? The simple answer is that the Dalasi is still struggling against major trading currencies, this is the fact. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, for example, well before Ramadan, as he rightly mentioned, one kilo of meat and bone in my area somewhere around Yarambamba ***D450*** per kilo. Okay, fine no problem, no I am from Kiang, but today, a kilo of meat and bone, 'Yapayah' is ***D500***. How many Gambians can afford that? For example, if most especially if you have a family of more than 20 or 15. How many of us can afford that for our

families? And yet, people are telling us that no price of commodities is now reducing.

Honourable Seaker, if you come to the issue of irregular migration, the President himself acknowledged the disaster associated to irregular migration and this is not a secret to anyone of us here but I believe, what I expect from the President's speech is how to curtail that irregular migration by creating opportunities back home here, instead of relying on a bilateral agreement with the West and Middle East. Middle East it is a dead centre or no, it is a trap for Africans, not only Gambians. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honestly speaking, it is not good for us. How many of us here would like our sons and daughters to be traveling to Middle East under this agreement? How many of us? Let us try to be realistic here. The President will not allow his sons and daughters to be traveling to that end neither me. Alhagie also is telling me the same thing. *… [Laughter]*

Honourable Speaker, I believe the President falls short of mentioning any programmes for the creation of jobs for the population of this country. Instead of relying on this bilateral agreement, I expect from the President to give us concrete plans that he and his Government have for the youths of this country so that we can try and, of course, minimise this backway issue.

Honourable Speaker, the President, in his State of Nation Address, did mention that they have signed bilateral agreement with Europe. What I know is only one European nation that is Spain, but the Vice President of the country is here. Mr. Vice President, I am telling you to come up with

other European nations that you have signed bilateral agreement with apart from Spain.

Honourable Speaker, coming to the issue of construction, I commend the Government for coming up which local financing when it comes to construction of local roads, I commend them for that, I am very much truthful I am not like you people. *… [Laughter & Desk thumping]*

I commend the Government for that but what I cannot understand is I have spoken about the issue of Njawara Minteh Kunda Road in this National Assembly, not once, not twice. I have set up parliamentary questions on it to the Works Minister.

They reply I got from him was *"funding is not available,"* but today, World Bank, through GIRAV Project, has come to the aid of the people around that end. They went to Njawara to lay the foundation stone of the construction of that road, without extending an invitation to me who have been advocating for this in this Assembly. I am just disappointed; I am surprised. *… [Desk thumping & murmuring]*

No, wait. No, the reason… Sorry, Honourable Speaker. You see, please.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, allow him to talk, please.

HON KEMO GASSAMA [LOWER BADDIBU]: The reason of doing that is the President and his people want to take the entire credit, but we are not you know… Whatever we say here in this National Assembly is always on record. *… Desk thumping] …* You cannot take the credit that is meant for Mr. A and give it to Mr. B.

And also, some of us National Assembly Members here thought that the construction of the 700km roads is entirely funded by the Government of

The Gambia. Please, this is, of course, a World Bank Project. *… [Desk thumping] …* Let us try and tell our people what is happening? Let us tell our people the reality. It has to be clear. Let us not*… [Interrupted]*

Honourable Speaker, on that note, I will, of course, take my seat here because they are disturbing me.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Lower Baddibu and thank you for looking so nice in your green. *… [Laughter & Desk thumping] …* I now invite the Honourable Member for Sami.

HON ALFUSAINEY CEESAY [SAMI]: *'Alhamdulillahi Rabil Alamin'*. Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor.

I thank the Almighty Allah because 5 years is not 5 days as highlighted by His Excellency the President of the Republic of The Gambia. This is the final year of the five-year term of the President to give a State of the Nation Address as well as the National Assembly Members. So, we must thank God for that because 5 years is not 5 days. We must thank God for that.

Honourable Speaker, if you look at the President's speech, he urged the Gambian people to make good decisions. Why did he say that? It is because of the election year he said that we should make important decisions for the future of this country. Honourable Speaker, this has reminded me that so many promises were made by the Government from 2016 up to date.

You know, Honourable Speaker, I had so many comments here, but in any speech you are making, you must talk about achievements and challenges. How can you just start talking about achievement? *…*

[Laughter] … We are not helping the Government, Honourable Speaker. We have to tell them the challenges so that they can improve on them. It is not that we do not know what they are doing. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, if we just keep on praising, that will not help them. Honourable Speaker, the 2020 Draft Constitution affects the whole Gambians. It is the Gambians decision; they went to all the corners of this country up to diaspora. They consulted everybody, but this very Assembly threw it out, which actually has so many things there. Honourable Speaker, some people are speaking*… [Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, it is not this very Assembly.

HON ALFUSAINEY CEESAY [SAMI]: When I say this Assembly, I am correct to say this Assembly because it happened during the 6th Legislature. It happened in this august Assembly.

THE SPEAKER: It is not even this august Assembly; it is the 5th Legislature, yes.

HON ALFUSAINEY CEESAY [SAMI]: Okay. This very Assembly during the 5th Legislature, you know, decided not to approve it and in that, Honourable Speaker, some of us are saying that how many people in Sami can hear what I am saying. They do not know. Very few. If they translate what some of you are speaking here into a local language, huh… if they come for you, you will know it *… [Laughter] …* because you know there is communication barrier, Honourable Speaker. The way I said it will be quite different from the way some people will narrate, but when we say it in our mother tongue, it will be clear.

Honourable Speaker, how many millions were spent on that? A Lot of money. ***160 million*** was spent on that. That money could have been used on something. Honourable Speaker, the President himself, in his speech, talked about the contribution of the diaspora, and this very Assembly said no to the diaspora's voting rights.

Honourable Speaker, can you please talk to the Honourable Member for Niamina Dankunku? He is disturbing me. Niamina West please, no observation. It is my time.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable, please continue. Honourable Member, if you talk about observation, and he does not sit down, then keep quiet.

HON ALFUSIANEY CEESAY [SAMI]: Honourable Speaker, a lot of money was spent on that. Honourable Speaker, I said the achievements. Yes, the Government have built so many roads, and that is true. Many communities have electricity. It is good. It is commendable, Honourable Speaker. This is why I said that you must say the achievement of the Government and also the challenges.

Honourable Speaker, the President, in his speech, said ***204 million USD*** is expected to create job opportunities for youths. Yes, it is in the report, and this has reminded me of… I now want to specifically look at 3 areas: agriculture, education and health. Those are going to be the areas that I will look at.

Honourable Speaker, we have to look at agriculture. The way the Government is looking at agriculture, we should look at another dimension because agriculture is the backbone of the country. Without food, with all these developments is meaningless. That is, we are talking of drinking cold water, sleeping under fan, but then there has to be something in our

stomachs, Honourable Speaker. If there is nothing in your stomach, how can you drink cold water? How can you sleep under a fan? You will not! *… [Desk thumping]*

Therefore, the Government should try all means. If you go to Nianija, Kuntaur and CRR South, there are vast lands where the Government can try to create something so that the youths can work on those areas for food-self-sufficiency. But other than that, whoever tell you that there is no hunger in this country, there is hunger in this country, Honourable Speaker. *… [Laughter] …* Yes, some people cannot have their three meals. If you say a bag of rice is ***D1,750***, the intention of the Government should be to reduce it down.

Honourable Speaker, agriculture… and I always say it is not only crops and animals. You look at their reports, they do not talk about anything with regard to livestock. They talked about what they have done in 2025 and what they want to do in 2026, but there was nothing like livestock mentioned in the report.

[Point Of Order]

THE SPEAKER: Can we have your point of order, Member for Lower Saloum?

HON SAINEY JAWARA [LOWER SALOUM]: Order 18 of the Standing Orders, *"Any member deviating from these Standing Orders may be immediately called to order by the Speaker or by any other Member rising on a point of order."*

Honourable Speaker, the Member mentioned ***$200,000*** for employment. Where is it in this document? I have not seen it there. I want the Member to substantiate where it is in the document.

HON ALFUSAINEY CEESAY [SAMI]: Thank you very much. It is 200*… [Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, yes, I heard you say that, and I do not refute that it is in the document because it can be there. But just hold on. Honourable Member, can you just make reference to the relevant pages for Members to note?

Honourable Members, when you are contributing instead of the page, just give us the paragraph number.

HON ALFUSAINEY CEESAY [SAMI]: It is Page 20. I am not speaking out of the blue. I am not speaking out of the blue like that. I made my jottings. It is there.

THE SPEAKER: *… [Laughter] …* Honourable Members, they are talking about Paragraph 60 which reads:

> *"To boost productivity and food security, the Government continues to implement the National Seeds Programme. Through it, over seven hundred and three million Dalasi* (GMD703 million) *have been allocated for seed and fertiliser subsidies and expansion of agricultural credit by an estimated twenty percent (20%). The Government also provided three hundred million Dalasi* (GMD300 million) *to recapitalise the National Food Security, Processing and Marketing Corporation."*

HON ALFUSAINEY CEESAY [SAMI]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. It is just that I am in a haste, but I got this thing in the report. It is 200. Huh.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, you could be right, but when you are challenged, you should be able to provide the evidence. If you are not challenged, we would continue But so far you are challenged, you are either*… [Interrupted]*

Hon AFUSAINEY CEESAY [SAMI]: You know why I brought this?

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member, hold on. Honourable Member, you are challenged, so you either prove it by showing us the area or you withdraw the statement.

HON ALFUSAINEY CEESAY [SAMI]: Okay. It is there. I am not withdrawing.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Sami, please. You cannot tell me that. You have made a statement that you are challenged on, so you either give us the evidence or you withdraw the statement until you see it, my friend.

HON ALFUSAINEY CEESAY [SAMI]: Let me just withdraw it. I will continue, but it is in the report. Thank you very much.

THE SPEAKER: We will give you back the 2 minutes.

HON SAINEY JAWARA [LOWER SALOUM]: Honourable Speaker, I rose on a point of order, you have to make ruling on it. Either he withdraws or*… [Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: That is what I have just done. Meaning, he has withdrawn. Honourable, if there was no ruling, he would not have

withdrawn. He withdrew; I heard him say it. Honourable Member, can you continue?

HON ALFUSAINEY CEESAY [SAMI]: I think I have withdrawn it. *… [Laughter] …* If he does not hear it, I have withdrawn. Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. They are just wasting my time.

Honourable Speaker, let me go straight to education. Yes, they have done tremendous job on that, Honourable Speaker. If you look at education in those days when some of us were in the system, it was a problem to have a staff quarter, but nowadays there are a lot of staff quarters and textbooks nationwide. They have provided that and of course, access to education, they have built a lot of Lower Basic Cycles, Upper Basic and Senior Secondary School.

Honourable Speaker, but in his speech, there are still gaps we must mention*… [Mic switched off]*

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Sami. Honourable Members, I now invite the Honourable Member for Bundungka Kunda.

HON SULAYMAN JAMMEH [BUNDUNGKA KUNDA]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor.

Honourable Speaker, first of all, I want to thank His Excellency the President for fulfilling his constitutional mandate. I equally to thank His Excellency the Vice President and the other Ministers present here on behalf of the President.

Honourable Speaker, I think the purpose of this SoNA, is all about the President to come and talk to the Gambian people through the Parliament.

… [Desk thumping] … So, that being the case, so far so good, we heard a lot. The most important thing here is about a government, you must highlight some of the achievements and your challenges, and which I just want to register that the achievements were highlighted.

But equally, the President highlighted some of the challenges. *… [Desk thumping] …* But the challenges he mentioned that, there are challenges which the Government realised but still, they will continue to ensure that at least overcome those challenges because in this world, there is no achievement without challenges. But all the time when there are challenges, if you want to highlight it, those are the areas where you will bring solution.

So, that being the case, I think when you come in terms of a regional government, I will start with that. For the first time, we have a land policy which has been approved and now it is in practice. So, I think this is a landmark achievement for the Government of The Gambia and at the same time, the housing scheme that they are almost trying to come up with, and an area has been identified. These are areas that we have never seen before and I think it is important that at least we have a housing scheme for Gambians in general, especially civil servants because at the end of the day, many people will work and they would not have their own property.

So, with this housing scheme, it will really enhance the civil servant to be able to have their own land or properties.

So, that being the case Honourable Speaker, when the President also highlighted some of the infrastructural developments, so these are things that are tangible. When we talk about infrastructure is tangible, these are

tangible projects. Roads and electricity are tangible projects and these are things that we can see, feel and touch.

So, for a member to stand and say, this is nothing or it does not have any impact because for a road, the moment you connect communities, you are connecting two communities together. That one alone is something. Wherein they can go to each other without having any trouble. The moment you construct a road, properties along those roads, the value of the road goes up and businesses become booming.

So, when you come to electricity because I understand there are about 1200km road. These are road constructions that are happening. And right now, in fact, as far as my community is concerned, the constituency we are, in fact… the upcoming projects Bundung is going to benefit too. But it is not only Bundung but it is interconnected, Bundung Sukuta and Bandung Tallinding.

So, those roads are coming… and which definitely for me, as a representative of my people because the purpose of me coming here is just to see development going to my people and it is happening.

On the side of water infrastructure, there are so many overhead tanks that are already on construction. Currently, when you go to Serekunda and Nemasu tanks there is one there for each.

So that they can address this low water pressure in the Greater Banjul Area. So, these are tangible projects that you can see for yourself.

Honourable Speaker, in terms of energy, just this last weekend I travelled to Kiang West, a village called Batelling. Because I have a project there

to my surprise when I went there, I saw a pole from the highway up to Batelling, and that is the only village in that area. *… [Desk thumping]*

I am happy, even my partners acknowledge the Government. They said this is progress and it is great because before when we go there, it is always very difficult when you come because they live in darkness, but very soon they will live in brightness, which I think is the purpose of being a good Government. *… [Desk thumping]*

So, because the thing is, to stand and say this is not a serious Government, at the end of the day, in fact, we need to ask ourselves, why are we here? Because we are here to represent our people and we are here to talk about issues that will benefit the Gambian people through our collaboration with the Executive and the Judiciary. So, if that happens, we just have to take responsibilities and ensure that at least we work towards that.

Honourable Speaker, when you go to Paragraph 85, on the site of youths, women and Social Protection. The President mentioned that by utilising the Social Protection Fund, Government is supporting five thousand, four hundred [5,400] beneficiaries of the Family Strengthening Programme.

Going down to Paragraph 86:

> *"To support low-income households for improved nutrition and food security, my government, through the NAFA-RISE Project, continues to support over twenty-nine thousand (29,000) vulnerable households. This support includes a monthly cash transfer of one thousand, five hundred Dalasi (GMD1500) to vulnerable households."*

So, these are efforts. So, we just have to appreciate, even if you do not appreciate, you can bring solutions because it is important. *… [Desk thumping] …* Being an opposition does not make you to be a bad person, but you should always bring solution to your opponent so that you can move together. *… [Desk thumping] …* Because at the end of the day, we are in this together. The President mentioned it and I must thank him what he did because for me, it is not common to me but last year he started it. He visited both the two sides of the Assembly, the Majority and the Minority caucuses which I think he has demonstrated a sense of maturity and inclusiveness. *… [Interrupted] …* Because he knows he cannot go without the Parliament and Parliament will have two sides.

So, this is why… In fact, for me, that very day what happened there at the SoNA; my elders said whatever happens, I should respect my leaders as I want them to respect me. So, that is the Quran, that is the culture. So, whatever the case is, we should respect our leaders especially our President because at the end of the day, what happened that day, we were trying to argue on clapping and desk thumping.

In fact, is our Standing Order, we should beat the table. But culturally, which one is even more acceptable? Maybe clapping is much better. *… [Desk thumping]*

So, those things should not be an issue wherein our Head of State is here, we try to interject or stop him. I do not think it is a nice thing. So, let us try and reflect ourselves and understand that we are together in this, whether you are in the Government or in the opposition. Let us work together for the betterment of our people and for the betterment of the Gambian people.

On that note, Honourable Speaker. I thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Bundungka Kunda. I now invite the Honourable Member for Foni Jarrol.

HON ALFUSAINEY CEESAY [SAMI]: Honourable Speaker.

THE SPEAKER: What do you want to speak on?

HON ALFUSAINEY CEESAY [SAMI]: I just want to clarify.

THE SPEAKER: No, we are not looking for clarification.

HON ALFUSAINEY CEESAY [SAMI]: I have seen it. I just want to clarify it.

THE SPEAKER: We are not looking for clarification.

HON ALFUSAINEY CEESAY [SAMI]: So, you do not want the correct thing?

THE SPEAKER: No, I am not giving anybody the floor to clarify what. If you want the person to give you, ask the person himself not the Speaker. Yes, Honourable Member for Foni Jarrol.

HON KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me space and time to also make a comment on the State of the Nation Address by the President. May I also seize this opportunity to thank the Vice President, all my fellow National Assembly Members and all the Ministers who are here with us.

Like I always say, when the President fails, all of us fail too. I know, as oppositions, our crime is only being an opposition. *… [Desk thumping] …* but we point out challenges because all of us cannot be here pointing out positive things. I said, I am here not to mislead anyone. I am here to

represent the Gambian people and my people. I am from a poor background, I am not going to say it is wrong when it is right, and I am not going to say it is right when it is wrong. I am here to make my honest opinion about issues.

Anytime we make political statements here because of the State of the Nation address. This is why I said I want my office, that is our offices to be occupied by technical people, not politicians, because they are going to bring us political reports. *… [Desk thumbing] …* Whatever is happening on the ground, the money is not coming from the President, the Minister, or the National Assembly Members. If you look at even our debt, we said 52 years, we are at ***48 billion***.

As I speak today, we are almost at ***130 billion***. Almost ***82 billion*** within 9 to 10 years. So, are we going to be surprised when we see development going on? No. It will be definitely dishonest to say that nothing is going within the communities. I have seen the President laying foundation stones everywhere and projects being inaugurated.

I am happy that is why I am here and I do not dodge away from my responsibilities. Anytime the President is there, be it Government, I always make sure I attend but those ministers who are there to attend because they do not want me to surface. Imagine my own Foni Jarrol, I attended an inauguration of a project, I was even denied to make a statement. *… [Desk thumping]*

This is not the first or second time. It is only once since I made my honest opinion about what is happening on the ground. What my people of Foni Jarrol and the people of The Gambia are going through. They now feel that the President should not know what is happening, because it is true

that not all of us will be clapping and I am not there to say no because electricity is an economic income for my people.

So, I will be proud to say thank you to the Government for bringing electricity to the doorsteps of my people. Which I am very grateful and I will thank Government again for constructing roads to connect the people. These are necessities that we as the representative of the people are looking forward to.

I am also interested to see the economy of people improve but looking at our reports, it is very unfair. The Government spend money on me and send me on trainings; went to Ghana, Kenya and other different places on financial trainings. When I come back to implement during my oversight function, then you see me as an opposition.

For me, I have no enemy here and no party is my enemy. In fact, people I have do not even belong to parties. I am seeing people crisscrossing everywhere and going to NPP, I am going to this, only for their opportunities. *… [Desk thumping]*

You look at it again, like I said, if you bring political statements here, you are going to get political responses here. *… [Desk thumping] …* Like you said that since 2017, our nation has been travelling… have travelled a demanding but determined path from democratic renewal through economic recovery to institutional rebuilding, national stabilisation.

Our economy has been growing 4.5% to 6.5% since 1994, 1% it was growing. Our inflation the highest even before 2017, it was something like 9%. But with the recent Government where monies are pumped, the EU and our development partners made it very clear. Monies given within 5 years has never been given to President Jammeh's Government for 22

good years. Then we should be asking you people where are those projects.

Our people are migrating, looking for greener pastures. It has been happening before, but it is worse now because no jobs for them. *… [Desk thumping] …* You said bad economy before the coming of this Government but I remember the former Government immediately you got admission to the College or the University you receive stipend.

So, with that economy, is it that possible? Our protocols, the security forces, they used to travel with Ministers. *… [Desk thumping] …* Was it bad? If at all that economy was bad, how was that possible? I am still surprised when you look at what you approved here, you still have security forces who still receives house rent of ***D250*** up to date. I am seeing it on their pay slips.

Travel allowances are like… because we have politicians in offices, we have President that appoint Ministers. Some of you probably came at the wrong time when they confused everybody. I used to say to say it here. *… [Laughter & Desk thumping] …* During the change, that 2017 he was talking about, occupying a position was about compensation, not about getting competency and knowledge to occupy the position. *… [Desk thumping]*

It was about anyone who was going against the former President, anyone who was calling him a dictator, you are qualified to occupy a position. That was how things were. That was why everything got a mess. Look at the electricity, we went into agreement with Senegal. Senegal that is not able to supply electricity to all its people, we signed a contract with them.

How much did you owe them? How much did we owe the Karpower Turkey?

I remember when those people had access to those contracts, people started clapping, now it is 24/7 electricity. I said wait; how much is now electricity? I told my people, let us clap. Let us accept. This is what we need. Electricity is there at our doorsteps. But if you people are not economically fit, it is just going to be like when we used to have those telephone poles. Later, people just had to be cut off because we were unable to pay the bills.

Being proud of 85% connected at the same time the services are not provided. We are connected; we have only 2 hours electricity. Can you tell me why are we proud of that? All this is happening. We have to improve because sometimes you hear people even in Kombo and Foni will tell you 24 hours electricity but we got only 2 hours. This is happening. *… [Murmuring from the audience; saying "no, no, no."] …* I am speaking!

[Point of Order]

THE SPEAKER: Yes, Honourable Member for Foni Bintang Karanai.

HON BAKARY K. BADJIE [FONI BINTANG KARANAI]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I am rising on Order 17[f], which states: *"while a Member is speaking all other Members shall be silent and shall not make unseemly interruption."* As the Honourable Member for Foni Jarrol is speaking, Honourable Member for Lower Saloum is making interruption and constantly talking to him.

THE SPEAKER: No. Stop that, please. Honourable Member, what the Honourable Member for Foni Bintang Karanai said is true. Members should

allow other Members to express themselves. If you are not in agreement, you can come with your own side of the story when you take the floor.

But Honourable Member try to speak into the mic and it is true, we have a whole thing that we are debating; that is the State of the Nation Address, please. Okay. You can go ahead.

HON KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JARROL]: Thank you very much. Let me move to security. Honourable Speaker, looking at the report, yes, I agree that The Gambia is ranked fourth probably, compared to other countries. But if we look at the rate of crime in this country, even gender-based violence, to me it has not decrease. Even in schools, people are stabbed which has not been happening. I am comparing yesterday and today. I am talking about public voices not what you people write here. I am pointing out here what my people and other people are complaining in the streets.

So, security wise, we have to improve. And then, the funny thing is, we said that we are fine with the security of The Gambia. Before this SoNA, the very day we had it on Thursday, our people were destabilised at the borders. Is that not part of our security? Was that not a security concern? We were concerned to make a statement in the Middle East, but we are not concerned to make a statement on what is happening in the Foni? *… Desk thumping] …* Are we serving the Middle East or the Gambian people?

Honourable Speaker, I rest my case.

THE SPEAKER: He has finished? Ah! Okay. Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Foni Jarrol. Somebody is saying something… *[Interrupted]*

HON OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NIUMI]: Can we kindly break for lunch and prayers, please?

THE SPEAKER: Not yet. *… [Laughter] …* I have been monitoring, and we cannot go out for prayers when the lunch is not ready. So, we are trying to merge or box them together. I now invite Honourable Member for Banjul North.

HON MODOU LAMIN B. BAH [BANJUL NORTH]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, I want to seize this opportunity to join my fellow Honourable Members to commend His Excellency the President in accordance with Section 77[1] of the Constitution to deliver the 2026 State of the Nation Address before this honourable Assembly.

But again, I want to show my maximum respect to His Excellency the Vice President, my own Vice President and also all the Cabinet Ministers present here.

Honourable Speaker, it is indeed very important for Members of Parliament to dwell or debate on what was presented by His Excellency during the State of the Nation Address. In doing so with your permission because I read the entire Statement and I will be referring you to the Statement that was delivered by the President with my comments.

So, in that regard, I will start with Paragraph 11, which talks about the issue of *"The 2026 Budget projects total to revenue and grants of fifty billion, three hundred million Dalasis (GMD50.3 billion), …"* Which is indeed very important and also seeing that The Gambia is at least

improving in terms of the budget allocation as far as our forecast is concerned.

But again, looking at it, it is like through GLF. The Government is only mobilising 64% of it, which is about ***32.2 billion*** and meaning, the remaining, which is about 36% will be in the form of a grant or loan.

My concern is the issue of the reliance of grants and loans as a country. I think it is very important for us to work on this. It is very dangerous as a country to be relying on grants and loans which is indeed a very big concern.

Going to Paragraph 13. Of course, the President highlighted and also commended the people in the diaspora, the Gambians in the diaspora for their contribution in terms of remittances and this is all about the importance of our economy. Seeing to it that in 2025, they have contributed and these are only recorded transactions. They contributed over ***872 million USD*** which contributed to 34% of our GDP which is very commendable.

But again, Honourable Speaker, if we are very honest to each other, are we not playing double standard as far as giving the rights to the people in the diaspora are concerned in terms of how do we run this country because I can remember during the consideration of the Election Bill, this humble Assembly removed a provision that gave them the right to vote and be voted for which is indeed a very important provision as far as that particular bill, which is an act today, should have considered?

So, I think this is something that we really need to put into consideration and see to it that whatever we advocate on behalf of the people or the Gambians in the diaspora is not only by mouth but also what we do and

also encourage them to be part of the decision-making process of this country.

Honourable Speaker, I will take you to Paragraph 19 under trade, industry and job creation. Paragraph 19 talks about the special economic zone, which I am very much interested in and I believe it is the way forward. I can see the Honourable Minister for Defence, who was the former Minister of Trade. I just want to know how far because I am not seeing the Minister of Trade here, but I think the Vice President will be able to respond to that.

In terms of the land allocation as far as the special Economic zone is concerned. Understanding the positive impact that it will have as far as The Gambia is concerned. So, these are things that we need to work on because why I am saying it, is like we need to stop presenting things we are putting little effort towards to because it is very important if we know that this is of benefit to the country, we must put all efforts to achieve it, which is indeed very important.

Honourable Speaker, I will just take you straight to Paragraph 24 of the Statement that talks about the issue of addressing irregular migration. And if you go down, it talks about Gambians are now working legally in Europe and in the Middle East. We want to know, we understand that there was this Gambia-Spain circular migration agreement which was approved by the National Assembly, and some young Gambians went to Spain to work. What I understood was like some of them absconded and some returned.

So, is it a new batch that went back to Spain, that is what the President is talking about here? I want clarity on that, Mr. Vice President as far as

this is concerned. And if yes, how many Gambians are currently legally working in Europe according to your data and also the Middle East?

Honourable Speaker, this is why I was just making emphasis of trying to see how best we can have the 15 minutes because I have a lot to say as far as this Statement is concerned.

But again, I will take you to Paragraph 44 that talks about *"To fast-track this objective, we have allocated three hundred and ninety-seven million Dalasis (GMD397 million) in the 2026 Budget to expand electricity services to the remaining unelectrified communities."* I will say kudos to the Assembly because according to the savings that we got, ***200 million*** was put into this amount. So, meaning the Assembly should also be at least acknowledged for their hard work for making enough savings of ***200 million*** that was put into this to make sure that the issue of unelectrified communities is electrified in 2026.

Honourable Speaker, going further, I will just take you to Paragraph 50 that talks about mining. I just want to know as far as... as a representative and people's representative for that matter, I always encourage what we call the local content and in doing so, it is very important to develop our grassroots. I just want to know how much this is benefiting as far as the different sides are concerned in terms of mining. What are they doing to change the lives and the livelihood of the people within those mining sites?

Honourable Speaker, I will also want to take you to… because I need to just move. Okay, Honourable Speaker, Paragraph 70, Page 23 of 47, that talks about what Government have done in terms of allocation for both education and health. I think it is also very important because the total amount was mentioned which is about 17.7%, that is fine. But how much

was allocated to health in terms of percentage? This needs to be clear so that people will know exactly what is happening because we need to understand that there was an agreement that we signed as a country and ratified, that is the Maputu Protocol that talks about 15% of our budget allocated to health.

So, I think these are things that we must consider. How far are we going to understand how much we are spending or budgeted for as far as health is concerned?

Honourable Speaker, I know I cannot say all as far as my time is concerned but notwithstanding, I also believe it is important to talk about issues that was mentioned during the Statement that has to do with allocation or the disbursement of funds to women in this country, which is part of the Women Enterprise Fund.

I think this Women Enterprise Fund initiative needs to be looked at because looking at the amount of funds that are being allocated to women and the number of women that we are saying are benefiting and still we cannot single out a single success story as far as this is concerned.

Again, my Honourable colleague has said it in terms of the Anti-Corruption Commission. Why the delay of the operationalisation of the Commission? Since 1st December up to date, that Commission is not operating. What is happening? We want answers for that.

Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member for Banjul North. I now invite the Honourable Member for Sabach Sanjal.

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the opportunity.

To begin with, Honourable Speaker, I just want to thank the Honourable Member for Lower Baddibu who dressed in a green attire this morning. I think it is very important. *… [Laughter]*

You see, there are things that we joke with which are very important as far as our lives as human beings are concerned. You see, green environment helps us, you know, develop our eyes so that we can see very clearly. *… [Desk thumping]*

But once you wake up in the morning and then you are unlucky to meet a very bad colour like for example, yellow, you call it. *… [Laughter] …* You see, it is very unfortunate. Sometimes, we have to be very careful.

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Focus on SoNA, please.

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: You see, once you become very unlucky, is when you wake up in the morning and you face that kind of colours, yellow, because you will end up having yellow fever and once you have yellow fever, one of the signs and symptoms*…*

[Point of Order]

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Honourable Speaker, Order 17[1] *"All Members shall restrict themselves to the business of the Assembly." [This quotation could not be verified in the Standing Orders.]* ... Are you the new Speaker?

THE SPEAKER: You are trying to put people to order, you yourself will be going disorderly. So, it is difficult for the Speaker to make that decision. Therefore, do not quote. Yes, do not quote for me then.

You see what I am saying, you are arguing with me. You do not talk until I ask you to talk. You are a special breed in the Assembly, honestly. *… [Laughter] …* Look on your right-hand side and your left-hand side, you see perfect gentlemen whom you should emulate, honestly. And I think you are the Chief Whip for this thing… one you should discipline.

I think Minority, you people should look back we want people to be disciplined, disciplinarian himself is the most indiscipline. *… [Laughter] …* You see what you are doing, I can just step up here and get… you do not argue with me, it is unfortunate. If you are here, I will not argue with you. No, please do not argue. Sulayman, please behave.

Honourable Sulayman, everybody here can be more stubborn than you please. We can be more than you. I am telling you please discipline yourself. Please be quiet and keep quiet, do not be responding to me. You cannot keep quiet? If you cannot keep quiet, then you go out. Here, you are to be quiet. If you cannot be quiet, you go out, please.

Honourable, I will not take it again. If you continue talking to me, I will ask you to please go out. Please, avoid that. Please be quiet or you will go out. Is the Sergeant at Arms around? If you are not quiet, I will send you out, honestly. I cannot entertain persistently being challenging the Speaker. Behave! Okay, who was speaking? Continue.

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. So, what that does is when you have yellow fever… Honourable Speaker, because the President was addressing health

issues you know, once you have yellow fever, you lose appetite. Even development, you will see it, but you will not feel it because you already lost appetite of every little thing. So, they do not have the appetite of the development going on in the country, but we will put them through. Yes, you want to observe me?

[Point of Observation]

HON OMAR JOBE [NIANI]: Thank you very much, Honourable Ceesay for giving me that chance. With regard to what you are saying about the issue. Even if you look at the leaf of a tree, only becomes yellow when it loses all its nutrients and the next thing is to fall down and get dry. *… [Desk thumping]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Niani, we have not heard you. *… [Laughter]*

HON OMAR JOBE [NIANI]: He gave me the chance to observe him regarding what he was saying about the yellow fever. I just added that even if we look at the leaves of a tree, it only becomes yellow when it loses all its nutrients and its expectation is to fall down and get dry.

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Thank you very much, Honourable Member Niani, for that wonderful observation. Honourable Speaker, if I come back to*… [Interrupted]*

[Point of Order]

THE SPEAKER: Yes, Honourable Member for Brikama North.

HON ALHAGIE S. DARBO [BRIKAMA NORTH & MINORITY LEADER]: Honourable Speaker, this is about debate on the State of Nation Address. The Honourable Member for Sabach Sanjal, in try to make

reference to earlier opinions regarding the statement of the President is trying to label the yellow camp as yellow fever, and I refer you to Order 29[5]; *"No Member shall impute improper motives to any other Member."*

The Member's opinion tries to relate that to yellow colour and yellow fever *… [Laughter] …* and agreeing to by Honourable Member for Niani which is an act of trying to impute improper motives to Members of yellow camp. *… [Desk thumping]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Member for Brikama North and Minority Leader, you took extra energy to emphasise but still he has not imputed anything to what the President said. *… [Laughter] …* Honourable Member, can you continue?

HON ALHAGIE B. CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker.

On a more serious note, Honourable Speaker, the Member for Busumbala Constituency was asking who conducted the review. The report that says that Gambia is the most peaceful country in West Africa. I will tell him that is world population review. They can go and look at it. It is very clear.

I think we must begin appreciating what we have as a country if we love our country. Within Africa, we are ranked as the first country that is the most peaceful country. If we are not happy with this and we do not appreciate what independent reports are giving, what will we appreciate, Honourable Speaker? We need to love our country. We need to have our country at heart. Once we realise that there are other independent institutions appreciating what we have, at least we should follow and emulate them.

Honourable Speaker, I want to thank the President in fulfilment of his constitutional mandate to come before us and inform the State on the State of the Nation which helps us to get what we call accountability, setting Government priorities and strengthening democracy as far as the rule of law is concerned and checks and balances.

Honourable Speaker, the President has highlighted so many developments that this country has achieved within this period from 2024 to now. He has also highlighted the future development that this Government intends to do which is a collective responsibility as he calls it. Assembly, Judiciary & Executive, and together we form a government. But once you are elected as a Member of the National Assembly, you have to understand that you are there to represent your people, but also to know that you are there for the country and not for your individual or political interest.

Honourable Speaker, there is nobody who would stand before the Assembly and question the developments that is going on in this country. Once the President mentioned infrastructural development, you do not question it. We are all living in the country and we are living in our different constituencies. We are seeing it happening.

When it comes to road infrastructure, you have seen it and one thing that I love about it is that the President made emphasis that most of these transformations are all from Gambian Local Funding [GLF], our own funding, and they are trying to strengthen what you call domestic resource mobilisation so that we collect as much as possible and plough it back to our development instead of depending on loans and grants. This is what the President is trying to address here.

Honourable Speaker, when it comes to agriculture, we have seen the President mentioned the difference, the increase in cereals this year. We are farmers, I am from Sabach Sanjal. Before the rainy season, the President made an announcement that he was going to support farmers with fertilizers through subsidies and he did that. Through that, farmers were able to buy fertilizer enough fertilizers for that matter and that has boost what you call cereal production in this country.

We need to start appreciating these efforts. *… [Desk thumping] …* You see, the President, in one way or the other is putting money in our pockets because a last year farmer who was selling, let us say, buying rice for ***D2,300*** after selling a bag of groundnut for ***D2,300***. This year, the same farmer is selling the same bag of groundnut for D2,300 and will buy a bag of rice for ***D1,600*** from Sabach Sanjal. *… [Desk thumping] …* How much money is the Government putting into your pocket as a farmer and as a as a citizen for that matter?

You talk about fuel, petrol and electricity; how much money is the Government putting in subsidies to make sure that they bring the prices of fuel down? Because what happens is, if the prices of fuel go up, cost of transportation also goes high and what that does is that at the end of the day, the same bag of rice which you could have transported from here to Sabach Sanjal for ***D10*** would now cost you for what, ***D50***, and that would have a great impact on that bag of rice that you would buy. So, we need to start appreciating.

You see, I am living in a border village in Sabach Sanjal. Every day, *'billahi wallahi'*. Mbow, you are a living witness to this. All of us who are living in border villages, we see people coming from our neighbouring countries to

The Gambia to buy rice, oil, butter, mayonnaise and every other little thing that they use in their homes. And not a single box of match is bought from their countries. *'Billahi wallahi'*, it is happening let us speak the truth! You see, the President has made it very clear in his statement that The Gambia we have today is different from The Gambia before, and that is a fact.

Today, I am free to go stand in the street and speak anyhow I feel like, but you see, when you have to criticize, you criticize with discipline. *… [Desk thumping] …* You see, we need to respect and appreciate the democracy that we have, but because you have the democracy that you have never tasted before, you want to abuse it, that means you want to drag us back and we are not going back as a country we are moving forward! *… [Desk thumping]*

You have to follow the footsteps of His Excellency President Adama Barrow, if you love and have this country at heart. You see he has called all of you, be it opposition or anyone. He is calling every Gambian to come and join him in His bus so that we can drive this country forward. *… [Desk thumping]*

So, what are you waiting for? You have an idea you are an economist and He is giving you the opportunity, come and join him. He has a place for you. Ministry of Finance is advertising every day. You can come and join them. So, you do not need to be a President to also support or play your part in the development of this country. If you know that you love the country, you are a specialist in economics, go to Ministry of Finance and work there. If you are a lawyer, go to Ministry of Justice. But not those lawyers who call themselves lawyers and then loot our country and at the

end of the day, you come here and start criticising our Government. We will not give you that chance never! *… [Desk thumping]*

You see, as Gambians, if you call yourself a patriot in your footsteps, once you step out from your house, people should see it in you when you speak or talk. The President said *'man dama firr deh'*. Whenever I go to other countries and see developments, I want to bring them in my country. Those are the people we want to see. These are the developments we are talking about.

So, if I come back to SoNA, I will show you something. One person mentioned, what is the Government doing as far as reforming or helping our youths to have jobs is concerned? That is why the Government has created the opportunity for them to go and learn. TVET centres under the Ministry of Higher Education. Go there and learn some skills.

Today if you go to Sabach Sanjal, people who used to be here as welder men or as carpentry, they have their local shops now. Why? Because the Government have created them the opportunity to have access to electricity now. So, the Government is there to create the opportunity for you to utilise. So, make good use of what the Government is creating. *"Make hay while the sun shine."* The Government is doing its best. We are expecting that you will follow.

Ministry of Fisheries distributed fishing boats to many places around the country last year. So, we need to appreciate these things. These are things that we are not seeing happening.

You know, agriculture, you go to trade. The former Minister is here; they have done tremendous job there. Now they are trying to even improve

the services of our local investors and people are going against that. So, they do not want even our local investors, you know, to grow.

Once Government start supporting them, they are going against it but we are focused and we will go in for development *"insha'Allahu Rabi"*. Thank you so much, Honourable Speaker. *… [Desk thumping]*

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member for Sabach Sanjal. I now invite the Honourable Member for Upper Niumi.

HON OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NIUMI]: Thank you very much Honourable Speaker for giving me the opportunity.

Honourable Speaker, let me also join my colleagues to recognise the presence of the Excellency, the Vice President and other Cabinet Ministers here present and also, to thank the President for fulfilling his constitutional mandate at least once a year to come to this Assembly and address the Nation.

Honourable Speaker, let me also thank you profusely for the way and the manner you handled this SoNA Session. At least, you know, to just have control over those who are trying to distract the President.

Honourable Speaker, I will start with infrastructure, and I will go to Paragraph 26 directly. When the President mentioned that he has completed 84km of Hakalang Road. Honourable Speaker, this has brought significant development for the people of Upper Niumi and North Bank Region. It has really brought access for development, education, tourism, sport and so on.

Honourable Speaker, with the coming of the Hakalang Road in Upper Niumi, it has developed education in the sense that many schools

throughout The Gambia are using the Kunta Kinteh Island for excursion and other things. In those days before that road get developed, having access to the island was very difficult and we are also appealing to the Government because we are losing that island.

There is a Project in place that is supposed to protect and preserve the island and to build a jetty from the river to where boats do anchor. This project's supposed to phase out around 2028. So, we are really appealing to the Government to fast track the Project in order to Protect the Island and to build this jetty for the people of The Gambia, not only Upper Niumi.

On that note Honourable Speaker, I will move to Paragraph 33, where the President mentioned that they have provided a green ferry for the people of North Bank Region. These are developments which we must appreciate and thank the Government.

Honourable Speaker, these things cannot be underestimated. When we were suffering from crossing from Barra to Banjul because there were no good ferries in place, there were so many noises around. Now when the problem is fixed, none of them came out to thank the Government*… [Desk thumping] …* and they were trying to demonstrate before. So, we must thank the Government for alleviating the sufferings on us and we really appreciate it and we are thankful to the Government.

Honourable Speaker, I will go straight to Paragraph 60 of the President's Speech, where he mentioned that they have allocated ***D300 million*** for the recapitalisation of Gambia Food Security Processing and Marketing Corporation. Honourable Speaker, this money has been appropriated by this National Assembly to National Food Security Processing and

Marketing Corporation and we really want to see that this money is given to GGC.

Honourable Speaker, when you talk about Food Security, it is either you produce it with national requirement on the farm, or you provide the gap through supply form and that was the reason why the intervention of GGC into the market through, you know, provision, food commodity to the Gambian people.

The price of rice has now drastically reduced, and when you look at the other basic commodities like oil and sugar, have also been reduced as well. These are clear facts in the market. You can go and do your market survey and see. This is happening.

Honourable Speaker, that is why it is important that development of this nature should not be underestimated, If Government recapitalised GGC, we are 100% sure that, If we cannot provide the national requirement of the food we need to eat through production, they can complement Government efforts to fill the gap through supply. And this will be provided in the form of a quality, affordability and accessibility. That is why it is important that we thank the Government for making sure that this particular fund is provided to GGC.

Honourable Speaker, I will go straight to Paragraph 142, and with your permission, I want to read this particular paragraph verbatim as stated by the President. He said:

> *"Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, Fellow Gambians, as we approach 2026 Presidential Election, I call on all political parties, candidates, and supporters to conduct their campaigns in a spirit of*

peace, tolerance, and mutual respect. Elections are a cornerstone of our democracy, and they must strengthen rather than divide us."

Honourable Speaker, when you look at this particular statement that has been cited by the President, if people are organising themselves in this country saying that no to third time and your Constitution does not provide for any time limit. Then, meaning that those people are going against the Constitution of this Country. *… [Desk thumping] …* And those people are not in for the peace and stability of this Country. If we want peace and stability to flourish in this Country, we must respect our Constitution.

Nobody can stop the President from going for third term. This is the Constitution that gave him the right. He can go for third, fourth, fifth or sixth term. If you do not want that, let us bring an amendment to the Constitution to this Assembly. Let us change it. Then, you have the time limit and you have all opportunities to change the Constitution in 2017, 2018 and 2019. They never did it. *… [Desk thumping]*

Today we are talking about term limit. We are talking about the third term. Whether you have all the powers to change the constitution, you refused to do it at that time. They know themselves. *… [Laughter & Desk thumping]*

So, Honourable Members, let us know that the President bid for a third term is a Constitutional mandate, and we are 100% behind him. *… [Desk thumping] …* We are going to support him and nobody can stop him from doing that.

On that note, Honourable Speaker, I thank you so much for giving me the floor.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member for Upper Niumi. I now invite the Honourable Member for Jarra West.

HON ALIEU BALDEH [JARRA WEST]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity. Honourable Speaker, I want to seize this opportunity to thank the President for fulfilling his constitutional mandate; that is to come and tell this august Assembly the policies, programmes, and the directions of his Government.

Honourable Speaker, I would like to begin with economy, but my Senior Honourable Member for Upper Saloum have dealt with that. I have seen people are trying to switch everything in another way, but they cannot do as much as you do. I thank you very much. You have made my work easy. I have to move to another sector.

Honourable Speaker, I go to trade. On trade, number… Page 7 of 47.

THE SPEAKER: Paragraph?

HON ALIEU BALDEH [JARRA WEST]: Okay, Paragraph 2… Paragraph 19. It says, *"Mr. Speaker, to transform our economic structure, we are investing in industrial parks, urban agriculture hubs and special economic zones…"*

Honourable Speaker, these special economic zones, we need to support this. The Government thought it wisely; we should applaud this. The site is identified in Jarra West. Luckily, the Trade Ministry has shown me all the design. I have seen the design, and then if we have this in place, it will create a lot of employment, job opportunities, it will increase our earnings and revenue. *… [Interrupted]*

[Point of Observation]

HON SAIKOU BAH [BASSE]: There is another noise underneath.

THE SPEAKER: Pardon? Noise, where?

HON ALIEU BALDEH [JARRA WEST]: Within the Chamber? I do not know.

THE SPEAKER: Ah! Okay. Yes, Honourable Member for Basse. It was confirmed that, yes, there was a strange noise, but it has stopped. I think it may be some of these mobiles or certain electrical equipment. Okay. You can continue, Honourable.

HON ALIEU BALDEH [JARRA WEST]: Honourable Speaker, here we need to work together. The Government have thought wisely to do a study on this. Design is prepared, sites are identified and luckily it is in Jarra West. *… [Desk thumping]*

What we need to do as parliamentarians is to muscle up and then do our oversights when projects like this are around. These are life changing projects; these are projects that can increase our revenue. So, we should work on this and then applaud the Government for thinking in this direction. It is only a serious government that can think this way. *… [Desk thumping]*

So, I appeal to each and every one to give your support because this one, when it is in place, if it is operational, you will see people living in Kombo to search for job at Jarra West District, 'insha'Allah'.

Honourable Speaker, I move to infrastructure, that is Paragraph 25, Page 9 of 47. He said, *"Mr. Speaker, my administration continues to work tirelessly to close our infrastructural gaps. Since 2017, the Government*

has constructed over 1200km one thousand, two hundred kilometres (1,200 Km) …" Which we are lucky to have part of these roads in the Kabada Corridor.

Honourable Speaker, if people are saying roads, are not development or not only roads are development, I will differ with them. Honourable Speaker, I remember two years ago, a brother approached me from Kohel Village to say that because Soma is our cosmopolitan town, where our people go for their daily needs to have essential commodities.

Honourable Speaker, people from Kohel find it difficult to ply the road from Kohel to Jarra Soma. People from Daru Salaam find it difficult to ply the road from Daru Salaam to Jarra Soma. People from Sankuya and Kani Kunda find it difficult to access Jarra Soma. When it rains, they cannot move to Jarra Soma.

Honourable Speaker, I asked for 100 bags of cement. I say we cannot do it alone. Even when we buy 1000 bags of cement, we cannot do this road. This is a difficult thing, but the Government is coming and 'Alhamdulillah', Government has come. Now we have easy access. People can rush to Jarra Soma from Kohel, three minutes, they are in Soma and they come back buy their needs and go back. *… [Desk thumping]*

So, we have to thank the Government of the day. If you are campaigning, you go there, you tell them road is not development, they will beat you, leave there. *… [Laughter & Desk thumping] …* These people know the importance of roads. When you have roads, people can move their goods, sell them and have money. When you have road, you have trade with different communities easily. Road connection, connects the people,

villages and I am seeing people are trying to speak negative about this report.

This is why the Debate is very easy today because some people cannot debate on the negative part of this report. The report is all about positive things. *… [Desk thumping] …* So, this is why when they stand, they go out outside the report. We are here to report on the debate on the SoNA, but people are debating outside the SoNA because they do not have anything to say against this report. If you come, we order you. *… [Laughter] …* You have to cage yourself. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, the President continued to say on the infrastructure, Paragraph 27: *"By the end of 2026, my government will have added an additional three hundred and seventy- five kilometres (375Km) …"*

Honourable Speaker, wherever you move in this country, it does not mean President won or has more votes here across the country. Cross cutting in the country, everybody is enjoying road development. Look at Kiang West, and the easiest and best thing about it is, when President gives you a good road, he also assigns GTSC bus to make transport easy for your people, Honourable Speaker. *… [Desk thumping]*

These are things that we see. We see it and all of us can see that. Today you move to my area, you go there easily. We just pray, Honourable Speaker, for this Kabada Road to move to the other side of the trans Gambia corridor then Seno Bajonki, and enter Jarra Central towards Jarra East, Honourable Speaker.

These are routes. People who are living there are farmers who live in their sweat when they have groundnuts, they need to sell their groundnuts and come and buy essential commodities for their families. When the roads

are there, these people will feel comfortable, and then we have seen the signs because the roads have gone up to Jarra West on the Trans-Gambia Highway. It is just to move on the other side towards the Jarra Central and then Jarra East, Honourable Speaker. *… [Laughter & Desk thumping]*

I will not talk about the GIRAV roads the President is doing now. That one everybody can see all these days. Maybe if it takes for one month, people tend to forget but this one is just on the way going now.

Honourable Speaker, on Maritime Transport Tour Operation, we sat in this very august Assembly; I used to have goods. Sometimes a lot of our goods or cars come through Senegal, but now ships were waiting for three weeks, now there is no ship that is waiting, Honourable Speaker. When you come, you offload and you go. This is increasing our revenue as a country.

Honourable Speaker, these are things that we see by ourselves. Let us tell the people what is happening. Honourable Speaker, there are subsidies going in. The groundnut and fertilizer are subsidized. Let us tell our people we are here representing our people.

Let us tell them what subsidy the Government is putting in whatever activity they are doing. The fuel, cash power, everything is subsidised, Honourable Speaker. Health is subsidised. Senegal is moving here to have drugs for their patients. There is nowhere in this country or in this world where you can go and have medicine for free. Education, only in The Gambia where you can have this. We are living here and the neighbours come here to access medicine we all see that in the daylight.

Honourable Speaker, when we see things, let us say it as how it is. Honourable Speaker, we can oppose genuinely and we bring in ideas so

that we can move this country. Honourable Speaker, with that short time I have, I want to tell you something, with all due respect. Honourable Speaker, I want to thank you with your leadership, but Honourable Speaker, there are sometimes somethings happening in this Parliament, we cannot take it. *… [Desk thumping] …* You are doing your job; we respect you for that.

Sometimes, some people behave here the way they behave, you can also behave that way, Honourable Speaker. I will never sit here and allow people insult my party leader when I did not insult their party leader, Honourable Speaker. We cannot take that, Honourable Speaker. *… [Desk thumping]*

When we meet, we are all brothers, we greet each other as the same family, but you cannot insult my party leader while I close my mouth and sit, Honourable Speaker. We cannot take that, and we are drawing the lines today. Honourable Speaker, with all due respect, it is because of the regulation we are sitting calmly, but we can behave like how other Members are behaving.

I thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Jarra West. Honourable Member, I think you are very right. The quietest Member here can be as radical as Central Baddibu. The quietest, can be as radical as Central Baddibu, but they decided to keep to the order, the standard, the integrity of the Assembly.

Honourable Member, you made a very eloquent speech. I just want to remind you that do not forget your neighbours. *… [Laughter] …* Yes, that

is what I was planning, but I want to put it together with the lunch. Who is saying lunch is here?

Honourable, we are closely monitoring it from here and to the to the best of my knowledge, since 2:00, I wanted us to go on break, but I was told that the lunch was not around. And if you go out by the time we have the 30 minutes or 1 hour, if the lunch comes, you cannot bring Members to the Chamber again until they have their food. That is why we are trying to put them together. If any time you know that it is around, they are monitoring, let us know and then we will go out for break.

Yes. Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Jarra West. I now call on the Honourable Member for Banjul Central.

HON ABDOULIE NJAI [BANJUL CENTRAL]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I will first and foremost like to thank His Excellency the Vice President and all Cabinet Ministers together with their support staff here present and every Gambian.

Honourable Speaker, our role here is to debate and examine based on evidence-based deliberations, basically, to do it objectively with a clear lens. Yes, it is important that we sometimes remind ourselves when it comes to what the Honourable Member for Jarra said; my humble friend. But I think when it comes to the Assembly, every single thing that passes here merits scrutiny, basically, yes. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, I would first and foremost like to make mention that the Speaker does catalogue the meritable gains based on the *'Yeruwa'*, and also our role is to link the findings with also the economic realities on the ground.

So, when it comes to our macro stability, Honourable Speaker, based on what we have seen in the document, we have seen that there has been a rise in growth from 5.9%... yes, from that of 5.7% in 2024.

Also, we have also been monitoring the inflation rate. We have seen that it has actually felt a bit to 6.6% from December. Yes, from 2024. That is from 10.2% to 6.6%, which is highly laudable, definitely.

Honourable Speaker, also as part of the Public Enterprise Committee, which is a Committee that is very dear to us, that has a very important role and a key instrument towards the prudent governance of our SOEs. We have seen a kind of a drastic swing basically from that of the SOEs from a loss of ***2.6 billion*** in 2024, to a surprising ***2.5 billion*** in consolidated net revenue, which is quiet, quite laudable as well.

Honourable Speaker, I think we will all bear witness that here in the Assembly there has been very important acts, bills, and also, we have seen policies that the ministries have laid down that have or are yielding dividend as we tend to follow things keenly.

Yes, Honourable Speaker also, when it comes to when it comes to our reserves… Honourable Speaker, mind you. I just want to first and foremost have a holistic review of exactly what we have seen because it is quite bulky. Based on our reserves, we have also seen there is 4.4 months of import reserves that the country currently holds.

However, Honourable Speaker, we have to like I said, everything that passes here has to merit scrutiny, basically. So, we also have to flag certain issues, not just to discredit the progress that has been made, but basically to just demand precision I would say. If you look at Page 9,

Honourable Speaker, on Paragraph 24, if we can all just go there quickly, under youth and migration. It says, I quote:

> *"Irregular migration continues to rob our nation of its youth. We are treating this issue with utmost urgency by creating opportunities for decent jobs, skills development and labour pathways. Through strengthened Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems and bilateral labour agreements…"*

Honourable Speaker, these are actually the way to go.

However, Honourable Speaker, we would have been prudent if the President would have given us certain statistics as to exactly how these areas are faring because when it comes to youth issues, the issue is always cross-cutting because it is in between different sectors having youth components within them. So usually, to understand it will be very hard to consolidate.

However, it will be very good for us to measure progress, to have given us a clear statistic exactly how these things are faring so far because it is one thing to set up the mechanisms to create opportunities, but it is also another mechanism needs to be created to be able to measure those mechanisms as of how much they are able to achieve. So, it would have been good moving forward to give us a statistical percentage so as to help in our oversight.

Honourable Speaker, it is very important to mention the medium term economic fiscal framework. I have always been reiterating it here in the Assembly because it helps in the operationalised mechanism when it comes to Government's fiscal prudence and based on budget-based monitoring aspects.

Honourable Speaker, I have to say that when it comes to our fiscal issues, there has been a prudent management of some of our fiscal issues based on the statistics we have seen. We have also seen that when it comes to revenue mobilisation through digitalisation and also compliance… have also really *… [Inaudible] …* born merit when it comes to what we have seen so far.

Honourable Speaker, it is very key that we make a very important indicator that we have seen that ***$872 million***, Honourable Speaker, that is 34% of the GTP is from remittances. Honourable Speaker, that is quite an astonishing number because this thing keeps our dalasi afloat. It also helps in sourcing foreign exchange as well. It also directly affects the households because we all know what remittances does.

When it comes to our social buffer Honourable Speaker, I think based on some of the lapses that might have been seen, I think this important increment in the remittances have actually closed a lot of gaps when it comes to our economic situation because we all know that there are certain economic vulnerabilities that might have happened, if at all let us say if there was a possible slowdown of you what is happening, for example, in the Middle East and in European countries where our families are residing. If at all God forbid, certain things happen, then it hampers our economy directly.

So, my question would be, are there any alternatives to be able to maybe help in boosting our revenue drive to be able to maybe, as a mechanism to foresee some of these things before they actually arise?

Honourable Speaker, just to touch on the employment aspect, I just want to quote from the recent GBoS survey. Currently, Honourable Speaker,

based on our national unemployment rate from 2025, is up from 8.3%, that is from 7.6% in 2022, 2023, now it is 8.3% unemployment rate.

By gender, women are 9.2% unemployed, men are 7.5%. When it comes to youth unemployment among youth, young people, that is 15 to 35, is 11.5%. So, if you look at the unutilised sector among our labour force, 26.7%... Yes, the unutilised people are 26.7%, Honourable Speaker.

I was just looking at these statistics because we have all been raising alarm when it comes to issue of migration and unemployment. I think these are statistics we should look at to be able to gauge exactly why young people are taking these journeys to be able to help in solving some of these issues moving forward.

So, Honourable Speaker, I would just like to say that based on the statistics that we have seen, I am quite optimistic moving forward. Our macro gains are actually looking good and also our fiscal prudence is actually good, but we also have to see how these things relate to the everyday Gambian and how does these things actually reach their doorsteps.

We have seen the issue of electricity and the roads; those are very good. But I think they also should be focused on the economic issues that are driving, let us say, our labour market and also that of our trade operations as well because most of the time the issues that we bring here are directly related to what people actually are feeling on the ground, basically.

So, Honourable Speaker, I would just like to make a final request, if the Honourable Vice President, His Excellency, if there exists any employment action plan for young people, I would like to know. Also, are there any mechanisms that can help?

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Banjul Central. I now invite the Honourable Member for Jarra Central.

HON KEBBA JALLOW [JARRA CENTRAL]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker for giving me the opportunity. Honourable Speaker, may I first of all recognise His Excellency, the Vice President and his Cabinet Ministers here present and technicians.

Honourable Speaker, last week Thursday, this Assembly witnessed the arrival of His Excellency, the President of the Republic of The Gambia, President Adama Barrow to fulfil Section 77[1] of the 1997 Constitution.

Honourable Speaker, if you may allow me to read what that says, Section 77[1] of the 1997 Constitution *"The President shall at least once in every or in each year attend a sitting of the National Assembly and address a session on Assembly the conditions of The Gambia, the policies of the government…"*

Honourable Speaker, this is telling you that His Excellency the President, Adama Barrow respects what the Constitution states. He has come here very early this time around, it used to be a blame game from the left side of the Assembly that the President does not come here early, but I am sure that one has been a thing of the past because from all the debates I heard here today, Honourable Speaker, I have not heard any Honourable Member of the National Assembly who mentioned that.

So, it is a big bravo to His Excellency, the President of the Republic of The Gambia, President Adama Barrow *… [Desk thumping] …* to come to the Assembly as early as the period that he has come here. Honourable Speaker, I will go back to Paragraph 19.

[Point of Order]

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Order 29[5], Honourable Speaker, *"No Member shall impute improper motives to any other Member."* Honourable Member of Jarra Central said that the other side, we have been blaming the President for coming here late. President had never come here been late for any SoNA. Since President came to office, you have to applaud him for coming to meetings or events on time. He is never late, nobody mentioned that one here.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I was trying to get the gist of what was said here, and I think both of you can correct me. I think what I understand is the Honourable Member for Jarra Central was saying that the President this time was not applauded for coming on time. Meaning not late, but he used to come in June and this time he came in March. He was not insinuating that coming to Assembly early, and I think where the Honourable Member for Central Baddibu also believed that your connotation means that they do not hail the President for coming on time.

Are you the Honourable Member for Central Baddibu? I do not know how you can say no. *… [Laughter] …* No, I will not give you the opportunity because we are very… I may give you the opportunity, but you do not have a right to say no because you are not the Honourable Member for Central Baddibu. Honourable, yes, I saw your tag, I have seen it. So, we get that clear and if you want to make something clear on this issue, Honourable Member for Wuli… Huh? Yes, you can come ahead and clear it for us.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Honourable Speaker, the Member for Jarra Central said *"the left,"* and that we did not applaud the

President for coming early, which was not correct because Members who spoke on this side also said they are thanking the President for coming early this time. So, you cannot say they have not done it, we did it. You are misquoting us.

THE SPEAKER: Trying to avoid… that was why I tried to find out from what I understand and then I try to engage, you know but the essence is, I think the whole thing is… Where is the Honourable Member for Jarra Central? Are we interpreting you correctly?

HON KEBBA JALLOW [JARRA WEST]: Yes, what you have just mentioned has interpreted it correctly.

THE SPEAKER: All right, okay. Honourable Member, you can continue.

HON KEBBA JALLOW [JARRA WEST]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker once again for giving me the opportunity to continue my submission.

Honourable Speaker, this will take me to Paragraph 19 of the President's speech. I think one of my Honourable Members, that is the Member for; my brother Jarra West mentioned about this paragraph, but what is so special about this paragraph, when His Excellency says, *"Mr. Speaker, to transform our economic structure, we are investing in industrial parks, urban agricultural hubs, and Special Economic Zones. thus, moving The Gambia away from raw exports towards value addition, manufacturing, and exports."*

What is more special in this paragraph Honourable Speaker is that, if things go well with this "SEZ" Special Economic Zone, we will have enough value addition into our goods more especially the agricultural products

that we are producing in our country. These SEZ zones are along the Trans-Gambia Corridor. Senegal have gotten 1 or 2 and in fact they are doing very well, Honourable Speaker. If you can visit those areas in Senegal where we have the SEZ, you will absolutely know that this Government is driving this country in the right direction. Senegal is our neighbouring country not very far from here, just take time and go and visit that site. This is something that is very laudable, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, Paragraph 21. His Excellency has spoken about The Gambia Competition and Consumer Protection. They have an intention to amalgamate there two acts, of course if they happen to do that, that will tell us that the consumers present in this country would benefit a lot.

We have been hearing for so many times accusations that this Government have no concern for consumers but with the effects of this amalgamation of these two acts into one Honourable Speaker, it will be things of the past for any Gambian to complain that consumers are not protected.

Paragraph 22, Honourable Speaker, *"On regional integration, The Gambia secured key ECOWAS positions for the 2026-2030 mandate. These include the positions of Director General of the Inter-Governmental Action Group against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA)…"*

I think I have to hails the Government and the country at large for holding this position.

Yes, Paragraph 23, Honourable Speaker, *"At the national level, in 2025, The Gambia Import and Export Promotion Agency (GIEPA) facilitated the attraction and awarding of Special Investment Certificates and Export Processing Zone License to sixteen (16) businesses."*

Why is this possible Honourable Speakers? We have to ask ourselves; we are able to achieve this as a government Honourable Speaker because of the transparency and accountability that this Government have portrayed for these years.

Investors now have the courage to come down to our country and invest as much as they can in a very free and smooth environment. This is why this number has increased. Go to statistics, Honourable Speaker, the number of investors we have in this country now, if you compare it in the past years, you will know that it has been a plus for this Government. I hailed them for that, Honourable Speaker. Let investors come. The Gambia is as safe as any other country and this is why this number has increased.

On infrastructure, Paragraph 29: *"Additionally, through innovative financing methods, the construction of about seven hundred kilometres (700km) of new roads will commence soon."* Honourable Speaker, this is another giant step and move that this Government under President Adama Barrow have taken.

With all the number of roads constructed in the country, this Government have still another additional 700km of new roads. And Honourable Speaker, I am sure the Japineh-Diganteh Village Road moving via Sasita Toranka and Medina Sasita will be among the 700km. This Sare Saidy-Foroya Wolof road must also be in this 700km.

And I know, Honourable Speaker, the Foroya Wolof to Soma Senoba Highway via Seno Bajonki, like what my Honourable Member for Jarra West has just mentioned, would also be part of this 700km. And,

Honourable Speaker, the Buiba-Sasita Toranka via Buiba Jallow Kunda and Sare Saidy road will also be part of these 700km additional new roads.

Honourable Speaker, Paragraph 32 on Maritime, the Member for Jarra West also mentioned this. It used to be 14 days for a ship to wait to offload, today it is just a day.

Honourable Speaker, in conclusion, it is easy for people to talk about corruption. Honourable Speaker, if you may allow me Honourable Speaker, Section 5[1] of the 1997 Constitution says:

> *"A person who alleges that any act or omission of any person or authority, is inconsistent with; or is in contravention of a provision of this constitution, may bring an action in a court of competent jurisdiction for a declaration to that effect."*

So, Honourable Speaker the Member for Kiang West, if he says this Government is corrupt, let him bring, let him invoke this section Honourable Speaker and likewise any other Honourable Member of this Assembly. Of course, this is a section of the Constitution.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Jarra Central. As I told the Honourable Member for Jarra West, do not forget. Honourable Members, I am sure what Members are looking for is not more for prayers but for lunch. *… [Laughter]*

So, I have just been tipped that it has arrived and that the time now… because I was also worried that Zuhr prayer may pass, because I was going to say that we call one of you to sit for us to for me to go and pray but I have just been informed that the lunch is here now.

So, we can adjourn now until what time? Half past or 4:00. It is already 15:32. I cannot hear you, let us have it once. Yes, Minority.

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: Quarter pass 4.

THE SPEAKER: Quarter pass 4?

HON. BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: All right Honourable Member, I think we can take about 45 minutes, have your lunch. But please, let us make sure that Quarter pass 4 you are in. If you are not in, I will be in. Okay, so the Assembly is now suspended until 16:15 sharp.

Assembly Sitting Suspended

Assembly Sitting Resumed

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the Assembly now resumes. Honourable Members, we stopped at Jarra Central. So, we now go to the next one, who is Honourable Member for Foni Bintang Karanai.

HON BAKARY K. BADJIE [FONI BINTANG KARANAI]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, we are to deliberate on the State of the Nation Address by the President, and in this deliberation, we will not be bias. *… [Desk thumping] …* We will be very sincere and honest as it is because The Gambia deserves to know the truth.

Honourable Speaker, the President came here, and he told us in his deliberation that the Dalasi is very stable against other currencies, including the CFA. Honourable Speaker, as I speak right now, starting from October, November until where we are today, we have not experienced any stability in terms of the Dalasi because the Dalasi

continues to depreciate, especially with regard to CFA that we are even close to.

Now as we speak, CFA is ***D660***, where are we heading to as a Nation? And why are we talking about these realities? We are saying this because we want the best for our people, set the record straight because it is a concern to us. Because we do not have anything better than the Dalasi, that is where our value is, and that is what maintained us as a nation.

Sometimes, when we say as it is, then we will find solutions to our problem, but when we are unable to say it as it is, then it becomes a real challenge. Inflation the President spoke about, he said, from December until now, the inflation has seriously dropped. I can tell you in terms of price of commodities it has not dropped in reality. When it comes to onion, in February this year, during Ramadan, a bag of onion was ***D1300*** to ***D1400***.

Now, where does the President get those statistics that he was talking about? As much as it is difficult, you must be able to come out plain to the Gambian people, tell them that I want this, that and that, but it is hard, I cannot do it. That is what is expected, once you admit those realities, then we will have solutions to the problems that we are actually facing as a Nation. Therein the Ministers will be forced to perform, the National Assembly Members will be forced to think, come up with solutions on the way forward.

And, there is no gate to the development of this country except through agriculture. Honourable Speaker, it is sad to realise that from 1965 to date, when you talk about agriculture, you talk about fertilizer. If you talk

about agriculture, they are also telling us about seeds, provision of seed and related things.

Now, when you travel to China and other parts of the world, what we have seen there is agricultural mechanisation, that is what is moving other nations to working. I wonder sometimes the reason as to why, there is a need for Members of Parliament, Ministers and other institutions to even travel because if we cannot transfer those technical knowhows, or their ideas to the country, then there is no need for us to travel to any part of the world.

Honourable Speaker, because of limited time, agriculture should be the backbone of our nation but as we speak, agriculture is not the backbone. In fact, we have no backbone. *… [Laughter] …* That is why it is hard, and some of the people are very allergic to the truth. Do you understand? So, this is why, we must depend on other people for grants and loans, and many a times, I have been telling these people that loan and grant will never take us anywhere.

Most of the time people are saying electricity and electricity and we have also seen the President under energy here, we have also seen the President moving, going to places, from one place to another saying that, *'Ako akata kurango leh mala. Kurang maloo dang maa, kabo Banjulu kata fo Basse.'* That is sad. Just to go and switch it on for people to celebrate. Honourable Speaker, that is unacceptable. How much millions are wasted in such an act? That is unacceptable and that should not be accepted, as far as we are concerned as a nation.

Moving forward, Honourable Speaker, looking at Gamtel for instance, the cooperation or the agreement with Gamcel have sent about 600 workers

of Gamtel home, and for the fact that they have gone home, we are talking about the President initially took the commitment of creating 150,000 jobs for the youths, now instead, in Gamtel, youths are sent to go and sit at home.

Even some of the people can argue that they are compensated, but that is not what we want as a nation. We want them to work for their nation, and that also connects to illegal migration because you are unable to create ***150,000 jobs*** as promised. Even in the event that you are able to create that 150,000 jobs, how much are you paying them? We have seen some teachers, police officers, security, the Gambia Arm Forces leaving this country as illegal migrants because their salaries are less than ***$200*** and sometimes even the senior ones are less than ***$300***. Most of the people are paid within that duration, and some are paid only ***$100***.

Honourable Speaker, when we talk about the growth of GDP, we must be realistic. When the GDP grow, the Minister could feel it, but the civil servants cannot feel it. How comes the poor farmers cannot feel it? Now, are we growing the GDP for ourselves or for Members of the Assembly that will stand here and justify that we are growing the GDP, you are looking at the growth of GDP in the interest of the poor people, on how it is affecting the life of the Gambian people. That is how we should look at things in a real manner.

Honourable Speaker, going further, this President also thanked the diaspora for the remittances that they are bringing, and the Members of NPP stood here and voted and said, the diaspora should not vote. Honourable Speaker, these are two contradicting things. You thank and

appreciate them for what they are doing but you said, you cannot partake in the debate or in electing the kind of leader that you want.

Honourable Speaker, when you thank the people for the work that they are doing, you must definitely appreciate and also give them what is necessary.

[Point of Order]

THE SPEAKER: Can you? Yes. Can you stand up?

HON BIROM SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: Order 29[5].

THE SPEAKER: Pardon, Order?

HON BIROM SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: 29[5], *"No Member shall impute improper motives to any other Member."* The Member said that NPP NAMs rejected to vote or give chance to diaspora people to vote. That was not what we did. We did our job accordingly.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, I am trying to get clarity on what was said and what the implications are. Honourable Member for Foni Bintang Karanai, you are indicating that the NPP NAMs voted against the diaspora people's voting. On the other hand, … yet the President goes to thank the diasporans. I think that is what you stated. And the Honourable Member is saying that NPP NAMs did not vote against the diaspora voting. Yes, I think that is what we said. That is what I am saying. Pardon?

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: *"By saying it,"* that is what he is saying.

THE SPEAKER: Do not say that? If you are imputing motives, it means that they did not say it. If they say it… If that is what they said, then you

are not imputing any motive. So, I think that is what you are saying. Am I right? Yes, and you are saying that NPP NAMs should not say it.

HON BIROM SOWE [NIAMINA WEST]: Good. What he said was that, it was the NPP NAMs that stopped diaspora from voting. I said, no to that. It was not just the NPP NAMs; it was the decision of the Assembly. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, Honourable Member for Sabach Sanjal.

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Yes, Honourable Speaker. I will help the Member for*... [Interrupted]*

HON KEBBA T. SANNEH [FONI JAROL]: No. Do not help him. Do not use my name. I am not the one who *... [Inaudible]*

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: The Member is imputing. He is saying*... [Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: Sabach Sanjal.

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Yes, sir. No, he is saying that the Assembly made a collective decision. I am saying the decision was not to reject diaspora from voting. We never, in this floor of the Chamber, rejected diaspora from voting. That is what I want to be cleared.

THE SPEAKER: What did you do?

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: What we did there was registration of voter's cards, registration of people from diaspora. And we said that it must be demarcated before registration can commence, but we never rejected them from voting.

THE SPEAKER: Yes, I want to recall my submission, Honourable Members. I do not know whether I remember very well. I think there was a time when the diaspora voting came in one of the Bills, and while we were looking at that Bill, the diaspora voting was expunged or removed based on the fact that they could not vote without having a constituency as per the Constitution. *… [Unanimous agreement]*

Yes, that was tidying up the Bill. That was not preventing them from voting because the agreement then was before you can vote… as what I heard you people quote was the Constitution, that a constituency must be demarcated before you can ask somebody to register and vote. And based on that, they tidy it up and there was this argument that there needs to be some fundamental amendments to be done before that clause can come in, if I remember a little bit.

So, I do not think they were denied to vote. *… [Desk thumping] …* Honourable Member, can you continue, please?

HON BAKARY K. BADJIE [FONI BINTANG KARANAI]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. Honourable Speaker, as sensitive as the Special Select Committee that the Assembly did set to investigate into the assets of the former President and their investigation. As surprising as the investigation was, the President, in fact, came to the National Assembly and did not actually talk about it at all.

And we expect him to also make the commitment that, at the end of the day, we will come up with something. Whatever the Assembly come up with, we will stand by it and we will enforce it to the last dot. That was our expectation from the President, and that the President should not be silent over it.

We are looking forward to the commitment that will come from various ministries and various Government institutions for us to establish justice because justice is necessary for the progress and the development of every nation. That is an important element of life.

[Point of Order]

THE SPEAKER: Are you rising on a point of observation or point of order?

HON ALIEU BALDEH [JARRA WEST]: Point of order.

THE SPEAKER: Point of order?

HON ALIEU BALDEH [JARRA WEST]: Yes.

THE SPEAKER: Okay. May I hear you?

HON ALIEU BALDEH [JARRA WEST]: Order 29[1], Honourable Speaker, *"Every Member shall restrict his or her observations to the subject under discussion."*

Honourable Speaker, we are talking about the State of Nation Address, so the report of the Select Committee is yet to reach the President for him to come here and deliver on that report. The report is still within the Assembly. Let the Member read what he is doing.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, the President's speech was very wide, all encompassing. I think if I understood, the Honourable Member is saying that he wanted the President to comment on it. Now, what you are saying, the Honourable Member is also saying that he cannot comment because they are waiting for the report of the Committee.

Now, I do not think any of you have said anything bad. The Honourable Member for Foni Bintang can talk about what he thinks. And in your

responses, you can respond to say that the President said that and that, but he cannot do it because he has not received the report yet. So, it cannot be something that is out of order. *… [Desk thumping] …* Yes, Honourable Member for Foni Bintang.

HON BAKARY K. BADJIE [FONI BINTANG KARANAI]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for always ruling in my favour. *… [Laughter & Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, as we can see today, during *'Koriteh'* in Foni, constant bombardment was coming and President also spoke about the security of this country and how secured The Gambia is, that The Gambia is even ranked 1st and the most peaceful country. *… [Desk thumping] …* Yet, shells were landing in Foni during *'Koriteh'*. On that Friday there was constant bombardment in Casamance between the MFDC rebels and the Senegalese soldiers and most of our people have evacuated.

We expect the President also to highlight on that and show concern and the Minister of Defence to come and also discuss with the President so that the President can come and highlight on those issues because it is a concern to the people and whatever is a concern to the people in the State of Nation Address, the President should be able to talk about it, update the people, his stand, what is the next plan that he has for the ordinary people.

Honourable Speaker, it will be of essence for the President to go back towards creating 150,000 jobs, as was promised in one of the SoNA addresses. That is, some of the Gambian College students that are just completing are without employment, and Honourable Speaker, it will be

hard for us to live in a country wherein there is no focus, wherein we can say we have no backbone. So, it is a serious challenge.

Honourable Speaker, on that note, I finally thank all of you, and I thank the Members of Assembly as well.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member for Foni Bintang Karanai. And as you said, I am always backing you, correct, if you are always right. So, make sure that you are always right. *… [Laughter & Desk thumping] …* I now invite the Honourable Member for Brikama North and Minority Leader.

HON ALHAGIE S. DARBO [BRIKAMA NORTH & MINORITY LEADER]: I am just stepping in. Honourable Speaker, I thank you very much. The State of Nation Address is an address expected to be on the State of the Nation. Somebody said, we have nothing to talk about the Statement as it appears that all is positive.

Yes, we do not only look at what is in the address, but we look at the State of the Nation, the expectation. This is what the President said, but this is what we expected. I do not think if anyone perceived it that way, that is out of order, Honourable Speaker. I think people have to understand that.

I must commend the President. After the address, he visited the Minority Office and his very words were *"Yes, one day I will be called a Former President, one day any of you will be called Former National Assembly Member, what will not be former is our relationship." … [Desk thumping] …* That is very symbolic. The President also recognised the presence of the Former Vice President and who happened to be his political godfather father. *… [Laughter]*

Somebody said that this may not be or is not going to be his last State of the Nation Address, somebody said, he is going to be his last State of the Nation address. I may wish to join to wish that, this is going to be his last State of the Nation Address *… [Laughter]*

But equally in the same spirit, I would love to see that the manner in which he invited the former Vice President, his political godfather, and he acknowledged and attended so that 2027, his former Vice President and political father can equally invite him as Head of State and him as former President to grace the 2027 State of Nation Address, that is my wish, Honourable Speaker. *… [Murmuring]*

Honourable Speaker, a lot talked about infrastructure development projects. I look at the State of Nation Address, Paragraph 101 that is about the Anti-Corruption Commission. *"In December 2025, the National Assembly confirmed the Commissioners of the Anti-Corruption Commission, positioning the country to intensify the fight against corruption and promote ethical governance."*

Honourable Speaker, the Act was passed in 2023 only for us to confirm the appointment in December 2025. Honourable Speaker, the law without implementation, risks before becoming a symbol of intent rather than an instrument of change. There we have the Act since 2023. We only have the Commission Members approved to be appointed in December and Honourable Speaker up to now, two months after the approval for the appointment, the Anti-Corruption Commission is not fully operational. When there is Anti-Corruption in place, not fully operational, who is questioning the commitment of the Government in fighting against corruption?

Honourable Speaker, at this juncture, I am making a clarion call and I am saying Honourable Speaker, with immediate effect the full operationalisation of the Anti-Corruption Commission. If the Government wants to demonstrate the commitment to fighting corruption, I am making this clarion call for the Commission to be fully operational, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, the President made mention of 375km pave roads, overall network connection 2026. I want the Vice President to inform us which roads are part of those 375km? And he went further to indicate that 700km of new roads are expected.

Furthermore, I want the Vice President also to break that down because I want to confirm whether my constituency is benefiting from this? When I benefit the Vice President benefits. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, in the review of the Local Government Act, the President made reference to, Honourable Speaker, I tend to doubt the commitment of the Government in reviewing the Local Government Act. Since 2018, this was the notion put to us that, we are reviewing the Local Government Act. Even our FPAC resolution made mention of the reviewing of the Local Government Act, and we were told that, it was in progress and very soon it will be laid before the Cabinet and up to now, that process is on. There cannot be any meaningful development or changes in the Local Government Sector without reviewing the Act.

Honourable Speaker, this reminds me about an aspect in the Act, the appointment of the Paramount Chief. I have raised that question over and over, and the Minister agreed that the Paramount Chief is not appointed. The last Paramount Chief to be appointed was in the days of former

President Yahya Jammeh, that was a Chief Demba Sanyang. Since then, there is no Paramount Chief appointed.

The last time I raised the question, the Minister informed us and promise that he is going to advise the President to Act effectively up to now, that is not done. Why is the President shying away from appointing the Paramount Chief, a delay or an inaction in that, it means the President is flouting our law, and as a Parliamentarian, we cannot sit and watch and allow the President to flout our law. A Paramount Chief, should be appointed, and when he is appointed, he is going to serve for two years and is rotational. Our tradition should be respected. Let us respect our traditional authorities.

This is the last time I am talking about this, the next time I will be coming, when the Paramount Chief is not appointed, I will move a motion for a Paramount Chief to be appointed, and that will be the last move, and that will be something must be done and will be done.

I thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Brikama North and Minority Leader. I now invite the Honourable Member for Kantora and Majority Leader.

I never knew that I have a Deputy Speaker with me on the table. Honourable Members, I now invite the Honourable Member for Janjanbureh.

HON OMAR JAMMEH [JANJNBUREH]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I want to seize this opportunity to thank the Vice President and Cabinet Ministers present here today.

I equally want to join my colleagues to debate on the recent concluded SoNA, and also to remind my colleagues that I am not really here to project any perfection but then, looking at the content of the SoNA, I want to believe that it affirms certain things. One is progress and two is actually to renew hope among Gambians.

The reason being is some of my colleagues have said it, we just have to be sincere at some level and this is not about politics. It is really important that we really measure… My Darboe Kundaka is looking at me. *… [Laughter]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable, all right. Just give me a chance. Honourable Members, especially those at the back there, please. If I see you talking, I will shout your name, and if you are not careful… if you want to talk, just step out. You do not disturb the whole Assembly and some of you have gotten your chances. Allow others to have their chances, please.

HON OMAR JAMMEH [JANJANBUREH]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker, for addressing that. Certainly, you should not be surprised that there is some noise. I think it is because of the shift*… [Laughter & Desk thumping] …* But again, it is about nation building and we have to face the realities. Take your time.

Honourable Speaker, as I said earlier, nation building is not only the duty of the Government, it is a shared responsibility and I want to believe that if all of us collectively should support the developments that are ongoing in this country, we should really reach where we supposed to be. This august Assembly have been a contributing factor to that. We approve budgets and have oversight over the Executive. So, as such, we have a role to play and what I meant here by we have a role to play is we are

also part of that government. Therefore, let us endeavour and work together as a team.

Honourable Speaker, I believe you will all agree with me that 20 or 15 years ago we were not at this level. *… [Desk thumping] …* We were some steps backward. Like in my own region, I want to give you a scenario. During Covid 19, I was embarking on distributing food to less privileged communities, more especially those that we thought were affected by Covid around the borderline.

I visited a community like Raneru almost during the rainy season. It was really tough for me to reach in that community and there was something that an old man told me when we give them sanitaries and whatever we have at our disposal. This old man told me in Wolof: *'Giss ngen nyun du ndoh ak lunyo rahaseh loho len sohlah. Nyun fii, purr nyu am ndoh bunyoo naan sah problem lah. Fum jarr rek, mu am ko hamneh dafayi duga chi birr tenn bi mu rot ndesiti ndoh purr sunu nak yii ak yeneni nyu muna naan.'*

That very day, we went on social media. I have some very close friends as a stakeholder. Then, I was a youth leader within the Local Government, they were not really happy with the kind of advocacy we were doing online to ensure that the people of Raneru would have water at their disposal.

A few weeks ago, when I visited that part of the country sometime last month, I was definitely amazed. *… [Desk thumping] …* It will take some of these community members two days to reach at Janjanbureh. Now it takes them an hour or half an hour to reach Janjanbureh. This is what we call development, something that the people can feel, it must be tangible and this is exactly what is happening.

Honourable Speaker, I would want us to look at the content of the SoNA Report. I would appreciate to start with tourism on Paragraph 115, and it reads: *In the same way, Micro Small and Medium Enterprises were strengthened, with over one hundred and twenty (120) enterprises supported."* This was meant for small scale enterprises in the tourism industry, and I can identify establishments within the community of Janjanbureh that has benefited from such supports. *… [Desk thumping]*

So, all that I want to say is for the Ministry of Tourism to continue on that drive and continue to support the development of rural tourism; enhance and maximise benefits for those that are in the tourism sector.

Also, he did report that on Paragraph 117: *"Relatedly, The Gambia has earned UNESCO's recognition in the Historic Georgetown in the Central River Region."* That is the very community I represent here. For us, what it tells us is the Government has an interest in preserving our heritage, not just our heritage, but also to contribute towards the development of cultural tourism on the island, considering what they are doing around the Janjanbureh Kankurang festival as well.

Honourable Speaker, I want us to look at youth and sports. It says *"Youth, women and social protections."* I understand that there are numerous developments that have been elaborated by the President during the SoNA.

However, I still want to challenge the Ministry of Youth and Sports to work towards laying the Youth and Sport Bill before this very National Assembly. There is nothing much we can do for our young people if the regulations are not in place. Looking at the trend of Migration and

unemployment, we can only combat it with the right documents and the right tools.

So, I want to encourage the Government to really look into that and also, if need be, to decentralise what we call the GSI initiative in the North Bank Region. I think it is a model that convinced every other Gambian youth that agriculture is something that our young people can be engaged in. So, as such, let us extend it to other regions and also engage our young people because if the youths are not engaged, then they will engage themselves.

So, for me, AGRO entrepreneurial is very key, if really, we want to feed the nation, we must ensure our young people would serve as driving factors towards this development, and having a decentralised would definitely address some of these things. We have seen the trend of migration in this country.

I want to challenge the Ministry of Interior to also look into the Immigration Bill or the Immigration Act, either to have a review of it or to lay another Bill before us in order to address migration in this country.

Also, our prison officers, sometimes it is very sad to realise that some of these officers would only earn D500 as a take home after they are caught from either loan and related matters, simply because the laws that are governing them are as old as mankind.

So, there is a need for you to look into that equally with the police and, if need be, Defence respectively. I think the Defence Bill is before us, but again, in order for we to achieve the required reforms, we must look into some of these existing laws either to review them, amend or have bills to address some of these challenging issues.

Finally, Honourable Speaker, the SoNA Report is not just a mare report. It is a reflection of a government that is working quietly, steadily and deliberately improving the lives of our people. *… [Desk thumping] …* In the report, they have underscored the challenges they are facing and I believe, together with all of us, we should be able to address some of these challenges.

With these few remarks, Honourable Speaker, I take my seat.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Janjanbureh. I now invite the Honourable Member for Lower Niumi.

HON TAMSIR CHAM [LOWER NIUMI]: Honourable Speaker, His Excellency the Vice President, Cabinet Ministers present, *'Assalamu Alaikum.'*

Honourable Speaker, I prayed here last year for us to witness the 2026 SoNA. Here we are today, debating on the SoNA that was held last Thursday by His Excellency the President, Saidina Adama Barrow. *… [Laughter & Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, let me join my colleagues to thank the President Saidina Adama Barrow for coming up with that beautiful SoNA last Thursday. It was one of the best SoNA in the history of this nation since colonial days.

Honourable Speaker, the President Saidina Adama Barrow and his Government are working hard to achieve their goal in the National Development Plan, which is the *'Yeruwa'.*

Honourable Speaker, going through his speech, looking at the National Development Plan, the Government has achieved 90% of the National Development Plan.

Honourable Speaker, to say so let me name a few of his achievements. Honourable Speaker, the Rural Electrification Project, right now, over 90% of Gambians are enjoying electricity in the rural area. *… [Desk thumping]* Thanks to the present Government.

Honourable Speaker, the number of roads constructed within the country is uncountable. As I am speaking now, there are some foundation stones laid for feeder roads within the whole country thanks to the present Government. *… Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, a lot of hospitals and health centres are built and lot of ambulances are distributed around the country. Many more ambulances are ordered by this present Government to ensure that everybody in the country is supplied with ambulances thanks to the present Government. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, classrooms and stones are built throughout the country. Here we are, there is no students that would work more than 3 kilometres to go to school in this country right now. *… [Desk thumping]* Thanks to the present Government.

Honourable Speaker, the North Bank Region has been suffering at the ferry crossing point from Banjul to Barra. Here we are today, just last week, we have commissioned a brand-new green ferry that is brought by the Government to our North Bank Region to ease transportation of goods and services in North Bank Region. Thanks to the present Government.

Honourable Speaker, last but not least, no one can buy peace. 'Alhamdulillah Rabbil'alameen', The Gambia is rated the number one in West Africa that gets the best peace and stability in the region in West Africa, and the fourth position in the entire Africa. 'Alhamdulillah'. May that continue. Ameen.

Honourable Speaker, let me again pray may we all witness the 2027 SoNA with His Excellency the President, Adama Barrow will deliver the speech of 2027 SoNA 'insha'Allah Rabi.' *… [Desk thumping]*

In that remark, may God bless you all, may God bless the country, may God bless the Republic of The Gambia. 'Assalamu alaikum, wa Rahmatullah.'

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Lower Niumi. I now invite the Honourable Member for Tumana.

HON NFALLY M. KORA [TUMANA]: 'Assalamu alaikum.' Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the opportunity.

Since morning, I have been sitting and listening to my honourable colleagues debating on the last SoNA of His Excellency the President of the Republic of The Gambia.

For me, this is the best SoNA since I know about SoNA. Starting with thanking the President for his very eloquent way of presenting this SONA to us, and definitely, as alluded by the Honourable Member for Janjanbureh this SoNA is very hopeful. It has renewed our hope because the issues discussed in the SoNA are definitely there towards the socio-economic development of the Republic of The Gambia.

Honourable Speaker, we will thank the President for coming to SoNA by fulfilling his constitutional mandate Section 77[1] of the Constitution of the Republic of The Gambia. We will thank him as a responsible Head of State heading a responsible Government answering to the call of the people of The Gambia. This is very necessary; I heard some people are saying that this is just a report.

Definitely, this is not just a report. As the Constitution alluded, that the President needs to sit in front of the Gambians through the Assembly to tell us the state of his Government, to address us, give us the achievements, also state some challenges and the way forward. Definitely speaking, if we are to speak between us and Allah, we will definitely know that His Excellency has done just that.

Honourable Speaker, this is the final SoNA for this particular presidential term, and I will Join my colleagues to pray to 'Allah Subhana'hu watalah' so that 2027 SoNA we can all meet here again by under the distinguished leadership of His Excellency President Adama Barrow.

Honourable Speaker, as stated by His Excellency himself that his administration is not only to govern but to renew our trust but also build our resilience and lay a foundation for future generation. National Assembly Members, we have to be frank to ourselves definitely speaking, what we are experiencing today and what we have experienced for the past nine years definitely is quite different. There are so many foundations be it education, agriculture or security.

Even security, people are complaining here about it. The then security and now are quite different. Definitely, even the public, State and everybody in The Gambia are well secured. Everybody has a right,

freedom of expression and can say whatever he/she wants. Even 4:00 at night, you can be roaming in the streets. Once you involve yourself in trouble, of course, trouble will catch you. Therefore, when The Gambia is ranked the first in West Africa and fourth in Africa, definitely The Gambia deserves this, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker moving forward, I will thank the Government for the recovery focused Nationals Development Plan. I think this plan is a very important plan and I think this plan is definitely guiding the Government in the right track. All the time, you can see the Government coming with very important programmes and projects that will change our lives, lay the foundation and will help us so that our lives are easy for us.

When I moved down again as I stated earlier, this SoNA there to show us the major achievement which the President did and also the critical challenges. It has highlighted that and the way forward. We have seen some policies that are there which are meant to change our lives and we have seen some of the policies that brought some of the important projects, we have also seen them.

Honourable Speaker, the economy is resilient, because if you go to Page 4, Number 8, you can see it there it says Mr. Speaker, in this volatile global environment marked by uncertainties, inflation pressures and geopolitical shocks. These are challenges and realities on the ground and it is a global problem. The Gambia also is being affected, His Excellency has admitted this, but with all these problems, our economy is steadily progressing.

Honourable Speaker, this progress dependents on the construction. We all know the construction that are taking place. I am not even talking about the sides of the Government, the people that have money and they

are constructing, then you cannot construct such a very big house here. If you want to do that, you are in trouble 'woo' *… [Laughter] …* but today, whatever money you have, you can do whatever you want to do and you are still safe. You can go to your house and sleep there. Your kids*… [Laughter]*

Honourable Speaker, moving to road construction this is very important. Some people are saying that this Government is building roads here and there, is road not a development? There is no sustainable development that can be achieved without good road network. We need to accept the fact but you know what is happening because you feel this development should not be done by President Barrow. You wish that this development is done by yourself and you are not in the position. So, please allow His Excellency to do his work. He is definitely developing us and we are progressing.

Honourable Speaker, the 300 and the 700km that President Barrow promised us, I also wish and pray my Tinkinjo, Kisikisi, Kulukuleh, Sanunding, the road going to Dingirin and also, those places. May I wish and pray that I am also part of it.

Honourable Speaker, agriculture. We all know if you go to Page 20, Paragraph 60 you will see wonderful things there which are stated by His Excellency President Adama Barrow. President Barrow stated: "*To boost productivity and food security, the government continues to implement the National Seeds Programme. Through it, over seven hundred and three million Dalasis (GMD703 million) have been allocated for seed and fertiliser subsidies…"* This is meant for Gambians and it is known to improve the life and livelihood of the Gambians. And if you come here

today and stand and say that this Government is not doing anything for the people of The Gambia, my friend, you are just talking.

Honourable Speaker, land policy for the Ministry of Local Government and I think this is also very important and it has been highlighted by the SoNA, and definitely it has just been launched, we will thank him.

Today, the world needs communication and digital economy to have sustainable development and this Government we have all seen since the inception of this new ministry, we have seen the strive that they have been doing. It is all geared towards creating employment for the people.

In this digital economy, you go to education, even in MoHERST, the development under the Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Technology, there are lots of tremendous development and they are meant to make sure the youths of The Gambia are well equipped so that they can also create jobs for themselves and for thousands of them. Honourable Speaker, I would do that. *… [Laughter]*

Honourable Speaker, human capital I am very happy, I heard a very prominent Gambian who says that His Excellency has talked about human capital and he is very okay with it and I am also very thankful to that. *… [Desk thumping]*

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Tumana. I now invite the Honourable Member for Basse.

HON SAIKOU BAH [BASSE]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor.

Honourable Speaker, I have to join my colleagues to thank His Excellency the President for fulfilling his constitutional mandate, Section 77[1], and

I would also thank the Vice President and the Cabinet Ministers who are here with us since morning to attend this SoNA debate.

Honourable Speaker, I have a question which I want to answer that was raised by the Honourable Member for Kiang West, whether we are in The Gambia or in Gambia. And that question really was answered thanks to the President, His Excellency for making the Honourable Member to realise or to know that, yes, he is within The Gambia and also to benefit all the constitutional rights he deserves as a Gambian.

For the President, allowing him or making him to benefit the taxpayer's money, and also any other fund being supported from outside to the Gambians by giving a lot of development projects within his constituencies. Those are projects like roads, hospital, electricity, clean drinking water and schools. So, Kiang West NAM has benefited from all these things. So, let him thank the President that the President has answered his question, that he is within The Gambia, not Gambia. So, thank you.

The other one goes to Sami. The Honourable Member for Sami said that the 5th Legislature of this august Assembly throughout denied the Draft Constitution, and the same President deemed it very fitting and necessary to answer to the calls of the citizenry to bring back the draft to this august body. And a fraction of National Assembly Members deliberately threw it out without any iota of anybody.

So, that being the case, I think the Honourable Member for Sami should not say it is us who denied the diaspora for voting. So, it is that fraction that denied them, not us, because we were championing for the draft to be adopted. Thank you very much.

Honourable Speaker, looking at the infrastructure on roads, we all know how important roads are and any other development for any other serious nation, the base of any development is roads because its cross cutting to all other areas. When you talk of health, schools and education, it all touches roads. So, roads are the basis for any other development in any serious nation.

And if you remember, or if you observe, even in our oral questions, three quarter of our questions from the NAMs goes to the Ministry of Works for road construction in their constituencies. So, I see no reason this thing was not being commended. It should have been commended in this in this august Assembly, the road construction. So, we are looking at Page 10, Paragraphs 26, 27, 28, 29 and 30. It has touched all the development projects which the President has highlighted in the SoNA.

Honourable Speaker, on energy, Page 15, Paragraph 44, with your permission, Honourable Speaker, *"To fast-track this objective, we have allocated three hundred and ninety-seven million Dalasi (GMD397 million) in the 2026 Budget to expand electricity services to the remaining unelectrified communities."*

Honourable Speaker, I think on this paragraph, for me personally, I have to thank the President for this and also thank the National Assembly Members for creating that amount ***200 million*** to allocate it to this budget line. For me in my constituency, I will use my constituency as a case study, my constituency out of 38 communities, it was only 10 that were electrified. As I am speaking right now, 30 has been electrified and it is only 8 that were not.

And for now, the feedback I am getting is the survey is ongoing for the rest of the 8 communities, So, this ***397 million*** is really genuinely allocated to the right budget line. Honourable Speaker, Paragraph 46.

THE SPEAKER: Is it about extension? Yes, when he is ready.

HON SAIKOU BAH [BASSE]: Honourable Speaker, Paragraph 46, where it says:

> *"I am proud to announce that, as part of our drive to achieve universal access to electricity, through the Sustainable Energy Services Company (SESCO- The Gambia), eleven (11) hospitals, eighty-one (81) clinics, and eight hundred and twenty-three (823) schools nationwide have been solarised."*

Honourable Speaker, I think this was something which most of these hospitals were yearning for because at times you go to other hospitals when they are in the operating room, light will go off and they have to sit down and wait for light, or they need to call NAWEC to connect.

A similar example also happened in my constituency, Basse. At times, we face these challenges but with these hospitals and even schools solarised, I think this is more than welcoming. We thank the President and the Cabinet for having this foresight to consider this second option in order to at least provide electricity.

Honourable Speaker, on energy subsidy. I think this is here to benefit everyone because even looking at the current electric projects, which they have already done in rural electrification because electricity bills are very expensive; but the Government have taken it upon itself to make sure at least they make it available so that to subsidise ***1 billion*** from 2025 and 2026. So, this is also a laudable initiative from the Government.

Honourable Speaker, on education, for the Government building schools and teachers' quarters across the schools in the country, is also been commendable because at times that was a deterrence for some of the teachers to go for postings in the rural Gambia. At times, they go to certain communities and they find it very difficult to have shelter where they can sleep in order to go to the schools. At times, they live far to travel and they use bicycles or even trek to go to those rural communities, at least to teach. But nowadays, with this quarter's, I think it has eased a lot of trouble for teachers to be traveling now or to go on postings at the rural areas.

Honourable Speaker, on health in Paragraph 26… Honourable Speaker, for me to conclude, I really have to thank the Government and the President for giving us this SoNA and this one, there is no iota of*… [Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Basse. Honourable Members, the Minority Leader raised his tag and indicated that it is almost half past and I have 5:29 now. So, we should decide either to adjourn at 6:00 till tomorrow or move a motion to continue to finish the debate. I have less than 10 people left.

So, I do not know what will be your choice to finish. Then, I think you will have to move the motion for us to sit beyond 6:00. Yes, Honourable Minority Leader.

HON ALHAGIE S. DARBO [BRIKAMA NORTH & MINORITY LEADER]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. Exactly! I move that we sit beyond 6:00 to continue with the business and finish it.

THE SPEAKER: Any seconder, Honourable Members? Yes, Member for Upper Niumi.

HON OMAR DARBOE [UPPER NIUMI]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. I so second the motion.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That the Assembly sits beyond 6:00 to complete today's Order Paper.]

THE SPEAKER: So, we continue. I now invite the Honourable Member for Foni Brefet.

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY: She stepped out.

THE SPEAKER: Pardon?

HON ALHAGIE BABOU CEESAY: She stepped out.

THE SPEAKER: I now invite the Honourable Member for Foni Kansala.

HON ALMAMEH GIBBA [FONI KANSALA]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I thank the President for fulfilling once again, the mandate that is bestowed on him.

Honourable Speaker, straight to tourism. Currently, I think yesterday, we dispersed in Kansala. I humbly thank the Tourism Minister for ably attending our Festival that is 'Futampaf.' This is a Ministry or a Minister who have just took up the position not long ago, and they have gone very far in making sure the intangible cultural heritage is in line for various 'Kayeagak, Boutoussabou and Futampaf'. I think they are in an advanced stage to make sure it is incorporated on the UNESCO calendar.

I sincerely thank the Government and him for moving that far and also, participating fully on the event. The only thing that happened was, he ran

away when wrestling was about to happen between my chief and I but I can inform him that, my chief ran away he could not stand me. Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Honourable Speaker, going to defence. When you look at the key sector of defence as a whole, the President spoke and said, peace and stability remain a fundamental foundation upon the development*… [Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable, if you are quoting, quote the Paragraph.

HON ALMAMEH GIBBA [FONI KANSALA]: Page 35, Paragraph 108.

THE SPEAKER: Just the paragraph.

HON ALMAMEH GIBBA [FONI KANSALA]: Paragraph 108. It says: *"Mr. Speaker, peace and stability remain the foundation upon which development depends. We have made a significant progress in Security Sector Reform process, strengthening internal security, public safety, and democratic oversight."*

Again also, in Paragraph 109. It says: *"As a result of these sustained efforts, The Gambia is now ranked the safest country in West Africa and fourth safest in Africa, according to the Business Insider Africa."*

I want to put this to the Vice President. This, analyses when was it? If you can tell us. I am putting to the Vice President, Honourable Speaker. Currently, in all the speech of the President about Defence and Security, we would not have the internal displaced person in Foni. Eid al-Fitr, he made a lot of jamboree statements assuring Gambians and also cultural whatever, imams and others; nothing was said about Foni.

Since or before Tobaski, schools are all closed in Foni because of shells landing in The Gambia. I do say this, the fight of Casamance between

Senegalese and the MFDC is not a Gambian fight but what we are worried is the Government has not sent any single press release towards that effect. I have not seen that and if I am wrong, I want to be corrected. What I saw was the press release from the National Early Warning and Response Mechanism Coordination Centre [NCCRM].

To our sympathetic, an institution that we have approved here. The institution that is a Gambian, as an agency did not even know villages in The Gambia and they are now selling those villages in Casamance. So, you see how unfortunate it is.

So, these are issues that I think the Government should be very serious because these are issues that shows the institution themselves sat in their offices and drafted this without even going and knowing a territory. This is not accepted we told the NCCRM to apologise and send a first press release saying that they have errored and we will continue to ask this.

Honourable Speaker, in so doing, The Gambia is peaceful. Foni is not peaceful, internally displaced. The Gambia is peaceful. Foni, no school going children and no schools in Foni. The Gambia is peaceful, I am telling you from Sibanor, shells and bullets will land in corrugated iron seats of compounds.

In Sibanor last week, at their Lower Basic School. I am informing you the Defence Minister is here; they had to close the Lower Basic School because of bullets landing in Sibanor all the way from Casamance.

Now, as a government, all those issues they have never been sent a release, doing the needful or informing the populace that we are with you. Only to come in SoNA and said that we are ranked fourth and first in Africa. *… [Desk thumping] …* So, I think this is unacceptable.

Honourable Speaker, the other thing also, in 108 it says about reforms. Yes, we agree with reforms, but what reforms do this Government brought in terms of security? I can say only the National Security Council Bill as a Bill. It is only that Bill almost coming to 10 years, only that particular Bill. We are asking, where is the GAF Bill? Nowhere. It is circumambulating from the Defence Ministry, Justice, it is not in the Assembly. Drug Law Bill, it is circumambulating from the Ministry down to the Unit, it is not in National Assembly.

You talk of the Prisons Bill, Police Bill, the Immigration Bill, all these Bills are not. I can vividly inform you, Honourable Speaker, the Vice President is here, when they come for Budget Bilateral NIA is still mentioned as NIA, but in the press release and Government, whatever they said, SIS. Yet, the Bill is nowhere to be seen.

So, are we really serious in terms of security? When you talk about their renumeration, they will now say the laws must be effective in order for renumeration to work. Here in this National Assembly, we approve a million plus for TACOS, but TACOS is dead.

This past Budget it was not because there is no commitment or seriousness from the Ministry of Finance. They do not do the needful. So, I think if we want to work on a befitting security, all these issues must be implemented.

Now thankfully, you see, the Immigration have also trained what we call the squad wing for Immigration but the problem is it does not conform with their laws. Where is their Bill? It is nowhere to be seen.

Last year, I asked a parliamentary question here, Minister of Justice said this heaven and earth and the Minister of Interior also said Heaven and

earth. You do not even know where these Bills are, 6 institutions. It is only National Security, and now when they needed an amendment, National Security came through Certificate of Urgency. So, meaning there are no urgencies for these Security Bills. Unless and until these Bills are here, we will still continue to sing and drum about security without fulfilling the conditions of those*… [Paused]*

Honourable Speaker, moving to digital economy. We have said that 642 staff of Gamtel were compensated but I can tell you, Vice President, take note. All those 600 is a problem for them to get their Social Security because why, Gamtel were not paying their due Social Security.

Therefore, when they went to Social Security, they said your institution was not paying. Now, for example, somebody who had worked in Gamtel for almost 30 years in the social plan, they are only paying them 17 years.

Honourable Speaker, the Vice President is here, who did that negotiation? Is it Cabinet? All of us who had worked in Government services, you work for 30 years and you are only paid for 17 years and out of those 17 years, your loans, what you took will all be removed at the end of the day they pay you that chunk that you have. How do you live with your family? This are vulnerability that we have with these people here. *… [Desk thumping] …* 642 all the way, they are in their homes.

I was speaking to somebody who said, out of all the 17 years that they paid him, he only had 80,000. What can 80,000 do for him and where would he work? So, I think, Honourable Speaker, the Vice President is here. Think again on this social plan.

The other issue of it also, if you look at the digital economy, Fibre is partially privatised, Gateway is liberalised and Fibre also is liberalised. One

thing that we need to be very careful about institutions that are core in terms of security, we need to be very careful. Gamtel is gone and it is gone for good. *… [Desk thumping] …* Now the idea of Gamtel is going to remain as boys' and girls' company. Why? Because young people who are coo into various departments are all gone. So, I think these are issues that I think we need to note and take seriously.

The other thing also, finally, my time is going, Honourable Speaker. In higher education, we all know the importance of higher education. This is an institution that is going fine and I think the wave of the education… thanks to the Minister on his foot, we are seeing it. The other thing that I also want to advise Government, university is the architect of Babili Mansa please, if you are doing inauguration, mention his name at least this is what we are seeking. *… [Desk thumping]*

Finally, about health, I will say Ndemban is a concern. Edward Francis Small is a concern. So, on that note, I thank you.

THE SPEAKER: Sometimes, I wonder whether the people knocking the table actually heard what was said because if I ask them to repeat what was said for which they are knocking the table, they will not be able to say it. Thank you, Honourable Member for Foni Kansala. I now invite the Honourable Member for Central Baddibu.

HON SULAYMAN SAHO [CENTRAL BADDIBU]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker. I would like to join my colleagues to thank the President for fulfilling his Constitutional Mandate by updating us on Government's programmes, policies, achievements and future plans.

Honourable Speaker, I would also like to thank the Vice President, the Ministers and their technicians who are with us here today to listen to the

Debate. But as I always suggest, and wish for the President himself to be here to witness this debate, but never realised.

Honourable Speaker, I want to acknowledge the infrastructural development taking place in the country, ranging from roads, school systems, solarisation and the school sector, refurbishing some school classrooms, building quarters, roads, bridges and the Green Ferry; which people of North Bank really appreciate.

Honourable Speaker, with all these developments or infrastructure and the area of agriculture, with the coming of the tractors, power tillers to the farmers, we still have a long way to go as a country. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, in the report, in the President's Speech, there is high indication that there is inflation in this country. There is serious inflation, we do not need to become economists to know whether there is inflation in this country or not. Whether we need to be a student of Adam Smith or not. Honourable Speaker, the basic living condition of countrymen and women is unbearable. Skyrocketing prices which do not commensurate with the earnings of the people.

Honourable Speaker, youth unemployment is still remaining an issue in this country. Promises were made; efforts were strike at Ministries to ensure that youths are employed but still we have more youths that are not employed in this country. Honourable Speaker, we are still relying on a lot of debt, particularly from the donors. Our economy and development are usually based on grants from the donors.

Honourable Speaker, public expectation is very high as far as job creation is concerned. Chinua Achebe once said that if an agama lizard falls down

from an iroko tree, before people praise him, he will praise himself. Honourable Speaker, all the road constructions they are talking about Hakalang, was not done in our absence. We supported it here in this Assembly, with Lamin Jobe the former Minister who bear us witness. Opposition MPs voted for a budget item for Hakala from our tax-payers money. *… [Desk thumping] …* So, we are part of the development. Nobody will beat their chest in front of me and say, the development is theirs, it is ours. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, coming to the health facilities. Hospitals were built across the country, but it is really sympathetic when you go to the hospitals you do not have medical doctors in those hospitals. One of the characteristics or quality of a hospital is to have practicing doctors not health workers who are not professional. I will thank them for the effort that they are doing because they are trying to make sure that they do a service that they are not trained for.

Honourable Speaker, we must make sure that we have qualified doctors. I said it here in the adjournment debate that Government must make sure, even if we are going to have a weekly traveling doctor to be going to those hospitals, to be seeing patients. You cannot call it a hospital when you do not have strings, you ask people to go to the pharmacy to buy paracetamol. These are the realities on the ground; we are not being political. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, governance and accountability. Accountability still remains a challenge in this country, and I thought the President's Speech will highlight this, and he will strike out giant efforts made by his Government to ensure that there is accountability. No, what is there is

very skeletal Majority Leader, you can come later. Do you understand? But what I am saying is we do not see the action points.

Honourable Speaker, about anti-corruption, we have the commission, the bill and the laws in place but implementation still remains a challenge in this country. We have good laws, proposals and policies, but actions need to be taken.

Honourable Speaker, I was saddened yesterday or 2 days ago when I was crossing to North Bank Region. The number of vehicles that the President is going with, we are still suffering, we say the budget is not enough. The President must have financial discipline with the team to ensure that those vehicles remain here, and let him have a team to go and do these launchings or whatever they want to do.

We cried during Jammeh's regime when our able men and women were going to offices or were going for their sacred jobs, they were stopped at Denton Bridge to seize their vehicles from them for what the Presidents Tour? The same system is repeating.

So, what are we seeing here? We need to ensure that when the President is making his speech, he talks about these issues. When we say reforms, we need to have institutional reforms. We cannot still live in the days of Mr. Jones when the animals do not have the right, feed and anything. It is a repetition of Jammeh's regime.

So, what is the difference between Jammeh's Government and our Government in terms of seizing project vehicles and they are all going for the tour? You are wasting tax-payers money on an unnecessary noise here; you call it stone laying. Lay the stones, we will do the developments, we are coming. *… [Laughter]*

Honourable Speaker, agriculture, we expect us to have Baddibu Rice, Niamina Rice or Niumi Rice. We have been to Malawi we see but here is made in where you are seeing Pakistan, made in China and they are bringing rice, somebody said the price of rice has been reduced. Even the animals in China or Pakistan are not eating that rice. It is a low quality compared to the rice that is eaten outside.

So, I am telling you, when we say agriculture, it must be linked to processing. It is high time we had Baddibu or Jahally Rice, we produce them here. This should be our vision, do you understand?

Honourable Speaker, we are constructing roads and nobody will deny that roads are part of development but we have to link them to the markets and processing. If you construct feeder roads to the rice fields, for example, or to the gardens, women do not have market for their products. Is it linked? There must be a linkage and you said you are constructing roads, Bani-Salikenni Road, is still disheartening.

Call the President, he will tell you. We cannot spend that amount of money on roads still, they are not motorable. There is no value for money. So, there is lot of waste happening. Do you understand? We cannot have development on the other side we see its impact so negatively.

Honourable Speaker, the President's speech, we welcome it. As I said, it is constitutional and this country is a country that belongs to all of us. For me, nobody will silence me I will continue to speak up my voice where it is necessary. I do not know whether it will be listened to or not. I believe nobody loves Gambia more than me, and we are not here as enemies to President Barrow or to the Government. If anybody wants to be a praise singer, continue to be a praise singer.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Central Baddibu. I now invite the Honourable Member for Lower Saloum.

HON SAINEY JAWARA [LOWER SALOUM]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor. I also join my colleagues to thank the Vice President and his Cabinet Ministers more especially President Adama Barrow, who is the greatest leader in Africa.

Honourable Speaker, you took me to Malawi for a benchmarking and one of the key things that I get from Malawi, and I must thank you, Honourable Speaker, for that. That is the way opposition leaders behave in economic development of the country. You cannot criticise a government, you have been in opposition, you know they said if the Government is serious, I am looking at the opposition side whether the oppositions are serious in national development.

Honourable Speaker, if they are serious, whatever you might think or you criticise has to be based on facts. When you went to Malawi that the opposition leader said he do not criticise based on criticism, he criticises based on facts and realities whereby the Government will adjust in that development area. But in our country, it is different, Honourable Speaker. Oppositions are meant to build a country, what the foresight are not seeing, the opposition need to make sure the leadership sees that in that lens but then, in his time, it is a different case.

Honourable Speaker, this SoNA is a policy guide, they cannot write everything in this document. There are most things that they leave behind, where you being the opposition, you can bring it forward. Do you understand, Honourable Speaker? This country and this Government, the President and his Cabinet, we must thank them because they use their

innovative mind and their technocrats to move this country move forward. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, this is a document that we have approved, this is the budget estimate in 2026; it is just a forecast. The amount of money that we expect from our budget, is ***D32 billion*** and in this D32 billion, how much is paid for recurrent? It is about ***D10 billion***. How much goes to goods and services? It is around ***D8 billion***. How much goes to these international contributions? It is about ***D7 millions***. How much is left? Nothing absolute, about just ***D2 billion***, Honourable Speaker.

Then, with all this struggle, this Government is doing the best. If any Member of this Assembly sits down, what he/she has asked is road, electricity and water. This Government, Barrow's administration, is going forward to that. And you, the same National Assembly Member, stood here and say that road without economic activities is useless. Who are you? Today, the people of Kiang, if you tell them that roads are not meant for our economic gain, they will insult you, Honourable Speaker.

By then going to Kantora took time before you reach there, but this Government have developed it. Electricity is same thing, Honourable Speaker, but our opposition works differently.

Honourable Speaker, of course, they are talking about inflation. Yes, but you see this Government in 2026 January have moderated economic inflation from 6.3 to 6.4 based on the tourism attraction which stabilises the inflation. If a country is stabilised, tourists come in. Then, we have to applaud the Ministry of Tourism as they make sure that tourists come into this country.

We have to tap their backs, Honourable Speaker, because they have mentioned that The Gambia is the most peaceful country. This is why this year they have registered tremendous influx of tourists into this country. Honourable Speaker, if there was no peace, they would have not come, and this is why the economy has boosted in that area.

Honourable Speaker, the good governance, even us, we know that everything will not be perfect. It is only God's Creation that make things perfect. We have to try our best possible whereby we can adjust, but in good governance, it is only this, Barrow Administration that makes everything free. Democratic freedom of speech, media openness is this Government that gave us those things.

Honourable Speaker, this Government have done a great thing. If you go to infrastructure development, this Government has built roads from rural and urban drift that can connect people. They have built bridges that will connect the South and the North Bank, whereby trade, freedom of movement of people and services can be easy for people whereby the economic activities will come in, Honourable Speaker.

Honourable Speaker, energy too has expanded. Today, I have heard the Member for Foni Jarrol, saying that there are places that get electricity for three hours. It has never happened in his history and there is no place whereby the Member can substantiate whereby you have three hours electricity, and light goes off.

But for me, I can do that in early days before 2017, in Kaur 12:00 to 6:00, you have electricity by then, from 8 to 12, you have electricity. But in this generation where we are everybody, the rural urban migration has… does not go down because of electricity, everybody is doing their work, within

their areas Honourable Speaker. As the Members of the Assembly, we have to substantiate issues because people are listening to us.

Honourable Speaker, water supplies has improved drastically because today there is a project on water in KMC region where pipes are expanding. And if you go to my constituency, water is not a problem. You know, this Government is doing all these things in the rural area, KMC, West Coast Region, and the resources mobilisation is not there. We have to tab their backs that they are doing very well, Honourable Speaker.

Health Sector, Honourable Speaker, this Government also is constructing and upgrading hospitals and in fact, they are also creating hospital equipment whereby they are able to upgrade the health system. That is true in border areas people from Senegal or neighbouring countries comes in and get drugs and also, they get service free.

Honourable Vice President, I think this should be a Cabinet Paper from the National Assembly, that Health should not be free you cannot go anywhere in this country whereby the Government will subsidise the health facilities. It has no use because health is expensive and it should not be free like that. Wherever you go in Europe, you have to pay money to get the services but in this country you must get free. This free of charge, make us to suffer.

If you go to an education system, yes, this Barrow administration is also expanding and building new schools. They are giving scholarship and training teachers; we have to tap their backs, Honourable Speaker.

In agriculture the same thing. The only problem in this country is the oppositions, but this Government is doing is well. Honourable Speaker, with this coalition Government, Insha'Allah come 2026, we go to 68% of

our voters because people trust us, you and I and Gambian to come back to 2027 for this SoNA in this Chamber. *… [Desk thumping] …* Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker for giving me the floor.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Lower Saloum. I now invite the Honourable Member for Foni Bondali.

HON PA DEMBO SANNEH [FONI BONDALI]: Thank you, Honourable Speaker for allowing me to also take part in this very important debate. Honourable Speaker, I would like to thank the Vice President and all Ministers of Cabinet here present.

Honourable Speaker, let me go straight to agriculture, if you allow me to read this. Honourable Speaker, to boost productivity*… [Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: Honourable, make sure you quote the paragraph.

HON PA DEMBO SANNEH [FONI BONDALI]: Sorry, Page 20.

THE SPEAKER: Just the paragraph.

HON PA DEMBO SANNEH [FONI BONDALI]: Sorry, Paragraph 60. Okay. *"To boost productivity and food security, the government continues to implement the National Seeds Programme. Through it, over seven hundred and three million Dalasi (GMD703 million) have been allocated for seed and fertiliser subsidies…"*

Honourable Speaker, we all can bear with me that, we are living in a crazy world today, having to depend on importing or buying seeds from outside The Gambia can be a big risk.

Honourable Speaker, we have our indigenous crops that are absolutely fading. Today, if you go to Foni and you ask our pure 'Buserengab' or coos you hardly see it now. We are depending on seeds that, every year

we buy the seeds and then not like before, whereby farmers will take the seeds from their present harvest to the following season, and our indigenous seeds are absolutely dying.

We cannot depend on importing seeds all the time, if things like what is happening today in US, Israel and Iran war that might affect us at some point. So, we have NARI and seeds that can improve our own local or indigenous seeds for us to use them instead of depending on importing the seeds from outside.

Honourable Speaker, if you go further, Paragraph 64 in the same area, agriculture. Honourable Speaker, the President made mention of bringing 189 tractors, but the way it is distributed is not detailed here.

Honourable Speaker, in my area Foni Bondali, that is where the agriculture camp is, we have only one tractor which is operating from Kansala, Bondali and Jarrol. Having heard that the 100 tractors are available and I am not seeing any tractor added to that one I would like to know how did that happen?

Honourable Speaker, one tractor cannot even serve the whole Foni Bondali talk less of the other two districts, Jarrol and Kansala. So, I hope we got one from these 189 tractors.

Honourable Speaker, I do not know whether I will be the only one who come up with this maybe if you like, say that a wild idea or whatsoever. Honourable Speaker, we have been talking of agriculture for ages, thus, agriculture is our backbone, agriculture is whatsoever we call it. Honourable Speaker, I think we should also now shift from agriculture and then check on other sectors like youth, sport and tourism.

Honourable Speaker, if we can develop our sports, especially our sporting infrastructure like, for instance, in, every region, you provide infrastructure for the young people, whereby they can train these young people at a very young stage to where they will reach at the time, where we will all say that, this is what we want.

I think that can also give benefit to the to the nation, like agriculture that have been here for ages and then we, hardly see the impact I can say, because as we are depending on agriculture, that does not prevent us from buying rice every month. So, we shift and then see how can those sectors also do to our economy?

Honourable Speaker, going to infrastructure, Page 36, we have to thank the Government for coming up with roads that connects the communities, especially the new roads but we should also not forget to maintain our old roads that we had, especially our Trans-Gambia.

Honourable Speaker and the majority of the NAMs or even the Cabinet Ministers who ply this road, especially at night, find it very difficult because of the worn-out lanes, you find it very difficult to drive at night. Honourable Speaker, so, I guess Minister of Works especially the NRA to check on the road maintenance.

Honourable Speaker, in trade, where we have irregular migration that continues to rob our nation and its youths. Honourable Speaker, if I say that the Government is also contributing to migration or irregular migration, people might disagree with me, but they are. Honourable Speaker, they are contributing because they are giving the grants to the wrong people who might not have the idea and the passion to do what they were even asked to do. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, there are many youth components in many other sectors or departments in the country. They claim to support the youths, which is a very fine initiative, but it always falls in the wrong hands.

Honourable Speaker, this can be done through collaboration with the Minister of Youth and Sports, who is working mainly with youths. You can take sample from the GSI in Chamen, North Bank; you have many trainees. I have two in my area who are doing very well but gets little support. And if these people are supported, they will at least employ many youths around that end, but these people do not often have this opportunity to pursue their dreams, but rather it falls on the wrong hands. If you give me something that I have no idea about, as time goes on, maybe I might even sell that particular thing, and then embark on irregular migration and most of the time this is what happens.

Honourable Speaker, rushing to Tourism and Culture, I was also a very big believer that our 'Futampaf' was like was a waste but looking at it in the way… and the Ministry of Tourism and Culture are coming up supporting this festival, I realise that culture is never expensive because this is what makes us to know who we are. So, I would like to thank the Ministry for the role they are playing in maintaining our culture.

Honourable Speaker, I can see that my time is up, but I would like to thank the Honourable Members and the Members of the Cabinet here present. Thank you so much.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Foni Bondali. I now invite the Honourable Member for Kantora and Majority Leader. Honourable Member for Wuli, that is not your job. Honourable Member, no. You cannot do that, please. No, you cannot observe him

without him giving you the floor. Please, do not do that. No, you should not even talk to him directly. Whether you use mic or not, you should not talk to him. He is taking the floor, please.

HON BILLAY G. TUNKARA [KANTORA & MAJORITY LEADER]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor.

Honourable Speaker, let me join the entire National Assembly to welcome His Excellency the Vice President and the entire Cabinet Ministers here present. I can see Minister of Higher Education, Minister of Defence, Minister of Tourism etc., of course, with their technical experts to come and listen to the debate on the well-delivered address.

Yes, it is true that I seconded the motion the day the President delivered the SoNA. Probably, that is still fresh in your mind, thinking that I have seconded this motion.

Honourable Speaker, it is very important as Members of the Assembly, when speaking in this hallowed Chamber, we speak with facts. *… [Desk thumping] …* It is very important if you are in this sacred Chamber, you make sure that what you are given out to the public is accurate and through nothing but the truth, but it is rather misleading and disturbing that Members of the Assembly are taking the floor of this Chamber trying to play to the Gallery. It is really unfortunate.

When the President in his remark said that The Gambia has been ranked 1st in West Africa and 4th in Africa in terms of safety, people are here attributing or comparing that with the recent development in Casamance is a misrepresentation of the facts. You cannot attribute what is going on in the Casamance when the rebels are fighting in Government, you want to attribute that how can Government claim a secure nation? You have

not been honest yourself, but you cannot fool anybody. We have minds and ears to listen.

What is going on in the border village of Foni does not have anything therein to say that The Gambia is not safe for people. What you are doing here, probably you do not know the magnanimity or the magnitude in what you are causing to your own country. You are speaking in these hallowed Chamber the entire world is watching you are telling people that my country is not safe! Are you a good citizen in the first place? *… [Desk thumping]*

So, that is why, if you are speaking the sacred Chamber, it is a rare privilege to represent your nation and when is given to you do not abuse it because of politics. When I listened to Member for Foni Kansala saying that the bullets are flying in Foni therefore we are not safe anymore, are you a good ambassador to your country? Are you a good Member to your community, you come from? People should desist from that. *… [Murmuring]*

Honourable Speaker, I have listened carefully when Members of the Assembly stood here that road construction, electricity is not all, have they transformed their life and livelihood? I am disappointed. Somebody that hailed from Kiang if you are really representing the people of Kiang West in this Chamber, you are telling me that the road construction does not transform the lives and the livelihood of the people.

It is two things; either you did not go there to see this impact on those poor women and men plying on the road, doing businesses, transporting their goods from one end to the other, or you stand here telling us that the road construction and electricity did not impact the lives and

livelihoods of people. This is what was translated. Do you even understand the terrain you are saying? Do you even know what is human development in terms of the GDP?

It is one thing to go to school but another to understand the subject matter one is talking about. It is really unfortunate for one to stand in this hollowed Chamber saying that there has never been road construction and electricity in his constituency, not even independence, since God created The Gambia. There has never been electricity and a tarred road in that constituency.

Thanks to this Government, regardless of our political affiliation the Government said, my development is for everybody. *… [Desk thumping] …* and we are here trying to caricature that and misrepresenting the fact. When I listened to him that Government should be committed in terms of fighting corruption, that is misleading.

If Government is not committed to fighting corruption, how would the same Government table a comprehensive bill in this hallowed Chamber? This same Government, after we passed it, the Government went back again; to ascend that law and brought in a commission, you are still trying to play politics to put blames that the Government is not committed is very unfortunate.

I want to say some people only attacking on the Alkalos, Paramount Chiefs and Seyfos appointments, you have not seen anything good in this book, rather than talking about grifting the mind of people, you do not have anything to say in this book, but calling issues that Paramount Chief has to be appointed. You have not seen or commented on the advancement

that you are enjoying today as a Member the Assembly. *… [Desk thumping]*

We came here in 2017; they can bear me witness the amount we have paid. The man is saying that that economic advancement did not affect him today, let him come gauge or compare himself. Who is the Member for Kiang West five years down the line and today is quite different?

Basically, both the Minority Leader, the claim or attribution he was trying to emphasize on the issue of Paramount Chief… I am so disappointed. It should not be the thing that he was really lamenting on rather let us look at the advancement and progress of this current Government under the leadership of President Adama Barrow. He is a master in rapid development. He has transformed this country, we used to have in 2016, 2017 less than one month import cover, today we are boasting of 4 to 5 months import cover. These are not just dropped from the skies or from the blues, it is called for due diligence, it calls for hard work, transparency, accountability to make sure that resources of this country are utilised.

If this country is going astray, no development partner will pump in their money; we have seen the tour right now. The President is actually linking farmlands to the main highway, this is geared towards transporting harvested produce from the farmland to the market and that is why the World Bank says to the President, *"The way and manner you are governing this country you are governing well, and we are going to put our resources to support your initiatives."*

You cannot take heavy equipment power tillers and tractors to farmlands when there are no good roads, and that is why, in terms of complementarity, the Government and World Bank are putting efforts

together to make sure that the complement effort, but His Excellency believes one thing, *'Aling makoi ye korda meng lo, mma nyasoto woleh ba tela'*. He believes that if you want to leave everything to the donors without looking inward, a rigorous resource mobilisation… you believe in yourself and drive your own agenda, in fact, your issue of development, road construction, hospital and electricity, if you want to wait for donors…

Last year, the budget support came at 26th December 2025, I stand corrected. *… [Desk thumping] …* But this Government never fell short in implementing the approved budget for development of this country as well as projects and programmes of Government.

So, if we are not here to appreciate that effort. *'Mandinkolu ko ning kukendo mantara jayiri suu a nyanta tarrla tentu suu.'* This is not about praising the President this is about appreciating what we have in the nation. Being in opposition is not to be an adversary government, you should be a watch dog to Government to make sure that you give… you can critique, but critique with constructivism you must be constructive criticism and proffer solution recommendations, but you cannot just come here building blame game that will not take this country anywhere. *… [Desk thumping]*

I will recommend more constructive opposition debate, whereby you can put forward your recommendations to Government. Do you understand? Of course, Governments, all political parties of Government in waiting but 'Billahi' this Government's continuity is in your best interest as oppositions. *… [Desk thumping]*

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much, Honourable Member for Kantora and Majority Leader. Honourable Members, we have finally come to the end.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Honourable, I have raised my tag since morning. I kept on raising my tag. I do not know why I was not called.

HON BABOU CEESAY [SABACH SANJAL]: You never raised your tag.

THE SPEAKER: Honourable Members, we have given floor to people who came late. Therefore, he was here since morning, and I was told that probably it is an omission, but he raised his tag. I think it is good that we give him the floor. Yes, Honourable Member for Wuli East.

HON SUWAIBOU TOURAY [WULI EAST]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for giving me the floor.

I thank the Ministers who have been here since morning and also thank the President for coming up with the State of the Nation Address in the first quarter. We demand that he comes in the first quarter. I would have preferred the last quarter because it would have impacted on the incoming budget. All the same, we can always make use of the State of the Nation Address.

Honourable Speaker, just to clarify certain things that are being misused by others, I have not heard anybody in this Assembly today who said road construction is not good or beneficial. I have not heard anybody say that and I do not know where that information comes from. I think people are coming up with arguments. They make statements of their own and then

argue against the statement and ascribe it to somebody else. So, that is a very dishonest way of debate. We should run away from that.

Honourable Speaker, the SoNA is meant to review achievements, outline policy agenda of Government as well as address the economic and social issues confronting us today. One good thing I would have reminded the President and the Government is that there is a war raging in the Middle East and that war, whether we like it or not, will have impact on everything that we do. I will not be able to say everything, but it will have impact on the cost of prices and fuel. And once it impacts on fuel, it will impact on everything else.

So, that is a crisis of its own, and I believe the Government should put that in mind and make contingency measures from now so that we will be able to address the issue before it actually impacts.

When the COVID came, it caught us by surprise. But the crisis in the Middle East, in terms of fuel crisis, the crisis in the Ukraine if combine, it is going to be a bigger crisis. Let us just pray that the war in the Middle East does not go on and on.

Honourable Speaker, if you look at the situation very well, you will see that the remittances are bringing ***$34 million*** more than the National Budget. We thank our brothers and sisters in the diaspora who are sending us all those remittances.

But Honourable Speaker, we need to be able to inject these remittances into a more proactive and financial way so that the Government and those bringing the remittances also will benefit. There are many ways of making the remittances beneficial to both the people in the diaspora and the Government. Remittances had helped a great deal in many other

countries. If you go to Senegal, you will see that remittances are used to even construct roads. So, it is a very useful thing.

Honourable Speaker, when it comes to the GDP, it is 5 point something. It is going to come appreciating but if you look at it, you will see that the increase in GDP is mainly due to the remittances. Therefore, we should not joke with remittances.

Non-tax also, Honourable Speaker, is compounded by the fact that we have gone into Africa 50 Agreement. And that is the reason the income from Africa 50 is what we are using to construct roads here and there. And then we know that we have mortgaged more or less to an Africa 50 to manage this thing on our behalf for 25 years. So, for 25 years we will be missing some income from that area. Therefore, we should know how to use that money to invest so that the returns will help us before the end of the 25 years.

Honourable Speaker, I want to also say that when a crisis happens in The Gambia, inflation and prices go up. But even if that crisis is done, the prices continue to go on; it will not come down. That is what happened to The Gambia. It is lack of monitoring.

The Government should engage in monitoring. Each given time, the retailers and the importers should be monitored to ensure that the prices are stabilised. You cannot just allow people to bring things and then sell them anyhow by calling it a liberalised economy. That will not help us in any way.

Honourable Speaker, the Minister should help us to clarify which funds are being used to construct other roads. There are many roads being constructed but not mentioned in the SoNA. When I look also at the

budget, I have not seen them there. There is a road in my constituency which is not seen in the budget and also not said in the SoNA. That is from Sutukoba to Wellingara then turn again all the way to Chamoi. So, where are those funds coming from? Are they coming from Africa 50 Agreement or from grants? We need to know that.

Honourable Speaker, the President also spoke about EPC; that is Engineering Procurement Contracts. So, I want to know that EPC. If what I know about EPC is the case, it means that you give many contracts to one contractor. From our experience here in the Assembly if we give many contracts to one contractor, he/she may fail you. That is what happened to us with the ecolodges.

Therefore, we should be careful not to dump all these contracts to one contractor because the contactor may not complete the contract on time, then there will be a lot of delay. We learn from Hakalang. How long has Hakalang taken? It has taken years, and if all the roads are taking years and years, then that is not a good thing for us.

Honourable Speaker, I want to also quickly say that Dangote Refinery is taking place in Nigeria. There is a way of contacting them to at least negotiate with Nigeria to be able to get our fuel because now they have almost the biggest refinery in the world. That is what they are building.

So, before we are late, we should be able to get there. They are producing 650,000 barrels per day in the refinery. Therefore, no matter what crises are in other parts of the world if we are able to negotiate because we are a close neighbour, it may not impact on us when it comes to that.

Honourable Speaker, I want to finally say that the SOEs are a popular thing that the President talked about. I believe we need to create an SOE

unit at the Ministry of Finance; a unit which will specifically monitor the operations of the SOEs to ensure that they pay not only to pay dividend to Government but also carry out their core mandate at the same time. I said it here that if the SOEs really pay dividend to Government in the way they should, our budget will boost up to be able to carry out so many projects.

We should know that it is the Government's responsibility to produce wealth and make people's lives better. If the Government cannot give jobs to people and take care of the disabled, we will blame them. This time, we want change. We do not just want cosmetic change. We construct roads and build this house. You are giving ***D500 billion*** from 2017 to date. And you are saying, I construct this road here, counting your fingers. That is not progress. We should look for progress to ensure that we do not play with our people or the country.

Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker, for your time.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you, Honourable Member for Wuli East. Thank you, Honourable Members.

Honourable Members, may I now invite His Excellency the Vice President to respond to some of the issues raised and wine up the debate. Your Excellency.

HIS EXCELLENCY MUHAMMAD B.S. JALLOW [VICE PRESIDENT]: Thank you very much, Honourable Speaker. Let me start by thanking all the Honourable Members here present for their contributions in the debate.

We also recognised that a lot of the contributions were actually supporting the initiatives of the President and the development that is taking place rapidly in this country. Although the Honourable Member for Wuli East said that he did not hear anybody saying whether roads were good or bad, but in actual fact, there were some Members that said roads were not. *… [Laughter]*

In fact, I have even suggested to the Honourable Minister of Finance that I think in this country we need to do actual and economic analysis of the impact of not just roads but electricity. I think electricity has the greatest impact as far as economic development in this country is concerned. *… [Desk thumping]*

All the new communities that have electricity, let us start counting the number of electrical workshops they have; metal and carpentry workshops. I think these are signs that there is a lot of economic growth going on. I think the purpose of Government is to provide the infrastructure, and the people will come up with their initiatives. And I think this is the greatest impact we have. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, allow me to just maybe try to provide some responses to some of the issues that have been raised. I know that a lot of the discussion was on the economic performance. We will not agree with some of the figures. I know there were some questions raised about poverty reduction.

Again, I think so far, I know that the Honourable Member for Banjul Central talked about a survey report, but I do not know which report was mentioned. So, I cannot comment on that. But the problem is, a lot of the survey reports that we rely on from GBoS are actually old. I know that the

last DHS conducted was like in 2019. They are right now in the process of doing another DHS. Unless that is done, we cannot have some of these figures that are being… Sorry.

Again, like I said, I am not aware. I know that it may be draft because again I chaired the Population Commission and these are some of the things that were actually demanded from them, and I am still not getting them. As part of the Population Secretariat as we speak, they are also trying to work with them to get it… Maybe, it is another survey that was commissioned by an agency owner, but as the DHS or the mix, I think they are yet to do a recent one.

I think a lot also mentioned about the remittances. Yes, we take this opportunity again to join his Excellency President in thanking the diaspora for the remittances that are coming. As Members have mentioned, most remittances are actually coming for household consumption but, as we speak, the Government is working with GK and other partners to try to see how we can help work with the diaspora so that most of those remittances can come as part of investment, like diaspora bond, for example. This discussion is far advanced, hopefully in the near future. And I think they are also working with the Central Bank and other partners to transform some of these things coming as part of investment.

Honourable Speaker, a lot of discussions also mentioned about the SOEs. The report mentioned the losses that we have experienced from the SOEs and now the profit that is being made, which is turnaround of like ***5.1 billion***. I think the Honourable Member for Wuli East, the Member for Brikama South and other Members mentioned in detail as far as the SOEs are concerned.

Honourable Speaker, you would realise that the issue is that we are actually running a lot of liabilities. In fact, some SOEs, at some point, could not even pay salaries, so Government with the SOE Commission has to come in to bail them out in paying salaries.

And also, for the influence of the Member for Wuli East, there is actually a secretariat that is supporting the SOE Commission to monitor these SOEs. In fact, as we speak, because of the turnaround this 2026, we are expecting at least 5 SOEs to actually pay dividend to Government. Although we have some teething challenges, we really feel that we are actually on the right track. We are expecting some dividend instead of now spending on those SOEs, even some that were actually not performing very well.

The Gamtel-Gamcel issue is a PPP. Government is not selling. Government is still a partner and actually has a controlling share. So, it is not like we are going to lose it. I think for the benefit of Members, particularly Member for Foni Kansala, I do not want to question your figures, but the person that said that they have received just ***80,000***, I think that raises eyebrows because I know there are some that have got actually close to ***D1,000,000*** in terms of compensation. But the main point here is that, it is like voluntary. Like, I do not question your figures, but we will still *… [Interrupted]*

THE SPEAKER: Please, Honourable Member for Foni Kansala, put down your tag. Allow him to land, please.

HIS EXCELLENCY MUHAMMAD B.S. JALLOW [VICE PRESIDENT]: The basic fact we have, I think, is what our Honourable Members would need to understand. The average staff level for some of the private GSMs

was about 300, but for Gamcel was more than 1000 staff. That is really an overstaffing. It is a huge burdening, but like you downsize and make sure that the rest remaining are actually handsomely paid so that you can retain those staff. I think this is what is happening even though you reduce, there are some specific areas where we need to recruit for specific capacities.

The Honourable Member mentioned the issue of Social Security. I think if that is the case, that is a serious thing because contribution to social security is a legal aspect. If they have left, we will try to make sure that they get whatever is due to them because that is the responsibility of the cooperation.

Honourable Speaker, I think some Members, I cannot recall who, talked about the issue of the socio-economic zone. The Honourable Member for Jarra West confirmed that, yes, actually land is available. It has been identified in Jarra West.

Honourable Speaker, one of the challenges we have is that the moment Government identifies a particular area for development, then the land speculators come in. Initially Government had agreed with the land owners, all of a sudden, you now have some people who could now come, complain and ask for more money. I think this is one of the challenges we have but the good thing is that there are investors who are interested.

Recently, in fact, we are even talking to the World Bank who are interested. I am just returning from Yaoundé and I had the opportunity of discussing with the President of the Afri-Exim Bank, who is also interested in this type of interventions. *… [Desk thumping]*

Honourable Speaker, I think some people also mentioned about the aviation and the domestication of Banjul and Dakar, which actually I am glad to inform that this is far advanced. I want to believe again that it is either started or is about to start.

The idea of the domestication is because between Banjul and Dakar, the taxes are so high. So, with this domestication, both countries have agreed to reduce the taxes and I think the fare now is somewhere less than ***$100*** to ***$150*** which would now be the average price of the air ticket between Banjul and Dakar, which used to go up to like ***$400***.

Honourable Speaker, I think I do not need to belabour the point on the infrastructure; the roads going to be constructed. Yes, I know the Member for Brikama North is inquiring whether some of the roads are under construction, but what I can say is that currently, as has been mentioned, there is this 200km of roads which have access to farms.

The 700km actually is nationwide, and I can assure you that your constituency will be involved. I do not think there is going to be any constituencies that will be left out because here, as the President has said, we want to move away from loans. We want to rely on ourselves. That is why we are looking at ways of non-tax revenue without adding any tax burden on households, and we believe that this is going to be possible.

Even after that, Cabinet has also discussed and approved another set of roads where it is going to be like a pre-financing, and the demand is actually very high. There are a lot of companies who want to now come in and get involve with pre-financing arrangements.

The EPC is engineering, procurement and construction. It is not that you are giving them a lot of contracts at the same time. No. It is like they do

the engineering, procurement and construction for one contract. That is why most of the time Government does not have the money ready at that particular point to do the design and all that because that takes a lot of time. Notwithstanding, Government will always be there to have either a private company or Ministry of Works, NRA to do the consultancy service for those works.

Honourable Speaker, I think a lot of points were made in terms of rice self-sufficiency. I agree with the Honourable Members. Yes, the aim of this Government is to make sure that, yes, we do not want to import rice. Right now, we want to reduce the cost of rice but, at the end of the day, we want to make sure that we grow rice sufficient enough whereby we have our own brands.

Currently, we have some of our local brands. They may not be sufficient. I do not want to mention names, otherwise it may sound as publicity. I think at least about three or more local brands are already existing in this country, and Government is committed to continue to support them in that endeavour.

The Member, I think, from Foni Bondali talked about the seeds. I think the amount mentioned in the SoNA is actually supporting the Seed Secretariat to actually produce local varieties that can be distributed within the country. You would realise that some of the seed varieties we have are actually low in nutrition component. That is why we have to engage more in terms of research for better varieties that can be distributed within the country. Resilience is also the other challenge we have.

I am sure, you know, those Members in Lower Saloum, Upper Saloum and Nianija will know that the salt water is also intruding and affecting our rice

growing areas, but we are also discussing with partners. Even when I was in Japan, I had discussed that with some of the partners to see how they can support in solving that salt intrusion.

Regarding the tractors he mentioned, I am sure you would realise that, yes, there are various tractors coming in, but this is like giving to master farmers where they have to pay 25%; Government pays the other 25%, and the 50% is actually roll out over a period. So, there has to be the capacity to do the down payment of the 25% before Government comes in. I know the demand is also high. The first loan has already been distributed. I do not know the distribution. Maybe, we can ask the Minister of Agriculture for further details.

In terms of human capital, I think a lot of issues have been raised. Just to confirm that the 17.7% may be low as the Honourable Member for Banjul North mentioned. The Maputo Protocol talks about 15% for Health and the Global Partnership for Education talks about 20% for Education, but you would realise that we are talking about the same cake. If you want to increase the share of one sector, that would mean a reduction of the share of another sector.

I think the challenge now is to make sure that we increase the base of our revenue so that whatever share we have is able to fulfil our needs. Yes, Agriculture is 10%, and the security will also want more. Exactly. So, these are the challenges. It does not mean that we are reducing the importance of those sectors.

Some issues of training were raised for health personnel. Just to inform the Honourable Member for Central Baddibu that definitely the Government is actually increasing the training of specialists. It has even

been mentioned in the SoNA that some of the specialists for the hospitals would benefit because we are expanding very fast. It would take time for the training to also catch up, and some of the challenges we have is that there is attrition as we train. So, it will take time before we stabilise.

Another point is not just the training but the deployment. A lot of the trained doctors are actually in the urban areas, so it will take time for them to move into rural areas. We are having discussions with Ministry of Health so that they can learn from the examples in Education to provide some extra allowances to entice doctors to move to the other areas.

I remember my last visit to Kuntaur; that was one of the challenges we had because the doctors are not staying in Kuntaur but in Bansang. I said to them that the Upper Basic School in Kuntaur is able to attract graduate teachers because of extra allowances. If you do similar things, then the doctors will probably stay in Kuntaur.

Yes, the hardship allowance is right because I know some Members feel that teachers are not having much, but I can assure you that some teachers may actually earn more than some of your National Assembly Members at the end of the day. We were all teachers. Sometimes, we can behave like we are poor, but what we take home is more than what you take home. If you ask them, they will not tell you, but we know each other.

Honourable Speaker, the issue of medicine and drugs has been raised. Honourable Speaker, yes, this is one of the challenges we have. I am sure Honourable Members would recall that since the issue of the AKI report, drug procurement has been very difficult.

Now, Medicines Control Agency, actually, a lot of imported drugs are quarantined unless they are tested. The challenge we have is that we do not have the labs until this new lab is inaugurated at Brusubi. All the drugs that came in have been quarantined until we send them to maybe Dakar, Ghana or other places before they can be cleared. This is the challenge we have. It not only affects the private pharmacies but even Government. The Embassies are also complaining, but Government is trying to work with the MCA to see how we can address that. Hopefully, when this lab is ready, that problem will completely be alleviated.

Honourable Speaker, the Honourable Member for Kansala has mentioned a lot of bills; Immigration and others. Some of those bills have been coming in and out of Cabinet because of other reasons, but just to inform you that I think some bills have already been cleared. As he say, maybe it is with the Justice. The Youth and Sports Bill has also been cleared by Cabinet. Maybe, it is at the level of the Ministry of Justice. I am not sure, but again we will take it up with the Minister.

Sometimes, we do not want the same thing that happened with the National Security Bill as we passed it and then come back only to realise that some things need to change. Sometimes, the bills stay in the Ministry for a very long time, and we lose track of some of the issues; only to look at it again and realise that if we pass it at that level, it is going to bring problems for the Government. These are the reasons they keep going back and forth as far as Cabinet is concerned. Sometimes, Cabinet actually allocates 3 days just to look at those bills; particularly, the Immigration Bill has come more than twice to Cabinet. We spent a long time just looking at it.

For the information of the Member for Brikama North and Minority Leader, the Paramount Chief has been appointed. *… [Desk thumping]*

The TACOS is not dead. The TACOS is actually implemented in phases and the phase approach is actually going to end in 2027. Hopefully, by 2027 Budget, the TACOS will be fully implemented.

Honourable Speaker, I hope I have not missed out. I know that a lot of issues were raised. So, I want to thank Members for their contribution. Thank you.

THE SPEAKER: His Excellency, in fact, I was going to tell you to round up. *… [Laughter] …* You can have your seat. Thank you very much. Honourable Members, let me put the question.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agree to]

[That this august Assembly do adopt the Motion on the State of the Nation Address in the 2026 Legislative Year by His Excellency the President of the Republic.]

Honourable Members, let me thank you all but before I thank you, let me on your behalf or on behalf of both sides of the Assembly extend our sincere gratitude and appreciation to His Excellency the Vice President who has been here with us since morning, and the Honourable Minister of Tourism and Culture. Both sides of the Assembly are very much appreciative. This is indicative of the type of person you are, honestly. You are so humble and caring. We recognise it, and we applaud you and the Honourable Minister of Tourism for that.

Honourable Members, some of those who spoke here are no longer in the hall. They only come, talk and go. People listen to them, but they do not

listen to others. I hope we are taking note of some of those discrepancies for next time. That will encourage others. If you want to go, do not talk. If you talk and people listen to you, you must sit down to listen to others. *… [Desk thumping] …* I think that is the best thing to do, but it has been a wonderful day.

Honourable Members, we have done very well. We had about 30 something people who spoke and were able to contain all and do it wonderfully. I thank you all.

5. **Adjournment**

THE SPEAKER: I now put the question.

[Question Proposed, Put, and Agreed to]

[That this Honourable Assembly do stand adjourned until Wednesday, 1st April 2026.]

This Assembly now stands adjourned until Wednesday, 1st April 2026, at 10:00am prompt.

[The Speaker slammed the Gavel against the Sound Block signalling the end of the day's proceedings.]

THE END