



NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE PARLIAMENT OF
THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC
OF GUYANA

OFFICIAL REPORT

*PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION
(2020-2025) OF THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION
OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE DOME OF THE ARTHUR
CHUNG CONFERENCE CENTRE, LILIENDAAL, GREATER GEORGETOWN*

17TH Sitting

Thursday, 4TH February, 2021

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.56 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Breaches of Standing Orders and Parliamentary Conventions, Customs and Practices

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, in the space of one week, between the last sitting of the National Assembly and this one, I have experienced so many breaches of the Standing Orders, and parliamentary conventions, customs and practices, that these demand that I, again, highlight them, caution Members and take action to enforce the Standing Orders.

First, publishing and causing in-camera proceedings of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of 1st February, 2021. Arriving on my WhatsApp account was a recording of a part of the proceedings of the Public Accounts Committee of Monday, 1st February, 2021. It could have happened a in few ways, among which, is that, someone who was present in the meeting made the recording. I would not speculate on others.

I would like to remind Hon. Members that Standing Order 95 (9) (a) states:

“The Meetings of a Committee shall be held in Private.”

There are exceptions. Standing Order 95 (9) (b) states:

“However, Sectoral Committees and the Public Accounts Committee may sit in public, unless the Committee determines otherwise. In determining what proceedings shall be held in private, the Committee shall strive to reach a decision by consensus, failing which the provisions of Standing Order No. 48 [Decision of Questions] shall apply.”

At the Public Accounts Committee, the custom and convention is that the public is invited when the Report of the Auditor General is being considered.

At the 101st Sitting of the Eleventh Parliament held on 3rd December, 2018, the Hon. Speaker, Dr. Scotland said:

“I noticed that one Member had a device which appeared to be recording the statement or recording events in the Chamber, I am not sure which one it was. What I am saying to Members is, that is not the practice.”

I caution and implore Hon. Members, to respect and uphold the Standing Orders and not to bring the proceedings of the honourable House or its Committee into disrepute.

Criticisms of the Speaker’s Decisions

The second issue I want to deal with is criticisms of the Speaker’s decision with respect to claims of bias and impugning the integrity of the Speaker. It seems that, after the 16th sitting of the National Assembly, it was opened season on the Standing Orders and the Speaker. At the 2nd sitting of this National Assembly, I had cause to raise the issue of criticising the Speaker’s decision and accusing the Speaker of bias. I am quoting from a document that the Hon. Speaker Dr. Scotland used prior and I used earlier, and I quote, again, one of the best-known rules of parliamentary procedure, which should be familiar to all parliamentarians world-wide, is that:

“The actions of the Speaker may not be criticised in debate or by any means except by way of a substantive motion.”

As I said earlier, this was taken from a document that the Hon. Speaker, Dr. Scotland, used. Reference in that document was made to the *Canadian House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Second Edition, pages 313–314 which states, and I quote:

“Reflections on the character or actions of the Speaker—an allegation of bias, for example—could be taken by the House as breaches of privilege and punished accordingly.”

First, the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, after the last sitting of the National Assembly levelled labels at the Speaker, which included words such as: bias, partisan, and non-partisan Speaker. In one of the Hon. Member’s social media posts, backed up with lampoons he writes, and I quote:

“Mister Speaker started out nice like them new cook shop...”

[Interruption]

I want to caution the Members that I am hearing, that, when the Speaker is making an announcement, we ought to give the chair the reverence of silence. You do not have to listen, but do not disturb.

“...and then the price raise and the standards fall. I thought after the second bout of COVID he'd stay closer to God, but the devils got him bias, partisan... you name it.”

And that is funny.

“Everybody showing deh self for 30 pieces of silver. Guess, after protesting Granger at Pegasus there no coming back.”

He had a lampoon stating, “Non-partisan Speaker shows his hands”.

Hon. Members, the Hon. Mr. Duncan’s social media comments and lampoon is a direct charge of bias against the Speaker and it imputes on the Speaker’s Character. Also, it is something which is not condoned in our Westminster Parliamentary System. I urge the Hon. Member to desist.

Criticisms of the Speaker with respect to the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) (Amendment) Bill 2020 – No. 16 of 2020 and on the Condemn the Brutal and Horrific Killing of Joel Henry, Isiaah Henry and Haresh Singh, between the period September 6 to 9, 2020 motion.

On 28th January, 2021, the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, on another programme he hosts had the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, as his guest. They both went on an attack of the Standing Orders, conventions, customs and practice and on the Speaker.

The Leader of the Opposition and the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, were criticising the Speaker’s decision on the Narcotics Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) (Amendment) Bill 2020 - No. 16 of 2020 and on the motion to Condemn the Brutal and Horrific Killing of Joel Henry, Isiaah Henry and Haresh Singh, between the period September 6 to 9, 2020. Here is a sample of the commentaries of these two Hon. Members:

“With respect to a mistake made by the Speaker saying the ‘ayes have it’ on the Narcotics Bill which the Speaker immediately corrected...”

The Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, imputed that the Speaker reversed his decision after he was prevailed upon or coaxed by the Government. These were some of his words and I quote:

“Then his colleagues prevailed upon him.”

“He had to be coaxed that the Opposition cannot win the debate.”

Nothing of the sort happened on 28th January, 2021. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition, also weighed in saying:

“The Speaker himself was convinced that at the end of the debate the ayes had it and he had to change his initial position.”

The most vile and atrocious actions that emanated from the Leader of the Opposition – these are some of his comments:

“They (PPP/C) are blocking things and they are getting the help of the Speaker to prevent certain measures from going through...”

[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members, please be quiet.

“...the additional majority which they have.”

Another quote from the Hon. Leader of the Opposition:

“Very early, we got an indication that the Speaker was going to take a position on this matter, that the matter was *sub judice*.”

I quote again, some of his words. He was responding to the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan. He said:

“The motion was not disallowed by the Government but by the Speaker, let us put the blame exactly where it is. The last time I criticised him in public...”

[*Interruption*]

Hon. Chief Whip and Leader of the Opposition, can you control your Members, please?

“...let us put the blame exactly where it is. The last time I criticised him in public, he made a big thing about it but this time he will have to make a big thing again. Every effort was made to prevent it from being heard.”

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition criticised the Speaker’s decision to not hear, at the 16th Sitting of the National Assembly, the motion on the late Henrys and Singh. He imputed improper motive that the Speaker was in collusion to prevent the motion from being heard. He accepted and he knew that what he was doing was against the rules and publicly challenged the Speaker to make a comment on his action.

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition knows better. He is a decorated soldier, he is a lawyer, he is intelligent, he is experienced, and he is a most important person, a leader on our country. Here, I outlined the process of motions and Bills...

[Interruption]

Hon. Members, I will have to start calling names and asking people to leave, if they continue with these outbursts.

[Interruption]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel]

I outlined the process for motions and Bills. Standing Order 51 (2) deals with Private Members’ Bills. Standing Order 51 (1) calls for 14 clear days’ notice, not including the dates of receipt or when it goes on the Order Paper.

Standing Order 24 deals with Arrangements of Public Business and how motions qualify for the Order Paper. Standing Order 24 (2) stipulates that, at every fourth sitting, Private Members Business gets priority except if there is a financial paper. Standing Order 41 (2) deals with impugning improper motive.

The Henrys and Singh’s motion was submitted by the Hon. Member, Ms. Chandan-Edmond on 16th November, 2020. It was read against the Standing Orders and the Hon. Member was written

to on 23rd November, 2020, regarding amendments to the motion to make it compliant with the Standing Orders. That was just a few days later.

The motion matured 14 days after and was circulated to Members *via* Notice Paper No. 18, dated 11th December, 2020. The date of the Order Paper that it qualified for was 14th December, 2020. The National Assembly met on 23rd December, 2020, where the financial paper took precedence. The next sitting of the National Assembly was on 28th December, 2020, and it was agreed by all sides that the motion would be deferred to the next sitting. That sitting was 28th January, 2021. During this period, developments rendered the motion *sub judice*. Two weeks before the sitting charges were made.

11.11 a.m.

Hon. Members, how could there be a collusion to delay or to not delay this motion when, within days of receipt, this motion was dealt with? It was circulated on the Notice Paper two weeks after it was received and put as an item on the Order Paper on 14th December. The issue of matters being *sub judice* is well documented in the Standing Orders.

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition is known to be a strategist. He achieved a very high rank in the army before he became a lawyer, a politician, and the Leader of the Opposition.

[Interruption]

I am sure that he studied the seminal works of Julius Caesar in *The Gallic Wars* and Sun Tzu in *the Art of War*, and that he continues to apply them appropriately.

[Interruption]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

I say that I am neither anyone's little boy nor am I intimidated by 'front yard' or 'back yard' bullies. If there are any occurrences or reoccurrences of breaches of the Standing Orders, I will have to ask a Minister to move a motion, and that is in Standing Order 47 (3), to refer the errant Member/Members to the Committee of Privileges. Thank you.

Meeting of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Constitutional Reform

Hon. Members, I was asked to inform the Members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee for Constitutional Reform that the meeting will be held when we adjourn for lunch, right here in the Dome of the Arthur Chung Convention Centre (ACCC). I also want to add that the Standing Orders permit any Member to sit in on any committee, except that they cannot interject or vote. Thank you very much.

Leader of the Opposition [Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon]: Mr. Speaker, may I crave your indulgence please?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, at this time, we will proceed with the order of business and, at the appropriate time, you can make an intervention. I am going to stick to the rules.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: I just wanted to say, thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, Hon Leader of the Opposition, please, go ahead.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for your elucidation on the question of the Standing Orders and the fact that you recognise that I come from a very strong and disciplined pedigree. I think, however, we, on this side of the House, represent over 270,000 Guyanese...

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. We shall proceed.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: Therefore, we have a right to speak.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, thank you very much. We shall proceed.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Speaker, I just have one point. I just want to say one thing, and that is the reference to my behaviour as 'back yard', I take strong offence to that. I am not from a back yard and did not have a 'back yard behaviour'. Thank you, Sir. I take my seat. *[Applause]*

[Interruption]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

ORAL QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we received, two days ago, a question from Hon. Member Dr. Cummings for the Minister of Health. The question had a number of sub-questions, including the last one which called for an opinion of the Minister. That is not allowed by the Standing Orders and it was deleted. Hon. Member Dr. Cummings, you have the floor.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The first question that I have for the Hon. Minister of Health: could the Hon. Member tell this august body where the comprehensive plan for the management of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) can be found to address the uptake of COVID-19 cases in Guyana? Could the Hon. Member also provide a copy of that plan for COVID-19 in Guyana?

It comes against the backdrop that, recently, the Minister received an emergency hospital from the people of Qatar. The equipment was transported and sent to the West Demerara Regional Hospital to be used and assist in the management of the COVID-19 there. Upon arrival, they realised that they had no staff and it had to be transported to Liliendaal.

The second reason for the question is that our borders are very porous. With the new strain of the COVID-19 emanating from Brazil, our neighbour, there is a possibility of reducing the efficacy of any antibody treatment for patients with the COVID-19. What plan does the Minister have to address this public health concern? Basically, what is the comprehensive plan, and may I have a copy if it is available?

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Dr. Cummings. The Member asked where the comprehensive plan is. The comprehensive plan is with the stakeholders who are implementing the plan. As you know, the plan has various sections, including the provision of personal protection equipment for the frontline health workers. We have been sourcing these types of things, such as masks, goggles, face shields, gowns, hair covers, foot covers, and all that is necessary for these frontline health workers to protect themselves while delivering care. That situation has increased dramatically from what we have inherited.

The second component of the plan talks about an increase in testing. With increased testing, as you would know, when we came into Office, we were only doing about 21 tests per day. While we were doing 21 tests per day, our range of tests was very limited. As of now, at the National Public Health Reference Laboratory (NPHRL), we are able to do about 1,500 to 2,000 polymerase chain

reaction (PCR) tests per day. That has increased our capacity tremendously. On an average day, we are doing close to 450 PCR tests.

In addition to that, the private sector has come on board, and the Eureka Medical Laboratories has also been doing PCR testing. There are a number of other institutions that are pending accreditation from the Ministry of Health.

Apart from PCR testing, we are also using the GeneXpert machine to provide point-of-care testing in several regions. As of yesterday, we have placed a GeneXpert machine in Lethem so that we can do point-of-care testing there. One such machine is also in Region 1. During this week, we will send a team out to train those persons in Region 1 so that we can start utilising that GeneXpert machine there. There is also an additional GeneXpert machine that is in Region 6 and one that is Region 10. We are procuring about two others that we will place in some of the other regions.

In addition to PCR testing, which is both the GeneXpert test and those that we do at the National Public Health Reference Laboratory, we are also doing antigen testing. Apart from the National Public Health Reference Laboratory being able to do those tests, we have now been able to accredit a number of institutions, including all of the regional hospitals and a number of point-of-care areas, health centres, and so forth, where antigen tests can be done in the public sector. In addition to that, we have already accredited five private sector entities to be able to provide antigen testing and we are in the process of accrediting another five this week. By this weekend, the names of those other entities will be published.

In addition to improving testing, another component of the plan talks about contact tracing. With contact tracing, we have our central team at the surveillance department that is responsible for contact tracing. In every region of Guyana, the regional taskforce, comprising of the Regional Health Officer (RHO) and his team, are required to do contact tracing. We have a comprehensive network of persons who are doing contact tracing.

I must say to the Hon. Member that, every morning at 7.30 a.m., each RHO reports on the things that happened in their region pertaining to COVID-19, such as, how many new cases they have, what steps they are going to take in terms of the cases they have, and the plans that they have to do contact tracing or additional testing. This is happening every single morning. Whether it is a

holiday, whether it is on the weekend or whether it is a Sunday, the RHOs and their teams are reporting every single day.

In addition to this, another component of the plan speaks to isolation and quarantine facilities. Every region has, at its disposal, public buildings that have been repurposed and retrofitted as isolation centres. The same is for quarantine facilities. So, we have adequate space in the institutional quarantine areas and the isolation areas.

Additionally, another component of the plan deals with clinical management of patients. Here, we have sought to increase the bed space and bed capacity for persons with COVID-19. At every regional hospital now, the doctors have been trained to be able to manage COVID-19 cases. And so, if one has mild symptoms and is in the isolation facility, he/she would be managed by one of the doctors who are being trained to do so. If one has more severe symptoms which require hospitalisation at any one of the facilities at the regional level, one would be able to get that type of care.

Additionally, there is the Ocean View facility, where there are 150 beds that are being utilised right now. Of those beds, there are 25 Intensive Care Unit (ICU) beds. Persons needing ICU care can get that at the Ocean View facilities. With complicated cases, if the regions cannot manage them, we send them to this specialised facility where we can offer care for the more complicated patients.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, you would realise from the press that the Government of Qatar has kindly donated a field hospital to Guyana. That field hospital has 60 beds, of which 20 can be used as ICU beds. We are currently in the process of determining in which one of the areas we are going to set that facility up. Initially, as the Hon. Member said, we wanted to set that up in Region 3. We had made an analysis of what we can do there, but then we thought that maybe we can consolidate it at the Ocean View facility. There are still some decisions to be made, but, at this point in time, we have enough bed capacity for both persons who require normal hospitalisation or ICU hospitalisation. Very shortly, we will determine exactly where we will be placing that field hospital. Once we do that, we will set that hospital up.

11.26 a.m.

In addition to these aspects relating to health, we have also developed a number of workplace strategies. That is another component of our plan, as we work with different workplaces in ensuring that they have the measures relating to COVID-19 so that they can continue working in those facilities.

Of course, another component of this plan deals with our economic relief. The Government of Guyana has been working with small businesses to provide COVID-19 economic relief to businesses that have been affected by the disease. As you would know, we have also rolled out a plan where each household benefited from \$25,000 as COVID- 19 relief. We have some measures. When we lock down specific areas, we are able to provide hampers through the Civil Defence Commission (CDC) and other organisations. So economic relief has also been part of our plan.

Another component of this plan deals with public education. While we have an aggressive programme on television and social media, we have also been working very closely with the Joint Services, through Operation CoviCurb, to ensure that our citizens are well aware of the dangers of COVID-19, and the measures they can take to protect themselves.

Then, the most recent component that we have added to our plan is to ensure that we acquire vaccines to prevent the disease. We have worked out a system of how we are going to allocate these vaccines and rollout this programme.

So, to the Hon. Member, yes, we have this very comprehensive plan, and I just gave you a broad approach to what we are doing, and, yes, we can make a copy of this plan available to you. Right now, we are updating the most recent component dealing with vaccination. As soon as we have finished that component, we can make that plan available to you. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, I want to bring your attention to the Standing Orders which states that 20 minutes should be allocated to this particular session. Hon. Member Dr. Cummings, you have the floor.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Hon. Minister for the plan. I am assuming, that before the day is out, you will give me that plan.

The second question is, could the Hon. Minister tell this august Assembly if the Ministry of Public Health would be able to adequately monitor the impact of these variants, the Coronavirus disease variant strains, as this disease continues to mutate and spread while the citizens of Guyana await testing for the variant spread?

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Speaker, I have a little challenge here because, as you would know, with the new Government, the entity known as the Ministry of Public Health ceased to exist. So, if we are talking about that entity, then I would say that I am not sure whether they had the capacity to be able to do gene sequencing. More so, after our first case on 11th March, one of the variants that was circulating then, and which became a dominant variant around the globe, was the D614G. I have not seen any reports by any person in that Ministry that points to them understanding that this was a mutant variant circulating.

So, I would say, at that point in time, the Ministry of Public Health did not have the capacity to do so.

Dr. Cummings: Be it public health or whatever you are saying, the fact remains that the public health mantra is ‘healthy people and healthy communities’. I think for both, we are assuming the same problem. By the way, there is the P1 strain that is from Brazil and our borders are very close, so take note of that.

The next question is, in light of this new variant strain of the COVID-19 virus, does the Minister plan to scale up the purchase of vaccines? You spoke about having a plan. But then, I saw the former Chairman of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) saying that CARICOM was expecting 100,000 vaccines but, it seems as though they may come in drips and drops because of the richer countries getting them. So, I want to know if you plan to scale up the purchase, and if you are sure about those vaccines that you are expecting to have?

Dr. Anthony: I am not sure what is the nexus between the variant strains and the vaccines. Nevertheless, I will endeavour to answer the Hon. Member. Indeed, we have been looking at the various strains that there are. The one which is next door, the Brazilian variant P1, we have been looking at that particular strain and what is happening in Manaus and the State of Roraima. That is one of the reasons why we have closed the border between Guyana and Brazil, and we have also stopped all flights from Guyana to Brazil and *vice versa*. So, we are monitoring the different

strains. Right now, in the World, the B.1.1.7 strain, first found in the United Kingdom (UK), is now in 80 different countries. The B.1.351 strain, the South African strain, as it is commonly known was first determined in South Africa. That is now in 40 different countries. The P1 strain, which was discovered, originally, in Japan from travellers emanating from Brazil, that strain is now in 10 different countries.

We are monitoring the different strains and what is happening. We participate, on a weekly basis, with the World Health Organization (WHO) as they tell us more about these strains and what is happening with them. We are part of a network of 22 laboratories in South America and the Caribbean that has been monitoring and doing gene sequencing so that we can know about the circulation of the different strains. So, this is happening.

As you would know, Mr. Speaker, we have a partnership with the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) where we are sending at least 10 samples every month to CARPHA so that they can do gene sequencing. We have sent the first 10 samples and we are awaiting the results. Right now, we are working on a partnership with the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) to send samples through them to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) in the United States of America (USA), so that we can add to the range of sequencing that we can do. This is how we are tracking the different variants.

In addition, the Hon. Member asked about vaccines. Yes, we have been working through the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access Facility (COVAX), the COVAX AMC, to get vaccines for Guyana. COVAX has allotted vaccines to Guyana for 20% of our population. We are expecting the first instalment of those vaccines to be 104,000 doses. We will have adequate vaccines to immunise our frontline workers. Those vaccines are going to be the AstraZeneca vaccine, which is being manufactured by the Serum Institute of India. But what is pending is the WHO authorisation because it is not listed by the WHO as yet. The World Health Organisation expects that, by the mid of this month, it will be able to grant Emergency Use Authorisation (EUA) for the AstraZeneca vaccine. This vaccine is already in use in the UK, where it has been granted Emergency Use Authorisation. It has been in use in the European Union (EU), where again they have granted it Emergency Use Authorisation and also in India, the place where it is being manufactured, again, they have granted Emergency Use Authorisation. So, we are going to get those vaccines.

In addition, the Government of China has donated to us 20,000 doses of vaccines from Sinopharm. Sinopharm is one of the biggest manufacturers of vaccines globally. We are going to get those vaccines shortly.

In addition to the COVAX arrangement that I spoke about earlier, we are in a number of bilateral talks with various countries, including not only China, but Russia and India. This is to ensure that we can have more than that 20% for this year. We are also talking to a number of multilateral agencies through which we think we would be able to acquire a vaccine. One such multilateral agency is CARICOM which has brokered an arrangement with the African Union. They have set aside 1.5 million doses of vaccines for the Caribbean. Out of that allotment, Guyana's quota will be 149,000 doses. We are working with that platform to ensure that we will also get doses from that mechanism. In addition, we have been engaging the manufacturers themselves, including, those manufacturing the mRNA vaccines and some of the other types of vaccines that we think, in the short term, will get emergency use briskly.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, we would have exhausted the 20 minutes, but I consider this very important. So, I will allow Dr. Cummings, the Hon. Member, to continue to the other two questions.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your consideration. The penultimate question is: would we see in Guyana, Hon. Minister, another lockdown to help contain the virus and, perhaps, the closure of schools at any time, bearing in mind that several countries are beginning to impose travel bans as a consequence? There have been lockdowns in our sister CARICOM countries like Barbados, and South American countries like Peru and in Israel. There are travel bans in Europe and the USA. I just want to know what is your plan. I have not seen it. Would you consider a lockdown going forward or no?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you again Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Hon. Member for that question. Pertaining to lockdown, this is always an option. But, as you know, in our management of COVID-19 in Guyana, we have exercised that right to do partial lockdowns, and we have done that in many communities. So, that is an option. In addition, as you rightly said, some countries have restricted flights. We have used that tool as well. We have now stopped all flights going to Brazil or flights

emanating from Brazil. These are tools that countries would use. As we deem it fit and based on the epidemiological situation that we are monitoring, we would also employ those tools.

Dr. Cummings: You have alluded to this question before, but just to reiterate, is there adequate public health infrastructure to keep pace with effective testing, that is, the three Ts – testing, tracing and treating, and also isolation – because it is increasing? We have about 7,000 cases now. Our case facility holds 15%. Do we have adequate infrastructure if these cases increase?

Dr. Anthony: Indeed, at this point, we do have adequate capacity for testing, contact tracing, and treatment. We have all these things in place. I outlined earlier some of the steps that we have taken. You can rest assured that, in every region, we have put testing in place; we have expanded the hospital capabilities, and, of course, we have contact tracing in those regions. Right now, we have the capabilities and, we are expanding those as well. You would have seen, recently, we made some moves in terms of expanding the infrastructure that we have, just in case.

11.41 a.m.

We hope that we do not have to use it because we are moving to the next phase. We strongly believe that, by the utilisation of vaccines and the right number of persons taking these vaccines, once we get high uptake, we would be able to develop herd immunity in Guyana, which would allow us to exit the pandemic here.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have received indications from a number of Members who had said that they were going to be on virtually. I just want to place on record those who are on at this moment, 11.41 am. The Hon. Member, Ms. Philadelphia; the Hon. Member, Mr. Rajkumar; the Hon. Member, Mr. Raphael Trotman; the Hon Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes; the Hon. Member, Dr. Vindhya Persaud; and the Hon. Member, Mr. Hugh Todd are on right now.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

For Written Replies

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have, for written replies, two questions on today's Order Paper. These questions are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley, and they are for

the Hon. Minister of the Public Service. These answers have been received and have been circulated in accordance with the Standing Order.

Scholarships

Ms. Sarabo-Halley:

(1) Can the Honourable Minister provide the programmes and cost of every local Scholarship awarded since August 2, 2020?

(2) Can the Honourable Minister provide the programmes, country and cost of every overseas Scholarship awarded since August 2, 2020?

(3) Can the Honourable Minister indicate how many of the overseas Scholarships awarded since August 2, 2020 are online Scholarships?

(4) Can the Honourable Minister give an accurate breakdown of the geographic and demographic spread of the awardees for both local and overseas Scholarships?

Minister of the Public Service [Ms. Parag]:

(1) I am advised that the programmes and cost of every local scholarship awarded since August 2, 2020 are as follows:

| Local Programmes and Cost for Scholarships Granted | Tuition |
|--|---------|
| University of Guyana | |
| Accountancy | 228,448 |
| Agricultural Science | 228,448 |
| Applied and Exploration Geology | 228,448 |
| Biology | 228,448 |
| Business Management | 228,448 |

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Chemistry | 228,448 |
| Civil Engineering with Environmental Engineering | 228,448 |
| Communication Studies | 228,448 |
| Computer Science | 228,448 |
| Dental Surgery | 713,900 |
| Early Childhood Education | 428,340 |
| Economics | 228,448 |
| Education | 228,448 |
| Electrical Engineering | 228,448 |
| Environmental Health | 228,448 |
| Environmental Management | 1,213,630 |
| Environmental Studies | 228,448 |
| Finance | 228,448 |
| Food Science and Nutrition | 278,000 |
| Forestry | 228,448 |
| General Psychology | 302,500 |

| | |
|------------------------|---------|
| Geography | 228,448 |
| Human Medicine | 713,900 |
| Mechanical Engineering | 228,448 |

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Nursing | 357,443 |
| Petroleum Engineering | 755,000 |
| Pharmacy | 356,950 |
| Public Administration | 571,120 |
| Public Health | 1,427,800 |
| Public Management | 228,448 |
| Social Work | 228,448 |
| Sociology | 228,448 |
| Supply Chain Management | 228,448 |
| Urban and Regional Planning | 1,142,240 |
| Guyana School of Agriculture: | |
| Certificate in Agriculture | 285,000 |
| Diploma in Agriculture | 285,000 |
| Animal Health and Veterinary Public Health | 285,000 |
| Art Williams and Harry Wendt Aeronautical School | 880,000 |
| Texila American University | 1,100,000 |

(2) I am advised that the programmes, country and cost of every overseas scholarship awarded since August 2, 2020 are as follows:

| Programme | Country | Tuition |
|-----------|---------|---------|
|-----------|---------|---------|

| | | |
|---|-------------------|----------------------|
| Labour & Employment Relations | Barbados | 6,345,000 |
| Cardiovascular Surgery | India | Study Leave with Pay |
| Chemical & Process Engineering | Trinidad & Tobago | 2,315,390 |
| Children Youth & International Development | United Kingdom | Study Leave with Pay |
| Climate Change | Spain | 779,746 |
| Management & Educational Leadership | UWI Open Campus | 921,083 |
| Environmental Engineering | United Kingdom | Donor Funded |
| Environmental Engineering and Project Management | United Kingdom | Donor Funded |
| Finance | United Kingdom | 4,213,500 |
| Bio Chemistry | Barbados | 4,320,000 |
| Human Resources Management | Barbados | 1,438,200 |
| Law | Trinidad & Tobago | 3,234,047 |
| Law | United Kingdom | Study Leave with Pay |
| Maritime Affairs | Sweden | Study Leave with Pay |
| Meteorology | Barbados | Study Leave with Pay |
| Ophthalmology | United Kingdom | 6,863,500 |
| Project Management | Barbados | 1,438,200 |

| | | |
|--|----------------|----------------------|
| Public Health | Jamaica | 634,500 |
| Public Health | United Kingdom | 5,962,500 |
| Public Sector Management | Barbados | 6,345,000 EACH |
| Public Procurement Law and Strategy | Italy | 2,150,500 |
| Science | Jamaica | 2,210,387 |
| Tourism | Barbados | 6,345,000 |
| Water Management | Netherlands | 10,403,613 |
| Nephrology | Canada | Study Leave with Pay |
| Business Administration | Barbados | Us 5000 |
| Oil and Gas Engineering | Russia | 60,000 |

| | | |
|----------------------------|--------|----------------------|
| Medicine | Russia | 60,000 |
| Infectious Diseases | Canada | Study Leave with Pay |
| | | |

(3) I am advised that there are twenty- six (26) online scholarships awarded since August 2, 2020. It must be noted that due to the Covid-19 Pandemic most scholarships awarded are of an online nature.

(4) (a) I am advised that the geographic spread of awardees for both local and overseas scholarships awarded since August 2, 2020 are as follows:

| Region | 2020 |
|------------------|-------------|
| Region 1 | 14 |
| Region 2 | 21 |
| Region 3 | 51 |
| Region 4 | 226 |
| Region 5 | 23 |
| Region 6 | 42 |
| Region 7 | 7 |
| Region 8 | 7 |
| Region 9 | 10 |
| Region 10 | 45 |
| Total | 446 |

(b) I am advised that the demographic spread of awardees for local and overseas scholarships awarded since August 2, 2020 are as follows:

Overseas Institutions

| Gender | Awardees |
|---------------|-----------------|
| Female | 24 |
| Male | 15 |
| Total | 39 |

Local Institutions

| Gender | Awardees |
|---------------|-----------------|
| Female | 230 |
| Male | 177 |
| Total | 407 |

Contracted Employees

Ms. Sarabo-Halley:

- (1) Can the Honourable Minister provide the designation, emoluments (salaries and other benefits) of each person employed on contract in the Ministry of the Public Service and its gazetted umbrella and associated Agencies since August 2, 2020?
- (2) Can the Honourable Minister advise if the salaries and allowances for these employees were catered for in the Budget 2020 and, if so, under which line item?

Ms. Parag:

I am advised that the designation and salary scale of each person employed on contract in the Ministry of Public Service since August 2, 2020 are as follows:

| Contracted Employees Ministry of Public Service - August 2020 to Present | | |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Designation | Number of Persons | Salary Scale/Band |
| Deputy Permanent Secretary | 1 | GS 13 |
| Confidential Secretaries | 2 | GS 5 |
| Personal Assistant | 1 | GS 7 |
| Ministerial Advisor | 1 | GS 14 |

(b) I am advised that the attached list below of designation and salary scale of each person employed on contract is inclusive of those renewed on contract in the Ministry of Public Service and its gazetted umbrella and associated agencies since August 2, 2020 and is as follows:

| Contracted Employees - August 2020 to Present | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Designation | Number of Persons | Salary Scale/Band |
| Cleaner | 57 | GS 1 |
| Gardener | 1 | GS 1 |
| Office Assistant | 5 | GS 1 |
| Handyman | 13 | GS 1 |
| Household Service Worker | 1 | GS 1 |
| Stores Attendant | 1 | GS 1 |
| Maid | 6 | GS 1 |
| Camp Attendant | 2 | GS 1 |
| Caretaker | 2 | GS 1 |
| Labourer | 4 | GS 1 |
| Hospital Porter | 1 | GS 1 |
| Security Guard | 5 | GS 1 |
| Labourer II | 1 | GS 1 |
| Janitor | 1 | GS 1 |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|----|------|
| Craft Shop Attendant | 1 | GS 1 |
| Laundress | 4 | GS 1 |
| Porter | 6 | GS 1 |
| Maintenance / Kitchen Attendant | 3 | GS 1 |
| Pool Attendant | 1 | GS 1 |
| Nurse Aide | 1 | GS 1 |
| Typist Clerk I | 7 | GS 2 |
| Receptionist | 7 | GS 2 |
| Cook | 8 | GS 2 |
| House Mother | 2 | GS 2 |
| House Father | 2 | GS 2 |
| Sluice Attendant | 13 | GS 2 |
| Vehicle Driver | 50 | GS 2 |
| Dental Aide | 11 | GS 2 |
| Clerk | 1 | GS 2 |

| | | |
|----------------|---|------|
| Service Man | 1 | GS 2 |
| Welder | 1 | GS 2 |
| Carpenter | 1 | GS 2 |
| Lab Technician | 1 | GS 2 |

| | | |
|---|---|------|
| Procurement Assistant | 3 | GS 2 |
| Accounts Clerk | 4 | GS 2 |
| Plumber/Gutter Smith | 1 | GS 2 |
| Audit Clerk | 1 | GS 2 |
| Contracts Assistant | 1 | GS 2 |
| Personnel Clerk | 1 | GS 2 |
| Mortuary Maid | 1 | GS 2 |
| Records Clerk | 3 | GS 2 |
| Telephonist II | 1 | GS 2 |
| Typist Clerk II | 2 | GS 2 |
| Security/Receptionist | 1 | GS 2 |
| Book Repair Assistant | 1 | GS 2 |
| Scanning Clerk | 1 | GS 2 |
| Electrician II | 1 | GS 2 |
| Supply Expeditor | 1 | GS 2 |
| Patient Care Assistant | 2 | GS 2 |
| Photographer / Public Relations Assistant | 1 | GS 2 |
| Ward Maid | 7 | GS 2 |
| Ward Orderly | 1 | GS 2 |
| Health Centre Attendant | 3 | GS 2 |

| | | |
|---|----|------|
| Field Assistant | 2 | GS 2 |
| Laboratory Aide | 1 | GS 2 |
| Head Laundress | 1 | GS 2 |
| Data Processing Operator | 1 | GS 2 |
| Legal Clerk II | 2 | GS 2 |
| Clerk II | 2 | GS 2 |
| Checker | 1 | GS 2 |
| Entry Clerk / Scanning Officer | 1 | GS 2 |
| Library Assistant | 1 | GS 2 |
| Driver / Mechanic | 10 | GS 3 |
| Driver / Administrative Support Officer | 2 | GS 3 |
| Accounts Clerk II | 11 | GS 3 |
| Mason | 1 | GS 3 |
| Mechanic | 2 | GS 3 |
| Equipment Operator | 5 | GS 3 |

| | | |
|------------------------|---|------|
| Cane Scale Supervisor | 9 | GS 3 |
| Clerk III | 1 | GS 3 |
| Supervisor, Household | 1 | GS 3 |
| Equipment Operator III | 1 | GS 3 |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|----|------|
| Research Assistant | 2 | GS 3 |
| Internal Security Officer | 1 | GS 3 |
| Data Processor | 1 | GS 3 |
| Seamstress | 1 | GS 3 |
| Data Entry Clerk | 1 | GS 3 |
| Community Health Worker | 2 | GS 4 |
| Captain Engineer | 1 | GS 4 |
| Nursing Assistant | 68 | GS 4 |
| Turtle Excluder Device Inspector | 1 | GS 4 |
| Storekeeper | 2 | GS 4 |
| Junior Procurement Officer | 1 | GS 4 |
| Supervisor, House Services | 1 | GS 4 |
| Health Promotion Assistant | 1 | GS 4 |
| Administrative Support Assistant | 1 | GS 4 |
| Confidential Secretary | 32 | GS 5 |
| Senior Research Assistant | 1 | GS 5 |
| District Development Officer 1 | 1 | GS 5 |
| Assistant Field Auditor | 1 | GS 5 |
| District Development Officer | 1 | GS 5 |
| Transport Officer | 3 | GS 5 |

| | | |
|------------------------------|----|------|
| Construction Foreman | 1 | GS 5 |
| Assistant Accountant | 1 | GS 5 |
| Clerk of Works | 5 | GS 5 |
| Secretary | 3 | GS 5 |
| Senior Operator Inspector | 1 | GS 5 |
| HIV Counselors / Tester | 1 | GS 5 |
| System Support Officer | 2 | GS 5 |
| Property Enhancement Officer | 1 | GS 5 |
| Plant Protection Assistant | 1 | GS 5 |
| Administrative Assistant | 10 | GS 6 |
| Welfare Officer | 8 | GS 6 |
| Overseer | 2 | GS 6 |
| Sea Defense Technician | 1 | GS 6 |
| Budget Officer 1 | 2 | GS 6 |
| Midwife | 5 | GS 6 |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|----|------|
| Social Services Assistant | 1 | GS 6 |
| Registration and License Officer | 1 | GS 6 |
| Staff Nurse | 10 | GS 6 |
| Videographer / Video Editor | 1 | GS 6 |

| | | |
|--|----|------|
| Community Development Officers | 21 | GS 7 |
| Public Relations Officer | 3 | GS 7 |
| Medical Technologist | 1 | GS 7 |
| Probation and Social Services Officer | 2 | GS 7 |
| Special Assistant | 1 | GS 7 |
| Physiotherapist | 1 | GS 7 |
| Social Worker | 4 | GS 7 |
| Warden II | 23 | GS 7 |
| Occupational Safety and Health Officer | 2 | GS 7 |
| Warden I | 1 | GS 7 |
| Personal Assistant | 13 | GS 7 |
| Port Health Officer | 8 | GS 8 |
| Senior Investigating and Liaison Officer | 1 | GS 8 |
| Socio Environmental Officer | 1 | GS 8 |
| Assistant Director | 1 | GS 8 |
| Accountant | 2 | GS 8 |
| Medex | 1 | GS 8 |
| Pharmacist | 1 | GS 8 |
| Port Health Officer | 1 | GS 8 |
| Health Visitor | 1 | GS 8 |

| | | |
|---|----|------|
| Senior Public Relations Officer | 1 | GS 8 |
| Logistics Officer | 1 | GS 8 |
| Programme Officer | 1 | GS 9 |
| Liaison to the Nation Toshao | 1 | GS 9 |
| Senior Social Worker | 1 | GS 9 |
| Assistant Regional Executive Officer | 1 | GS 9 |
| Surveillance Officer | 2 | GS 9 |
| National Ozone Officer | 1 | GS 9 |
| Expenditure Planning and Management Analyst I | 3 | GS 9 |
| Principal Personnel Officer | 1 | GS 9 |
| Technical Assistant | 5 | GS 9 |
| Engineer | 10 | GS 9 |
| Environmental Officer | 1 | GS 9 |
| Electrical Operations Officer | 2 | GS 9 |
| Electrical Engineer | 5 | GS 9 |

| | | |
|----------------------------------|---|------|
| Civil Engineer | 4 | GS 9 |
| Manager, Materials Lab | 1 | GS 9 |
| Co-ordinator of the City Cleanup | 1 | GS 9 |
| Software Engineer | 1 | GS 9 |

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|--------------------------------------|----|------|
| Chief Accountant | 2 | GS 9 |
| Director | 1 | GS 9 |
| Administrative Officer | 1 | GS 9 |
| Economic/ Financial Analyst I | 3 | GS 9 |
| System Development Officer | 2 | GS 9 |
| Co-ordinator of Web Services | 1 | GS 9 |
| Community and Outreach Officer | 1 | GS 9 |
| Internal Auditor | 1 | GS 9 |
| Crop Extension Officer | 3 | GS 9 |
| Psychologist | 1 | GS 9 |
| Veterinary Public Health Officer | 1 | GS 9 |
| Senior Planning Officer | 1 | GS 9 |
| Budget Officer II | 1 | GS 9 |
| Legal Assistant | 1 | GS 9 |
| Liaison Officer | 1 | GS 9 |
| Science Officer | 1 | GS 9 |
| Digital Communications Officer | 10 | GS 9 |
| Senior Public Affairs Officer | 1 | GS 9 |
| Community Engagement Officer | 2 | GS 9 |
| Food and Agro-Processing Inspector I | 1 | GS 9 |

| | | |
|---|----|-------|
| Ministerial Liaison Officer | 1 | GS 9 |
| Public Affairs Officer | 1 | GS 9 |
| Regional Coordinator | 2 | GS 10 |
| Medical Officer | 2 | GS 10 |
| Health Economist | 1 | GS 10 |
| Project Manager Donor Programme | 1 | GS 10 |
| Procurement Officer | 2 | GS 10 |
| Assistant Aviation Inspector | 1 | GS 10 |
| (Government) Medical Officer | 71 | GS 10 |
| Economic and Financial Analyst II | 7 | GS 10 |
| Special Project Officer | 2 | GS 10 |
| Administrator | 1 | GS 10 |
| Systems Administrator | 1 | GS 10 |
| Management Development Officer | 5 | GS 10 |
| Health and Family Life Education Co-ordinator | 1 | GS 10 |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|-------|
| Co-ordinator Private Schools | 1 | GS 10 |
| Legal Officer | 2 | GS 10 |
| Communication Director | 1 | GS 10 |
| Manager, Programme Enrollment | 1 | GS 10 |

| | | |
|---|---|-------|
| Senior, Food and Agro-Processing Inspector I | 1 | GS 10 |
| Consultant Occupational Safety and Health | 1 | GS 10 |
| National Co-ordinator Community Development Officer | 1 | GS 10 |
| District Community Development Officer | 5 | GS 10 |
| Administrator within Community Policing Secretariat | 1 | GS 10 |
| Policy Analyst | 8 | GS 10 |
| Human Resources Project Co-ordinator | 1 | GS 11 |
| Co-ordinator International Desk | 1 | GS 11 |
| Hospital Administrator | 1 | GS 11 |
| Manager, Traffic Maintenance | 1 | GS 11 |
| Marine Superintendent | 1 | GS 11 |
| Programme Co-ordinator | 2 | GS 11 |
| Senior Economic Financial Analyst | 7 | GS 11 |
| IFMIS Transformation Technician | 1 | GS 11 |
| Assistant Director of Youth Empowerment | 1 | GS 11 |
| Principal Assistant Secretary | 1 | GS 11 |
| Chief Co-operative Development Officer | 1 | GS 11 |
| Chief Recruitment and Manpower Officer | 1 | GS 11 |
| Prosthodontist | 1 | GS 11 |
| Senior Education Officer | 1 | GS 11 |

| | | |
|---|---|-------|
| Schools Inspector | 1 | GS 11 |
| Senior Legal Advisor | 1 | GS 11 |
| Registrar General | 1 | GS 11 |
| Gastroenterologist | 1 | GS 11 |
| Energy or Legal Advisor to the Minister | 1 | GS 11 |
| Project Analyst Co-ordinator | 1 | GS 11 |
| Environmental Awareness Co-ordinator | 1 | GS 11 |
| Natural Resources Specialist | 1 | GS 11 |
| Regional Representative | 5 | GS 11 |
| Chief Neurosurgeon | 1 | GS 12 |
| Chief Executive Officer | 3 | GS 12 |
| Senior Engineer | 8 | GS 12 |
| Manager, Technical Services | 1 | GS 12 |
| Head of Department - Regional Planning | 1 | GS 12 |
| Head of Department - Project Cycle Management | 1 | GS 12 |
| IFMIS Transformation Analyst | 1 | GS 12 |
| Head Bilateral Department | 1 | GS 12 |
| IFMIS Transformation Administrator | 1 | GS 12 |
| Court Manager | 1 | GS 12 |
| Director of Planning | 1 | GS 12 |

| | | |
|--|---|-------|
| Director, Material Management Unit | 1 | GS 12 |
| Technical Officer | 4 | GS 12 |
| Director of Digital Communication | 1 | GS 12 |
| Director of Public Affairs | 1 | GS 12 |
| Director of Industry and Innovation Unit | 1 | GS 12 |
| Director, Business and Entrepreneur Development | 1 | GS 12 |
| Director, Policy and Governments | 1 | GS 12 |
| Senior Legal Co-ordinator | 1 | GS 12 |
| Project Manager | 1 | GS 12 |
| Head, Policy Planning Co-ordination Unit | 1 | GS 12 |
| Financial Analyst | 2 | GS 12 |
| Consultant / Forensic Auditor | 1 | GS 12 |
| Deputy Permanent Secretary | 6 | GS 13 |
| Director IFMIS Transformation | 1 | GS 13 |
| Director, NCERD | 1 | GS 13 |
| Chief Administrative Officer | 1 | GS 13 |
| State Solicitor, Public Trustee/ Official Receiver | 1 | GS 13 |
| Regional Executive Officer | 7 | GS 13 |
| Secretary to Integrity Commission | 1 | GS 13 |
| Ministerial Advisor | 2 | GS 14 |

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|----|--------------------|
| Permanent Secretary | 10 | GS 14 |
| Finance Secretary | 1 | GS 14 |
| Chief Education Officer | 1 | GS 14 |
| Head of CANU | 1 | GS 14 |
| Technical Director | 1 | Special F Scale |
| Head, Enterprise Monitoring Division | 1 | Special F Scale |

(2) The five (5) contracted employees, employed in the Ministry of Public Service after August 2, 2020 were not catered for in the 2020 Emergency Budget. However, the said employees were paid under the line item 6141, i.e.

Revision of wages and salaries paid by the Ministry of Finance.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BILLS – Second and Third Readings

The Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill 2021 – Bill No. 1/2021

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act.”

*[Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility
for Finance]*

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance [Dr. Singh]: I rise, today, to move that the Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill 2021 – Bill No. 1/2021, published on 27th January, 2021, be now read a second time.

The Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill is, at one level, an extremely simple Bill. It seeks to enact a few amendments to the Principal Act, the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA), as it is now popularly known. These amendments are designed to streamline the budget process, increase its efficiency and improve the effectiveness which Parliament can consider the budgets of these entities.

It is, indeed, my expectation that this amendment Bill will enjoy swift and smooth passage through the House and unanimous support from both sides of the House.

It will be recalled that the FMAA, when it was first introduced in the National Assembly in 2003, represented a vast and comprehensive piece of legislation. It was intended to overhaul the fiscal management architecture of the country, repealing and replacing, as it did at that time, the financial administration on the Audit Act that we had inherited from colonial times, which, though it had served an extremely useful purpose over the years, had outlived, by then, its usefulness and relevance to modern financial management practices worldwide. The FMAA was introduced, like I said, and comprised a comprehensive legislative architecture to govern the entire budget process – from budget preparation to budget execution to expost reporting and accountability arrangements. That new Act, brought into law in 2003, served our country well for many years and has often been cited by Members on both sides of this House, sitting in our respective places, in successive Parliaments. This demonstrates its utility, its value and its sustained relevance as it relates to the management and accountability of public money.

The particular amendments that we are moving today relate to certain provisions that were inserted into the principal Act in 2015, shortly after the change in Administration. In June or July of 2015, shortly after our Colleagues on the Opposite side of the House had assumed Government, they brought to the National Assembly an amendment Bill to amend the original FMAA. That amendment Bill related to the budget process to govern constitutional agencies, as they were then described. In particular, the term constitutional agencies was interpreted to mean, although not defined in the FMAA amendment at the time, those entities listed in the Third Schedule to the

Constitution. There was, in fact, a companion Bill, a Constitution (Amendment) Bill, that sought to expand the list of those agencies reflected in the Third Schedule.

The stated intent of the FMAA (Amendment) Bill was to give effect to article 222A of the Constitution which relates to the financial autonomy of the said constitutional entities. The then amendment articulated a two-stage process, whereby the budgets of constitutional agencies would be brought to the National Assembly, considered by the Assembly and approved, and then incorporated into the national budget, which would subsequently be submitted to the House for consideration. At that time, the budgets of the constitutional agencies, which had been so incorporated, would not be reconsidered by the House, but would simply form part of the annual budget.

It might be worthwhile to note that the 2015 amendment represented the second time that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) had sought to introduce this amendment, the previous occasion being one that preceded their assumption of Government. I believe that would have been during the Tenth Parliament. On that occasion, the FMAA (Amendment) Bill did not receive the benefit of presidential assent and for very good reasons, reasons on which I will shortly elaborate.

While the intent to give effect to article 222A is, perhaps, one worthy of commendation, the process that was articulated in the FMAA (Amendment) Bill, instead of giving effect to the said article, had the result of colliding with certain critical aspects of that article. It collided in a manner that rendered the process of this Assembly's consideration of the national budget convoluted, complicated and problematic. I will cite at least one significant example in this regard. The amendment that we are now bringing to the House seeks, very simply, to remove this two-step process that involves the prior submission of the budgets of constitutional agencies or to combine these two processes into a single submission of the National Assembly for reasons that I will elaborate shortly. On that basis, it constitutes a very simple and intuitive amendment.

The Bill addresses issues that are very fundamental. I wish to highlight a couple of these very fundamental issues that the Bill seeks to address. First of all, it is a well-established principle, in our Constitution, in the traditions of our Parliament and in Parliaments like ours, that certain responsibilities as they relate to fiscal matters are vested in the Executive. This, perhaps, is best

exemplified by article 171 of the Constitution, which clearly articulates that certain matters relating to the public finances, including the levying of any taxes, the incurrence of any expenditure or the causing of any charge against the Consolidated Fund, can only be brought before this House with the prior consent of Cabinet, signified by a Minister. Indeed, this article of the Constitution refers not only to Bills but even to motions. It specifically states:

“(2) Except on the recommendation or with the consent of the Cabinet signified by a Minister, the Assembly shall not –

(a) proceed upon any Bill (including any amendment to a Bill) which, in the opinion of the person presiding, makes provision for any of the following purposes –

(i) for imposing or increasing any tax;

(ii) for imposing any charge upon the Consolidated Fund or any other public fund of Guyana or for altering any such charge otherwise than by reducing it;

(iii) for the payment, issue or withdrawal from the Consolidated Fund or any other public fund of Guyana of any moneys not charged thereon or any increase in the amount of such a payment, issue or withdrawal;

or

(iv) for compounding or remitting any debt due to Guyana; or

(b) proceed upon any motion (including any amendment to a motion) the effect of which, in the opinion of the person presiding, would be to make provision for any of the purposes aforesaid.”

This particular article is replicated in the Standing Orders of our own august Assembly, reinforcing the role of the Executive in matters relating to public finances and with good reason.

11.56 a.m.

As long as we will hold the Executive accountable for fiscal outcomes, then the Executive must, of necessity, have an appropriate role to play as it relates to fiscal matters.

Later today, we will be debating two motions seeking to confirm Orders relating to the public debt of Guyana – domestic and external. Compliance with the ceilings prescribed by those two Orders is the responsibility of the incumbent Government. To the extent that the incumbent Government is responsible for managing the fiscal affairs of the country to ensure compliance with those ceilings prescribed therein, it behoves the incumbent Government to manage all of the operations that affect the public finances to ensure compliance with those laws.

The principle regarding the involvement of the Executive as it relates to matters in finance is very well established, like I said, in Parliaments similar to ours across the world. What the 2015 amendment sought to do and, in fact, did once enacted, was to curtail and diminish the Executive's role. Those budgets no longer came to the National Assembly, submitted by the Minister of Finance or by the Minister responsible for Finance or with the prior signification of consent of Cabinet, as is required by our Constitution. Instead, they were submitted through the Office of the Clerk of the National Assembly. Of course, no disrespect whatsoever intended to the distinguished Clerk of the National Assembly.

The function of managing the public finances, the function of ensuring compliance with any ceilings, whether on debt or any other fiscal ceiling, and the function of ensuring the achievement of fiscal outcomes rest with the Minister responsible for finance and the government of which he/she is a part. That 2015 amendment violated that cardinal principle that required the Executive's involvement in the management of the public finances.

The underlying principle is: if we will hold the Executive accountable for the achievement of fiscal outcomes, then the Executive must be clothed with suitable authority to ensure the achievement of those outcomes. Otherwise, if we want to carve out a part of the budget and remove the Executive from the involvement in consideration of that part of the budget, then we need to exclude that part of the budget from any ceilings that would be applicable to the fiscal outcomes for which the Executive is responsible. That, of course, was not done.

Secondly and equally fundamentally, the language of article 222A is very clear, sufficiently clear that I believe it would be obvious to all of us what the intent of the framers of this article was. Article 222A states:

“In order to assure the independence of the entities listed in the Third Schedule –

- (a) the expenditure of each of the entities shall be financed as a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund, determined as a lump sum by way of an annual subvention approved by the National Assembly after a review and approval of the entity's annual budget as a part of the process of the determination of the national budget”.

I want to repeat that particular part of the article for emphasis:

“...after a review and approval of the entity's annual budget as a part of the process of the determination of the national budget”.

We might ask ourselves why the framers of article 222A, which was inserted in our Constitution following the 2001 constitutional amendments, following the comprehensive constitutional reform process that we all took part in, go to the lengths and take the pains to specify language that required the approval of the budgets of constitutional agencies to be part of the process of the determination of the national budget.

The insertion of that language was not an accident. It was very deliberate for the following reasons: a cardinal principle of sound fiscal management is unity and comprehensiveness. When one is examining the national budget and considering how various allocations will impact the macro economy and fiscal outcomes, it is unavoidably necessary that one should consider the budget in its entirety. The budget, after all, is a process of prioritisation. It is a process by which a range of competing calls on the public treasury, more often than not all very legitimate calls on the public treasury, are considered amongst each other. A process of prioritisation is undertaken in order to achieve an outcome that optimally allocates the finite fiscal resources that are available to the country across these competing needs. Unavoidably, some agencies will not get what they requested. Many agencies have vast, ambitious and very legitimate plans for rolling out their agendas for developing their respective sectors. Here, indeed, I speak equally to many of my Colleagues on this side of the House, many of whom, were there not to be a fiscal constraint, would have very ambitious plans to transform their respective sectors.

We as a Government and, indeed, this Assembly, in considering the national budget, must have a view of the entire national budget. We must have a comprehensive view, otherwise, this Assembly is being asked to consider and approve a part of the budget in isolation from all of the other

competing calls on the public treasury. This is an important issue and it is an issue that has arisen in this very House over the course of the last five years. I will cite just one of many examples.

Imagine that we are coming to this House and asking this House to approve the budgets of a long list of entities, carved out of the national budget and extracted from the totality of all budgetary calls in this country. We are presenting this carved-out part of the budget and saying to the House that, in isolation of what else is happening in the economy, we are asking you to approve these budgets. Irrespective of what is expected to happen with growth in the economy, irrespective of what is happening with respect to revenue in the economy and irrespective of what is happening with respect to other calls on the budget, we carve out this subset of the budget and we say that we are presenting this to the National Assembly and we are asking that you blindly – since you do not have a view of the rest of the public finances – or *blindfoldedly* approve this part of the budget, irrespective of how it fits within the broader fiscal framework.

Indeed, it will be recalled that the 2015 amendment required the Minister of Finance to submit his comments. I will give just one example of what was submitted, by way of comments, by my predecessor in office to support the recommendation that he was making. This was the document that was circulated to this House, requesting approval of the recommendations of the Executive and it was the recommendations of the Executive that were brought for approval and, ultimately, were approved.

This is the comment of the Minister of Finance, my predecessor, that was put before this House:

“...the recommended allocation is made in the context of the existing fiscal space and consideration of agency’s requests within national development priorities”.

This Assembly was asked to approve these budgets without a picture of what this fiscal framework was all about, without a picture of what revenue development would look like and without a picture of what anticipated growth in the economy would be. Indeed, it would be fair to say that this House was really being asked to approve these budgets blindly. This fact, I am happy to say, was not lost on my Colleagues on this side of the House who, at that time, were sitting on the opposite side of the House. I quote from the debate on the 2018 budget for constitutional agencies, but this trend was seen every year. I quote from my distinguished Colleague, the Hon. Minister Teixeira, then the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira who, said as follows:

“When the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) was amended in 2015 and we started this process of having the Constitutional Bodies dealt with separately, we did this before the Minister’s Budget presentation.”

That is very important. So, the full set of fiscal projections had not come to the House and the revenue projections had not come to the House. The Hon. Member correctly identified this and said as follows:

“It was not as clear last year as it is now in the sense that the Minister has written in the legend and as he just said that the macro-economic outlook, that the macro-economic outlook, projections for revenues and borrowing and sustainability of these had led to the cuts.”

Here is the operative part of the quote. The Hon. Member and now Minister Teixeira said, very importantly:

12.11 p.m.

“But, the problem is that we do not know what his macro-economic outlook is. We do not know what the projections for revenues are. We do not know what the projections for borrowing are. We have a media report of July, which was circulated in the House and the Minister is not saying it, but I would say it for him, the performance is abysmally bad. It is dismal. But the Minister has not said that; the outlook for 2018 is absolutely dismal.”

Yet, this House was being asked to approve these budgets without having access to this absolutely critical information – critical to accessing affordability and capacity to pay, critical to accessing relative competing priorities and critical to accessing the entirety of the budget. This should not come as a surprise to us because, like I said earlier, it has been a long-standing and well-established principle that, in presenting budgets to the National Assembly, they should be presented comprehensively. The National Assembly, if it is to consider the budget in a meaningful manner, must have a complete picture of all of the public finances, of the revenues of Government, of the projected expenditures of the whole Government and how these will be financed.

That 2015 amendment to the FMAA Act had a number of perverse consequences. First of all, as I said, it excluded the Executive and required financial matters to be brought before this House by

a route other than that required by the Constitution – which is a route that requires the prior consent of the Cabinet, as is required in article 171 of the Constitution. It also had the perverse result of the Assembly being denied a complete picture and was instead being asked to pronounce on matters with only a very partial picture of the public finances.

In the interest of remedying and curing those significant defects, we have brought this 2021 amendment to the FMAA Act to ensure that this Assembly is presented with a complete picture, to ensure that when we bring the national budget to the Parliament, and when the Parliament is asked to vote on items, it receives the whole of the budget, including those of constitutional agencies. I hasten to emphasise that, in proposing these amendments, we are careful to preserve those provisions that are required by article 222A.

First of all, I should say that what this amendment does is correct what has transpired over the last five years, in violation of article 222A, which explicitly requires that the budgets of the constitutional agencies be considered as part [Interruption] It corrects the fact whereas the Constitution, at article 222A (a), requires that the budgets of these constitutional agencies be considered as a part of the process of the determination of the annual budget. Instead, that did not happen because of the 2015 amendments that were introduced. Our amendments seek to correct this.

I wish, like I said earlier, to emphasise that we preserve, in the FMAA Act, those provisions that require that the budget be voted as an annual subvention, approved by the National Assembly. So, one will note that requirement is preserved as well as the provision that ensures that the budget is made available to these constitutional agencies in a lump sum to manage as they deem fit, immediately after the budget is approved as a lump sum. Those provisions we have preserved, thereby ensuring that the letter and intent of article 222A, as it relates to the financial autonomy of those constitutional agencies, that autonomy is preserved and is made good.

We believe that the Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill, currently before the House, will result in a budget process that will be far more meaningful than has obtained over the course of the last five years. It will ensure that this House makes better informed decisions and, ultimately, we expect that it will ensure that our country is better able to realise the fiscal outcomes that we aspire to achieve.

I do not wish to speculate – we will come back to the matter of debt later in the day – about whether it was this carving out and carving up of the budget that resulted in the suboptimal fiscal outcomes that arose, including the accumulation of the vast overdraft that we will speak about later. We would like to correct and fix this matter. Hence, the amendment Bill that we now propose.

I conclude by emphasising that nothing in this Bill affects the financial autonomy that will be enjoyed by constitutional agencies and that is very important. Absolutely nothing in this Bill will affect or influence the financial autonomy of these constitutional agencies. With those words [**Mr. Duncan:** Read your Bill.] I repeat, for emphasis, that absolutely nothing in this Bill affects the financial autonomy that is enjoyed by the agencies listed in the Third Schedule of the Constitution.

With those words, it gives me great pleasure to commend the Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill 2021 to this honourable House and, at the appropriate moment, I will invite my Colleagues in the House to vote in favour of its smooth passage. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. The question is proposed.

Before we take the suspension, our internet streaming is down but we are still live on *Facebook*, our website and *YOUTUBE*. Let me apologise to all those online persons for the break in our transmission.

Hon. Members, with deference to not interrupting the next presenter, let us take the suspension now and return an hour from now at 1.20 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 12.20 p.m.

1.36 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.36 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: To our online audience, both local and international, our internet connection is back up. We apologise for the inconvenience. Our technicians worked diligently, during the past hour, to ensure that we are fully back with our online audience. Thank you very much for being patient with us. Thanks to our technicians and to all who are continuing to have such a keen interest in our fledgling democracy. The Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde, you have the floor.

Mr. Forde: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. I rise to oppose the Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill 2021 – Bill No. 1/2021. The Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill 2021 states, in the Explanatory Memorandum, that:

“The Bill seeks to amend the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, Cap. 73:02, to correct several anomalies relating to Constitutional Agencies.”

The main thrust of this Bill is set out in Clause 5 of the Explanatory Memorandum, which states that it seeks to:

“... amends section 80B of the Principal Act by deleting subsections (1) to (4). The effect of this amendment is to correct the anomaly which gave the Clerk of the National Assembly certain functions in respect of the budget proposals and the presentation of those proposals to the National Assembly by returning those functions to the Minister with responsibility for finance. This clause also amends section 80B (5) by clarifying that not only must the detailed budgets and appropriations be reflected in the Annual Estimates together with the detailed Estimates of Revenues and Expenditures of the Constitutional Agencies but that the budgets, appropriations, estimates and expenditures shall be reviewed and approved as part of the process of the determination of the national budget.”

Clause 7 of the Explanatory Memorandum states that the Bill also seeks to:

“...amends the Schedule of the Act by inserting a number of agencies as budget agencies. These agencies are the Chamber of Director of Public Prosecutions, Judicial Service Commission, Public Service Commission, Police Service Commission, Teaching Service Commission, Public Service Appellate Tribunal, Public Procurement Commission, Office of the Ombudsmen, Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), Parliament Office, Supreme Court of Judicature, Ethnic Relations Commission, Human Rights Commission, Women and Gender Equality Commission, Indigenous Peoples’ Commission, Rights of the Child Commission and the Office of the Auditor General.”

Mr. Speaker, what this Bill, in fact, seeks to do is to undo the significant and important legislative measures, which were incorporated and set out in the Fiscal Management and Accountability

(Amendment) Act of 2015. The mover of the Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill 2015 – Bill No. 3 of 2015 said, at the time of the passage of the Bill, that:

“...this Bill...its eventual passage into law will mark the culmination of a long tumultuous journey to free the constitutional commissions and other agencies from administrative strictures and controls of their finances.”

It is important that I refer to the Explanatory Memorandum of that 2015 Bill, which is the Act that is now being amended by this proposed Bill. That Explanatory Memorandum of the 2015 Bill stated that:

“This Bill seeks to amend the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, Cap. 73:02, (i) to extend the application of the Act to the responsible Minister and (ii) to establish financial independence of certain Constitutional entities including, Service Commissions principally, to specifically allow for lump sum payments to be made to these Agencies and to free them from the automatic obligations of the Budgetary Agencies and the discretionary powers exercised by the Minister of Finance over Budgetary Agencies, which obligations compromise their independence which they are intended to have as contemplated by the Constitution.”

These are the matters which this Bill seek to change. These are the very important issues, which are currently before you, Mr. Speaker, and which are on the floor of this House for consideration. Mr. Speaker, while the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance have indicated to you, to the Hon. Members of this House, to the public and to the world at large that this is a more simple Bill, I will endeavour, during the course of my presentation, to elucidate a number of errors in this Bill, a number of misconceptions and numerous instances where that statement belies the importance and the constitutional framework which we have to consider in seeking this amendment.

The scheme introduced by the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act of 2015 resulted in the following: first, it gave authority to the main public individual responsible of managing the affairs of the agencies to prepare the budget estimates and submit it to the Clerk of the National Assembly. The submission to the Clerk of the National Assembly removed the need to submit the estimates directly to the Minister of Finance. At the time of submitting the estimates to the Clerk of the

National Assembly, the head of the agency is required, also, to copy it to the Minister of Finance and to the Speaker of the National Assembly. The single exception is in that of the Audit Office of Guyana for which the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) has specific responsibility.

The procedure set out in the 2015 amendment to the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act allows for the request for funding by agencies to be considered, directly and only, by the National Assembly, instead of through the subject Minister. In preparation of their budget submissions, the constitutional agencies will be guided by the budget circular issued by the Minister and Ministry of Finance as set out in the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act.

Any concerns that the fiscal autonomy of the constitutional agencies might be abused, and they could demand any amount from the Executive without providing supportive arguments for justification, was without merit. These agencies were subjective to the same fiscal structures as other agencies. However, where there is an attempt to seek an exemption from the general fiscal constraint being imposed on the rest of the budget agencies, the relevant constitutional agencies had to come to this House to justify. The amendments in 2015 provided for the Minister of Finance to submit his comments and recommendations on the budget of the constitutional agencies in a timely manner, so as to allow for consideration by the National Assembly.

At this point, I wish to draw to the public's and the world's attention that this did not happen in relation to the last Budget. On the very first day when we attended, when were sworn in, the budgets of the constitutional agencies were considered and determined by this House. At that time, there was no sitting chairman of the PAC or was there a Public Accounts Committee constituted in accordance with the Standing Orders. I want to highlight, again, that, from day one of this Parliament, there have been non-compliance with the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act.

The Minister of Finance, under the 2015 amendment, is entitled to make recommendations, but those recommendations are limited to the size of the allocation and not to line items, which give rise to the total amount requested. The 2015 amendment outlined a procedure for the agencies requests for funding to be considered directly and only by the National Assembly, instead of the Executive micromanaging the activities of constitutional agencies. The measures set out in the 2015 Act ended, once and for all, the Executive's ability to interfere in the affairs of constitutional agencies.

Therefore, it must be concluded that these 2015 measures, to which I referred, represented a positive, enlightening and forward-looking system, which were aimed to prevent the state of affairs which existed prior to 2015. For 23 years, from 1992-2015, there was a state of affairs in which the Executive was free to mismanage and control the activities of the constitutional agencies.

The Fiscal Management and Accountability Act of 2015 established, for the first time, a legislative foundation for the independence of the constitutional agencies of Guyana and give such agencies, not partial, but complete control over their finances. These are the issues which are before us today. The Fiscal Management and Accountability Act of 2015 gave effect to the article 222A of the Constitution. That provision states and I quote:

“In order to assure the independence of the entities listed in the Third Schedule –”

“(a) the expenditure of each of the entities shall be financed as a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund, determined as a lump sum by way of an annual subvention approved by the National Assembly after a review and approval of the entity’s annual budget as a part of the process of the determination of the national budget;

(b) each entity shall manage its subvention in such manner as it deems fit for the efficient discharge of its functions, subject only to conformity with the financial practices and procedures approved by the National Assembly to ensure accountability; and all revenues shall be paid into the Consolidated Fund;”

During the course of the presentation by the Hon. Member Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, he referred us to article 171 of the Constitution. As we all know or should know, the Constitution has to be read as a whole. I would first like to refer this honourable House’s attention to article 122A of the Constitution. In relation to the Supreme Court of Judicature, it states:

“(1) All courts and all persons presiding over the courts shall exercise their functions independently of the control and direction of any other person or authority; and shall be free and independent from political, executive and any other form of direction and control.”

Article 171, that was cited as the basis for this amendment, I suppose, or for the basis of going back to the pre-2015 states of affairs, does not support that proposition and does not support the

basis for this amendment. A review of articles 171 and 222A of the Constitution would lead the reader to conclude that we are speaking about two different categories of appropriation.

Under article 171 of the Constitution, what is contemplated therein are provisions emanating by a Bill where the National Assembly is being asked to proceed on a Bill to impose any charge upon the Consolidated Fund. The record of this National Assembly, the *Hansard*, will show that, for the past five years, in relation to the constitutional agencies, no such Bill was brought because we were not proceeding under article 171 of the Constitution. This contemplates arrangement where one operates on the basis of an Appropriation Bill being brought to the House for a budget agency.

1.51 p.m.

Article 222 of the Constitution deals with a situation where expenditure for those entities listed in the Schedule is deemed by virtue of the Constitution to be a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund. There is no need to bring an Appropriation Bill in respect of these matters. Conceptionally, we see the problem here. No Appropriation Bill could be brought in relation to items listed which are direct charges by the Constitution.

What we have here is a very confused proposed piece of legislation. The proposed Bill seeks to reverse the important measures to which I have referred. It seeks to turn back time to revert to the days of the Peoples Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) Executive control, to a time of the abuse of the Constitutional Agencies, to the imprisonment of the Constitutional Agencies, to the demolition of the independence of the constitutional agencies and to a time where there is a failure to give effect to longward and spirit of the Constitution. I say so because the Bill, currently, before the House seeks to repeal section 80 (b) 1 to 4 of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act of 2015. These are provisions which provided for the submission of budget proposals by constitutional agencies, their conveyance to this National Assembly through the Clerk of the National Assembly and the considerations of their budget proposals and or submissions with recommendations from the Minister.

This Bill is among the first of the PPP/C since its installation in August, 2020. The Fiscal Management and Accountability Act of 2015 was among the first for the A Partnership for National Unity, Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) in 2015. These two Bills reflect a divergence in the philosophy between the two sides of this House. Whilst the APNU/AFC Amendments

reflected the ethos of decentralised Government, enhancing and empowering the constitutional agencies and compliance with the Constitution, the PPP/C, on the other hand, has not changed and is here reflecting its philosophy of centralised Government capturing the independence of the constitutional agencies and corrupting compliance with the Constitution. By amending the Schedule to the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act of 2015 to now include the constitutional agencies, which are listed in the third Schedule of the Constitution, the PPP/C has, once again, relegated those constitutional agencies to mere budget agencies, subjected to the whims and fallacies of the Minister of Finance, his political agenda and that of his Party.

Budget agencies, under the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act of 2015, are required by section 14 of that Act to prepare a budget submission, and that such budget submission be approved by the concerned Minister. The concern is defined, in section 2 of that Act, to be the Minister assigned responsibility to the relevant budget agency. Then it is forwarded to the Minister of Finance. When the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance stood up this morning, before the break, waved the amendment before this House and said that there was nothing in the amendment to worry about; he is correct within the confines of reading what they proposed. On an analysis, what we have here is the fact that the constitutional agencies are being cornered and are being subjected to the executive authority. They are not changing section 14 of the Act, in any regard, in relation to constitutional agencies. That is remaining the same. Section 14 states:

“(1) A budget submission shall be prepared for each fiscal year by each budget agency in accordance with the rules, procedures and guidelines set out in the Budget Circular pertaining to that fiscal year.

(2) A budget submission shall be approved by the concerned Minister for each budget agency prior to being forwarded to the Minister.”

The Hon. Attorney General recognised that the 2015 amendments presented by the APNU/AFC removed Executive interaction. He stated that on 7th January 2016. It is recorded in this House, in the *Hansard* of that date. This is what he said:

“When we give the independence and autonomy to the constitutional agencies to submit their budgets directly to Parliament we removed from the executive any interaction whatsoever. That is what we did.”

On that same day, he also said that, when we look at the law, it states that it must be done independently by Parliament with no input from the Executive.

The Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, Ms. Gail Teixeira said, and this is also recorded in the *Hansard*:

“The present Government amended the Constitution, further, to include other agencies. It went further and amended the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) which now states how the process is going to happen – how the agencies will bring their documents into the House since they are now under no ministerial provision.”

It is clear that this is not about removing or correcting an anomaly, as is stated in the Explanatory Memorandum to this proposed Bill. This is simply about subjugating the constitutional agencies to the control of the Executive. It is simply about the restoration of the ministerial control. There is no anomaly which exist in relation to the constitutional agencies submitting their budgets proposal to the Clerk of the Assembly and, in the case of the Audit Office of Guyana, to the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

Last night, the Hon. Minister of Finance and his Colleague, the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce were on the television, the National Communications Network, Guyana (NCN). What we heard is exactly what the Hon. Minister said today. He said that this proposal is being brought to the House to reduce time and to streamline and to deal with the issues of expediency. I want to point out a certain number of indisputable facts.

First, under the APNU/AFC Government, three budgets, using the same process outlined in the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act of 2015, were brought to this House before the start of the fiscal year. The issue of expediency, the issue of reducing time for consideration of budgets for the constitutional agencies have no merit. The question of autonomy and the question of independence are superior concepts to the concepts of expediency. It cannot trump compliance and conformity with the Constitution.

I hear them wailing on the other side. What they do not appreciate is that an Appropriation Bill cannot come into this House in respect of constitutional agencies. The constitutional structure and the architecture contemplate this very two stage process. The proposition and the argument that this must be done in one process is without merit. [**Mr. Hamilton:** Why do you not ask the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ)? *Pholourie Joe* rest yourself. Are you hungry? The measure to roll back the independence secured by the 2015 amendments have a good deal to do with the hypocrisy of the PPP/C.

Prior to 2015, the *Hansard* records their position as being that the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act created the proper legislative structure for those constitutional agencies. They were committed to constitutional agencies remaining budget agencies so that the Minister of Finance could manage and control the affairs of the constitutional agencies. Presidents under the PPP/C governance refused to sign previous legislation into effect. Post 2015, after the APNU/AFC had brought these amendments and enacted them, they were in defence of the constitutional agencies.

Today, in 2021, there they are again. To use the words of the then Prime Minister and Leader of Government's business then, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, they were seeking to have the Constitutional Agency imprisoned. I will quote him:

“...imprisoned them within the ambit of Fiscal Management and Accountability Act to be railroaded, as any other agencies had been railroaded, and interfere with the independence of the judiciary and the independence of the Parliament and independence of the other agencies.”

What the other side wants is for the Minister of Finance to be free to cut and control the budgets of the constitutional agencies. This position is drawn from the words of Mr. Nandlall, the Hon. Attorney General on the 7th day of January 2016. This is what he said:

“The mischief identified by the Government, both when it was in Opposition as well as in Government in mid-2015, when the debate was held, was to ensconce, entrench and make a reality the fiscal financial autonomy and independence of these constitutional agencies. That was the policy, the letter and the spirit of this law.”

He is saying that, Mr. Speaker. I continue:

“We were told that the procedure, extant at that time, was bad and that it undermined independence and autonomy because it resided the power in the Minister of Finance to review and reduce budget estimates that were presented to him. What is the difference? We have moved the place of reduction from Urquhart and Main Streets, the Ministry of Finance and we have located it or located it in the Public Buildings, the Parliament.”

Mr. Nandlall continues:

“The very Minister of Finance is recommending the cut, but the cut, this time, will be effected by his Colleagues in the Parliament. Instead of one executive officer doing the cut, which was the Minister of Finance doing the cutting at the Ministry, he has come to the National Assembly to put forward the cut and then the cut will be effected by a vote of the Executive in the National Assembly. There is a circuitous procedure being employed with the effect being the same, which is the Minister of Finance, effectively, retaining the power to reduce the budget proposals of these constitutional agencies, thereby rendering feeble and defeating all of the concepts, precepts, policies and arguments that we heard about independence and autonomy. Minister Ashni Singh, in the previous dispensation, would have done the same thing —”

This is what Mr. Nandlall is saying, Mr. Speaker, in his presentation. I do not know if my Hon. Friend, Mr. Dharamlall, is finally saying that Mr. Nandlall sounds like *lamby pampy*.

“Minister Ashni Singh, in the previous dispensation, would have done the same thing — reduce the budget by \$75 million. That is what the then Opposition had said was wrong and undermined the independence of the Office. Now, they are doing the same thing with the exception that they are doing it here.”

The spurious argument outlined then by the Hon. Attorney General, as he then was and is now, and the Minister of Finance, as he then was and is now, previously, simply misses the point, simply misses the importance of a point laying in article 222 of the Constitution. The point being that it is the National Assembly and the National Assembly alone and not a Minister which must approve or disapprove of the constitutional agencies’ budgets.

What the other side fails to recognise is that embedded in article 222 is the concept of transparency. It is for the National Assembly and not the Minister of Finance to cut or consider any budget of the constitutional agencies as admitted by them and the present Attorney General and his Colleague, the then Minister and present Minister of Finance would have done.

2.06 p.m.

Having regard to the track record of the then Minister of Finance and the now Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, there should be no surprise that his first acts are to return to a regime shrouded in mystery, unconstitutionality, the abuse of power and the usurpation of a naked centralisation of power.

This is a Minister of Finance, who spent over \$4 billion without parliamentary approval. This Minister of Finance, although he presented almost 15 Supplementary Appropriation Bills, has never once, between the years of 2006 and 2015, produced a single supplementary document as required by Section 24 of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA). This Minister of Finance failed to disclose to the National Assembly that, in 2010, he had closed dormant accounts with balances of more than \$30 billion when the budgeted funds from Norway did not arrive.

The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, who is piloting this Bill, is the same Minister of Finance who opposed the motion in the 2012/2013 period. It is the same Minister of Finance who opposed the 2013 Bill to introduce these measures which were eventually enacted in 2015.

It is certainly clear that we now have before us, for all to see, a creeping dictatorship. It is not just simply a creeping dictatorship, but a dictatorship that is in full flight. The irrational desire and the lust to meddle in and control all affairs are not restricted to the financial independence of the constitutional agencies, even in sports.

Yesterday's, *Stabroek News Editorial* makes that point, Mr. Speaker. It states:

“Rather than over....”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, for you to continue you will have to get an extension. Standing Order 38 (9) gives the mover of the motion 45 minutes to make his presentation and every other Member gets 30 minutes. You started at 1.37 p.m. and we are now at 2.08 p.m.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: I beg that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you can continue.

Mr. Forde: I was saying that the Government's irrational desire and the lust to meddle in and control all affairs are not restricted to the financial independence of the constitutional agencies only, but even in sports. Yesterday's *Stabroek News* editorial makes that point. It states:

“Rather than overseeing sports, the minister appears to be hell bent on autocratic meddling, which does not augur well for local sports and brings to mind Claudius's words to Gertrude in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, ‘...When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions.’”

Mr. Speaker, the word is not *batty-lions*. It is battalions. This Bill is a tragedy for the Guyanese people. It is retrograded and should be rejected.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Member, Bishop Juan Edghill, the Minister of Public Works.

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to lend support to my Colleague, the mover of this Bill, the Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill – Bill No.1/2021, which is before this House. Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde, who seemingly wanted to defend what brought confusion, conflict and what led this House into serious episodes that saw various conundrums being manifested. I have been a Member of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of

Supply since 2012, for the period 2015 through 2020. Every time we had to come to budget, one of the things that was characterised was confusion – conflict.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure – and I would like to offer an apology on his behalf – that the Hon. Member, Mr. Forde, did not read well. The same July, 2015 amendment that he rose to defend as sacred and as that which is putting things in order, every time the budgets of constitutional bodies came to the House, during APUN/AFC's tenure, the Minister of Finance's recommendations represented a figure significantly different and reduced from the request of those agencies. Under that same architecture of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act of July 2015, which was amended, in August of 2020, for the first time in this House, constitutional bodies got their requests unamended. The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) did that. Whatever they requested, they got unamended. Do you know why we did that? We did that because of our belief. We must stand true to our belief. We must be consistent in our approaches. Mr. Speaker, the... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Duncan, I can hear you quite clearly from here. You are listed to speak.

Go ahead, Sir.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, on the big arguments that are being made about the independence and financial autonomy of constitutional bodies, I want to bring to this House's notice, documentation that I have seen, irrefutable evidence of the then Government's interfering with the autonomy of constitutional bodies. The contracts for the Chief Executive Officers (CEO) of the Rights of the Child Commission, the Women and Gender Equality Commission and the Indigenous Peoples' Commission were not signed between the commissions and those persons. They were signed between the Executive and those persons. That is interference and you should be ashamed to come here and talk about interference. The documentation will show that the then Minister of State over-reached into those commissions, made concessions and granted privileges to members of staff without even the Commissioners approving them. That was the nature of that Government. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker...

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, the Hon. Chief Whip....

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker, Standing Order 41 (6) states:

“No Member shall impute improper motive to any Member of the Assembly.”

Bishop Edghill: What is that?

Mr. Jones: We are kindly asking that the Hon. Minister withdraws such a statement, or it be ripped from the [*Inaudible*].

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. Hon. Member, you may continue.

Bishop Edghill: Some people always have a problem with the truth. Mr. Speaker, if they have a problem with what I am saying, take me to the Committee of Privileges and I will provide the evidence. When I said your raise in salary was over \$1 billion, I went to the Committee of Privileges and showed that it was, you sought to hide the facts. I stand by my word. You over-reached and interfered with the independence of commissions. That is what you did. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Jones...

Bishop Edghill: To come to this House...

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. I crave your guidance, Sir, based on Standing Order 41(6). As I mentioned before, the Hon. Minister impute improper motive on the Hon. Member, the Leader of the Opposition. We ask that he withdraws that statement or that it be stricken from the *Hansard*.

Mr. Speaker: Tell us what you understood the Minister to be saying.

Mr. Jones: The Minister said that the current Leader of the Opposition, while he was the Minister of State, over-reached his authority and [*Interruption*] and gave [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please allow Mr. Jones, the Hon. Member, to make his Point of Order.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker, the Hon. Minister indicated that the current Leader of the Opposition, while he was the Minister of State, over-reached his authority as Minister.

Bishop Edghill: He had no power over the commissions.

Mr. Speaker: I do not see that as impugning. I am sure that there are issues on which all sides will have some amount of comments. I would not uphold that as a Point of Order at this time. Hon. Minister, please continue.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, the matter is a simple one. If people are meddling in waters where they are not authorised to be then they ought to be rejected. The then Government of the day interfered with the independence of constitutional bodies by making appointments, offering concessions and interfering with the proper functioning of those commissions while it had a July 2015 Bill. In *sanctimonious gangsterism* style, they are standing here today to defend it. That is the fact. I could name the individuals who harassed the CEOs of constitutional bodies as they were seeking information.

Constitutional bodies have administrative controls over their own affairs. The Hon. Attorney General had to carry two former Government Ministers to court to reverse actions that were taken at the Police Service Commission (PSC) and the Public Service Commission (PSC). They overreached their authority. Mr. Jones, please rise and move your Point of Order. The court records will defend what I am saying.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Minister Bishop Edghill, it is the Hon. Member Mr. Jones.

Bishop Edghill: It is Hon. Member, Sir, and I direct my comments to you. Mr. Speaker, it is painful, at times, to sit and listen to people who want to present a façade to the world that they are defenders of freedom and that they believe in the independence and financial autonomy. Every time these same bodies presented their documents to the Clerk, in keeping with the 2015 amendment, the Minister of Finance, came to this House with his recommendations and offered the explanation that they were recommending a particular amount based on the fiscal space that was available. What a charade.

Minister Singh's Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill, which I support is to bring an end to that charade that we saw in 2015 all the way through to 2018. That is what we are doing. We are bringing an end to that charade.

2.21 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, if the Hon. Leader of the Opposition would like to inquire, he should use the position of a research officer to research properly before he speaks. It would help him; he would sound much more intelligent in his heckling than what he is trying to do right now. This is because when they cannot improve their arguments, they get nasty and personal. That must not be allowed. We have to bring that to an end in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I want to remind that the evidence is there, some of us participated and because I know other speakers are coming behind me, I do not have to deal with everything. We sat in the Business Sub-Committee, the Parliament was delayed for days getting to the consideration of the estimates, trying to find out the mechanism of how we would get this there. *[Interruption]*

Why were we there? Even the author, architect and mover of the motion that led to the July, 2015 amendment, was not clear in his mind what he wanted. That was birthed in an era when the Opposition had a one-seat majority, where they were cutting budgets and wanted to control Government's spending from the Opposition benches. Those measures and motions were passed in their era and they had to live and keep faith with the people of Guyana. Even though they knew that they were wrong, they went and made these amendments even though they knew they were not workable. Even when it was time for the presentation of the Auditor General's budget, and they realised that the then Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) had to... According to the July, 2015 amendment and it is not that we agree with it because I do not know how an Opposition Member could be presenting a budget that makes a charge on the accounts of Guyana without the approval of the Executive, and in violation of the Constitution of Guyana. That created another confusion.

Minister Singh's amendment is to bring an end to that confusion; it is to bring an end to that crisis. We have shown the people of Guyana that we are prepared to follow the law. Even when we came to Government in 2020, the law that was in place, we followed it, but we practiced it in the true spirit, by not amending the budgets of the agencies. You passed the law; you used your one-seat majority in the Parliament to humiliate those constitutional bodies on the floor of the National Assembly by cutting their budgets. That is what you did.

When the Minister stood up and said that he was recommending a sum, what he was actually doing was humiliating the agency by saying, I am giving you this, take it and do *wuh ya* want with it.

That is what you were doing. We are removing that bullyism; we are removing that despicable behaviour. We are bringing it into an era of decency, engagement, consultation, financial analysis and proper spending, allowing a proper engagement, so that you allow figures with justification and not capriciously and whimsically executing vengeance because of your personal vendettas. That is what we are removing.

If we leave this the way it is, with the vendetta that we have seen before, if this group that is currently the Opposition ever get into Office and they have a problem with any one of these agencies, they would sit silently and wait until it is budget time and then they will come and say, do *wuh ya* want, we giving you a number, *yuh can't do* nothing about it. This is bringing financial planning, projection, situating things in its proper context, so that we could have an overall picture that Guyana's development would be adequately financed in a balanced way and not one group being left behind, but everyone being allowed access to State resources, so that our development would be in a very programmed manner. That is what the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance is suggesting here today.

The breaches that we may have seen, the breaches that would have been experienced, the confusions and the difficulties that we face, we are getting the country back to normal. For example, this Bill gives the Clerk of the National Assembly a power and authority that is totally outside of his constitutional function. He became the Administrative Officer to finance the affairs of constitutional bodies by him receiving budgets and presenting them to the Parliament. The budget agencies are merely sending copies to the Speaker and the Minister of Finance. The Clerk of the National Assembly do not need such a job. The reason why there is an Executive, and the people choose their government, is that they say to the government, we have put you there, you are accountable to us for the way you spend our money, you are accountable to us for the management of our resources. The Constitution makes provision that any Minister who comes to the Parliament with a Bill that has financial implications, that Bill must have the approval of the Cabinet. This is because that is the way good governance goes, collective responsibility and being answerable to the people of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, all the arguments about making these constitutional bodies subservient and reducing them to budget agencies, I could guarantee you that, between 2015 and 2018/2019, with the July, 2015 amendment, a lot of the budget agencies never got their money in lumpsums. Do you know

why they could not have gotten their moneys in lump sums? It was not practical. The country does not collect all of the taxes at one time. The Chief Executive Officers and the Financial Officers were stilling running down to the Ministry of Finance and making all kinds of negotiations with an Act that they were breaching. The Minister who stood up and said that this is what we are doing, was allowing that practice in his own Ministry.

We should not come here and try to pretend to the people of Guyana that we are different. The reality is, we have to find a constructive lawful constitutional pathway of engagement between constitutional bodies and the Executive so as to determine their final number of allocations in every year budget. That cannot be an agency putting up a number to the Clerk of the National Assembly. Without any dialogue, discussion or engagement, the Minister comes to the Parliament and says, I heard what you want, but this is what I am giving you. That does not make sense.

That is why, after the passage of the budget, and the Hon. Leader of the Opposition would know because he served as Minister of State, constitutional bodies were writing to the Clerk of the National Assembly, the Speaker of the National Assembly and everyone in Government for restorations of moneys because they were saying they could not have done certain things based on those cuts. The documentation on the letters are there. Thank you for the silence because the truth always stands out.

My simple contribution to this debate today is that, all of us, as reasonable people in this House, must discover that, until we could find a better pathway, the amendments being made by my Colleagues seem to be the most reasonable, rational and responsible approach to take. This is to ensure that, in the engagements with constitutional bodies, they maintain their administrative independence, their financial autonomy and that the country is able to support their work, in keeping with what the Constitution states, in a framework of affordability. Unless and until some superior approach, that do not create the kind of confusion, crisis and difficulties that we had, comes up, I am compelled to support the arguments of my Colleague Dr. Ashni Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. I warmly welcome the Hon. Member, Mr. Sherod Duncan.

Mr. Duncan: Generous Speaker [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Duncan: Unbiased Speaker, thank you for your comments this morning. From your comments, I get the impression that you are an ardent fan of the evening show *In the Ring* which is aired from 8.00 p.m. every night, on social media.

Mr. Speaker, there is a passage in the Bible, just before Saul was converted to Paul. He listened to the arguments on the other side, he said:

“Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.”

When I listened to the Bishop, he has almost persuaded me to his arguments, but I understand the facts and endeavour to present the facts to the Guyanese people. The core principles for the Alliance For Change (AFC), its bedrock principles are transparency, accountability and good governance. It was with these values in mind that we agreed with our coalition partners in 2015. We agreed with them on the amendments that were proposed and subsequently passed for the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA). We stand with our coalition partners today and, as such, we cannot agree with the amendments proposed by the Government.

Mr. Speaker, a wise man said:

“Only light can drive out darkness.”

There could never be too much light. We know all too well of the darkness of the pre-2015 era. When as one poet said:

“All around the land...

Red flowers bend their heads in awful sorrow.”

And,

“The shining sun is hidden in the sky.”

Then 2015, came and the light came to drive out the darkness. In the explanatory memorandum of the 2015 amendments, the astute Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, said that the amendments were aimed to,

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“free them from the automatic obligations of Budgetary Agencies and the discretionary powers exercised by the Minister of Finance over Budgetary Agencies, which obligations compromise their independence which they are intended to have as contemplated by the Constitution.”

He goes on to state:

“The Bill also seeks to amend the Schedule to the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act to ensure its consistency with the spirit and letter of the Constitution with regard to the independence of the listed entities and the relevant motions adopted by the National Assembly”

To amend this Act now, based on what our Colleague on the other side described as a “fragmented approach” and “correcting a defect,” neither of which has been coherently articulated anywhere, would be to say to this country, to the world, and to our international partners, that there can be too much independence for constitutional agencies. If one reads, any one of the persons qualified to speak on such matters of the independence of constitutional bodies, transparency, accountability and good governance, one cannot find, anywhere, any grounds for what the Government is suggesting, which is pulling back on the independence of the agencies. If one reads the comments of Mr. Christopher Ram, an ardent supporter of this Government, or read Mr. Anand Goolsarran’s comments, neither has commented negatively on the passing of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act in 2015. None. The APNU/AFC’s five years in Government was characterised by giving power back to the people through the independence of constitutional agencies and commissions. We gave power back to the people by not only holding local government elections, but also by activating the Local Government Commission, whose life has lapsed under the current People’s Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) Government and they have not seen it fit to renew the life of this Commission to date.

In giving power to the people, through these commissions... Take the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission (GLSC) for instance, it was given more independence under the APNU/AFC Government. In his first gazetted order, President Irfaan Ali stripped the Commissioner and Chief Executive Officer of the GLSC of the power to issue and approve land leases. That power is now back to the President himself, and this has been published. While we have given power back to the people through these commissions and heads of agencies, they are now consolidating power. That is the nature of the beast. It was back in 2016 when President Granger delegated, gave up power, to the Commissioner and CEO of the GLSC.

Instead of independence and oversight, instead of a fiscal framework mechanism being observed and enforced, the PPP/C has done the opposite. It is because of this, I say to this honourable House that, the PPP/C is not an honest interlocutor in any regard on this matter. Instead, they are the original sanctimonious *gangsters*. The very Minister who brings this motion to strip constitutional agencies of their independence is the very Minister who was in breach of several statutory duties, and what one social commentator, Mr. Christopher Ram, called:

“professional obligations imposed on him in defiance of public opinion and the rule of law,”

And so, I forgive the Minister for not knowing that it was the APNU/AFC Administration that gave power back to the people through these constitutional agencies. While he was languishing on a beach, somewhere in the Middle-East, working on his tan and his weight, we were hard at work for the Guyanese people on the frontlines in this country. While we gave power back to the people...

We can look at the abuse of the lottery funds under the PPP/C Administration and what they did with the moneys that were supposed to go from the lottery fund to the Consolidated Fund. It was dealt with as a piggy bank. This is how the PPP/C deals with such matters as the lottery fund. These are the original sanctimonious *gangsters*, because they do one thing and then they come and say something else in the House.

Another issue that was flagged was the Mid-Year Report under the PPP/C Administration. Again, it is a financial or fiscal framework mechanism to provide oversight. As commentators have said, not only was the Minister pre-2015, the Hon. Dr. Singh, in breach of this statutory duty with regard

to the timing, even when he belatedly submitted the report, it was frequently misdated to minimize the delay and omit key information prescribed by the Act. I am arguing that, against pulling back on the powers of the constitutional agencies, the totality of the act should be enforced. That is why I said, in cases like the Mid-Year Report under the PPP/C, they are not honest interlocutors; they are the sanctimonious *gangsters*.

I was almost persuaded, as I said, when I listened to the good Bishop. Again, instead of strengthening oversight institutions, the PPP/C has declared war on them, and that is not now. We know too acutely of the case in which \$4.6 billion, which was disapproved for spending by the National Assembly, was spent by the very gentleman who now brings this Act. As a matter of fact, it was Brigadier Granger who sought several declarations. The expenditures were illegal because the House had cut the budget and the honourable Dr. Singh proceeded to spend the money from the Consolidated Fund. The honourable Chief Justice, Mr. Chang, said of the Hon. Dr. Singh, who has been languishing in Dubai for the last five years, that it is clear that the prohibition contained in Article 217 (b) of the Constitution was infringed. That prohibition is against any withdrawal from the consolidated fund, except, as authorised by an Appropriation Bill passed by the National Assembly and assented to by the President. That did not happen. And so, the Chief Justice was livid that the same people who come here and preach to us about obeying the Constitution were themselves in violation of the Constitution. These are the original sanctimonious *gangsters*.

Again, instead of strengthening oversight institutions, the PPP/C has declared war on them. We can start with the Integrity Commission or we can start with the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC), which the good Bishop used to be the Chairman of. Now he is a politician. He left the ERC and picked up politics. He has put down his cross and he is now following the PPP/C. Again, they are not for the strengthening of oversight institutions, because they would have been strengthening the State Assets Recovery Agency (SARA) as against disbanding it. These are the original sanctimonious *gangsters*.

Regarding the Public Procurement Commission, after 15 years, since the Constitution was amended to provide for the establishment of the Commission, it was not until 2016 that the five members of the Commission were appointed. These are the original sanctimonious *gangsters*. Since the life of the Commission came to an end in last October, it has not been reconstituted. These are the original sanctimonious *gangsters*. These issues also impact on the engagement with

our international partners and with our standing, through bodies like Transparency International – Well, you just lost Taiwan, Mr. Nandlall – and its Corruption Perception Index (CPI). We have to be careful.

I say to the people of Guyana that this Act, as passed in 2015, offered the genuine safeguards on the independence of these constitutional agencies. To do anything less than keep it intact, how it already is, is to pull back from giving power back to the people through their constitutional agencies.

So, you can listen to me and our side of the House, Guyanese, or you can listen and follow a man like the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, who, quite recently, inexplicably had some fraud charges dropped without any reason. And they come here to lecture us about law.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Mr. Duncan. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, Mdm. Teixeira.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor.

I want to say to this House that this saga began in 2012. This whole controversy on this Bill began almost 9 years ago. And so, we have to remember how we ended up where we are now. In 2012, in the midst of discussions on the first budget with the APNU/AFC, the Parliamentary Opposition, there were discussions on this issue of constitutional bodies. A decision was made on 22nd April, 2012, that this matter would go to the Constitutional Reform Committee, which was headed by the then Leader of the Opposition, Brigadier Granger. However, in the interregnum, Mr. Carl Greenidge brought a motion to bring into effect that the service commissions, the rights commissions and other constitutional bodies, must be treated in a fashion that would not have them being reviewed, but would allow them to come to the House in some kind of mechanism. This was discussed in House and the PPP/C then, as now, pointed out the flaws in the motion. A motion is not legally binding. That was the first issue.

The second issue was that the arguments on transparency and independence of the constitutional bodies were also flawed. They were flawed because the constitutional reform process focused on two components to do with transparency and independence of the constitutional bodies.

One was to develop a parliamentary mechanism for consensual agreement on the manner in which the commissions were appointed.

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In the service commissions, there is only one service commission where the President has a discretion of his own to appoint. In fact, in the drafting, despite the Constitutional Reform Commission had given the President that discretion to appoint a person in the Police Service Commission and in the Judicial Service Commission, that was left out.

Like the service commissions, the rights commissions were appointed by a mechanism through the Committee on Appointments. So, the focus of the Constitutional Reform Commission during 1999 to 2001 was on the way in which the commissions were appointed. That this would not be subject to the Executive and that the bodies or representatives would come from a combination of stakeholders using a parliamentary mechanism which required a two-thirds majority. That was put in place in 2002 and 2003.

Of course, it got stuck in the Committee on Appointments because the then Opposition, the People's National Congress (PNC), did not agree for several years on the list of entities that required the two-thirds. So, when we talk about independence, in the Committee on Appointments, after the Constitution was amended, it got entrapped in the political problems between the Opposition and the Government, and the issue of which entity could be asked to make submissions.

The Constitution and the (Constitutional Reform) Commission were very clear that, in order to protect the independence of the commissions, the hand of the Executive had to be removed and a parliamentary mechanism was created. That is number one.

Number two, was constitutional reform, in article 222A, which also made it clear. I just want to read the clause because I think that some Members are not reading or have not read article 222A. This was by a constitutional amendment in 2001. It states:

“222A. In order to assure the independence of the entities listed in the Third Schedule –

- (a) the expenditure of each of the entities shall be financed as a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund, determined as a lump sum by way of an annual subvention approved by the National Assembly after a review and approval of the entity’s annual budget as a part of the process of the determination of the national budget;”

So, this is what the Constitution stated in 2001.

In 2012, the motion was passed by the Opposition. Then in 2013 and 2014, Mr. Greenidge brought the Bill. But, funny enough, in 2012, when the budget was brought to the House, it was the Opposition, with its one-seat majority talking about the independence of the commission, that cut the Ethnic Relations Commission’s budget to zero dollars. A motion was brought by the Parliamentary Opposition, the APNU/AFC, and one of the movers or seconders, I cannot remember which one is in the room today, but they seconded that motion to cut the budget of the Ethnic Relations Commission to zero dollars. That was before the motion was brought by Mr. Greenidge.

Mr. Greenidge then brought, on behalf of his party, the APNU/AFC, a Bill to bring into effect what he was putting in the motion for his party, but eventually came in the 2015 Bill. That was brought to this House and again debated. The similar arguments which are being made today by both sides of the House, are similar to what was said then. The Bill was passed with the one-seat majority. President Ramotar, with the constitutional powers that gave him the right to not assent to a Bill, implemented and invoked that part of the Constitution. The reasons were given in writing, as required by the Constitution, which meant the Bill could not return to Parliament within six months.

The 2015 Elections were held. In July 2015, the Bill was brought to the House which became the Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Act of 2015, signed by President Granger on 5th August, 2015. Again, it was debated but we were not present in the House.

The importance of the issue is that the Bill collided with article 222A. This was because it removed the review and scrutiny of the National Assembly for any entity, including constitutional bodies requesting money from the Consolidated Fund or any other public money and public accounts of

this country. They have to come to the House for approval. We had pointed this out publicly at that time. Ironically, as the earlier speakers said, having the Opposition come so sanctimoniously to the House in 2012 about the independence of the constitutional commissions, and having come sanctimoniously in 2014 while they cut the budgets and, sanctimoniously in 2015 where they cut the budgets again. So, having made these big moral arguments, in 2015, they passed the Bill, as my Colleague pointed out. And as the budget was being debated in August, 2015, the Minister of Finance had no clue how it was going to be implemented.

As my Colleague also pointed out, the Business Sub-Committee had several meetings trying to unravel a mechanism. Of course, you used your majority again. The funny thing is, when the budgets for the constitutional bodies were brought to the House, it was the Minister of Finance who cut them in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. You have cut the budgets of various constitutional bodies, and, ironically, some of them are critical, maybe some more than others. You cut the budgets of the Judiciary, the rights commissions and the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). So, please do not come here and play sanctimonious. It really stinks. This is because, over nine years, we have been dealing with this issue.

I will say that, in 2015, when the APNU/AFC won, they said on the elections trail that, all of the bills that Mr. Ramotar did not assent to, they would bring them back and assent to them. As usual, the APNU/AFC does not listen. They are *hard ears* as the saying goes. You do not listen and learn that you made a mistake. Fix yourself. What they did was, in a *fit of pique*, with wounded vanity, they came to this House in 2015 and railroaded this in, passed it and you had to live with it. Mr. Jordan was not pleased about this whatsoever because, suddenly, he was reduced to a postman's role, to be able to say cut each time.

The other unusual issue of this Bill, and again going back to article 222A which I read, is that, these were the only entities that could access money without any review. I remember in 2015, when we got to the August budget and the constitutional bodies, there was a sheet with all their requests, of what they got the year before, and what they were asking for now, current and capital. Quite innocently, some of us, including me, got to ask questions on the line items in the budget. However, we were stopped and told that we could not do that. So, the issue of the lump sum in the budget was about them getting their money as a lump sum. It does not remove the scrutiny of the

National Assembly on the use of taxpayer's money by anybody, whether a constitutional body or a non-constitutional body, a statutory body or any other body.

This is a highly irregular and unusual situation, where the constitutional bodies of our country are not scrutinised by the Parliamentarians, whether they are APNU/AFC, PPP/C or whoever will be here in the future. There cannot be a situation where bodies are asking for millions of dollars and when you add up all the constitutional bodies, they would require several billions of dollars. In fact, I remember in 2015, the Minister had cut the budget by about \$5 billion for all of the constitutional bodies. The same thing went on in the 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 Budgets. However, the difference came in 2020 when we went through the same process; we did what the Bill required, and we brought it here. The difference was that we did not cut the budgets. Therefore, it went through without question because there was no other way. According to the Bill which you drafted, you brought, and you assented to, there was no room for anybody to question. So, if the Minister did not cut the budget, there was no discussion. You could only discuss on the floor the Minister's cuts and not the content of the commissions' request.

We have heard these arguments in 2012, 2014 and 2015, but we are back here at the table. You are mixing up independence, impartiality, transparency, and accountability. You are mixing them up. I must say that any bill that comes before this House, be it by the Opposition or Government, has to deal with certain criteria as a *rule of thumb*. Does the Bill before the House violate or undermine the Constitution? Does the Bill do harm to the rule of law of our country? Does the Bill impact positively or negatively on the people? How will people benefit? In what way will the Constitution be enhanced or weakened by this Bill? The 2015 Bill, which became an Act, undermined the Constitution because your side interpreted that it meant there could be no discussion on the constitutional bodies.

I heard Mr. Duncan talk about the Integrity Commission. By the way, the Integrity Commission is not a constitutional body. [**Mr. Nandlall:** They would know that Ms. Teixeira.] Oh, well I should not bother with him. You are right. The issue too is that we have to write something so that things do not get mixed up.

There were also discussions about when people are selected for the commission. Is it the people that are expected to be impartial or the commission? This is because they all come from different

backgrounds and organisations. The view was that the commission, as a body, had to be independent, fair, transparent and accountable to the people. It was about building trust and confidence because the rights commissions were created, particularly, in the Constitutional Reform Commission so that there was redress. People could have redress in their complaints if they thought that their rights were violated. It is the same thing with the service commissions and, yet, as my Colleagues have pointed out, again, you come sanctimoniously.

Despite the Bill of 2015, which was passed by the APNU/AFC and became an Act of 2015, there were two occasions where the courts of Guyana ruled that the Government had acted unlawfully and had violated the Constitution. One, was in relation to a Minister of the then Government stopping the employment and promotion of people in the Public Service Commission. Two, again in the Police Service Commission, the present Chairman of that Commission was given orders by way of letter by a Member in this House who happens to be the Leader of the Opposition. This was all documented, so do not ask me to withdraw it. I will not. Those courts ruled that it was overreached and that the Executive could not give instructions...

3.06 p.m.

Those courts ruled that it was overreach, that the Executive could not give instructions to the Police Service Commission and could not give instructions to the Public Service Commission. Yet, you come here sanctimoniously as if *butter would not melt in your mouth*. Your whole history on this issue is so egregious. I could go on to all the other issues, but then we would be here for a couple years with me talking.

This Bill is to try to bring us in compliance with article 222A of the Constitution that constitutional agencies require review and approval of the House. This Bill does no harm to 222A because it retains the part about the lump sum payment, to which your Government never adhered. One of the arguments on this Bill, which I do not think I have heard so far, was how would any Government hand out, within a month of the budget being passed, the equivalent of \$11 billion or \$12 billion right then? How could any Government commit to doing that when its revenue generation, if my Colleague, Mr. Ashni Singh, will guide me, is based on revenue collected on taxes on import and exports? This was raised in the motion of 2012, in the 2014 debate, and in 2015 in the press. How could the Government commit itself, within one month of the passage of

the budget, to giving each of the constitutional bodies the money they required? Therefore, this would make a hole in the revenue and in the Consolidated Fund of a month, which in most cases was a first quarter of the year, when you could not guarantee there would be that level of revenue. It also meant that the Government, whoever the Government was, would have to then decide who gets money from what was approved in the budget. It was an impractical thing to do, but the Constitution states that and we have to adhere to it.

The problem with the history of this issue is that it had less to do with law and independence and transparency, and more to do with flexing muscles and showing who is the boss. That is what it basically was. This whole notion that constitutional bodies were being under resourced is not true. In fact, it was under the era of 2015 to 2019 when constitutional bodies had their budgets cut. Let us take an example, the Indigenous Peoples' Commission. It was bad how you treated the Indigenous Peoples' Commission. You come here and talk about the Commissions, but the Indigenous Peoples' Commission got a paltry sum of money. You quibbled over what they got, and you kept them in this little bubble. Yet, Bina Hill Institute, which was supported by your Government and which had a former Minister running it, was getting five times more than the Indigenous Peoples' Commission, which is the Constitutional body to oversee and make sure that the rights of our Indigenous people are protected. But you did not care. I find this discussion today kind of repugnant because, unfortunately, it is a history of an Opposition that refuses to learn and it is an Opposition that felt that it was their way or no way and that no one else made sense.

We have gone through this. This Bill – and let me go back to the Bill just in case I have left out anything – signed by Mr. Granger has deleted section 3, clauses 1 to 4 and it has kept a number of the clauses that are in section 3. One has to compare the 2015 Amendment Act with the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act. The Bill has removed certain areas, but it has also included certain areas. In section 80 (b), for example...that in section 5, it is not deleted. A phrase is added which talks about constitutional agencies being reviewed and approved as part of the process of the determination of the national budget. That is what is in 222A. It brings it back into line.

The other thing is the Schedule. What the original amendment Act did was remove agencies under the heading in Schedule 3, but we have put back all the agencies that are constitutional bodies. It is important for us. You can shout high and low about the Constitution, but the Constitution is very

clear about what is provided for. If there is to be any other change, it has to go through a constitutional process.

I believe that this Bill, as amended, brings us back into compliance. It brings us into a situation where any constitutional body can answer questions in this House. It is just like Mr. Trotman had proposed several years ago, as Speaker, that the annual reports of the constitutional bodies should be sent to a parliamentary committee for oversight. Right now, they are tabled and that is it. Therefore, the issue of oversight is important. We are the ones who work in this Parliament to make sure that we create commissions that are ones of integrity. We have the constitutional post holders, some of whom are appointed between the Leader of the Opposition and the President through meaningful consultations. These are the ways in which the Constitution enshrines the independence of the constitutional post holders and the Commissions. It is by ensuring there was a buy in between Opposition and Government. That is why when you talk, as I said, sanctimoniously...Look at the behaviour in the appointment of the Chairman of the Election Commission (GECOM). Yet, you come here and talk about independence. As I said, it is repugnant.

They appointed someone in violation of the Constitution and the matter went all the way up to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). The CCJ ruled that the President's appointment of the Chairman was flawed and was in violation of the Constitution. Then, we came to the whole process of finding another Chairman. As I said, I find the debate rather nauseating. I would not have minded if the Opposition had come with a good, hard-hitting Bill or discussion. What it has come with is a lot of fluff and smoke and mirrors to deflect from the issue. If there is anybody in this House who is guilty of interfering with the constitutional bodies of this country, it is the APNU/AFC.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Speaker, we have heard presentations from the Government's side of the House, and I have listened to the arguments, along with everyone else. To hear the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, describe her feeling on this debate of such an important matter as nauseating is quite a disappointment to everyone, especially the Guyanese people and the constitutional agencies that are being affected by the amendments to this Act.

In order to comprehensively analyse the impact of the Bill before us today, we must first understand where we are and where we will be, should this Bill be approved today. Firstly, the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act governs the way in which Government revenues, especially taxes, are spent. In simpler language, the Act speaks to how Government spends the people's money. This Bill seeks to change the way in which 17 constitutional agencies prepare their budgets. It is not one or two, but 17 agencies. Some are not constitutional. Why? We must ask ourselves why it is so important for the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) to want such amendments?

I can say this: The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance clarified the reasons during the premiere of a National Communications Network (NCN) programme, The Parliamentary Agenda, last evening. The Minister used words like lengthy, fragmented and dysfunctional to explain the current structure of the budget, while stating the Government's reason to amend the Bill as wanting to make the Parliament have a more comprehensive view of the budget. The process as it stands gives autonomy to the budget process for the constitutional agencies. By no means is this process lengthy, fragmented or dysfunctional. I further state that the Opposition's side of this House sees the current two-stage process, as so explained by the Hon. Minister, as completely comprehensive and does not require any system of clarity, as the Government's side so desires.

What was clear, from the comments by the Hon. Minister, is that there is absolutely no reasonable justification for the amendment of this Act other than it is the will of the PPP/C; there is no other reason.

In outlining his opposition to the current Act, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance explained that the current process is that the constitutional agencies would take their budgets to the Parliament and not to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. He then explained further that he is seeking for the budgets of all constitutional agencies to first go to his Office, and only after he approves these budgets, would they be brought to Parliament. This would signal the end of independence of every constitutional agency in Guyana. If no agency has the power to prepare its own budget, then it is simple; it is a fact, therefore, that no independent agency will further exist.

In 2013, Guyana was ranked 136 on the Transparency International Corruption Perception Index – some 53 spaces worse than the ranking of 83, which was where Guyana stood at the end of 2020. After the APNU/AFC Government cleared the sewage of corruption from the arteries of our State mechanism, today, this is a disgraceful excuse for a legislation. We see the depths to which the PPP/C is willing to go as it works tirelessly to undo the progress that this nation has seen under the APNU/AFC.

3.21 p.m.

To think that Hon. Members of the PPP/C would stand in this House and shamelessly demand that institutions whose purpose are to provide checks and balances and independent oversight, must now crawl on their knees to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and beg his approval for their budgetary needs is shameful, even for the likes of the PPP/C.

In what universe, Mr. Dharamlall, is it considered acceptable for the Auditor General, who is empowered to audit the Executive branch of Government, to *beg his bread* at the office of the very officials whom he is duty-bound to audit? In which nation is this acceptable?

It was a celebrated accomplishment of the APNU/AFC that the Judiciary was freed from the chains of financial dependency under our tenure, and rightfully celebrated it was. Now, we watch the PPP/C attempt to erode the very separation of power that rests at the core of modern democracy, by demanding that the Judicial branch of Government also join the line of those who must now *beg their bread* at the table of the PPP/C.

This Bill speaks to 17 agencies that are now subjected to the wrath of the PPP/C and will have to fall in line or else. It will not do justice for me to not speak to the implications that such an undemocratic change will reflect in every individual agency. It is imperative that I single out some of the most alarming agencies whose budgets the PPP/C once controlled.

Clause 4 of the Bill amends Section 80 (a) of the Principal Act, to provide that the format for the annual report of a constitutional agency shall be determined by the official in charge of the constitutional agency in consultation with the concerned Minister and the Minister with Responsibility for Finance. All that says is that every programme examined by the agency will be

subjected to scrutiny by the PPP/C and no longer will they have the independence to outline programmes and to carry out these programmes that best reflect the nature of the agency. How absurd is it that the PPP/C, who stand at every Sitting in this House and abuse the word ‘democracy’, is now standing to defend a Bill that seeks to remove the most vital aspect of democracy from 17 agencies. This is the fact before us today.

If these horrid violations of democratic norms, which the PPP/C is bent on pursuing, do not already sicken everyone with the will to think for themselves, then surely the fact that they will go as far as demanding control over the Elections Commission must certainly wake us all up. As it is right now, the Elections Commission prepares its budget with complete autonomy and that budget comes to the House for approval without GECOM having to subject itself to the will of the PPP/C. With this amendment, the financial arms of the GECOM will now be shackled to the will of the PPP/C. To further break that down, if the PPP/C does not see it fit to include house-to-house registration in the estimates for GECOM, there will be no house-to-house registration, this is what happens when independence is removed from constitutional agencies.

Allow me to highlight a few nations where the budgets of the election authorities fall under the authority of the party in charge. There are North Korea and the Soviet Union, just to name a few. With the leadership of the PPP/C, Guyana will soon be a part of this group – no financially-independent judiciary, no independent auditors and, now, one more step in the direction of no democracy. This is the PPP/C. If this is not a developing dictatorship, then nothing else is.

It says a lot that one of the first acts of the PPP/C Administration is to remove all the State mechanisms put in place to keep mismanagement in check. This is a clear sign of things to come. We see the same budding signs of danger as the PPP/C attempts to cripple the work of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), a Committee that is guided by the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act also.

Let us take a look at some of the agencies. One of the agencies that will be affected by this amendment is the Indigenous Peoples’ Commission. I do not see my Colleague, the Hon. Ms. Campbell-Sukhai, sitting in her seat at the moment. I looked at the Hon. Member, Ms. Campbell-Sukhai, and I must ask, is this the self determination that our people have struggled for, for generations? It pains me to think that the Hon. Member, Ms. Campbell-Sukhai, does not

understand the implications of such amendments. I have convinced myself that the Hon. Member does not understand the implications of this policy. Heaven forbid that she does understand and that she is fully aware of these implications and it is her explicit intention to deprive the Indigenous Peoples' Commission of financial independence. This is the representation that you provide to our people. This is shameful.

Let us talk about the Public Procurement Commission (PPC), a constitutional Commission. Though it has been a constitutional body for decades, the PPP/C made sure that it had no Commissioners. It was not until the APNU/AFC came into Office that the Public Procurement Commission was given life. Today, the very life of that Commission is being sucked out with the Amendment Bill, which seeks to give the Government total control of the functioning of that Commission. This is not accountability; this is control. We all know that the PPP/C would love to cripple and control the PPC. Furthermore, I dare say it has been proven, through their repeated refusal to establish the Public Procurement Commission over the decade of their rule prior to 2015, that the PPP/C is completely opposed to the very existence of the Public Procurement Commission.

Like I started by saying, we have heard the arguments. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance said that the amendment is simply to remove the two-step process and combine it into one step. Yet, it is stated in Clause 4 of this very Bill that this process adds two additional steps to the process. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance closed his presentation by stating that the amendments being proposed here today do not take away autonomy from the constitutional agencies. I am therefore convinced that the Hon. Minister does not truly understand the meaning of the word autonomy. If he did, he would know that autonomy means the right or condition of self-governance. The very amendments of this Bill stripe the constitutional agencies of their right to financial governance.

The Hon. Minister, Bishop Edghill, described this Bill as reasonable, rational and responsible. There is absolutely nothing about this Bill that is reasonable. There is absolutely nothing about this Bill that is rational. There is absolutely nothing responsible about back dating progress by five years to achieve the recklessness that was enjoyed by the PPP/C prior to 2015.

I close by saying that the fight to empower the constitutional agencies is being overturned today by the very people who preach democracy. It is without reservations that I submit to you today that I cannot support such a malicious Bill. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: Mr. Speaker, I have listened here, for the past three hours, to the APNU/AFC defending constitutionality, defending the Constitution and defending independent constitutional organisations. The APNU/AFC is doing that in this House with a straight face.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Joseph Harmon, wrote to the Police Service Commission, on behalf of His Excellency, President David Granger, instructing the Commission to halt police promotions. The Chief Justice of Guyana pronounced that the letter violated the Constitution. That is a constitutional independent institution.

Former Minister, Ms. Simona Broomes, wrote to the Public Service Commission directing that it must halt all promotions for public servants. The Public Service Commission is an independent constitutional Commission. The then Chief Justice, Mr. Ian Chang, knocked down the letter as unconstitutional.

The Chairman of the Public Service Commission was summoned to the Office of the President and was requested to resign or else there would have been *blood on the carpet*. The Public Service Commission, again, is an independent constitutional Commission.

A Judge of the High Court was told that the last person who spoke to the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs in the manner in which the Judge had spoken to the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs had turned up dead. That was in the middle of a case. That Judge is a member of the Judiciary – an independent constitutional Commission.

To hear these pronouncements coming from these Members is really the biggest joke of the year 2021. When one adds that to the five or six months that this country endured while they slaughtered the Constitution, when they went to the court and when the court did not rule in their favour, they attacked all the Judges. They went all the way to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) in their attempt to defeat the will of the people, thwart the Constitution and defeat democracy. Today, they

come here – I cannot help but use the overused term – like *sanctimonious gangsters* – that terminology is so appropriate – to lecture us and this country that has not yet recovered.

3.36 p.m.

We are still psychologically scarred as a people by your conduct over those five months, where you massacred democracy. Now, you come here trying to lecture us about constitutional democracy, about rule of law and about independence of institutions.

We said, during our campaign and in our manifesto, that when we assume government, we are going to revisit a number of aberrations, a number of anomalies and a number of illegalities that were passed as laws in this House. This is only one. We will bring to this House the law that they imposed that makes every Guyanese a criminal to have in their possession more than US\$10,000. That law is still on the books. We have to bring to this House the law that authorises the Commissioner-General of the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) to invade people's bank accounts without notification. We have to bring that to this House. We also have to bring to this House the law they passed that all broadcasters must put public advertisements, free of cost, for one hour per day on their television stations. We also have to bring to this House the law that if one's value-added tax (VAT) is not due but is in arrears, one can be blocked at the airport, blacklisted and prevented from travelling by the Commissioner-General. There is a series of aberrations and unconstitutionality which we have to correct. This is only *a drop in the bucket*. I do not know what the big *hullabaloo* is.

My Colleague, the Hon. Gail Teixeira, spoke about how they are speaking about interfering with financial autonomy, when they cut the budget of constitutional agencies to one dollar. One dollar! What is wrong with you people? Do you not think about what you say? Do you not know that people are listening to you? Do you not know that people have memories? You degutted the constitutional agencies that were supposed to oversee you and reduced their budgets to a dollar. We are doing something here– which I will speak about later– that does not alter budgetary sums. You took the entire budget away. Now, you come here and have the audacity and the temerity to tell us about interference with financial autonomy. Parliamentary language and protocols restrain me, Mr Speaker.

Let us begin by first recognising that our Constitution is predicated upon the principle of separation of powers. What that means is that the Constitution divides responsibilities and functions, and attribute them to different organs within the document. In that distribution, the Executive Government is assigned the responsibility of managing the finances of the State. Integral to the management of the finances of the State is how it is going to be expended, how it is going to be scrutinised, how it is to be reconciled and accounted for to the National Assembly, representing the people of Guyana. Those are responsibilities that the Constitution reside with the Executive. The Constitution also states – I have to read these things to put them permanently on record – at article 8, in the marginal note:

“Supremacy of Constitution”

Article 8 states:

“This Constitution is the supreme law of Guyana and, if any other law is inconsistent with it, that other law shall, to the extent of the inconsistency, be void.”

So, if one passes any law that is inconsistent with this Constitution, then that law is void to the extent of the inconsistency with this Constitution.

Let us go to the Constitution again. Article 218 (1) states:

“The Minister responsible for Finance or any other Minister designated by the President shall cause to be prepared and laid before the National Assembly before or within ninety days after the commencement of each financial year estimates of revenues and expenditure of Guyana for that year.”

What you see here, clearly, is that, as I said, finance is an Executive Government function. Article 218 states clearly that it is a presidential function, which the President assigns to the Minister of Finance or any other Minister designated by him. Part of that responsibility that the President holds is the presentation of the national estimates of the country. That is what is called the national budget. The Minister of Finance, exercising a presidentially delegated function, is to prepare the budget and lay it before the National Assembly. Simply put, with this Act that they passed in 2015 in relation to constitutional agencies, they took that power from the President of Guyana and they gave it to the constitutional agencies, to present budgetary estimates.

Right there, one sees that article 8 states that the taking away of that power – because it now becomes inconsistent with article 218 of the Constitution...Article 8 states that this Fiscal Management and Accountability (FMA) (Amendment) Act 2015 is void to the extent of that inconsistency. It is as simple as that. Very simple. The Minister with Responsibility for Finance must retain that power. That is the gravamen of the wrong that was committed in 2015, when this Act was passed.

I will go back a little. The substantive Act, the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, Chapter 73:02, was unanimously passed by this House since 2003. Every budget after that, until 2012, was done in accordance with this Act, and not a single objection was ever raised in relation to the manner in which budgets of constitutional agencies were presented. Mr. Winston Murray spoke every year. No one can doubt Mr. Murray's competence. I believe Mr. Hoyte was the then Leader of the Opposition and then Mr. Corbin. All the Members of the House, the various Parliaments from 2003 to 2012, not once faulted the process then being used. I have never heard, and I challenge anyone... Mr. Ramjattan, the Hon. Member who will speak after me, let him point to a single allegation, in all the years, ever made against the People Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government, utilising this process, any allegation ever made by a constitutional agency that they were ever stifled or interfered with financially or otherwise. Point to one allegation! Many millions of allegations have been made about the PPP/C Government. Point to one where the Judiciary has said that they cannot spend the money they want to spend because the Government cut it. Point to any other agency, other than the agencies that you all cut. There are none.

The other important point I want to make is that Guyana does not have a peculiar, unique, financial and fiscal structure. Our fiscal, financial and constitutional structure is similar to that of 49 other countries in the British Commonwealth. Let them point to one country in the British Commonwealth where there are agencies coming by themselves, outside of the Executive Government, to present budgets. Let them point to one. They cannot because it does not exist. This was a figment of Mr. Carl Greenidge's imagination. It is Mr. Carl Greenidge who concocted this formula. That is why his successor, Minister Jordan, had great difficulty and discomfort with this because he worked under Dr. Ashni Singh and he worked under the PPP/C. He may not be competent, but he has experience. He worked with us, he travelled widely, and he knew that this was alien to the practice and procedures known to Her Majesty's Commonwealth. Our law, as it

currently stands, is an aberration. It cannot be found in *pari materia* with any other jurisdiction around the region or further afield.

That is the first point I want to make about trying to encroach upon the powers of the Executive. That is how the Bill errs conceptually. Then, practically and pragmatically, it collides, frontally, with article 218 of the Constitution. What they have done, also, which is again an aberration, is remove from Parliamentary scrutiny billions of public dollars that, by law and by the Constitution, can only be spent after public scrutiny. I will deal with the argument of Mr. Forde. He totally misunderstands how a lump sum operates and how an Appropriation Act operates.

What they have done is parcelled off some entities and have removed them from the scrutiny of the people. One of the fundamental functions of Parliament, in addition to law making, is financial scrutiny of public moneys. That is our second most important function. They have hived off a whole set of entities and made their moneys not susceptible to any form of scrutiny. There are exceptions and I will deal with the exceptions.

This Bill seeks to bring back into parliamentary oversight, a lot of moneys that were spent without parliamentary scrutiny. Let them go tell the taxpayers out there that they are authorising agencies to spend money how they wish, the people's money, not the agencies money and nobody must say anything about it. In essence, this is what they want.

3.51 p.m.

When the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act 2003 came into force, the long title read:

“An Act to provide for the regulation of the preparation and execution of the annual budget; the receipt, control and disbursement of public moneys; the accounting for public moneys; and such other matters connected with or incidental to the transparent and efficient management of the finances of Guyana.”

Did you read anything here that excepts and exempts constitutional agencies? Do they not benefit from the finances of Guyana? What they had done was done out of ignorance. They do not understand the ramifications of what they had done. This is the only Act of its kind in Guyana. It is not that they could go under another mechanism and have their accounts examined and scrutinised. They cannot. This is the only piece of legislation of its type. There was an Act before

and it repealed its predecessor, leaving this and the Constitution as the only form of managing how State moneys and public funds are going to be spent and managed.

What they have done by removing these agencies from this legislation was to put it beyond the reach of anyone. Poor Mr. Jordan had no other choice because they placed him in a jam. That is why he had to, embarrassingly, carry out a circus here every budget of slashing the constitutional agencies budget when they were presented. The poor fellow had no other alternative because that was the only form of scrutiny with which they left him. He also did not exercise it in the manner that they are glorifying because I remember one year, the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) building was leaking and was falling apart. There was a budgetary sum under the capital head for a new building or, at minimum, some moneys to renovate the building. That was slashed. How it was done did not broker any form of discussion because a lumpsum was presented, and the lumpsum was cut.

The Judiciary, for example, having planned its entire year, was not given an opportunity to reorganise its priority. It already had a budget and a workplan but when it came to the House, \$20 million was slashed from it. The Minister of Finance, not asking... did not ask from where the moneys were slashed, allowed the officers to go back and to reorganise their budget so that they could have smooth functioning for a year. Every time the Hon. Minister slashed the budget, he threw the constitutional agencies into some form of turmoil and trauma. They had to go back to the drawing table to adjust their work programme. That caused tremendous hardship and inconvenience.

Even the autonomy that they purported to give by this piece of legislation was never realised because, as I said and Mr. Forde quoted me, they removed the cutting from Urquhart Street and brought it to the Parliament. He made repeated reference to what I said, but never put it into context. For the purpose of the debate, I was adopting their arguments and attempting to show that, using their own argument in which they said that they were conferring fiscal autonomy on these bodies, they were not really doing that because, when it came here, it was being slashed anyhow.

To bring back some form of scrutiny, the expenditure of these agencies was the other important component of the amendment that is before the House. We were careful in inserting the amendments, which we are proposing here that the budget of the:

“...Constitutional Agency shall be as determined by the official in charge of the Constitutional Agency in consultation with the concerned Minister and the Minister with responsibility for Finance.”

But, that the official remains in charge. Look at clause 4 of the Bill. The official is the dominant persona in the creation of the budget. Of course, that official has to consult with the Minister because no country has infinite resources. There is a process that allows the financial officer to adjust based upon the needs of his constitutional agency and to bring his budgetary proposal within a contemplated agreement with the Minister of Finance rather than it being slashed on the floor, without consultation, and then the whole budgetary process and cycle goes *helter skelter*.

Mr. Speaker, you have a very experienced Clerk, Mr. Isaacs. I would like to keep him out of the debate, but I am just drawing attention to him. I know that the Clerk has travelled the world. I know that he has attended many conferences. I want the Clerk, in his own quiet moment, to whisper to you and say which Parliament he visited where the Clerk receives budgetary proposals from independent agencies and not from the Executive Government. I could tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the answer is in the negative.

This afternoon, the other important component of our amendment is that it restores our budgetary process to constitutional compliance, as is prescribed by article 222A. Imagine, they have violated article 222A. We are trying to correct it and they are telling us that we are violating article 222A. I do not understand. Our amendment clearly states that;

“...the detailed budgets and appropriations be reflected in the Annual Estimates together with detailed Estimates of Revenues and Expenditures of the Constitutional Agencies but that the budgets, appropriations, estimates and expenditures shall be reviewed approved as part of the process of the determination of the national budget.”

Mark these words, Mr. Speaker. Let me go straight to article 222A and you will hear the similarity and the identical language being quoted. Article 222A states:

“In order to assure the independence of entities listed in the Third Schedule;

- (a) the expenditure of each of the entities shall be financed as a direct charge of the Consolidated Fund, determined as a lump sum by way of an annual subvention

approved by the National Assembly after review and approval of the entity's annual budget as a part of the process of determination of the national budget;”

This is the Constitution and this is the Bill – identical language. Mr. Forde spoke about the lumpsum and said that the lumpsum cannot be part of the Appropriation Act. One could only get money from the Consolidated Fund by legislation. The legislation is called an Appropriation Act. Whether it is lumpsum, dare sum or whatever sum one would want to call it, it can only come from the treasury by virtue of an Appropriation Act. It goes on by loans, deposits, *et cetera* and it comes back to an Appropriation Act approved by this House. How else could we get it? Lack of experience.

The Constitution goes on to state at (b);

“each entity shall manage its subvention in such a manner as it deems fit for the efficient discharge of its functions,...”

In a manner that the National Assembly shall prescribe. Do you know what the National Assembly has prescribed? It is the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act.

The agencies, after their agencies budget is approved and after they receive their money as a lumpsum, now have to manage it in a manner prescribed by the Constitution. Well, the manner prescribed by the Constitution is this Act and, as I said, there is no other Act. When they are removed from the scope of this Act, again, Constitution is being violated.

All that we are trying to do is to bring our constitutional entities back into regularity because they have been taken and they are now orbiting in space. Thankfully, the accounting officers of these agencies are experienced. They still have been following the prescriptions outlined in the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act because they have nothing else.

Also, the point has to be made that, though the Constitution speaks about a lumpsum payment, there are some people on the other side who believes that it is a physical lumpsum and that the agency would get a bag of money at the beginning of the year. Budget is a cycle and it is rotating. Very rich societies would have all the lumpsums to be paid at the time of the national budget. That also has to be the subject of administrative arrangement. There are cannons of constitutional principles that govern how the Constitution is interpreted to make sense not to destroy it. The

Constitution should be read practically and liberally. It is a living document. It is organic and should be read that way. Read it as an alive document [**Mr. Ramjattan:** It is living.] Yes, as a living document. You know the story and yet you are doing it wrong.

We are simply putting back the constitutional bodies on track. I recognised that the experienced Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan is listening intently. I know that he came into Parliament with a different view because I heard him last night. I hope that myself and the other speakers have persuaded him, and that he will now stand and agree with us whole heartedly.

4.06 p.m.

Only last night, I heard him speak about *control freakism*. This is not *control freakism*. Nobody wants to control anyone. This is accounting to the people of Guyana for the manner in which their moneys are spent. None of the constitutional agencies will object to what we are doing because they themselves do not wish to be the subject of controversies and criticisms.

I stand here as part of our team and with the full support of the constitutional entities. They would like to bring regularity to their affairs. Therefore, I have no hesitation in lending my fullest and most absolute support to the Bill tabled by the distinguish Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs. Hon. Members, I think this is a good time for us to take the suspension. Let us see if we could have the break for 40 minutes, so that we could return at 4.50 p.m.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Could we go through?

Mr. Speaker: The Order Paper is quite long. We have Mr. Ramjattan to speak and then we have Dr. Ashni Singh.

Hon. Members, let us take the suspension.

Sitting suspended at 4.07 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.02 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: We will now take the contribution from the Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This afternoon I am glad that I have the wonderful opportunity of ensuring that my argument on this Bill is recorded.

To understand the text and the context of this Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill, it is important that we go back to what it was that we had as a constitutional reform process. We all appreciated that there is an article 218 in our Constitution, which give the Minister of Finance the power to propose budgetary allocations for various budget agencies. But in that process of reform that led to the amendment to the Constitution in 2001, it was made clear that there are certain entities – constitutional entities we would call them – and they are all named in the FMAA, as amended in 2015. Even in this proposed amendment, these bodies must have what is regarded as a special regime under which they must operate. That is why I take objection to what was proposed as being, from the Learned Attorney General, that we are undermining the Constitution and that we are not, in any way, doing that which would see scrutiny of these entities. That is not what the text and the context of this Constitution talks about.

When we are dealing with the Constitution, which, in accordance with article 8, is our supreme law. It is very important that we do not just quote one article as against the other. I remember having a big debate here with Dr. Singh in 2013. I remember him being the soul speaker on that motion then. A Bill was passed but which, of course, was not assented. In identical terms almost, it was dealing with this issue as to independence of the entities listed in the Third Schedule.

At the time when that amendment was made in 2001, we wanted those constitutional entities to be separate from the regime as against budget agencies. We also wanted to ensure that we had scrutiny of what those entities will come with in this National Assembly. We did not want a Minister of Finance, a member of the Executive branch of Government to be the one deciding the finances in relation to those entities. It is important, in that context, to understand why we said:

“...in order to ensure the independence of the entities listed in the Third Schedule.”

We then go on to say:

“(a) the expenditure of each of the entities shall being financed as a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund, determined as a lump sum...”

It then goes on thereafter.

However, it was an extraordinary difficult exercise to ensure that we ‘flesh out’ this provision. That is why in 2001, I was a member of the People Progressive Party/ Civic as a parliamentarian then, we had huge difficulties as to how we were going to deal with constitutional agencies as against budget agencies. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes, I would want to read the others and that is what will contradict the Hon. Member, the Attorney General, because he gave the impression that we are not going to have scrutiny from the level of the National Assembly.

“...as a lump sum by way of an annual subvention approved by the National Assembly...”

So, it must be that. It is not as if the Chancellor of the Judiciary will simply bring to the Clerk of the National Assembly a lumpsum and say that he/she wants \$50 billion. It went on to qualify what could be brought to the National Assembly for its review and scrutiny for the purposes of ensuring that there is the independence of those entities.

In 2013, we tried, at best as possible, to give meaning to that.

What we created was the nature of a statutory system, an institution or a process which saw that the heads of those entities got whatever sums they wanted. And, it could not have been exceptional sums. It had to take into account the sums from the previous year that was given to them. They then brought it to the National Assembly, and it became a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund. It must be a direct charge.

What that meant was obviously not understood and comprehended properly because that which is allocated as an appropriation is different from that which becomes a charge in a very direct way. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes, it is 17, but still those – what you call institutional arrangements – will ensure that this National Assembly approve as against the Minister of Finance. I must say that it is here but, somehow, it has gone way above the heads of some of the Members of Parliament (MP) on the Government’s side.

I just want to emphasise that all the provision in this Constitution must have some meaning. If we were to go back to what is happening here at article 218, we are not going to give meaning to article 222A. Article 222A goes on to say:

“(b) each entity shall manage its subvention in such manner as it deems fit for the efficient discharge of its functions...”

That is a qualification immediately. It is not that the judges of the courts are going to squander money or – I do not want to say gift law books but whatever it is – go to India for conferences and spend the money in a manner that is totally inefficient and, probably, corrupt. That was the first qualification we had to put.

I remember, in the 2001 constitutional reform process, all of that was thought through. Now, we are creating a statutory creature that would give independence to constitutional entities. How does one create it? That is why it was not *pari materia*, with other commonwealth countries. [Mr. Nandlall: I am not helping you.] You are not going to want to help me now. If one checks the other commonwealth countries, they do not have an article 222A in their Constitutions. What they do have is an article 218 which states that the Minister of Finance will come here and propose and the National Assembly will dispose. When we created this article, it was supposed to be a totally different regime for the constitutional entities. What do we do about it? It gave headaches from 2001 to 2012, because when we were asking and I remember asking this in my party, the then PPP/C, how we were going to flesh this thing out. [Mr. Nandlall: *(Inaudible)*] Alright, leave it. Whether it was 2004... I got kicked out, I formed my party and I came to Parliament. They never thought that would have happened. I came here in 2012 and my party decided that we must flesh it out. That is when we decided that it required an amendment to that FMAA of 2003.

Additional qualification as to how we get this institution and process working is indicated in article 222A (b). It states that it must be:

“...subject to only conformity with the financial practices and procedures approved by this National Assembly to ensure accountability...”

When people say that these constitutional entities, which are made up of very profound minds and people of good character and quality, are going to take the money and tell the National Assembly via the Clerk of the National Assembly or that the Clerk of the National Assembly will do some budgetary arrangement that would be outrageously out of the realm as it were...

5.14 p.m.

That is not what we are dealing with here. How do you flesh it out then? You had to create it, as we did in 2013 and in 2015, when we said that as soon as we have... The important point is that we give meaning to constitutional reform with legislative buttressing of article 222A. It is in that context that we must understand this text.

I got the impression that the scrutiny is all going to be abandoned. It is not going to be abandoned. When they come here as they have come, and I remember two big booklets with the constitutional agencies... I tried to get them in order to bring them here a couple months ago. They stated for what it is that the agencies wanted moneys – salaries of the employees and whatever else. They have context in them that is similar to the agencies of the budget, but it is very much different in that it does not come under the control of the Executive branch of Government. We must understand that, in our Constitution, there are some that will come under the exclusive jurisdiction of proposals from the Minister of Finance and there are others that will come from the head of entities to the Clerk and then to this National Assembly. It is just like with the budgets of the Parliament, the Judicial Service Commission, the Public Service Appellate Tribunal and the Guyana Human Rights Association, *et cetera*.

We have to understand it. When we get arguments from Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira that the appointment had problems and that the problems had to deal with the protection of independence, we are talking about another independence. It is the independence of the institution to make its decisions in relation to its core functions. Yes, in the history of this country, there had been attempts to ensure that there is a sacking of that independence of the core functions. When we gave independence in relation to financial autonomy, that is a totally different thing. Whosoever did what, whenever they did, and I would want to bring instances at another time of what the PPP/C did and what other political parties did, is not the matter. The matter here is what is financial independence and financial autonomy. The best place to put that is in the entity itself. That is why we created a special session to deal with constitutional entities. They come here with their estimates and we deal with it at a special sitting of the National Assembly. We then propose, as a National Assembly, what looks fine and what does not. It is also, at that stage... because, by that time, the Minister of Finance would know about it since a copy would have been sent to him. It is not that we could not do it without the Minister of Finance.

There is not a precluding of review and scrutiny. That is not an undermining of the Constitution. That is but a buttressing of the Constitution, when we create articles to gain entry into the Constitution, unlike other Commonwealth countries, and then we do nothing to establish them or constitute them. They are like the Public Procurement Commission (PPC). We ensured that we had a Public Procurement Commission in the reform process. Years in the PPP/C and you could not have gotten it established. It is one important thing to understand that, sometimes, one does constitutional reforms and then they lay on the shelf and nothing happens to them. What we did here was to give a fleshing out, as I had said. What was wrong with that fleshing out in the context of what was proposed in the Constitution? There was absolutely nothing wrong with it. Prior to that, there was a situation where everything went to the Minister of Finance. There could be times when, of course, Ministers of Finance would tell the people that Government could not do all of this for them in view of what their demands were. I understand that was done on a couple of occasions. The fiscal space was the excuse. Whatever it is, it must be a direct charge. Even if it is not workable with perfections, we must not undermine our constitutional provision. That is what is happening here. We have a situation now, whereby, all that which we mounted as an institutional process is now being dismounted. What did they say? They said that 1-4 and a portion of 5, which had been created in 2015, should be deleted.

What we must not do is to *throw out the baby with the bathe water*. We must learn to develop and evolve. As was said, the Constitution is a living document. Let us breathe life into it rather than now abort that extension that was grown out of the 2015 fiscal amendment and for which was fleshed out. It was given some backbone, so it was there living as a living organism. What we are doing here, now, is nothing but a clipping of the wings as it were – an abortion. That is not right. That is absolutely not what we should be doing in the context here. From that, we could glean the purpose.

I had coined a term in these parts called *control freakism*. I could take a patent right or a copy right for that. I had indicated, at that point and time that, indeed, those Government Members, at that time, wanted to control everything. I feel that is exactly what we have here now. If a Chancellor would like to go to a conference in New Delhi, a Cabinet Paper would be sent to Cabinet for a Cabinet Decision. One then has to speak to the Ministry of Finance's officials and all of that. The lumpsum that she could have received to attend the conference, and the independence and the

autonomy of that set of finances to ensure that she attends that conference to hear what Chancellors of the Commonwealth are talking about as new developments of the law, she now has to wait on Dr. Singh. That is not what this Constitution, in article 222A, speaks about.

Similarly, we wanted the Audit Office of Guyana, which has to scrutinise the spending and the management and the accountability of the appropriated sums to be under the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). The PAC must deal with the budgetary allocations for that entity because they deal with the Auditor General all of the time. They are more in tuned. That is why we set up that special regime in relation to that. What we have here is but a dismantling of that institutional process. That is why I believe that what we are doing here is taking away and reducing, to almost nothingness, this process of constitutional entities. It is not a good sign at all knowing very well that, when the Constitution was read at around same time, we had a big argument from Dr. Singh that we could not cut the budget and that we could not scissor it. A High Court Judge also ruled that we could not do it. We did it because we knew it was right and when it went to the Court of Appeal, that court ruled that we had powers to do that. It was the very **[Mr. Dharamlall: All of you still did it.]** No. That was Mr. Carl Singh. Mr. Carl Singh, Chancellor of the Judiciary, had ruled that Mr. Chang was wrong. We went through that in a previous time here.

We have Standing Orders which indicate how a cut could be done. We have a constitutional provision in article 171 which states how it could be done. **[Mr. Dharamlall: You sound like you are bluffing now.]** No. It is in the Constitution and that is how the Court of Appeal so ruled. Article 171 indicates how the cutting could be done. The Standing Orders make reference that notice must be given. We went through the process. We went to the court and it was never appealed to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). We know that *Erskine May Parliamentary Practice* and all of those documents talk about one reducing the budget. An Opposition Member cannot increase it but they certainly could reduce it. We did exactly that when we found that the Ethnic Relations Commission, *et cetera* were not functioning. This is a very dangerous sign in my opinion. We have to ensure that we do not go there.

[Laughter by Government Members]

They laugh, that is okay. This is serious matter. Not because of the fact that you could have what is called a majority as they were cussing us that time... we had a good purpose behind coming with

that amendment. It was to ensure that, in relation to constitutional entities, the National Assembly does the job rather than the Minister.

This Bill also deals with certain other things. It indicates here what will be done with Section 80A of the Principal Act:

“is amended by inserting after the word “Agencies” the words “and the format for the annual report of the Constitutional Agency shall be as determined by the official in charge of the Constitutional Agency in consultation with the concerned Minister and the Minister.”

So, if it comes [**An Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible*)] Exactly. There was absolutely, in my opinion, no need for that because that is what you generally will have. It comes to the National Assembly and a copy is sent to the Minister of Finance. Obviously, if there is a Ministry that is otherwise concerned, it will be sent there too. It is made public when it comes to the National Assembly. There cannot be a place where it could be made more public than the National Assembly. I do not understand why it is that we are giving the impression that scrutiny and review are going to be abandoned. That is what they are doing. That is but a crossway of deflecting the truth behind the purpose or the purpose behind what they are trying to amend here. It is not a very sensible position at all.

5.29 p.m.

I want to indicate that the passages quoted by Mr. Roysdale Forde in relation to how the Hon. Attorney General had dealt with this matter, are very apt. There were also passages quoted by Dr. Ashni Singh which are very apt. We are of the opinion that these were basically the basis for which we did what was done. Mr. Winston Jordan, the former Hon. Minister of Finance, ensured that these things were fleshed out to a practical way when dealing with these entities ... ensured that, at least, we had five years of experience of doing this.

Mr. Speaker, people like Mr. Joseph Hamilton might not understand the constitutionalism that is involved. We have provision for a Public Procurement Commission (PPC) in the Constitution, but none was established until the APNU/AFC came into Government. That is why.

Also, there are certain laws which indicated that there must be Local Government Elections, but you never held them. There are laws in relation to other institutions placed in the Constitution, but

nothing happened to them. That is why, a reversion to a position, whereby the Ministry of Finance, an Executive branch... which the Constitution, in a reform process, took away from, you want now to restore it. The Doctrine of the Separation of Powers is an exceptionally wonderful one. The Branches of Government must be different. The Judicial Branch will interpret the laws; the Executive Branch will execute the laws; and the Legislative Branch will make the laws.

When we make the laws here, we must further refine them to the extent and the purpose behind the original ones. Not dismantle them and try to put wool in the eyes of members of public, to say that this is the purpose when it is not. It is the purpose of controlling. They are control freaks and that is why ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, for you to continue to make the law, you will need an extension.

Mr. Ramjattan: I would not be longer Mr. Speaker.

Deputy Speaker [Mr. Shuman]: Mr. Speaker, for my Colleague to finish his presentation, I would like to ask the House's indulgence in granting him five minutes.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you can continue.

Mr. Ramjattan: Yes. Thanks very much. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** *(Inaudible)*] I thought that you would have given me the five minutes.

The other aspect that I would like to cover has to do with the 17 constitutional agencies. It will come up to a large amount of money that the National Assembly has to scrutinise which may not go through the Ministry of Finance in the way that the budget agencies should. Notwithstanding that, if there is a peculiar creature that we created as a result of article 223A, then so must it be. Do not take away the financial autonomy.

The marginal notes of that article are very clear. It states, "financial autonomy". How do we go about doing it? The argument is being made that there are 17 of them. They are all listed in section 7 of the amendment... and that it will come up to billions of dollars which they will not get to scrutinise. What better scrutiny is there than when the 17 estimates come here and we, as Members of the National Assembly, review and deal with them? Is it not better than the Senior Minister in

the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, who, by virtue of the hardcore politics of it all, will be someone who might not be the best in relation to constitutional entities. The larger Assembly, made up of the 65 Members here, would be a superior body to deal with these allocations.

Although it takes away and reduces the number of agencies that the Minister would have to deal with, that should not be a problem for him. He should be glad that, in context of a provision hard fought for, after all the troubles prior to 2001... Do you remember that? You were there too. It was hard fought for, now all of a sudden, we feel that we will throw it away and these 17 agencies must come back into the ambit of that Ministry of Finance.

I think that where we are going is to ensure that this thing is unconstitutional. It might have to be decided... [**Mr. Hamilton:** We might end up at the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ).] Yes, it might very well end up there. We might very well have to do certain thing in relation to this Bill because it is taking away fundamental rights. When there is a judiciary or parliament that has its funds financially autonomous from the Executive Branch, there will certainly be better operationalising of those institutions. That was the whole purpose behind the 2001 Constitutional Reform. We had big quarrels and problems then. I think that is what is not being confronted here. It is but the extensions that are confronted, not the root. We must get back to the root and ensure that we do our Constitution justice and right. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Singh (replying): Mr. Speaker, I rise to conclude the debate on this Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill – Bill No.1/2021, having listened to the contributions of my Colleagues on this side and Hon. Members from the opposite side of the House. I tried to pay as keen attention as I possibly could, hoping perhaps, particularly from my Colleagues on the opposite side of the House, that I might hear arguments addressing the merits of the Bill before us. Regrettably, for the greater part, we were treated to a veritable cacophony of invectives, innuendos and irrelevance, none of which had anything to do with the contents and merits of the Bill. That I consider to be most regrettable.

As I said in my opening statement, notwithstanding the apparent simplicity of the Bill, I do believe that the Bill addresses very fundamental issues which would merit serious deliberative consideration by this House. Given the seriousness of the Bill, there could be no greater indication

of which side of the House is committed to addressing the people's business in presence of this honourable House, in the current moment. Look around, Sir, on our side, recognising how important a matter this is, we have gone through one speaker after another, the various provisions of the Bill and have listened to the presentations made by our Colleagues on the other side, responded to those and addressed them conclusively. The other side, notwithstanding their protestations, saw no value in staying to see this debate to its culmination. That is the level of importance they attach to this matter.

As I said earlier, notwithstanding that, for the greater part, the presentations from the opposite side avoided and evaded the issue and engaged more so in personal insults and irrelevant noises, there were one or two particular points which were very telling. In particular, it struck a special cordant note when I heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde, say that the 2015 Bill that amended the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) in the first instance, displayed the ethos of the APNU/AFC Government. I believe he was right. The 2015 amendment did display, in full abundance, the ethos of the APNU/AFC Government. What might we ask is that ethos? Mr. Speaker, if the last five years have taught the people of Guyana and the world anything at all, it is that nothing that is said by the APNU/AFC can be believed, absolutely nothing.

They regaled the nation with their self-proclaimed commitment to consultation and inclusivity. Having regaled the world, with their self-proclaimed embrace of consultation and inclusivity, they proceeded to receive a first tranche of six nominees for the chairmanship of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). The persons were six, fine and upstanding citizens of Guyana. Promptly, the former Government rejected them with the disparagement that they were not 'Fit and Proper'. They proceeded to receive a second set of six persons and proceeded, promptly, to say that the second set of six was still not 'Fit and Proper'. They proceeded to receive a third set of six persons, bringing us to the grand total of not six or 12, but 18 nominees for the position of chairmanship of GECOM. They dismissed this third set of six persons, once again, as not being 'Fit and Proper'.

5.44 p.m.

These were the people who were beating their chests and proclaiming to the world how much they believed in consultations and how much they believed in inclusivity. They dismissed 18 fine, upstanding Guyanese citizens in whom the People's Progressive Party/Civic reposed sufficient

confidence to be nominated as Chairman of GECOM. They rejected all 18 of them as not being 'Fit and Proper' to the extent that they brought the phrase, 'Fit and Proper' almost into ridicule.

Billboards were set up all over the country with the phrase 'Fit and Proper' as if it was something to be laughed at. Oh yes, it was not 'proper' it became 'fit and *Proppa*'. [**An Hon Member: Inaudible.**] That is right, I believe there was one on David Street, Kitty. A big sign that said, 'Fit and Proper', ridiculing and mocking 18 fine and upstanding Guyanese citizens as not being 'Fit and Proper'. Those 18 Guyanese citizens are still around. They remember that the APNU/AFC said to the world, 'We do not consider you 'Fit and Proper' but, yet, we believe in inclusivity and we believe in consultation'. They proceeded, unilaterally and unconstitutional, to appoint a selection, a proxy of theirs, whose appointment was subsequently to be repudiated by the highest court of our land. This was from the APNU/AFC that proclaimed and continues to proclaim their belief in constitutionality, their belief in and respect for the Constitution, their embrace of the principles of inclusivity and consultations.

Sir, if that was not enough to display the ethos of the APNU/AFC, rewind to 21st December, 2018. The constitutional arrangements surrounding a no-confidence motion are crystal clear. They are written in English language, in the language of our Constitution, in our official language, English language - plain and simple English language. It is the same Constitution that they are now waving in the air pretending to be champions and defenders of. The provisions of our Constitution are crystal clear and, even if those provisions were not clear, the traditions of Westminster Parliament, enshrined through centuries of parliamentary practice, are well known and highly respected. Those provisions require that, upon the successful moving of a no-confidence motion, a general election shall be called within 90 days.

Mr. Speaker, if you want to get a display, yet another example of the ethos of the AFNU/AFC, on the night that they lost the no-confidence motion, they rapidly assembled in a room at the Parliament Chambers and acknowledged that they had lost the motion. That press conference is still available. Today's technology captured that moment live and direct for the entire world to see. They went to a room in the Parliament Chamber. They acknowledged that they had lost the no-confidence motion, they accepted the consequences of that defeat. They said: 'We are disappointed, but we will respect the result and proceed with the consequences of a no-confidence motion and an election will be held in 90 days. That was captured and recorded for posterity. Sir,

if I am not mistaken, no less a person than the then Prime Minister presided over that press conference.

Mr. Speaker, if you would like yet another example of the ethos of the APNU/AFC: very swiftly, within a matter of 48 hours, after they accepted the results of the no-confidence motion and indicated that they would abide by our Constitution, which required an election within 90 days; they suddenly discovered that 33 was no longer greater than 32 and suddenly discovered and announced to the world that they were no longer. There was something about half, add half, minus half, round out and round up. They suddenly engaged in a bizarre attempt at arithmetic trickery. The ethos of the APNU/AFC; if you want to see the nature of the APNU/AFC. And, the list goes on.

On 2nd March, 2020, Guyana went to the polls by well-established tradition. At the end of poll, every polling station counts, observed by party representatives, and something called a Statement of Poll (SoP) is produced, signed by the presiding officials, signed by the party representatives, published on the wall of the polling station, taken away by the party representatives and the GECOM officials and tallied up. It is, once again, a matter of very simple arithmetic, a simple question of adding up the Statements of Poll to generate your results. Within a matter of hours, anyone in possession of their Statements of Poll would know the results. We are now in February. In less than one month's time, it will be one year since 2nd March, 2020. Up to today, the Statements of Poll, allegedly in the possession of the APNU/AFC, which according to them show results different from what was declared, those Statements of Poll remain a phantom like a figment of the imagination. Up to today, they are unable to produce their Statements of Poll. The ethos – they claim that they won, they insist, they beat their chests, they thump their chests and say, 'we won', but they cannot produce their Statements of Poll to display this victory. Sir, that is the ethos of the APNU/AFC. The world is watching. The world knows that not a single word uttered by the APNU/AFC can be believed.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, waxed lyrically about the noble intentions of his Government when they brought this 2015 amendment. In his speech, just a few minutes ago, he spoke about their respect for the Constitution. Mr. Speaker, this is the same Hon. Member who went to the Ministry of Public Security, mere days after the 2nd March and addressed his staff in a speech that was recorded. Sir, I will quote from that speech. He said:

“It is with sadness that I want to say a couple of words to you. I do not know, although I rather suspect that tomorrow might be a declaration that the numbers were against us. I am prepared to accept and move on and I wanted not to miss the opportunity because if it happened tomorrow I will be out and I might not have said a word of ‘thank you’.”

Sir, so far, so good. That speech was captured in a recording that became available, immediately, for the entire world to hear. Mere days later, the Hon Member appeared on a radio programme, hosted by Mr. Fazeer Mohammed on a Trinidadian channel. By that time, it appeared as though the Hon. Gentleman was no longer quite as sad. Apparently, the ethos was gone. On this occasion, when asked about his acknowledgment that the numbers were against them and that a declaration was about to be made that they had lost the elections, apparently the Hon. Member conveniently forgot what he had said, instead he said that he was not conceding or acknowledging that they had lost. He was saying farewell because he was about to relocate to the Office of the Prime Minister. Ethos of the APNU/AFC. When they come here and they claim that they are champions and guardians of constitutionality, when they come here and claim to be friends of the constitutional agencies, the world is watching and the world knows fully well that not a single word uttered by anyone on that side of the House could be trusted. Sir, the world knows this fully well. They come and claim...

Mr. Shuman: Mr. Speaker, I stand on a Point of Order. The Hon. Member is impugning my character, personally, and I take note. I think that the House needs to recognise it. **[An Hon. Member of the Government:** All except you brother.]

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw any inferences that might have been mistakenly interpreted as directed to the distinguished Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Shuman: Very well.

5.59 p.m.

Dr. Singh: I believe that I did make reference to the APNU/AFC. I have no doubt that the distinguished Deputy Speaker is proud to not be associated with the APNU/AFC.

When they claim that they are champions, protectors and friends of the constitutional agencies, and they claim that the 2015 amendment was intended to give these entities autonomy and remove

the Ministry of Finance and the Executive from reviewing and cutting the budgets of the constitutional agencies, once again, nothing could be further from the truth – ethos.

In 2016, when this provision was first to be applied, the constitutional agencies had requested \$8.7 billion. The Minister of Finance came and recommended \$7.8 billion, and the House immediately proceeded to approve the very recommendation, reflecting the reduced amount recommended by the Minister of Finance. In November, 2016, the same was the case. The constitutional agencies requested \$11.3 billion and they recommended \$6.8 billion. The very GECOM had requested \$5.8 billion, and they recommended a grand sum of \$2 billion. The explanation read thus, and I quote:

“recommended allocation was made in the context of the existing fiscal space and consideration of the agency’s request within national development priorities.”

This was the information provided to the National Assembly on the basis of which the House was expected and promptly proceeded to approve. So, all of this noise that is being made about removing the Executive and not having the Minister of Finance cut the budgets of the constitutional agencies is, in fact, nothing different from everything else that is said by the APNU/AFC. That is correct.

The world is not deceived. The world is not fooled by this newfound proclamation that the APNU/AFC is somehow a friend to the constitutional agencies. The fact of the matter is that the 2015 amendment did absolutely nothing whatsoever, as it relates to changing the arrangements with respect to the budget process. It still clothed the Minister of Finance with the right to cut those budgets. That right was still abundantly exercised, as is reflected by these numbers. As they always do, they will go around saying that this amendment was intended to safeguard the financial autonomy of the constitution agencies. Once again, nobody believed them then, as indeed nobody believes them now. Make no mistake of it, Sir, that, like everything else uttered by the APNU/AFC, they could not be believed.

My Colleagues on this side of the House have already expounded abundantly on what is problematic about the 2015 amendment. If I might, in wrapping up the debate, reiterate one, two, or three simple but fundamental points as they relate to why the 2015 amendments collided with the Constitution and why the current amendment is necessary to realign the budget process within the constitutional framework. I would do so as follows.

First of all, as I indicated, when I spoke on the first occasion this afternoon, article 222 (a) is crystal clear. The budgets of the constitutional agencies shall be considered, reviewed and approved by the National Assembly as part of the process of the determination of the national budget. That is for a very simple reason. It is for the reason the Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira pointed out, so many years ago. That it is well-nigh impossible to ask this House to vote on a budget when all it has is the expenditure for some agency. The House has no information on the fiscal framework, no information on the revenues of Government, no information on anticipated growth in the economy, and no information on other potential expenditure requirements in Government, but this House, by the 2015 procedure, was being treated with the contemptuous request of being asked to vote on budgets of agencies without knowing anything about what was happening in the rest of the economy. This is in direct contravention of the requirements of article 222 (a), which states, very clearly, that constitutional agencies should be considered as part of the national budget. It is in violation, I hasten to add, of the principle that the budget should be comprehensive. It should present a complete picture of revenues and expenditure of the State if it is to be meaningfully analysed and if sensible decisions are to emerge from that analysis.

The distinguished Attorney General drew attention, also, to article 218, which states, very clearly, that the Minister responsible for finance, or any other Minister designated by the President, shall cause to be laid before the National Assembly estimates of the revenues and expenditures of Guyana for that year. The distinguished Attorney General pointed out, very astutely, as he always does, that it did not state the revenues and expenditure of Guyana, except for those relating to constitutional agencies. It stated very clearly, revenues and expenditure of Guyana, reinforcing the principles of unity and comprehensiveness in the budget – one comprehensive budget. Article 218 reinforces that principle.

Thirdly, as I pointed out in my earlier presentation, article 171 is crystal clear. Matters of a financial nature are vested in the Executive. It is the Executive that is accountable for the realisation of fiscal outcomes. It is for that reason, enshrined by centuries of practice in Parliaments such as ours, enshrined in our Constitution and repeated in our Standing Orders, that matters of a financial nature can only come to this House by being submitted by the Minister responsible for Finance or any other Minister so designated by the President, with prior consent and agreement of the Cabinet, clearly indicating the role of the Executive in fiscal and financial matters.

All three of these constitutional articles collided with and were violated by the amendments that were inserted in 2015. In 2015, all that was taking place was the usual APNU/AFC political grandstanding. Like I said, they have, by now, become notorious for thumping their chests [**An Hon. Member (Government):** *Inaudible.*] Yes, they have gained a fair degree of notoriety for many things, but foremost amongst these is for thumping their chests and proclaiming themselves to be so righteous. What was the phrase? Sanctimonious *gangstering*. They have become famous for thumping their chests and proclaiming their virtues, when, in fact, their actions speak louder than their words. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** *Inaudible.*] Absolutely, Attorney General. They have become notorious, if I might repeat it for added emphasis, the APNU/AFC has become notorious for thumping their chests and proclaiming their self-righteousness, when, in fact, their actions reveal their true natures. But the people of Guyana are watching, and the world has been watching. The people of Guyana are wiser, and the world is wiser. Nobody believes all of this self-righteousness that they are carrying on with. Nobody believes all of this grandstanding that they are engaged in. The truth is that the ethos, to use their word, of the APNU/AFC is well known, and that is they lack ...

How could I forget this? Sometime last year, I was travelling down Main Street and I saw lots of green banners adorning the electric poles. These banners were emblazoned with big letters indicating three words, ‘Honesty, Decency and Integrity’ – yet, more chest thumping – words proclaiming their honesty, decency and integrity. Little did we know, putting aside their elections shenanigans, if one could ever put those aside, that these self-proclaimed honest and decent people with integrity were busy pilfering the public purse to buy themselves bracelets, bangles, earrings. **An Hon. Member (Government):** Bedsheets.] Bedsheets and beds. Little did we know that, while emblazoning the streets of Guyana with the words ‘Honesty, Decency and Integrity’ they were busy acquiring bangles, bracelets and earrings. Shame on them!

I will conclude by saying that this amendment, that we have brought today, finally puts to rest this ridiculous charade that they have been engaging in for the last five years, pretending somehow to be preserving the financial autonomy of these constitutional agencies, when they were busy cutting their budgets. Might I say that, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, perhaps, did not read the Bill as closely as he should have. This is because we have done nothing to tamper with the provisions that deal with the lump sum allocations. We have done absolutely nothing to tamper with those

provisions. Those provisions are intact. But, in his usual manner, and in his party's usual manner, he comes here with all sorts of drama and histrionics, trying to whip up a public frenzy, trying to mislead people that, somehow, we are tampering with the provisions as they relate to a lump sum.

6.14 p.m.

Fortunately, Sir, the people of Guyana know better than to believe anything that he or his Colleagues have to say.

With those words, I commend, once again, this Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Bill 2021 to this honourable House.

I add that I have circulated a small amendment, which I will move at the appropriate time. I believe that it is now before Hon. Members. I trust that the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, now the sole representative of his party, will see it fit to do the honest and decent thing and vote for this highly meritorious and most worthy piece of legislation.

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

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Clause 1

Clause 1 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, do you want to propose an amendment to clause 2? I have something circulated here.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, if I might, the amendment that I am proposing is the insertion, after clause 2, of a new clause 2A.

“2A. Section 66 of the Principal Act is amended by substituting for the words “Part IX” the word “Act”.

I would be guided by you, Sir, on whether this is the appropriate time to move that amendment.

Mr. Chairman: It would be in clause 2 because this is a subsection. So, it will amend the entire clause 2.

Dr. Singh: This, Sir, is being inserted as a new clause 2A.

Mr. Chairman: So, we are taking clause 2.

Dr. Singh: Very well, Sir.

Amendment put and carried.

Clause 2, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 3 to 7

Clauses 3 to 7 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported with amendment, read a third time and passed as amended.

MOTIONS

Confirmation of the Customs (Amendment of First Schedule) (No. 3) Order 2020 – No. 82 of 2020

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly, in accordance with Sections 8 and 9 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01, confirm the Customs (Amendment of First Schedule) (No. 3) Order 2020 (No. 82 of 2020) which was made on 30th December, 2020, under Section 8 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01 and published in the Official Gazette dated 30th December, 2020.

[Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance]

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move the motion that this National Assembly confirm the Customs (Amendment of First Schedule) (No. 3) Order 2020, which was issued on 30th December, 2020 and which was published in *the Official Gazette* on the same day.

This Order is yet another simple item and one which, I expect, should be passed very swiftly through this honourable House. This House would recall that, in 2008, the Members of the Caribbean Forum (CARIFORUM), including Guyana, concluded an Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the European Union (EU), which included a number of provisions relating to market access by both the CARIFORUM and the EU to each other's markets and preferential access in relation to particular goods and services.

As events would have it, the United Kingdom (UK) would subsequently, by way of referendum, decide to exit the European Union. It was an exit that subsequently came to be known, universally, as BREXIT – the exit of Britain from the European Union. Following the decision made in the United Kingdom to exit the European Union, the unavoidable consequence of the United Kingdom no longer being a party to the EU-CARIFORUM Economic Partnership Agreement resulted in negotiations and discussions between the UK and the CARIFORUM Member States. This led, eventually, to the concluding of a UK-CARIFORUM Economic Partnership Agreement. That Agreement was concluded on 22nd March, 2019 and Guyana signed on to that Agreement. Having signed on to that Agreement, my predecessor issued two Orders. The first, in November, 2019, sought to bring into force the UK-CARIFORUM Economic Partnership Agreement with effect from 1st November, 2019, apparently with the expectation that BREXIT would have been concluded and effected on that date.

Of course, events in the United Kingdom had by then moved on, and the United Kingdom continued to be a member of the European Union until its eventual exit at midnight on 31st December, 2020. During that period, recognising that the commencement date of 1st November, 2019 was no longer applicable, my predecessor issued a second Order on 11th December, 2019, repealing the previous Order which, as I said earlier, had an effective date of 1st November. This indicated that the new Order would come into operation on the date on which the United Kingdom exited BREXIT.

Under the provisions of sections 8 and 9 of the Customs Act, that Order would ordinarily have been required to be confirmed in this National Assembly, as the current Order is required to be confirmed. But as domestic events would have it, the National Assembly did not sit after that date. Sometime around that time, I believe towards the end of 2019, if I am not mistaken, that Parliament was dissolved. This, of course, led to the 2020 Elections which, as a consequence, led to the automatic expiration of the second Order issued by my predecessor. It therefore became necessary for a new Order to be issued with an effective date matching the effective date of the UK's exit from the European Union, in order to bring into force the provisions of the said UK-CARIFORUM Agreement.

I, therefore, Sir, had the privilege of issuing this Order, which I did, like I said, on 30th December. The effect of this Order is to enshrine into our domestic legislation the provisions of the UK-CARIFORUM Agreement that had been signed in March, 2019.

6.29 p.m.

That Agreement preserves a number of trade opportunities which were previously enjoyed under the European Union Agreement and would now be enjoyed under the United Kingdom Agreement. These included access to the UK market for our rice exports, sugar exports and other products under the preferential arrangements that had originally been contained in the CARIFORUM Agreement with the European Union and which now have preserved in the UK Agreement.

This Agreement is important and the coming into force of these provisions and the preservation of these conditions is important because the United Kingdom is an extremely valued bilateral partner and an extremely valued trade partner. We have significant trade with the UK and we export several products. The UK continues to be an important market for our sugar. The UK is an extremely important market for our rice, particularly cargo rice. We also export significant volumes and values of rum to the UK. Other products that we export to the UK include wood and gold. In order to ensure the producers in these sectors continue to enjoy uninterrupted access to the UK market, we have issued this Order. We see this as an important step to ensure that these sectors continue to enjoy markets for their products. We remain closely engaged with the UK on the subject of continued and potentially enhanced access to its market so that our domestic producers can continue to find welcoming markets for our products.

We do, of course, the same with all our bilateral partners, as we work actively to ensure that the productive sector of Guyana finds lucrative markets that, ultimately, will contribute to export earnings, to the economy as a whole and earnings for our producers, whether they be in the agricultural sector or other sectors of the economy. This is all within the context of our agenda for expanded economic activity; our agenda for accelerated economic growth; our agenda for promoting improved incomes and livelihoods for all the people of Guyana; and, ultimately, our agenda for improving the wellbeing of all Guyanese people. That is the background against which this Order was concluded. Given that the Order seeks to bring into force an agreement concluded in March, 2019, I do not expect any degree of contention but expect, instead, that the confirmation of the Order will enjoy the unanimous support of this honourable House.

Once again, before I resume my seat, might I say that it is very sad that a matter that is so critical as access to the UK market for our sugar, rice and rum producers, could not enjoy the benefit of unanimous support of the House because our friends on the opposite side elected not to see this matter as being one of sufficient importance for them to be here to add their voices to it.

Be that as it may, this House and the people of Guyana can be assured that the Order will enjoy strong and immediate support from this side of the House. I hope that the representatives on the other side of the House will equally support the motion to confirm this Order.

With those brief words, I commend this motion to the House seeking to confirm this Order and I recommend its swift passage. Thank you very much.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, for the record, I wholeheartedly, and in keeping with the ethos of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), support this.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance.

Motion is proposed.

Our next speaker, the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Hugh Todd, will be joining us *via* Zoom.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Deputy Speaker, if Minister Todd is not online, may I suggest, with your permission, that we move on with the next speaker?

Mr. Todd is apparently online.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, I ask that you bear with us for a few moments. We are having some technical difficulties. I see Minister Hugh Todd is on; it is just to bring him on screen. Hon. Members, it seems as though we are having quite a bit of technical difficulties with Minister Hugh Todd's connection. We will proceed with the next speaker, the Hon. Oneidge Walrond.

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce [Ms. Walrond]: I rise in support of my Hon. Colleague, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, who has brought this motion to confirm Order No. 82 of 2020.

We trust that this Order, which merely seeks to take account of geo-political realities outside of our control, will be supported on both sides of this honourable House, given its obvious benefits to our country. Of course, our Hon. Colleagues on the other side are absent, to which my Colleague Minister has alluded.

We know that the people of the United Kingdom voted to exit the European Union in June, 2016. The ensuing process culminated with the UK's official withdrawal on 31st January, 2020. Thus, we needed to make arrangements for continued preferential access to what remains a very significant market for our products. I should also add that this is access to the market of a valued and valuable bilateral partner, which has been associated with us for all of our existence as a nation and before.

What this Order, issued by my Hon. Colleague, does is simply maintain the status quo in terms of our trade access to the United Kingdom on their exit from the European Union, by including an agreement that was struck between CARFORUM and the United Kingdom, which substantively replicates the benefits conferred on the CARIFORUM States under the EU-CARIFORUM Economic Partnership Agreement.

Lest we forget, these benefits include preferential access for exports from the Caribbean, including duty-free and quota-free access for Guyana's exports, now including rice and sugar. They also

include access to a wide range of import commodities from the EU, which can serve to reduce production costs for Guyanese products.

Also included, are commitments to the removal of technical barriers to trade, especially on the vexed question of sanitary and phytosanitary measures, which remain a significant barrier to our ability to export our agricultural products.

It would be remiss of me if I did not point out that the agreement, which we have entered into by virtue of this Order, includes provisions on the regulatory framework and cooperation in key sectors, including tourism and e-commerce.

To quantify in some measure the impact of this Order, I know that, despite the fact that exports to the UK have declined significantly in recent years, as a proportion of exports into the European Union, the UK remains strategic for us here in Guyana, since our total exports to the United Kingdom are on the order of \$10.1 billion per annum. Included in these export products are sugar and its associated product, alcohol. We note, further, that 99% of our sugar still goes to the United Kingdom as well as almost 70% of our alcohol exports. Apart from sugar and alcohol, in recent years, our rice exports to the UK increased from \$15 million, in 2017, to almost \$1 billion in 2019.

Given the range of benefits in the dollar value in external trade that I have outlined in this short presentation, the strategic imperative of maintaining this market ought to be self-evident. Thus, I lend my voice in support of this motion.

[The Deputy Speaker left the Chair.]

[Mr. Speaker assumed the Chair.]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, the Hon. Oneidge Walrond. Are we still trying to get Minister Todd?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, my apologies. Mr. Todd has asked to step down as a speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister.

Dr. Singh: I wish to move that this National Assembly, in accordance with sections 8 and 9 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01 of the Laws of Guyana, confirm the Customs Amendment at First

Schedule, Order No. 3 of 2020 and Order No. 82 of 2020. It was made on 30th December, 2020 under section 8 of the Customs Act, Chapter 82:01 of the Laws of Guyana, and published in the *Official Gazette*, dated 30th December 2020.

Motion put and carried.

6.44 p.m.

Confirmation of the Public Loan (Increasing of Limit) Order 2021 – No. 2 of 2021

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly, in accordance with Section 2(2) of the Public Loans Act, Chapter 74:13, confirm the Public Loans (Increasing of Limit) Order 2021 (No. 2 of 2021) which was made on 27th January, 2021, under Section 2(1) of the Public Loans Act, Chapter 74:13 and published in the Official Gazette dated 27th January, 2021.

[Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance]

Dr. Singh: We have before us two Orders relating to the ceilings that are prescribed on the level of borrowing, domestic and external, respectively, that we can contract as the State of Guyana. The first is the Confirmation of the Public Loan (Increasing of Limit) Order 2021 – No. 2 of 2021 and the second is the Confirmation of the External Loans (Increasing of Limit) Order 2021 – No. 3 of 2021.

Because the subject matter of these two Orders is so closely related, with my current presentation, I will offer remarks that could be considered directly relevant to both Orders, with the intention that, once the first one is put to the House, the second can be proceeded therewith immediately thereafter.

The Confirmation of the Public Loan (Increasing of Limit) Order 2021 is an Order that is made under the Public Loan Act, which is an Act that prescribes the limit of public loans that can be contracted in Guyana, that is to say, the level of domestic debt that could be undertaken or assumed by the State. We are seeking, in this Order, to increase the limit from its current level, which is \$150 billion, to \$500 billion.

The second motion relates to the External Loans Act. In this case, the current limit is \$400 billion. We are seeking to revise that limit to \$650 billion. The background to these two Orders is as follows: successive Parliaments have enshrined in law limits that apply to the level of debt that could be contracted with the aim and objective of ensuring that we do not contract excessive or unsustainable levels of debt. From time to time over history, these limits have been revised to accommodate the prevailing economic realities of the country.

When we assumed Office in August, 2020, we embarked on an effort to take stock of the state of the public finances. In doing so, one of the first and most striking realities that we discovered was that the Government had accumulated debt beyond the domestic debt that had been publicly reported, and a number of other liabilities and indebtedness, including a net overdraft which, at the time, exceeded \$90 billion, at the central bank. I will come back to why I emphasised net overdraft. A net overdraft means that when one takes the aggregate of all of government's bank accounts and offsets the overdraft by positive balances that might exist in other government's bank accounts, there was a net overdraft that was approaching \$100 billion. If one were, in fact, not to net off the overdraft with the positive balances, the overdraft was considerably higher – in excess of \$100 billion.

If one takes account of other obligations, including commitments that have been entered into, payments that had been issued but had not yet been processed and contracts and other undertakings that had been assumed, the accumulated indebtedness was considerably higher. If one adds, on top of that, contingent liabilities that had been assumed by the State, that is to say, borrowing contracted by other entities for which the State was either explicitly or implicitly exposed, whether by way of Government's guarantee or otherwise, that accumulated to additional billions of dollars.

I will give one example. The now well-known National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) bonds that were issued for the purposes of raising financing, ostensibly for GuySuCo, accumulated to \$30 billion. I say ostensibly because we are yet to discover what that financing was actually used for. Of the \$30 billion, \$17 billion had been drawn down, for which there is limited or no capacity to repay, and for which the State has a binding obligation to honour as a result of a guarantee. It was an unconditional and binding guarantee that was given by the treasury. That is another \$17 billion.

If the overdraft had not been accumulated at the Central Bank, but had been financed by domestic borrowing instead, as would have been required by the normal course of things; if in fact the Government's guarantee had not been issued, but the debt had been contracted as Government's debt instead and if this device of an off balance sheet borrowing transaction shifting it off of the Government's balance sheet, but supporting it was a Government's guarantee making it a contingent liability, had not been used, but the liability had been contracted directly by the State instead, we would have seen the ceiling of \$150 billion, which was the ceiling in force at the time that, breached.

One can only speculate as to why these transactions were treated and classified in the manner that they were, and one can only speculate why the decision was taken to shift this borrowing off of the balance sheet of the State. What we do know is it had the effect of avoiding being counted within the ceiling. One could only speculate why, instead of contracting borrowing to finance the deficit, the State took the opportunity to simply accumulate an unauthorised overdraft at the central bank which, incidentally, the country was cautioned against, and I will come back to that.

Had these transactions been reflected in the way that good practice requires them to be reflected, the ceiling would have been breached. On top of that, we came into Government and discovered that vast liabilities had been accumulated, artificially causing the fiscal deficit to have the appearance of being lower than it actually was. To give you an example: instead of the Government honouring its electricity bills to the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL), which would have widened the fiscal deficit and necessitated additional domestic borrowing or additional borrowing to finance that deficit, the treasury took the reckless course of action of not honouring its electricity obligations. At the time the APNU/AFC Government demitted Office, the treasury owed the GPL Inc. a staggering \$12 billion. This was with obvious and direct consequences for liquidity at that company; with obvious and immediate consequences to that company's ability to meet its own obligations, including critical maintenance of its equipment – its generating plant in particular – and its transmission lines; and with immediate and direct consequences for the company's ability to invest in its capital expansion programme.

The debt was simply accumulated. The State simply refused to pay the GPL Inc., damaging, severely, the company's financial position while, at the same time, avoiding an accurate reflection of the fiscal deficit and avoiding the incurrence of an additional \$12 billion of debt. The list goes

on. As the days go by, we have unearthed more and more and additional and additional layers upon layers of debt, of other liabilities, of other obligations and of other commitments undertaken by the State, all summing to a completely parlous State of the public finances.

We, therefore, have, first of all, to regularise that. It would be recalled that we came to this National Assembly, not so long ago, and sought approval of an amount of \$6 billion to start to pay off the Government's debt to the GPL Inc. That is an immediate call on the public treasury. It has immediate impact on the fiscal deficit, and it has immediate impact on the borrowing requirements of the State. The company is cash strapped. It has supplied electricity to a wide range of State agencies and it should, quite rightly and correctly, be paid. We have now the matter of this staggering overdraft which, like I said, exceeded \$100 billion when one takes into account all of the obligations, not just the bank balance at the time that we assumed Office, but all of the other obligations, and when one adjusts for the fact that one really should be looking at the gross overdraft and not the net overdraft after offsetting the positive balances in other Government bank accounts. That matter now needs to be regularised.

In addition to that, we have, of course, outlined a development agenda that is intended to bring relief to the people of Guyana, who have been suffering for the past five years due to the consequences of bad economic policy, unconscionable economic policy and adjustments to punitive taxes.

6.59 p.m.

This honourable House would recall that *Budget 2020* immediately moved to lift many of the punitive and unconscionable taxes that were placed on the backs of the people of Guyana, to implement interventions aimed at restarting the economy which was reflecting the toll – the policies of the past five year – of the events that transpired in Guyana between March and August of 2020 and the devastation of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). All of these interventions have to be implemented as a matter of immediate urgency. Sir, on top of that you know that we have committed to the people of Guyana, an agenda for the transformation of our country as outlined in our manifesto, which constitutes our contract with the people of Guyana and on the basis of which we were elected to Office. Those interventions will need to be financed for which purposes, unavoidably, new borrowing will have to be contracted.

It is against that background that we have moved and are now proposing to increase the ceilings that apply to both the domestic and external debt ceilings. I might add that these ceilings were last adjusted almost 30 years ago. In the case of the domestic debt ceiling, it was last adjusted in 1994. In the case of the external debt ceiling, it was last adjusted in 1991. If I may point out that, given our Government's strong track record as it relates to sound and prudent fiscal and debt management, a track record which we would always jealously guard, we ensured that we have set the ceilings at levels that would ensure continued fiscal and debt sustainability, given that we have worked so hard to achieve fiscal and debt sustainability during our previous time in Office.

This House would recall that, when we assumed Office in 1992, Guyana's public debt exceeded our gross domestic product (GDP) for the size of the economy, many times over. In fact, our public debt as a percentage of GDP was approaching 600%. By the time we demitted Office in 2015, that ratio had declined to under 40%. It had actually declined to 36%. We did so by careful and conscious management of public moneys, and by ensuring prudent borrowing and careful investments of the proceeds of our borrowing to assure that the economy would grow in a manner that ensured our level of borrowing was consistent with sustainability. This meant, in other words, that we were in a position where we were borrowing at a level that was affordable. That is what we achieved the last time we were in Office, having inherited a country in a state of total bankruptcy and restoring it to a state of solvency. At the time we came into Office, Guyana was not credit worthy. Very few partners or institutions were willing to lend us but, by the time we left Office that situation had changed completely. We were, once again, a creditworthy country.

In 1994, when the domestic debt ceiling was last set, it was set at \$150 billion. That amounted to 199% of GDP. That was the level of debt we had inherited and that was the level at which the ceiling needed to be set in order to accommodate the inherited debt and to accommodate the financing required to repair the damage that had been done to the economy. At that time, the ceiling for domestic debt was \$150 billion, which was the equivalent of 199 – one can say 200% of GDP.

We are proposing, now, a domestic debt ceiling of \$500 billion. I hasten to point out that it represents just 53% of our GDP as compared, like I said, to 199% of GDP the last time the ceiling was set. Today, we are proposing to set the ceiling at just about 53% of GDP and I emphasise that it is non-oil GDP. That gives you, Sir, a sense of how seriously we take our responsibilities with ensuring that we cap the level of debt that we are contracting at a level that will remain affordable.

Similarly, as it relates to our external debt ceiling, this ceiling was last set in 1991 by our then predecessors in Office and it was set at a level that was needed to accommodate the staggering and unsustainable level of debt that they had contracted by 1991. The level, at that time, was \$400 billion. I might add that \$400 billion amounted to the equivalent of 584% of GDP. That was the level of the external debt ceiling that was set in 1991. We are proposing, today, to set the ceiling at \$650 billion. It would interest this honourable House to know that it represents less than 30%, in fact, a mere 29.9% of GDP – I hasten to add that it is non-oil GDP.

In contrast, in 1991, the debt ceiling was set at 584% of GDP. Today, we are proposing to set the external debt ceiling at less than 30% of GDP. It is very conservative, reflecting the seriousness, as I said earlier, with which we take issues related to debt sustainability.

It is particularly interesting to not only look at the level of the ceiling relative to the size of the economy. We all, in our own homes at one time or another, have contracted debt and, of course, in accessing debt, we might wish to consider how much debt we are contracting relative to how much wealth we have. We might also wish to compare how much debt we are contracting relative to how much income we are earning. If I may, in addition to the striking comparison to where our proposed debt ceilings are relative to the size of the economy, I would also wish to share some numbers as they relate to the level of the proposed debt ceiling relative to the level of Government revenue. If one were to contract all of this debt, it gives an idea of how many years of Government revenue it would take to pay off all of that debt. Of course, these are ceilings that we are prescribing. They are not debts that we are contracting immediately. They are ceilings that we are contracting to accommodate future borrowing.

Let us examine for a moment the domestic debt ceiling. In 1994 when the debt ceiling was set at \$150 billion, it was comprised more than six times the total revenue – 6.34 times the total annual revenue of the State of Guyana. The proposed debt ceiling of \$500 billion that we are now moving to introduce, represents a mere 2.19% of Government current revenue, today. Compare and contrast that, in 1994, had the ceiling been fully utilised, it would have taken a full six years of Government revenue – doing nothing else – to discharge that obligation. Today, if the entire ceiling were to be utilised, it would take just over two years to discharge that obligation.

Similarly, an even more striking comparison is to be had when one looks at external debt. In 1991, when the external debt ceiling was last revised and set at \$400 billion, that ceiling amounted to 33.83 times of Government revenue. Sir, indeed, that ceiling was almost fully utilised, and you would recall, in fact, how much debt had been accumulated by 1991. This means that it would have taken 33 years of devoting all of Government's current revenue in order to pay off that level of indebtedness. The proposed external debt ceiling of \$650 billion, which we now bring before this honourable House, represents a mere 2.85 times Government current revenue. Consider, for a moment, that comparison. It is 2.85 times when compared to 33.83 times, in 1991.

I have taken this time to elaborate on this matter to really make the point that these adjustments, notwithstanding that they are necessitated, are made necessary to address the tremendous level of indebtedness that we have assumed. Notwithstanding that we have ambitious plans for development, these ceilings have been set at an extremely prudent and responsible level. I wish to emphasise that point. Suffice to say that this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government remains enduringly proud of our outstanding track record in repairing the economy the last time we were in Office. We remain enduringly proud of the fact that we came into Government to meet a State in bankruptcy and restored it to a State of creditworthiness and credibility. [**An Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*] That is correct.

We stand by that track record and we guard it very protectively and very jealously. We assure this honourable House that the new debt ceilings are, in fact, very prudent.

7.14 p.m.

They assure that we will be able to make the investments that are needed to realise the levels of growth to which we aspire, to repair the deep and scarring damage that was done to the economy and to ensure that we could return to a trajectory of positive economic growth and improvement for the wellbeing of all the people of Guyana.

Against that background, it is my privilege to commend both of these Orders. I will, if necessary, speak on the second Order, at the appropriate time, that is to say the External Loans Act. I trust that, depending on how the debate goes, it would not be necessary to repeat any of these arguments.

I now move and I commend to this House, firstly, the Public Loan (Increasing of Limit) Order 2021 – No. 2 of 2021. I hope that our Friends, on the opposite side of the House, will recognise and take responsibility for the damage that they have done and for the level of indebtedness that they have left. I hope that they will take responsibility and support this Order to facilitate the damage that they did to this economy. With these words, I commend the Order to the House and will, at the appropriate time, move the motion, formally, for its adoption.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Minister. I have on my list of speakers, the Hon. Hemraj Rajkumar. He is online and he said that he is ceding to the next speaker.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, I understand that he is having some difficulties. We should move on.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan. The next speaker on my list is the Hon. Member, Mr. Sanjeev Datadin.

Mr. Datadin: Mr. Speaker, I rise to support the motions so that the debt ceiling for our local, domestic and foreign debts can be increased.

The local debts, like everything else, is governed by statute. Section 2 (2) of the Public Loans Act demarcates how much debt our Government is entitled to carry. It is important to note that the last time this figure was fixed, as the Hon. Senior Minister pointed out, was in 1994. At that time, it was set at a \$150 billion. Guyana was a very different place then and it had a very different economy.

Our external debt, which is also governed by statute – the External Loans Act, is also being increased. Again, this is because Guyana is now a different place. The proposed amendments are simple and uncomplicated. We need to have a higher debt ceiling so that the Government could conduct its business in a way and in a manner that is acceptable, so that delivery of services to the nation is possible.

This, respectfully, should suffer no resistance in this Parliament. There should be no resistance to the Government being able to fund the projects that it has been mandated to do. We had a

manifesto, and a manifesto gives a mandate. The mandate is to deliver on those promises in the manifesto. For those promises to be delivered, we have found ourselves in the position that we are forced to come to this Parliament to increase the debt ceiling. The prospects of our country are at stake. Why do we have to increase the debt ceiling? Well, the people have already paid for the gold bands and the jewellery and, in return, they have not received any services. We have civil servants, who should be doing their work, sitting in the House. Somebody has to pay to get the work done. No right-thinking Guyanese would accept that \$93 billion of debt, which was left by the last Administration, would provide sufficient room for any nation, anywhere, with a debt ceiling of \$150 billion, to do anything. There were promises and they are programmes in the last Budget, as well. Those have to be met.

Mr. Speaker, I would just, briefly avert your attention to the *Statista Website* that keeps all economic statistics. Guyana is expected to achieve or the projected foreign investment in Guyana in the next two years is approximately US\$1.29 billion. It is also projected that, for those investments to bear fruit, the Government of Guyana (GOG) has got to be able to provide services to the nation at a different level. On 16th October, 2020, the National Association of Securities Dealer Automated Quotation system (NASDAQ) published that Guyana is the fastest growing economy in the world, notwithstanding the effects of COVID. Our newly found, well at least newly in the process of new development because nothing happened from 2015... projects growth for Guyana at 26.2%. We all know that the local media has been publishing figures of projected growth of 51% at the highest and 38% at the lowest. Economists may disagree with the percentage of growth but, rest assured, there is no doubt that there will be growth.

The Government of the day must be in a position to not only support growth of the petroleum sector. It has to look after all of the farmers, all of the persons in agriculture and all of the persons who are struggling to find a job and employers who are unable to keep staff because of COVID. These are the realities that every Guyanese know. What does this Order seek to do? This Order seeks to have the Government, in its next budget, be able to pay for all of which is required. Governments have obligations but, if there is a debt ceiling, one must also obey the law. The Senior Minister in the Ministry of the Presidency with Responsibility for Finance has outlined, in great and painful detail, how little regard the Members in the Opposition, when they were in Government, had for statutes and their meaning. The world witnessed the interpretation of our

Constitution which, as the Senior Minister pointed out earlier is written in English and we all speak it, was such a difficult road.

As a nation, we have just over \$50 billion left in our reserves. It was reported, in 2015, that the accounts were \$18 billion in the positive. As of 2nd August, 2020, it was \$93 billion in the negative. If we do not raise the ceiling, how are we going to fund, how are we going to finance and how is the Government going to meet its obligations to the people of Guyana?

We know that the Opposition has continuously asked, publicly, not yet in this House, why. Building on credit is not new and it is not novel. Guyana's credibility to carry debt has improved. Guyana's ability to provide services to its people is improving but we always have the aged old question: How do we fund development while, at the same time, taking into consideration what we could afford?

Now, in 1994, when the economy was what it was, we could not have afforded much more than \$150 billion in debt. We would not have been, and we would have struggled with more debts. We could not have progressed out of that situation the way we did. We are now doing better. We are a growing economy. The fastest or, at least percentage wise, the highest growing economy in the world. We are now more credit worthy than we were before. Institution and entities such as the world financial institutions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and nations, also, are prepared to enter into bi-lateral arrangements for funding to be accessed, so that programmes could be undertaken for the people of Guyana to benefit. At the same time, we cannot take on more than we should. We must have projections. Considering that we have inherited \$93 billion of debt, we are, essentially, moving \$100 million out of that \$500 billion, to which we would like to raise the ceiling, to clean up the mess of the previous Administration. We have to own it. We did not create it. Responsible governance dictates that we address it and we find ways to provide services to the people of Guyana, despite the poor financial practices of the APNU/AFC Government.

7.29 p.m.

This increase will allow the Government to provide the services that it so desperately must. It will allow the Government to fulfil its obligations to the people of Guyana. When a mandate is given, in simple terms, it creates a contract between the people and the government. The Government has

promised, in its manifesto, that it will do certain things for the people. It is an obligation on the part of the Government that, when the people adopted its manifesto at the ballot box, this is what they want.

Now, what must take place is that the Government, as part of that contract, must fulfil its obligations. To fulfil the obligations, we must have access to funds. We must have access to the necessary funds so that those obligations are fulfilled. Our circumstances and prospects are what determine our creditability. For example, the debt ceiling could be raised to a number or a figure to which no one will reasonably lend moneys anymore. It is like, out of the state of a country, and one looks at personal transactions, if one goes to the bank and seeks financing for something and does not have collaterals to provide, or are not earning sufficiently, then the bank will not give the funds that she or she requires. One has to be realistic. I, respectfully, commend to you that this is realistic. The prospects and circumstances of Guyana are excellent. Our ability to now carry it and our ability to now manage that debt is here. We have the unenviable task, but it is our obligation. We have to clean up the mess from before and we have to also fuel growth. These are two central tenets of why an increase in the debt ceiling is require.

In closing, I endorse the words of the Hon. Member Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh. This is a landmark move by the PPP/C Government to regularise and accurately reflect the significant liabilities accumulated over the past five years and to harness Guyana's debt carrying capacity to finance the Government's transformative development agenda.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin. The next person I have one my list is, the Hon. Member, Mr. Shurwayne Holder.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to explain to this House and the nation why I cannot and will not support this motion. First, I would like to address the last speaker, the Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin. I am sure that I heard him state that the reason they have to raise the public debts ceiling is because the people had to pay for gold bands. The sum of \$260,000 for gold band is small change [**Bishop Edghill:** It is not (*inaudible*)] Yes, Hon. Member, it is small change when compared to what some Hon. Ministers of this PPP/C Government received: dentures at the price

of an Allion motorcar, law books worth over \$2 million that were stolen and lands to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars which were undervalued. This Government, including the Hon. Member, Bishop Juan Edghill, who has just sounded his voice, has no moral authority. I repeat, it has no moral authority to speak on this issue.

In recent years, Guyana has been assessed to have medium debt carrying capacity. Based on the 2019 *World Economic Outlook* (WEO) macroeconomic framework, the country's composite indicator (CI) score was 3.01, the range being 2.69 to 3.05 for medium rated countries. Guyana has substantial space to absorb shocks, we understand this, reflecting on the current low level of external debt. I must point out that the country's risk of external and overall debt distress remained moderate for the past five years under the APNU/AFC Government.

However, while the country's debt dynamics improved, significantly, it remains vulnerable under the standardised stress tests. As it is now, the debt indicators remain well below their respective vulnerability threshold and it is forecasted to remain so for a projected period of the next 10 years. This is a period dubbed by the Former President, Mr. Granger, as the 'Decade of Development'. I am happy that the Hon. Minister, in his presentation, acknowledged that.

The present value of our external debt to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio is projected to decline from 22% to about 3% as the need for external borrowing is eliminated by the accumulation of the external assets. Prudent fiscal policies implemented by the APNU/AFC Government, over the years, helped to reduce the overall public debt [**Mr. Hamilton:** *(Inaudible)*] If you listen, you might learn something. Prudent fiscal policies implemented by the previous Administration helped to reduce the overall public debt ratio. In 2019, it was down to about 44.2% from the 2008 figure of 61.2% under the Dr. Jagdeo led PPP/C Government. I must add that a very small section of society believed that the Hon. Member, Dr. Jagdeo was some sort of an economic wizard. The facts on his record and that of the PPP/C proved quite the opposite.

The standardised stress tests indicate that Guyana's public debt ratio, as I mentioned before, is vulnerable to extreme shock, which combines simultaneous shock to real GDP growth, primary balance, exports, other flows and nominal exchange rate depreciation. Fluctuation in global commodity prices and capital flows could put pressure on the domestic economy. It, therefore,

highlights the importance of structural reform to diversify and strengthen the domestic economy and to reduce our over dependence on oil which could exacerbate economic growth volatilities.

To improve public financial management, the Government needs to understand that it must adapt rigorous project selection and prioritisation and costing criteria that will inform multiyear budgeting. Also, mechanisms have to be put in place to ensure fiscal transparency. That is something that has been, noticeably, absent since this Government was installed six months ago. These were initiatives taken by the David Granger-led Administration that changed the way Guyana dealt with its public debt, thus, bringing it down to one of the lowest in the entire Caribbean according to the United Nations Economic Commission 2019 survey.

While the PPP/C, in Opposition, was running around the country brainwashing the public about how poorly the APNU/AFC Government was managing the economy in terms of our public debt, international agencies were busy conducting surveys which concluded that the APNU/AFC Government was actually handling the public debt in the most prudent manner.

During the period of 2010 to 2014, our external debt, fuelled by excessive level of borrowing, raised many eyebrows in the financial and economic community. The then Dr. Jagdeo-led Government aided and abetted in this. The very Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, whatever that means, did not heed to the many warnings and criticisms they received. The APNU/AFC Government, after coming into power in 2015, listened to the sound advice of these Economists and worked hard to reduce the public debt to an acceptable level and ensured that it remain sustainable.

I will tell you what we did. Under the Public Debt Management Capacity Building Programme (PDP) Strategic Country plan for Guyana, the country had made notable progress in areas of debt management. Those are the facts.

Listen, the APNU/AFC Government formulated a National Sustainable Funding Strategy Workshop as soon as it took Office in 2015, inclusive of a Debt Sustainability Analysis (DSA) and public debt strategy, which were clearly absent prior to 2015.

Then, in 2016, the APNU/AFC Government launched a National Workshop on Debt Management Self-Assessment and Improvement using the World Bank Debt Management Performance

Assessment Methodology. These were all clear indicators of the APNU/AFC Government's efforts to raise the bar in the management of public finance.

7.44 p.m.

All of that is not being tossed through the window by this installed PPP/C Administration. The PPP/C Government's predisposition for irresponsible borrowing and absence of a demonstrated debt policy are worrying signs that Parliamentarians on both sides of the House should consider before approving this Bill.

From the time the PPP/C was installed in Office, they began a flurry of borrowing from every conceivable creditor they could find. In the first three months of this fraudulent Government, it has borrowed more than US\$180 million. The disbursement of which leaves many questions unanswered.

Coincidentally, that is roughly the amount of revenue oil that was expected to be delivered in 2020. It is quite evident that this Government is definitely counting its chickens before they are hatched. Clearly heading straight for the Dutch oil disease that destroyed so many oil-rich nations around the globe. It comes as absolutely no surprise Hon. Joseph Hamilton, that this carefree PPP/C Government would bring a Bill and attempt to force its approval *via* their one-seat plus one majority to effectively give them the full licence to continue on this dangerous borrowing spree.

Mr. Speaker, you will recall the last time the PPP/C attempted to increase the public debt, it was around 2013, to allow for the Amalia Falls Hydropower Project. That Project, we all know how that turned out. That Project turned out to be a national embarrassment for the PPP/C Administration. From the beginning, there was a lack of transparency; from the shady selection of a contractor, a contractor who never built a simple driveway, to the doubling of the project cost. That came just after the white elephant Skeldon Estate Factory that, up to present day, still cannot produce one pound of sugar at a cost that will be profitable.

Coupled with some other failed projects like the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) Expansion Project which still has Guyana in a vortex of never-ending expenses, that is your record. I must say that nothing is wrong with increasing the debt ceiling, but for what is the troubling question. This Government has failed to properly explain to this nation why it wants to increase

the public debt ceiling. Not by 10% or 20%, but by more than 233%. From \$150 billion to \$500 billion. Why is the question? This Government has not explained properly why it intends to reverse all the gains made by the APNU/AFC Administration in terms of the external debt management and our plan to reduce the debts. You have not explained that. Under the APNU/AFC plan, over a period of time, external financing would not be required, as capital and current expenditures would be met by both oil revenues and non-oil revenues. Instead, this Government is seeking to borrow loans to once again finance failed projects like the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and the Amalia Falls Hydropower Project, which will continue to be a liability, devouring moneys from the public purse and returning Guyana to the state of being a highly indebted poor country.

If this Bill, which the PPP/C is proposing, to increase the public debt by over 233% is approved, then we would be laying the foundation for a great burden that our children and grandchildren would have to repay. Those are worrying signs. The future generation will have to either pay extremely high taxes or experience significant backward movement of essential sectors like education and health. That dream of the ‘good life’, which the APNU/AFC proposed, will not be realised for decades upon decades to come. Given this Government’s track record, especially over the last six months, it would be impossible for me or any of the Opposition Members to support this Bill. I urge every right-thinking Parliamentarian in this House to not support it as well including those on the Government’s side. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member Mr. Holder. I now turn to invite the Hon. Minister in the Ministry of Public Works, the Hon. Deodat Indar.

Mr. Ramjattan: I just wanted to interrupt. Are we are not having a break? I just wanted to know because, I have noticed that, normally, at 7 o’clock... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please allow the Hon. Member to interject. There will be no break Hon. Member. We took the break at 4 o’clock and, normally, we would end at 8 o’ clock. Someone may have to move the amendment of the Standing Order.

Hon. Prime Minister, would you want to move an amendment to the Standing Order so that we could proceed beyond 8 o’clock? Hon. Member, Mr. Deodat Indar, I do not want to interrupt you so let us move the Standing Order.

Suspension of Standing Order No. 11

Be it Resolved:

“That Standing Order No. 11 be suspended to enable this sitting of the National Assembly to continue with its business beyond 8.00 p.m.”

[Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, I seek the extension of time for us to conclude our business.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Minister in the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]: I rise to support the Order made by Dr. Ashni Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. The first order is with respect to the Public Loan Act and the extension of the limit from \$150 billion to \$500 billion. I rise to support the second motion, the External Loan Act, and the extension of the limit from \$400 billion to \$650 billion – all in Guyanese currency.

We have to ask ourselves; how did we arrive here? I just listened to the Hon. Member Holder, who seems to be reading from a script and I do not think he actually understood what he was saying. I am saying to you, there is no script on this side of the House. There are just these papers that were circulated. I will show you how it is that you are grossly incorrect.

The first thing is, if one looks at the year 2019, in the 2019 Report by the Bank of Guyana, under your Government, the APNU/AFC, if you go to page 89 of that report that was published by the Bank of Guyana, given to the then Minister of Finance and check under current liabilities, one will see a figure in brackets, \$70 billion. The reason for that \$70 billion – right next to it states Government of Guyana, it means that the central Government owes the Bank of Guyana \$70 billion. That was at the end of 2019.

In that same report, one will see that domestic debt was recorded at \$79.7 billion. That was at 2019. Moving to September, 2020, the couple months that you all were in Office after the elections

and so on, that figure for domestic borrowing went up to \$88 billion. If one checks the statistics that come out from the Ministry of Finance, the Hon. Member Mr. Sanjeev Datadin and the Hon. Dr. Singh spoke about the overdraft at the Bank of Guyana reaching \$93 billion. If one adds the simple mathematics of the \$88 billion on the books, the uncleared amount, and the overdraft of \$93 billion, it takes us to \$181 billion. Right now, based on the law, and the law is in this purple book that I picked up from down there, if one checks it, the limit is \$150 billion. Right away, you already breached the law. You cannot say in this House that there is space, when the Government that you ran, ran up the debt, some on the books and some off the books, and it breached the existing law.

Here is it that the Minister of Finance has brought to this House the remedy to fix the mischief that you all did, and you all are saying that you cannot support it. This that you have done by racking up spending all the time, not clearing it and paying back the Bank of Guyana – clearing the debt – has caused trouble.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF), in its report, mentioned this: that the moneys showing up at the Bank of Guyana is in a credit. You do not have in liabilities a figure in brackets. What it does is squeeze the asset base of the bank. In 2019, under your Government, it was around \$230 billion. How did we arrive there? It was your collective decision-making that put us there - the entire Government, under former President David Granger, every single person that was part of the last Cabinet. This is because had to have known that the size of the budget and your spending for the past five years was far outstripping the speed of the income generation of the country. What you have done is, rack up debt and we now have to fix it. That is the long and short of it.

I am speaking to not just the Members of this House, I am speaking to every single man, woman and child that is listening. If the APNU/AFC Members of this House come to this House and say that they did not rack up this debt, just go to the Bank of Guyana's website right now, click on 2019 Annual Report, look for page 89 and you will see the number there.

7.59 p.m.

There is no lie. There is no skirting of the facts. There is no political grandstanding as the Hon. Member just stood up and said. I believe, honestly, that to say that they have not racked up this kind of debt locally, is an enthusiastic corruption of the public good. That is what it is. The Hon.

Member just said that they made gains and they did not have to borrow because it was funded internally. I want to talk about that point which the Hon. Member made, that their expenditure was funded internally, meaning by taxes.

The last full year that the PPP/C Government was in Office, was 2014. At the end of that year, if you check the tax revenue, it was \$135 billion. The APNU/AFC went into Office in 2015 and was there for 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. At the end of 2019, if one checks the revenue from taxes from people and households, it went to \$226 billion. That means there was \$91 billion extra in taxes. The Government had pushed both its hands in the pockets of Guyanese. That was a 67% increase from the base year. That was a 67% increase in taxes. Ask yourselves, how much did salaries go up by? It was not by double figures. No one in this country can say that they had double figures increases in salaries, but at the same time, taxes went up by 67% within five years. How could you explain that? If you say that your spending was funded internally, you might be partially correct because you were taxing the life's blood out of people.

That is why, in the 2020 Budget, when Minister Bishop Juan Edghill presented it, there were a host of fees that we had to reduce. Minister Edghill said it in the right language, he said that you all taxed the *badam lacha* man, the *jalebi* man, the man who selling *sal sev* and the man pulling a horse drawn cart. Everybody was taxed. So, you are right. You maybe did fund it, but you funded it on the backs of Guyanese.

I want to touch on the debt. You talked about debt and stress testing. I do not know if you truly understand what that means. To find the debt burden, one simply divides the debt by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Now, there are various ways of calculating Gross Domestic Product, but there is a simple way. We call it the income method, whereby the income of the entire country is added. So, the denominator is the income and the debt is placed at the top. What has been happening to Guyana, is that the denominator is growing. If it is going to grow, it means that we are credit worthy as a country to extend the borrowing limits. We can extend the borrowing limits and that is what we are here to do. We have a developmental agenda that will require borrowing. I am saying to this honourable House that the numbers we have proposed on both of these orders, are well in keeping with the developmental agenda that we foresee as a Government. I am saying to you if... [**Mr. Holder:** (*Inaudible*) Inherit.] We inherited an overdraft. One does not inherit an overdraft.

I want to raise the issue of financing by debt. When this paper was initially introduced in this House, there were some reports in the media that spoke to it. I am saying to you that the reports were misguided. In most households and businesses, people finance cars, vacation, working capital, capital investment and anything that they can possibly find. That is why there is a financial system in a country. That is why banks make money because people borrow. Borrowing is not a new phenomenon, it is part of managing any country's financial affairs. I am saying to you that the borrowing we intend to do will be responsible. It is not borrowing to paint any building. When we borrow, we do so to spend in two areas.

What we are looking at as a Government, is that when we spend money, it gives results in two areas: social and economic formation. That is what spending goes into. We do not spend money as a Government on all those things that do not generate social or economic formation. We spend responsibly.

To repeat the words of Dr. Ashni Singh, who said earlier that the debt ratio is something that we look at as a jealous husband. It is so critical for credit worthiness. A country has to look at its debt ratio as it. We borrow for capital projects that will deliver good services to our people. Look at what we have inherited, most of the infrastructures are dilapidated. How did you build a country when you found that the resources are dilapidated? Look at what we found; all of these infrastructures are dilapidated. What we do when we go out? We take pictures and show them so there is no lie. The pictures paint a thousand words.

Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, if you look at the case study of Tanzania and how debt has managed to help the country grow to some extent; if you look at the case study of Pakistan and how debt has allowed it to grow; if you look at the case studies of Canada and China, you would see that all of them have debt as part of how way in which they raise financing to grow their countries. Guyana is no different. We are now on a transformation. We are at point in the country's history where we have to develop the country. We cannot say that we are going to be a first world country, that we are going to be the 'Dubai of South America' and then we have dilapidated infrastructure. We have to make sure that we spend money in the areas that will see benefits to our people.

I know that there is a long line of speakers after me. I would like to close my arguments by saying that these two simple measures to increase the ceilings of borrowing, both locally and for external

loans, are not unreasonable. Both of them are actually fixing the problems that we inherited. If the debt ceiling is going to be increased, it does not mean that we are going to borrow to the debt ceiling. That is another issue. Every external borrowing, under the laws, have to come to the National Assembly to be laid and debated on. There are further checks of spending. When spend money, it comes to this House and is debated upon. It then goes to the Committee of Supply and is debated down to the line items.

There is no run-away train, as somebody just said. There is no runaway train operation going on here. This is designed to fix the issues that we found when we came into Office and to remedy the situation going forward.

Mr. Speaker, I rest my case. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Minister, I have online the Hon. Member Ms. Annette Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson (Participated Virtually): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member has been online all day and I did not recognise her initially.

Just one second Hon. Members, the Clerk of the National Assembly has arranged some stuff downstairs. We would not break but you could take a break to go downstairs. Thank you very much.

Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, I am sorry, my apologies for interrupting you, go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise on behalf of the APNU/AFC to contribute to the motion on the Confirmation of the Public Loan (Increasing of limit) Order 2021 – No.2 of 2021, before the National Assembly, laid by the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh. I wish to state from the onset that we, on this side of the National Assembly, are not against development for our nation, which will indeed bring about the ‘good life’ for all. However, we question the true value of this motion since it is our belief that the PPP/C has a poor track record in development projects. Increasing this debt ceiling, will allow for many such projects now and in the future.

Mr. Speaker, previous speakers on the other side...[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, please, it is going to be difficult to hear the Hon. Member because she is not in the National Assembly. Hon. Members, Mr. Mahipaul and Minister Mc Coy, please. Hon. Member, please go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: Previous speakers on the other side made references to the claimed liabilities by the APNU/AFC. What they have failed to tell us, of which I will remind them and this honourable House, is the following. Where is the Brazil to Guyana Fibre Optic Cable that Mr. Alexei Ramotar was responsible for establishing? Where is it? Millions of taxpayers' dollars were wasted on that developmental project. Why is it that the Skeldon Sugar Factory, once herald as the saviour of the sugar industry, has never performed to the expectation? That was a waste of over \$30 billion. Why was the road to the Amaila Falls such a disaster? How many million did we waste there? Who in Guyana really believes that these so-called developmental projects the PPP/C has and will propose, will ever reach fruition?

As for the Guyana Marriott Hotel, the PPP/C, while in Office, pre-May, 2015, borrowed US\$16 million from Republic Bank Limited to fund the project with the expectations of the hotel repaying same. This was not happening when the APNU/AFC came into Office. It was placed on the central Government's books and taxpayers are currently repaying for that. The same can be said for the Colonial Life Insurance Company (CLICO). Over \$5 billion was borrowed from the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) to fund the CLICO saga. It was never repaid by CLICO. That money is now on the central Government's books of which taxpayers are the major bug bearers.

Let us abandon this illusion that the PPP/C knows anything about investing Government's moneys for development. Mr. Speaker, in the third 'AND WHEREAS CLAUSE' it states:

“AND WHEREAS the new Government has outlined an ambitious programme of development aimed at transforming Guyana and delivering improved quality of life to all Guyanese, which will require new financing including through additional external debt,”

The questions I wish to put to the mover of this motion are: Where are the feasibility studies for all these proposed projects? Why are we not seeing specifics? What is the rush? Let us have studies done, consultations held, and these projects debated on.

May I remind this honourable House that we did not have a good track record under the PPP/C before. Instead of changing our methods and looking closely at future spending, we are getting ready to waste more. Why are we not matching this with tax cuts for the hardworking average Guyanese? Surely, that would yield a better life for all. Let me make this clear, this is the people's money and not the PPP/C's money?

8.14 p.m.

It is not to be treated so casually. This money will be borrowed, poorly invested and ultimately become a debt burden for our youth.

We are in favour of development, as I alluded to earlier. But, it is very hard to see how a Government with a 23 years old record of failed national development projects would suddenly change its stripes and become some champion of progress. The only reasonable explanation we can have is that these projects will be filled with problems, budgets would be over-run, and more money would be thrown into the fire. I have not even mentioned the big word 'corruption'. Surely, any right-thinking Guyanese must be suspicious that the true reason these projects keep failing is due to some corrupt schemes.

In conclusion, we, on this side of the National Assembly, are against raising the debt ceiling, because it is almost given that we will get little from this endeavour and more tears, sorry explanations and debt on the backs of our already struggling citizens. We have seen this movie before and, frankly, the ending was disappointing as the *Game of Thrones*.

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

Mr. Narine: As we consider the motions by the Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh, to increase the public loans ceiling and foreign debt ceiling, we cannot fail to recognise what the Minister has said to this House that the adjustment we are considering today is in part attributed to the financial recklessness and fiscal irresponsibility of those who now occupy the Opposition benches.

During the life of the Coalition, it appeared that those former officials were literally gambling with the nation's purse. But, worst yet, it seems they intended, like they did when they occupied the seats of power prior to 1992, to pauperise the Guyanese people with greater hardships and heavier burdens. How else can one logically explain that the Government's balance in the central Bank

moved from \$21.4 billion, at the end of 2014, to an overdraft of some \$79 billion in August of 2020? At the same time, what is there to show for the massive expenditure? I wonder where these moneys really went and who did they benefit? Could it be that some were utilised to purchase the high-priced gifts received by my Friends on the other side? Who knows? What is known is that the ‘good life’ slogan that they preached was an *airy fairy* promise deployed to deceive and dupe the Guyanese people, while the former elites secured valuable State assets, built ivory towers, adorn themselves fancifully and put some 30,000 poor Guyanese on the road without thinking where their next meals would come from. That is their legacy.

The economic balance sheet that the Irfaan Ali Government inherited reminds me of what confronted Dr. Jagan, when he entered Office in 1992. I am convinced that the PPP/C, like it did in the past, will right the ship once again. Indeed, we owe it to this and future generations of Guyanese. Though I know the path may not be easy, the PPP/C has demonstrated that it is up to the task and we will restore the pride of all Guyanese.

I, therefore, see the increase in the debt ceiling as the first step in righting the wrongs and protecting the Guyanese people. With capable hands at the helm, we will exit the rough seas that the Coalition led us into.

In as much as the Government must correct the poor decision-making of the previous Administration, the Guyanese people yearn for development. Undoubtedly, they want to see themselves and their children’s life improving. They desire too to see the country once more, firmly on the road of progress. We too see this as a foremost responsibility. The President himself has alluded to this on more than one occasions, and we are all aware of the PPP/C’s vision to build a stronger united Guyana, where our people can enjoy the fruits of our beloved nation.

Added to that, our people deserve these developments now, not tomorrow or the day after, as it may already be late. But, as the Government seeks to meet the high expectation of our people, it requires some breathing room to bring the aspirations of our people to reality. The Government has already begun to move aggressively in this direction. We have seen several transformational projects being actively pursued to bring relief to advanced development, but most of all, make our people’s lives easier and happier. Indeed, the Government has wasted no time in seeking to make up the grounds lost over the last five years to bring about the transformation that we all require.

I could look at you in the eyes and talk. I am at a lost over the *hue and cry* emanating from the Opposition benches. It appears they seek, no matter the costs, to erect barriers to development. Why is that so? Why would they want to deny the people the development they deserve? Why are they obstructing rather than supporting progress? It is because they are not the ones who are perusing the programme. If that is really the case, it says a lot about the character and patriotism of those who occupy the Opposition benches where they belong permanently. Are they really stooping so low that they will thwart the improvements in the lives of the Guyanese people? I really hope that that is not the case.

Guyanese people are smart people, they know who has their interest at heart, they know too who will bring betterment and who will help them to realise their dreams. Given the many issues that confront our people, I must admit that I am indeed sadden that the Opposition has not joined and lent support to increasing this ceiling. Then again, their anti-development tendencies may have trumped their responsibilities to the people of this country.

The adjustments we are debating today; I see them as an investment in our people and one that is easily manageable. More so, given the proud economic track record of the PPP/C, I recognise that the ceiling was last adjusted in 1994 and, at that time, it represented two times our GDP. The proposal now is equivalent to just about half of our GDP. Certainly, with the bright prospects that await us under the PPP, the increase in the ceiling is more than manageable. Moreover, I am comforted given the prudent management of our economy during the stint of the PPP/C and the rapid economic expansion expected in the coming years, as well as the urgent need for the acceleration of development.

This motion should enjoy unanimous support. In this vein, I join with my Colleagues on this side of the House as we stand with our people to bring them a better life and express my support for the motions to increase the loan ceilings.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Mahipaul: The advent of this motion which seeks to increase the limit of our country's public loan is a confirmation that the Ministry of Finance is in desperate need of Cde. Winston Jordan. Sir, allow me to take this opportunity to call on Cde. Jagdeo to immediately begin the process of engaging the Hon. Winston Jordan. This is because I know that he is the one who calls the shots

over there. And, as fast as possible, book a ticket for the Hon. Dr. Singh and ship him back to where he came from. Cde. Speaker, it is not too late, heed the advice.

Only people with children, grandchildren, and people who are planning to ensure that their names are carried on will understand the dangers of this motion, should it be passed. People who have neither a chick nor a child, a dog nor a cat will not understand the magnitude of danger that this motion is bringing to them. Should this motion be passed, it will give us as taxpayers uncontrollable diarrhoea. And, those on that side of the House who eats off of the expense of taxpayers, who sleeps off of the expense of taxpayers and travels off of the expense of taxpayers, it will give them not a single worry because they will not have to go into their pockets to pay back these loans or the moneys that they are endeavouring to borrow.

I can advance arguments with big words too, I can advance arguments with political jargons, and I can also attempt to play the legal role of manoeuvring with words, but the seriousness of this motion requires me to speak directly to the ordinary hard working, committed and dedicated Guyanese. The Guyanese who struggle every single day to make ends meet, the Guyanese who wake up every single morning, kiss their children and leave for work, the Guyanese who understand what it means to hang your hat where your hand can reach.

8.29 p.m.

The simplest explanation for this motion is that the Government wants to kill us with heavy loans and to bind us to loans that will have us working harder than ever before to pay back. I do not know how the Government can think of increasing the domestic ceiling from \$150 billion to \$500 billion. It tells us that this Government intends to go the extra mile and create that burden on the poor people. It is they who will feel it.

I heard Hon. Deodat Indar say that when he added the \$88 billion and the \$93 billion, the current overall debt is \$181 billion at the Bank of Guyana (BoG). Even if I wanted to agree with him, and even if I wanted to say, yes, it is true, if one is to add \$181 billion, which is his number, to the current number that exists, which is \$150 billion, there would still have that space because one will get \$331 billion. Why does the Government want to raise it to \$500 billion?

Do you see the Berbice River Bridge? None of them over there have to pay to cross it. It is the poor people who pay to cross it. Do you see the Skeldon Sugar Factory? Moneys are not coming out of their salaries to pay for that. The Brazil to Guyana Fibre Optic Cable project and the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project are projects that they had, and it is those projects that have failed us. That is your record; you cannot run from it. That is your record.

To come to this House and to tell us in your motion that you have an ambitious ...

“AND WHEREAS the new Government has outlined an ambitious programme...”

What are we getting? Is it another Skeldon Sugar Factory? Are we getting more hotels so that more of you can go and live inside when your rooftops need to be fixed? That is what Guyanese must understand. This motion that is before us is seeking to create pandemonium in this country.

Sir, do you know that fuel price in this country, since August to now, has gone up about five times? Fuel prices have gone up about five times and nobody from that side has had the decency to make it known to us. We had to study these things to know that they are happening. The Senior Minister with Responsibility for Finance and all of them on that side have an obligation to the people of Guyana. The people of Guyana elected us – well, we had legitimate votes; I do not know about over there – to represent their interests. I am not going to attempt to use words that they would not understand easily. It the ordinary people – the grassroot people, the people in Wakenaam and Leguan who have to climb coconut trees and pick the branches to make brooms and sell them for a living – who are going to be affected by this. The teachers who have to teach our children are the ones who are going to be affected by this. Public servants are going to be affected by this. Hardworking Guyanese, the hire car drivers, those are the people who we are seeking to kill here.

On that side of the House, they spoke...it was the Hon. Deodat Indar. We did not hear any of them say anything about the phrase that they always use – 50% increase in ministerial salaries. None of them over there said anything about it because right now ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, this is the third time in your presentation you have referred to “them over there”. Please have a bit of decorum in the House.

Mr. Mahipaul: My apologies, Sir. Thank you for your guidance. I have great admiration for you and your guidance.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Sir. You have on a very nice shirt and tie.

Mr. Mahipaul: None of the Hon. Members on that side of the House said anything about the 50% salary increase for Ministers. Even though they know it is not true that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) increased all Ministers' salaries by 50%, none of the Hon. Members are saying anything because they are enjoying it. My Friend who sits right at the back here, Hon. Lenox Shuman, is getting the same free electric bills, free water bills, 24-hour security, and all the like: eat, sleep and everything else is free. All the taxpayers are getting is more burden with this motion. I am begging the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance to tell me that I am wrong. Tell me that the Attorney General (AG) is not getting a tax-free salary and so he does not have to pay back any loans. Tell me that the Hon. Prime Minister is not getting a big salary and that he does not have to pay back the loan. Tell me that free phone credit is going to Hon. Members and that they do not have to pay back the loans. But you cannot tell me that I am wrong when I say that it is the poor people who will be suffering as a result of this motion. The motion states:

“WHEREAS since assuming office in August 2020, the new Government has identified significant outstanding obligations that were accumulated by the previous administration including large overdrafts at the Bank of Guyana as well as payables owed to several other entities, ...”

These are ambiguous words. If the Government is going to bring a motion to this House and wants to justify to more than 217,000 Guyanese that there is a need for an increase of the public debt ceiling from \$150 billion to \$500 billion, you have to give us some facts. You cannot be playing around the place with words and expect us to believe them. You have to be truthful. The facts remain that the current amount of moneys that we have as public debt do not reach \$150 billion. Even if I want to agree that it does, if it is doubled it, it is \$300 billion. Why are you raising it to \$500 billion? That is what you have to explain to the ordinary Guyanese.

Tell the ordinary Guyanese what your plans are. Tell them that you want to build large hotels in which the poor man cannot stay. That is the fact. Tell them that you are going to do a series of projects from which they will not benefit but for which they will have to pay. Those are the facts of the matter. If this Government was focused on prudent management, it would have adopted a

strategy to enrich the poor, not enrich the rich. Lifting people out of financial miseries should be the function of the Government. We did that during our five years. We increased the salaries of public servants.

The fact of the matter remains that the APNU/AFC was a Government more focused on poor people. That is our ideological principle. We focused on the poor because part of good governance and part of being a good government requires lifting people from one way of life to another way of life. But the Members of the PPP/C, on the other hand, have a track record of enriching themselves, enriching their friends, enriching their families and punishing the poor.

Sir, you cannot tell me that if you cause somebody to move from zero to one, when you move from five to 10, that is improving that person. Where is the equity? Because a poor man moved from zero to one, you go to them and you shout, from the top of your voice, that you have bettered their lives. What you are not telling them is that you moved yourself from five to 10. So, when you took five jumps, you gave the poor man one jump. That is what the People's Progressive Party/Civic is known for. When you look at how the APNU/AFC did increases, we looked at percentage and gave the poorer man, public servants, a larger percent increase in their salaries. A larger percent is what we provided for them because we saw that they needed it more. At the end of the day, this motion that is before us is something that will burden the poor people. This motion before us, and both motions I may say, will create a greater burden on the poor people. The future generations – our children, our grandchildren and our great grandchildren – are going to be left with a heavy burden. They are going to be left with a Guyana that will have to continue to pay and pay.

Do you know what else? We will continue to have this obligation to whoever we are borrowing it from. Let me tell you a story without calling names. I used to work with a firm. There were two employees who worked with that firm for over 30 to 40 years with \$50,000 each as their salaries. This is about ten years back. Even if we want to accept that \$50,000, Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, was a big amount then, do you know why they were working there for so long? It was because the owner of the firm had a supermarket and he gave them the opportunity to go and take things without paying from their \$50,000. So, if they took \$25,000, it meant that they only had \$25,000 disposable income. So, \$25,000 had to go back to the supermarket. He kept allowing them to take. They were *binded* to him because he kept allowing them to take. I am saying it in that creole form because I want ordinary Guyanese to understand that, with this increase, the Government is

creating that space for Guyana to borrow and borrow, and I will have to pay, my children will have to pay, and my grandchildren will have to pay. That is what you are doing to poor people. I want you, Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, to understand it from a grassroot level, because I believe all your life you have been in an affluent state. After all, you came from Dubai. The poor people of Guyana are not prepared for this. I am saying that an increase in the debt ceiling is not the problem; it is the amount we are going towards. This ambitious programme that you speak of, do it in a staged manner.

8.44 p.m.

In stage 1, you could target a few projects and you could borrow a few dollars. Then, you can move to stages two and three, but do not jump from \$150 billion to \$500 billion. You can always come back to this House for us to increase, should we see the need. This House would not disappear. Probably in two years' time, you will be on this side of the House, but the House would still be here.

I am saying to you that this movement is very ambitious indeed, but it creates space for vulnerability. It creates that space for an atmosphere that will cause us to become more vulnerable. I am saying to you, with the fullest of respect, that you could have done it in an incremental manner, rather than just drop everything onto us like that. Five hundred billion dollars is a lot of money when you are talking about increasing from \$150 billion.

The external debt moving from \$400 billion to \$650 billion is simply too large. We are going too high, and we are creating problems that the ordinary Guyanese will face. I keep saying that because it is them who will have to pay. It is us. I am in that category too because I pay taxes. Even though the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, cut my salary. For whatever reason, I do not know. I am still employed by the Ministry, but I will deal with that at the legal level. The point to note is that the ordinary Guyanese will continue to suffer. These very people here, the staff of the Parliament Office, will have to pay too. These cameramen will have to pay it too. The drivers who drive all the Hon. Members, such as Mr. Anand Persaud, will have to pay too. Sir, your driver will have to pay. Sir, you will have to pay it also. But the difference between you and your driver is that your driver gets under \$100,000 a month. It is people like these who have to struggle to buy things in

the supermarket where prices are going up steadily, and they have to do a lot of other things. They may even have to go and pick up your grocery.

The point to note is that we are punishing the poor and we are enriching the rich with these kinds of motions. I urge the Hon. Member on the other side to relook at this motion, rework it and come again. Once it is done in a manner where we can see and understand that the poor man will not have to suffer a great deal, you can enjoy our support, but as is, we cannot, and we will not.

I thank you, Sir. *[Applause]*

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker, earlier in the day, I received an email from the Parliament Office that indicated there is going to be training next week Tuesday, 9th February. I would seriously recommend that we include, in the training next week Tuesday, the subject of comprehension. This is because these vacuous arguments that I heard coming from the Opposition, clearly tells us that we have a problem with comprehension. The scaremongering in trying to tell people they will have to pay back and that this is a burden around their necks is something that is so far from the truth.

This motion that we are debating is not about borrowing. It is about raising the ceiling so that there can be the facility, if needs be. Every time there is a loan or a debt incurred, the Minister of Finance, by law and the Constitution, has to table it in the National Assembly. There can be no backroom borrowing and sand dancing. I want to say to all the people of Guyana, who are being misled by these vacuous, misleading arguments, that the Government of Guyana, the PPP/C-led Government, is not borrowing \$500 billion locally and \$650 billion externally. That is not what is happening. It took 30 years, from when the debt ceiling was raised the last time, for us to come back to this House to have an increase in the debt ceiling. It was movement for over 30 years. One does not come to Parliament every now and again and say one wants to raise the debt ceiling. That is the first thing I want to put on record. The Government is not borrowing \$500 billion locally and \$600 billion externally. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** *(inaudible)*] The motion does not state that. This is why you need a lesson in comprehension. We are raising the debt ceiling.

A Member of the Opposition, in making their presentation tonight, spoke about the Bill to raise the debt ceiling to facilitate the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. There again, it is a comprehension problem. We never came with a Bill to raise the debt ceiling for the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. We came to raise the guarantee – the ability of the Government to guarantee.

When we brought that, we put in place a clause that it was only for the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. While in Government, you used that very same mechanism. You came to this House, used your majority and raised the guarantee to facilitate the NICIL bond by saying ‘any matter’, when it was only specially tailored for the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, and where no debt whatsoever was being incurred. The then Government used the same facility, increased the guarantee and borrowed \$30 billion from NICIL. It looks like we have real and serious comprehension problems.

The second thing, including what the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, said...I am sure if the international financial institutions listened to this debate and the quality of the presentations...Mr. Mahipaul was actually suggesting that Dr. Ashni Singh could go to the financial market, even locally to the banks, floating bonds or bills, and that people would just lend money without being satisfied that there is proper management and sustainability for them to recuperate their funding.

Whether one goes to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) or any of the international financial institutions for a loan or concessional financing, they will examine one’s books and record to see whether, over a period of time, through proper management and sustainability, they could recover their moneys and the country would not collapse. One cannot go to a local bank with a particular salary and borrow \$50 million. The bank would not lend it to that person because he or she would be in the ranks of non-performing loans. The difference between the PPP/C and the A APNU/AFC is how we manage money.

In 1992, when the PPP/C came into Office, we spent more than 100% of revenue to service debt. When we exited Office in 2015, we were paying between 9% and 10% of revenue to service debt. That is the difference. So, we had 90% of our revenue to invest in social services; to make capital investments; to develop our people; to bring universal secondary education, having achieved universal primary education; to bring pure water to communities; to develop our infrastructure, to improve tertiary-level education; and to make investments in our single moms through the Women of Worth (WOW) programme. We had money to do that because we managed our finances properly. Moving from 100% and more of revenue to pay debts, we brought it down to 10%. So, our track record of financial management is on the table.

I heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, speak. It would appear that we have brought *standpipish, yard fowl* behaviour to this National Assembly. The standpipe, as you all know, is where everybody would push their buckets to get the water and they would fight, but nobody would get the water because they cannot line up properly. He is accusing the PPP/C Government of strangulating the poor. He gave this example: if you allow the poor man to move one step, but you move five steps, that is not equity.

Let us discuss this rationally and reasonably. Who got lands under the APNU/AFC? It was friends and cronies of the Government. These are the lands at Millie's Hideout and the waterfront lands at Dalawalla. Do you know what happened? Thousands of Guyanese were lining up for house lots and they got nothing. We have revived our pro-poor programmes to ensure that the ordinary man benefits. You were building duplexes that nobody wanted. Look at what is happening now on Brickdam. I pray for Minister Croal and Minister Susan Rodrigues because the backlog is so great. Do you know who caused it? A non-active, non-functioning and mark-time Government that was in place for five years.

The people who are opposing this motion that we are discussing are people whose vision are seriously affected or obscured, and they are not a part of the real world.

8.59 p.m.

Development has a timeframe. Development and developmental projects are only relevant for a particular season. If you do not capitalise on the opportunities that are available, you will miss out. I want to give an example. This part of the world needs a deep-water harbour. With oil and gas that is coming on board and the expansion of what is taking place in our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), we need shore base facilities and we need deep-water harbour facilities. We need to expand. There are three things that you can do to propel grow and facilitate development. We can create a framework of private/public partnerships; we could create a build, own, operate and transfer mechanism; or we can borrow and develop and, overtime, recuperate with great dividends or profits. If people do not understand simple concepts, then it is hard to really engage in a serious debate.

We have to understand that when we came to Government – which should have happened since March, 2020 but, was delayed until August and we all know why – we came to Government with

a vision to transform Guyana; to modernise Guyana; to bring Guyana into a new level of prosperity where there is equal opportunity and equal access; and a vision to develop the traditional sectors of rice, sugar, bauxite, forestry and gold. We will catalyse and energise emerging sectors such as tourism and information and communication technology. We will lift oil and gas into its special place of what it can do for us at this particular time.

While we have foreign investors and the foreign companies here in the oil and gas sector, we also have to deal with ensuring that the Dutch Disease does not take over Guyana and that we stabilise, modernise and energise traditional sectors and encourage new sectors to grow and develop. In order to do that, we have to create the legal infrastructure. We have to ensure we have proper local content policies. We have to be able to create the physical infrastructure – we have to build roads; we have to ensure sea dams are protected; we have to build farm-to-market access roads; we have to ensure proper drainage and irrigation; we have to ensure that the connection between Hinterland and the Coastland are properly connected; we have to ensure that travel time is cut. This is the ease of doing business. We also have to ensure that the economic architecture is in place – access to financing, reduced interest rates and ensuring sustainability. All of these things are necessary in order to modernise Guyana.

When my Colleague, Dr. Ashni Singh, brought this motion, which we are discussing here tonight, he was actually saying, look Guyana, we came with a programme. We want to be able to ensure we support education by ensuring that, over a period of time, we have at least 20,000 students who would have online scholarships. We want to ensure that all of our children registered in schools would be able to have a grant on an annualised basis to encourage education. We want to lift our pensioners and our senior citizens out of poverty. We want to ensure that we build 2000 kilometres of road in the hinterland. We want to develop our urban centres. We want to be able have proper streetlights. We want to be able to introduce modern crime fighting measures. We want to do institutional strengthening of various areas. But we also want to do big, macro things – transformative projects. We want to build new highways. We want to put a bridge across the Demerara River. We want to engage in putting the bridge across the Corentyne River. We want to connect Guyana, French Guiana and Brazil. We want to be able to put a free zone, a market on Long Island. We want to be able to have our farmers produce enter Brazil and further into South America. We want to be able to link Guyana and South America as a hub of bringing the Caribbean

in direct connection with South America. We have to modernise our country. We want to be able to move our people from Region 1 to Georgetown in half the time that it takes them to do right now. We want to be able to ensure that our farmers from Parika and Hubu get all the way to Paramaribo with their plantains so that they do not have to dump them. We want to ensure the people from Black Bush Polder who have their pumpkins, baigan and all the rest of it, could get them to market. We want to encourage agro-processing. We want to open up new areas of plantation agriculture for soya bean and corn, so that we could become a major exporter of poultry. We want to be able to introduce cheap and reliable electricity to ensure that we encourage agro-processing, small and light manufacturing and possible industrialisation down the line. We want to be able to bring gas to shore to ensure that we have proper power in Guyana. We are not talking about candle and flambeau mentality here. We are talking about a modern Guyana.

The Minister with Responsibility for Finance rightfully came to this House and said that he is going to manage our revenue, he is going to sustain manageable levels of taxation, he is going to keep interest rates in check, he is going to ensure there is incremental increase of wages and salaries, he is going to keep inflation to manageable levels but, he also wants the flexibility to be able to do developmental things for Guyana. That is what this motion is all about.

I do not know what else to do to explain to my Colleagues but, let me just take this opportunity to say to the people of Guyana that this motion of raising the debt ceiling, locally, from \$150 to \$500 billion and, externally, from \$400 billion to \$600 billion, is designed to alleviate poverty and lift Guyana to greatness. It is not about putting a stone around your neck. It is about giving you an opportunity to breathe. It is about bringing us in line with the modern world so that we do not have to be left backward.

A do-nothing Government, over the last five years, cannot understand these concepts. That is why I understand the personal attacks on Dr. Ashni Singh and Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo. It is because some people just cannot understand these developmental concepts.

When a family comes around the table and they talk about their future – we want to buy a new car, we want to elevate ourselves from the motorcycle because when it is raining we get wet, we have to hide, we go to work late, we want to buy a car. They examine their current income and they explore possibilities with financial institutions that will accommodate them to advance them

moneys that they could pay back in a sustainable way, so that their dreams could be realised. That is what is called incurring debt. They approach the bank and the bank says it could finance up to \$1.3 million. They put that down with the dealer and they get a car that they could manage. Based upon their savings, they add to that and they move on.

Dr. Ashni Singh, the PPP/C Administration and, yes, the financial economic wiz of the Caribbean, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, have analysed our financial situation. We have looked at the various strings of revenue. We have looked at the sectors that are performing and at the ones that need injection. We have looked, over the 5-10 year period, at what Guyana should look like and at how much it would cost us to catch up if we do not make these interventions now.

When we weigh and measure all of those things, we say, do you know what we have to do? We have to look and explore possibilities. Tonight's activity in the National Assembly is not about the borrowing of the money. It is about creating the space to give the Finance Minister and his team the negotiating capacity and the wherewithal to sit with possible financiers, possible donors and possible lenders to discuss Guyana's development and make the necessary adjustments, whether it is on the local market or on the international market. To say that you are opposing this Bill is to tell the people of Guyana that, because we are not in Government, we do not want development. It is what I called, in a previous debate, *do not cut your nose to spite your face*. A certain gentleman retorted that he already had his nose cut.

This is about our future. It is not about putting pressure on our children and our grandchildren. It is about opening up avenues and opportunities. As a country in 1992, we were a heavily indebted poor country (HIPC); that was our status. When we attended forums and participated internationally, we were in their bracket as a highly poor, indebted country. In 2015, when we left Government, we were a middle-income country due to the management of the PPP/C. By the way, for all the people who are doing the scaremongering, we had available to us the possibility of borrowing up to \$150 billion and, over the 30-year period, we did not.

The first thing the Minister is seeking to do tonight – and he said it – is regularise the books. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change and the gentleman who the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, wants to bring back... he borrowed; he created liabilities; he put us in debt and he

did not put it on the books that reflect debts. It was hidden in all forms of machinations that you are yet to describe.

9.14 p.m.

I want to remind the people of Guyana that in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, the total budgets were over \$1.1 trillion dollars and there is not a single transformative project that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) has to show the people of Guyana what they did with \$1.1 trillion. You could criticise the Skeldon Sugar Factory because there is a Skeldon Sugar Factory. You inherited the Cheddi Jagan International Airport Expansion Project and you sat with some people and gave away US\$23 million. I do not know if you collected it but, at least, US\$23 million was removed from the contract.

The Cheddi Jagan International Airport Expansion Project that we inherited is not one that was conceptualised. We now have a new agreement because we understand the importance of a modern state-of-the-art airport. We were able to broker a deal with the same contractors, who got US\$23 million, for them to put in two extra access air bridges and a corridor, to do the curtains, in order to create the façade of beauty and excellence and to create a new ambience to show how Guyana is progressing. Watch it; you will like it.

We are not borrowing moneys to eat, we are not borrowing moneys for Grey Goose and we are not borrowing moneys for cheese straws, stuffed eggs and banquets. Check the APNU/AFC budgets, people of Guyana. Dietary was a major and significant increase – sports for the boys. We are not borrowing for that. We are ensuring that we could cut travel time to the airport by, at least, half because we will bring the first four-lane highway from Ogle to Eccles, then from Eccles to Diamond and then from Diamond to Timehri. If you want to talk about borrowing, we are borrowing to build a road to Lethem. It is no longer a feasibility study. I heard the Hon. Member, former Minister Ferguson, talking about where are the feasibility studies. Let me tell you, we are not just looking merely at a road. We are looking at a rail with accompanying alignment that we could move containerised cargo into northern Brazil through that same alignment where we are constructing a road. We are talking about the possibility of getting a diversionary road coming off of Linden through Ituni and into Berbice so that the container trucks do not have to come all the

way to Georgetown and then back to Berbice, and linking it with a deep water harbour. That is what we are talking about.

The budget is coming soon. Things are happening, people of Guyana. I call upon you, Members of this National Assembly, to rally with us in the PPP/C. Support the measures being put in place by my Colleague, Dr. Singh. Support these motions, both to increase our local capacity to borrow and our capacity to borrow externally because we are not funding clothes and parties and Buju Banton tickets. We are funding real development, opportunities for the future and modernising Guyana. Let us go back to classes and get some comprehension.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister for your impeccable timing. I thought that I would have had to borrow some time for you. I now invite the Hon. Member, Dr. Singh...

Dr. Singh (replying): Mr. Speaker, I rise to conclude the debate on this motion with very mixed feelings. When I opened the debate on this motion, I started out by explaining why we needed to increase the ceilings on domestic and external debt. I did so by outlining the dismal legacy that we inherited, which was cause for a sombre mood. I also outlined the fact that we acknowledged that implementing the development plans of the future will involve new borrowing. My expectation was that any elected representative of the people and anyone who would want to present themselves as a legitimate representative of the people would see the merit of standing on the side of development.

Alas, having listened to my Colleagues on the other side of the House, I am filled with sadness because this Parliament is a serious place. It is a place where each of us has a responsibility to come and speak truthfully; to advocate the interests of the people whom we represent; to analyse issues in an objective and factual manner; to desist from distortions and misrepresentations; and, most importantly, not to lower the Parliament to some kind of amateur dramatic stage where we come and dramatise some fictional play in which we have conjured in our minds. I will come back to why I say that.

Let me, first of all, elaborate on why we are where we are with respect to the need to remedy the situation that we inherited in relation to the staggering overdraft. I refer to the International

Monetary Fund 2018 Article IV Consultation. As Members of this House know and should know, every year the IMF conducts an assessment of the economy of the countries that are members of the Fund. This is a commitment that all member-countries have accepted and have undertaken. Every year, big and small, the economies of all member-states of the Fund are subjected to Article IV Consultation.

Let me read what the 2018 report on the Guyana's economy states. I refer here to Article IV Consultation, dated July, 2018. Mind you, Sir, this is not the Hon. Ministers, Bishop Edghill or Mr. Indar speaking. This is from the International Monetary Fund. The 2018 report reads thus:

“Domestic financing options remain limited. At present domestic debt consists of short-term Treasury bills. The Government has maintained an outstanding balance at the central bank of about six percent of GDP at end March, 2018 (from three percent at end 2016 and 3.5 percent at end 2017)”.

And I pause to repeat that:

“...from three percent at end 2016 and 3.5 percent at end 2017 and 6% at end March, 2018.”

This is the very overdraft which we [*Inaudible*].

“Staff includes this overdraft in the debt figures of this report. These operations provide limited benefits in terms of reduced borrowing costs since the interest rate on the Treasury Bills issued for monetary policy operations paid by the Treasury.”

This is policy advice being provided by the pre-eminent international financial institution.

“Staff reiterated and stressed the importance of settling these balances at the central bank, which the authorities agreed to do in the short-term through the issuance of Treasury Bills.”

Central Bank financing should not be used at all. That was in July, 2018.

One year later, in September, 2019 – mind you, I just read that the authorities indicated their intention to take action – in the *IMF's 2019 Staff Report on the Guyanese Economy*, this is what the International Monetary Fund had to say about the state of the public finances in Guyana.

“The domestic bond market should also be developed further, following the 2017 MCM TA recommendations, in order to enhance financial intermediation.”

Here is the important point:

“The government has accumulated an overdraft balance at the central bank 9 percent of GDP at end 2018 (up from around 5 percent at end 2017 and end 2016). Staff recommends settling these balances at the central bank and relying on the issuance of Treasury Bills for future government cash flow management.”

For two years, the International Monetary Fund identified a growing and burgeoning problem, involving the accumulation of an overdraft. For the avoidance of doubt and for purposes of clarity, it is important to understand what that means. That is essentially the equivalent of continuing to write cheques without wanting to borrow, legitimately, but insisting that you could continue to write cheques because you feel that the central bank must honour these cheques.

9.29 p.m.

That is essentially what happened. When we talk about how much we love poor people... the poor people of Guyana cannot write cheques in an unlimited fashion like the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government believed that it could do. The poor people of Guyana have to live within their modest and legal incomes, while the APNU/AFC Government, apparently, believed that the central bank of Guyana was a bottomless pit and was a money tree that it could constantly shake.

Minister Edghill made a very important point which is worth repeating for emphasis. If any one of us on either side of the House were to borrow some moneys – let us say any one of us and Minister Edghill gave some good examples.... Let us say that one goes to the bank and demonstrates that he or she has a job by presenting a job letter, proof of income and borrows some moneys. The bank then approves a loan of 1.3 million, I think that was the figure Minister Edghill cited.

Of course, the bank will ask what one wants to do with that money. One then takes the \$1.3 million loan and buys a car. The incurrence of that debt of \$1.3 million will be matched by an asset that one acquires – the motorcar. If any one of us and if any one of these ordinary Guyanese, who Members on that side of the House claim to represent and claim to champion their cause... if any

one of us or anybody else, any single individual, anywhere else in this country, went to a bank and said that they wanted to take out a mortgage and that they wanted to borrow moneys to buy a house, they would have had to present their transport, their certificate of title or other collateral. The bank then does its due diligence by examining their income, their capacity to repay and then approves the loan. When the bank disburses that loan, that loan will be used to buy a house. There will be an asset that has been acquired. The individual will have a loan at the bank or the building society and, with the proceeds of that loan, they would have acquired an asset. They would have bought a house, or they would have expanded or repaired their house.

What is extremely alarming is, despite the accumulation of an overdraft of \$100 billion and despite spending in excess of \$1 trillion, what is there to show? A couple arches here and there. There is one on the East Bank and one on the East Coast that, in any case, corporate sponsors paid for. What is there to show? There is absolutely nothing. What that points to is the outrageous squandermania that the APNU/AFC Government committed against the people of Guyana. Mind you, it appears that some of them got a few bangles, bracelets and earrings in the process. What does the poor people of this country have to show for it; the same people that they want to claim that they are representing and championing?

A few months ago, about a year ago or so, I was walking through Skeldon Market [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Did you say a year ago? Were you in this country a year ago?] Yes, I was, actually. About a year ago I was walking through Skeldon Market. As I was walking through Skeldon Market, I stopped and engaged in conversation with some of the people there. Many of them remembered me from when I had been in Government and they recognised me as a former Minister. I stopped and I engaged in conversation with many of them. They recognised me as a former Minister, Sir. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** (*Inaudible*)] If you had been paying attention, you would have heard what I said. They recognised me as a former Minister, and they engaged me in conversation. I recall [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** (*Inaudible*)] That is what put you over there and put me here. [*Interruption*]

I walked through Skeldon Market and was engaged in conversation. I recall speaking with a vendor, an elderly Guyanese woman, an ordinary Guyanese woman, who had a vegetable stand. She was selling bora, okra, corilla and boulangier –vegetables like those. I stopped and asked her how business was doing. She said to me, with tears in her eyes, that her husband had died in an

accident, her son had worked with the Guyana Sugar Corporation Incorporated (GuySuCo) and was now out of work. There were tears in her eyes as she spoke of the fact that her son, no longer being employed had turned to alcohol and was incapable of taking care of his children. As a result, she, as the grandmother with her small humble vegetable stand, was now tasked with trying to sell some vegetables to feed her son, his wife and his two children. Except that, she had a vegetable stall, the lady next to her had another vegetable stall selling the same things, the lady opposite had another vegetable stall selling the same thing and there was nobody to buy, because the economies of communities had been destroyed as a result of a callous Government. A callous Government which caused the sugar industry to be closed and put thousands of people out of work. When you come here and *cry crocodile tears* about poor people, do not mock the tens of thousands of poor people who you put out of work when you closed the sugar industry. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** (*Inaudible*)] Go to Canje. Why do you think that Mr. Charrandas Persaud had to vote with his conscience? Go to Canje and speak to the poor people there. Go to Albion and Port Mourant and speak to the poor people there. Go to Kwakwani and speak to the poor people there who can no longer work in the bauxite industry because you caused the industry to be closed.

Mr. Speaker, through you, I would say to the Members on the other side, do not come here and behave like this is an amateur drama stage and *cry crocodile tears* for poor people. You were not crying tears for them when you sent home nearly 10,000 sugar workers; you were not crying for them and their families. You were not crying when you sent home nearly 2000 Amerindian community workers – Community Support Officers (CSO's). You were not crying for them then, when you sent them home. Do not come now and *cry crocodile tears*. Do not come now and pretend to be concerned about those people. The APNU/AFC Government does not represent any poor people in this country, did not do so when it was in Government and is not doing so now.

Shaking of bangles by Mr. McCoy.

Mr. Speaker: Minister McCoy, you have to desist from using that as a noise amplifying equipment.

Dr. Singh: When we come to this House and say we want to raise financing for developmental programmes, we are open and transparent about it. We are not writing cheques on the central bank of Guyana and we are bullying the central bank of Guyana to honour those cheques. We are open

and transparent about it. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** That is an old story again.] I will tell you about Canje now. In addition to going to Skeldon, I went to Canje, where Mr. Charrandas Persaud lives. I recall speaking with an individual, who said to me [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** Was that in Skeldon?] No, in Canje. The individual said to me that, in the space of the last week, she had been to three funerals and all three of these funerals were for people who had committed suicide; young men who had committed suicide. All of them had committed suicide because they were out of work, had no income and could not take care of their families. All three of them who had committed suicide were former sugar workers. It saddens me when I see Members on the other side of this House come here and behave like this is an amateur theatre stage, where they could engage in comedy, ridicule people and pretend to represent poor people when they do not, when they sat down and supported a Government that sent people home, closed industries and banished thousands of people into poverty and penury.

We have plans for developing this country. We have plans for creating jobs. We are not a Government who says that job creation is not a task of the Government and so persons should go make plantain chips and cook-up rice. We are not a Government that says that job creation is not our business and that persons should go make plantain chips and cook-up rice to earn a living. It is very telling. I was in this House when a Member, on that side, said that sugar was not their problem and that sugar was our problem. Do you all remember those words? Do you remember when those words were uttered.

I tell you this: we represent the cause of all Guyanese – sugar workers, bauxite workers and people who work in the rice fields.

9.44 p.m.

We represent the cause of all Guyanese. When we come with an agenda for development and you stand to seek to obstruct that agenda for development, you cannot with any modicum of seriousness claim to be representing the cause of any Guyanese, poor or otherwise. I will say this: It is our intention to repair the finances of this country, despite inheriting an empty and bankrupt treasury. It is our intention to mobilise finances for the development of our country and it is our intention to implement development programmes in this country to ensure that the lives of every single Guyanese person are improved. We are not here for drama and histrionics. We are not here to jump

up and pretend like Members on the other side of the House, like I said in previous debate, beating their chest and claiming to represent this person and that person. [**Mr. Ramson:** Thumping it.] Thumping their chests as if this is a comedy show, knowing fully well that they put people out of work and closed the entire industries. Then you come here to behave as if this is a comedy show. This is the Parliament. We are supposed to be representing people's interest here. Do not come and behave as if this is a comedy show.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic Government has always stood on the side of the people of Guyana and we will continue to do so. Those who vote against this motion are voting against development and are voting against the people of Guyana.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister.

Motion put.

Mr. Jones: Division.

Division bell rung.

Mr. Speaker: Before I ask the Clerk to take the division, I would like to ask the operators if they could put the screen up with all of the online persons, so that we could see how they vote also. Instead of doing the picture of the Dome, we could put the full screen up so that we could get all the online persons. Noting that we have this new hybrid Parliament, online, we want to ensure that we give people, who have taken a relief break, an opportunity to come back online.

Assembly divided: Noes 29, Ayes 32, as follows:

Noes

Mr. Sears

Mr. Figueira

Mr. Sinclair

Mr. Jaiprashad

Mr. Jordan

Mr. Ramsaroop

Ms. Philadelphia (Participated virtually)

Ms. Flue-Bess

Mr. Mahipaul

Mr. Holder

Mr. Cox

Mr. Henry

Ms. Fernandes

Mr. Duncan

Ms. Singh-Lewis

Ms. Walton-Desir (Participated virtually)

Mr. Rajkumar (Participated virtually)

Ms. Hughes (Participated virtually)

Ms. McDonald

Mr. Patterson (Participated virtually)

Ms. Ferguson (Participated virtually)

Mr. Jones (Participated virtually)

Ms. Chandan-Edmond

Ms. Sarabo-Halley

Dr. Cummings

Ms. Hastings-Williams

Mr. Forde

Mr. Ramjattan

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon (Participated virtually)

Ayes

Mr. Shuman

Ms. Veerasammy

Mr. Williams

Dr. Smith

Mr. Jaffarally

Dr. Westford

Dr. Ramsaran

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks

Mr. Narine

Mr. Datadin

Dr. Mahadeo

Mr. Charlie

Mr. Seeraj

Ms. Rodrigues

Mr. Persaud

Mr. Indar

Mr. McCoy

Ms. Parag

Mr. Ramson

Dr. Persaud (Participated virtually)

Mr. Croal

Mr. Dharamlall

Mr. Bharrat

Mr. Hamilton

Mr. Mustapha

Ms. Manickchand

Dr. Anthony

Bishop Edghill

Mr. Todd (Participated virtually)

Ms. Teixeira

Mr. Nandlall

Mr. Phillips

Motion agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we now move to the second motion. For the motion: Confirmation of the External Loans (Increasing of Limit) Order 2021 - No. 3 of 2021, I now invite the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance to proceed.

Confirmation of The External Loans (Increasing of Limit) Order 2021 -No. 3 of 2021

WHEREAS since assuming office in August 2020, the new Government has identified significant outstanding obligations that were accumulated by the previous administration including large overdrafts at the Bank of Guyana as well as payables owed to several other entities, along with significant contingent liabilities that were contracted and that have since materialized resulting in additional calls on the public purse;

AND WHEREAS the new Government has also identified significant external loans that were contracted and that are currently undisbursed, but were they to have been fully disbursed at the time the last administration demitted office, they would have utilised a significant amount of the room remaining within the prevailing statutory ceiling on external debt;

AND WHEREAS the new Government has outlined an ambitious programme of development aimed at transforming Guyana and delivering improved quality of life to all Guyanese, which will require new financing including through additional external debt,

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly, in accordance with Section 3(7) of the External Loans Act, Chapter 74:08, confirm the External Loans (Increasing of Limit) Order 2021 (No. 3 of 2021) which was made on 27th January, 2021, under Section 3(1) of the External Loans Act, Chapter 74:08 and published in the Official Gazette dated 27th January, 2021.

[Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance]

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much. As I indicated when I spoke on the previous motion, it would not be my intention to present extensive remarks on this second motion, given the close connection between the two. I therefore wish without any further remark, to move the motion: That this National Assembly confirm the External Loans (Increasing of Limit) Order 2021 – No. 3 of 2021. I will confine my remarks to this simple moving of the motion, unless necessary depending on how the debate progresses on this matter. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Minister. The Hon. Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, you have the floor.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, I am going to utilise the opportunity to speak about both the domestic and the external ceilings because I did not want to speak twice on the two motions and do that individually and separately.

9.59 p.m.

It is important for us to understand that government will always want to do borrowings, especially, in the context of revenue streams that are not there, for current expenditure and, also, for developmental projects that they might want to prioritise. It is a good thing that there is a capacity to borrow. What I have a problem with is balanced budgets not being the concept that we want to support. Also, allowing that kind of balanced budgets arrangements to come from, not necessarily borrowings of a high order, as these two ceiling levels have indicated, but to ensure that you diversify your tax base. This is where I get the impression that the Hon. Member, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, his team and the Hon. Members on the Government benches want to go.

I was there in the People Progressive Party/Civic and there was a very famous leader of that Party, probably the most famous of them all, Dr. Jagan. Dr. Jagan talked about and condemned the borrowings that used to happen in those days when he was the leader of that Party. I have checked on a number of his speeches. One in 1980, when he talked on the loans that were being given to the Guyana Stores Limited (GSL). It is in Volume 6, 1980 of his selected speeches. More than that, even at the Accrabe College... Persons at the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU) would know that, also, Mr. Seepaul Narine and persons from the Rice Producer Association (RPA) would know that too. You do not go putting your hat where *yuh* hand *can't* reach.

Let me tell you something. The dreamy-eyed speech just given by the Hon. Member, Bishop Juan Edghill, as to all the infrastructural works that they have, it will not happen, if you do not have what is called balanced arrangements, ensuring that the revenue streams come from the good mixture of borrowings, taxes and non-taxes revenues.

We have a huge set of oil revenues that will be coming in. We also have done a number of legislative arrangements as to where the country could now get the moneys from – a natural resources fund. This is because the oil is not the PPP/C oil, understand that. So, we could go as

part and parcel of a APNU/AFC Opposition and a PPP/C Government, to ensure that a revenue stream is there where you could ensure that you get the revenues to do what you want.

You know, I rather got embittered by what they were saying that, in the last five years, we do not have anything to show for \$1.3 trillion. There are roads almost all over the place. The village of Corentyne did not have streetlights, there are streetlights there now. There are police stations all over. There are also hospitals. Boats were built. For the Guyana Defence Force (GDF), aeroplanes came in and all of that. There is a Magistrate Court. There is drainage and irrigation under the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA). What is the problem with you guys? Do you just not recognise anything that happened in the five year? Oh, my goodness.

In trying to *pull wool over the eyes* of people, the Government gave the impression that nothing was done. They then came to the National Assembly and said that they went to the Skeldon Market and *wan poor woman deh selling vegetables*. Well I went to the Skeldon Market too and the people in the Skeldon community was telling me that the big white elephant that the Government made and spent \$200 million for, *mi nah wan mi pickney guh cut cane*. Plenty of them are telling me that the next generation of those communities must not be cutting cane. But, you know, that is exactly what it would appear that they want.

The Hon. Members on the Government benches poured more money into GuySuCo, which has already proven to be so unprofitable. They bring in all kind of experts, right down to Mr. Sasenarine and all of the – ‘experts’ in inverted commas. I heard that Mr. Jagdeo calls him a false name. I could go anywhere in this country and hear what people are saying about this Government. I was there only recently, and people were saying that all of this spending that the Government is doing in relations to the sugar industry, especially when the price is almost half of our production cost. What do you want to borrow for? Is it to put more money into bad investments? That is why I am saying it is necessary that we look at the past to understand why we are going to give a *carte blanche* to this Minister, knowing what had transpired before.

They took a lot of money, \$5 million, to pay a speciality engineer for the speciality hospital. The man ran away with the money. Do you remember that? All of the Colonial Life Insurance Company (CLICO) investments money went down the drain. We had a number of projects that failed miserably. It is not as if we wanted it that way. Sometimes these things happen because we

did not put the priorities right. We were not testing them with feasibility studies. We were not doing the pre-conditional arrangements to ensure that the money is well spent. Now, to come and say that you would like to have a *carte blanche* because of the dreamy-eyed kind of Bishop Edghill desires – we want road here, we are going to get railway here. By the time I hear that Hon. Member, I want to know if Guyana is going to be a Hong Kong or a Dubai. It is not going to be real. We have to deal with development in an incremental way. We have always spoken about that.

We also have to understand that we would have to have a capacity that if things go wrong with the revenue stream, how will the future generations pay for these things. The former President of this country and famous leader, Dr. Jagan, who trained all of the Hon. Members over there or most of them, used to say that, when you borrow, *via* taxes the future generations will pay the money. That is what Dr. Jagan used to tell us. So, we must ensure what we can earn today. If we are earning... How much are you earning? Is it a million dollars? You are going to now know that is what you are going to spend on the varieties of activities that are expenditures in your lifestyle. That was something the APNU/AFC Government did over the last five years. It did not seek to increase this kind of thing to \$600 million and then \$500 million. The trouble is, one could not have gone that way because he/she would have found his or herself in bigger trouble and that is why we held back.

Now, because the oil revenue is coming in, instead of taking that which is a portion of the revenue as we have worked out, in relations to the petroleum funds... Do what will come *via* taxation, levies and whatever else that we have, and a certain set of borrowings so we can go on with doing the developmental works. What is it that they would now want to go for \$500 million – billion dollars? What is it? Is it \$500 billion? Then another big increase by about \$250 billion for the domestic debt?

We had the brunt of a very big public relations war that the PPP/C, while in Opposition, put on us. The mantra was what the APNU/AFC Government was doing, was taxing and spending [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I will come to that just now. What they want to do here is borrow and spend and let the future generations pay through taxes. They must understand that they cannot just go and willy-nilly in a two-paragraphs arrangement saying that this thing is for the debts that you incurred and also for the developmental works that we want. How much debts did we incurred that would categorise this thing to that very high level? It is not, because...

I understand that in the eight or nine months or six months or for however long you have been in Government, your deficit in the last budget was \$75 billion. That was the borrowings that will fund the 2020 Budget. In five years, we had \$92 billion as the debt because there was tremendous self-restraint as to how to do the borrowing. I must say and give kudos and accolades to Mr. Winston Jordan for doing that. That is on the back page of the Budget Speech that was done here by Mr. Juan Edghill. It is all there. [Mr. McCoy: I want y'all to bring back Mr. Jordan to the Parliament.] He did not want to come.

External debts, too, can rise to the very high levels of the early 1990s, if we do not watch what we are doing [Mr. McCoy: *(Inaudible)*] Well whatever the Government..., You are human too, you could make the mistakes and, also, get that thing going higher still. Then we will have to go and beg the 'Paris People' or what you call the 'Paris arrangements' and all of that. This is completely wrong. Whenever we want to raise ceilings, we have to do it extraordinarily conservatively, rather than liberally, like we have here. It is important that we appreciate that things could go wrong.

The tremendous confidence that is creating this liberal attitude is as a result of the fact that we have oil. This year, we have some moneys coming in. Last year we had some money that came in. But do not put all your chickens in that one place because of the fact that oil prices could come down. It could also have huge competitions from a number of other resources, like the solar, wind and whatever else that are call renewals. It is important that, assuming we start giving a carte blanche to a minister of finance, who had seen bad things in relations to investments with CLICO, Guyana Marriott Hotel, Skeldon Estate, the speciality hospital, that is what I can recall now, but there were others, we have to ensure that we are far more conservative in our approach in handing out this kind of huge increase in our limits.

10.14 p.m.

No, it cannot be done. I am urging that, notwithstanding all the fantastic projects they are saying they are going to put on stream – infrastructural works and so on, it can be very dangerous indeed.

I had quoted in a previous budget speech that this thing about infrastructural works... I quoted from author, Mr. Paul Collier, who wrote the book: *The Bottom Billion*. He came here earlier in 2016 and indicated that these contracts for infrastructural works, rule of thumb, have a lot of corruption behind them - plenty. Especially, when they are being guaranteed. They will also

probably be funded by moneys from the public coffers – big time. That is what happened at the Skeldon Estate. The biggest set of money that was ever spent on any one single project – that sugar factory, and it went right down. Do not let wool be pulled in our eyes by the thing that we were the ones that caused that to happen at the Skeldon Estate. The Skeldon Estate started after there were problems with the European Union (EU). Then Mr. Jagdeo, who was President indicated, that he would put up a big factory that was going to be so efficient. What did it turn out to be? Not only a white elephant, it turned out to be a dead elephant. Do not put the blame on us that we were the ones who caused this little lady to now be selling vegetables.

I want you to understand too, Mr. Speaker and Members over there, that it is important that things could happen and go very wrong. We must ensure that we do not allow that kind of big jump in the facility of a limit that is going to \$600 billion. We have to get revenues, as I said, from taxes and widening the base. Assuming oil does not do that well, in 20 years from now, when you have to pay back whatever debt is piling up, do you know who is going to pay the debt? It will those who are taxpayers on the books. In Guyana, the taxpayers on the books are generally public servants. A lot of those that are avoiders and evaders, they have big houses. When you go to ask them as to where they got their revenues and so on, they do not want to say. It is a non-declaration. Lots of them we know are trying as best as possible to avoid and evade. We have to be very concerned about that.

I remember, we had a Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre (CARTAC) report done. The Report indicated that broadening the tax base is important. When they indicated here that we did 100 extra taxes, they were not 100 new taxes or any such thing. They were taxes that were in the books. It was because they had 1955 rates, 1964 rates and all of that, one puts on the present-day rates in relation to the licensing requirement and whatever it is for the dollar value. That was what happened. For all of them, I must tell you, we got the blunt of it because of their public relations that, for example, we taxed the horse drawn cart, we taxed on this and that. They were all there and they would want to be critical of that.

You must understand too that, when the value-added tax came into being, that same Government had a windfall because it was not supposed to be 16% to equalise with what you were bringing in through the other taxes that it came to replace. They made a windfall, but did they utilise it

properly? One set of all kinds of mischief went on that we knew about. That is why they were very much criticised by the press and a whole lot of people all around as to what they did.

We have a number of projects that we would want to do as a country. You would want to ensure that there are a lot more agriculture schemes. The Mahaica Mahaicony Abary – Agricultural Development Authority (MMA) is supposed to get another phase 2 or phase 3 that will ensure... That is what we were thinking about that we would do. We were also of the impression that, once the moneys come in, the entire country is going to support, especially agro-based industries. I did not hear much about that from the Bishop. He was talking about all these infrastructural works. If you are going to fix them, you have to also have investors who will want to come.

There are other things that could ensure that development projects are done. The Hon. Minister did mention them. You could also ask people to come with the moneys in an arrangement where they would then charge a toll and pay themselves back and so on. They do not want that kind of discipline. They want an unrestrained capacity to just go and take the moneys, and, as a previous Minister Ally had said, *belaway* the thing. That is what they want to do. We must not do that.

I am telling these Members here that is what my scare is; that is what my fright is. The thing is too high. I remember they came in relation to the Amalia Falls Hydropower Project to guarantee some loan to the tune of \$150 billion and we then brought it down to \$50 billion. We did not have anything after that. One project so much money. The Insight Global went away after that. How do we know that if we give this Minister all of this heightened capacity, widened capacity, bigger capacity, that we might not very well get things going wrong? It is good that he could come here whenever he wants. If he is unto a project of a road and a railway from Lethem to Georgetown, well fine, let us see the project, let us see the feasibility study. If he wants, because of the fact that he must get a guarantee for that project, as Dr. Cheddi Jagan use to teach us, let us do that for that project. They do not want me to call his name because a lot of his arguments could counter what they are coming with now. Just like what he did in relation to the stores, that same Main Street store. It is very important because that could be done that way. We, at a national level, could all come behind whatever the project is, but we cannot do that at this stage.

I see that my time might be up. I want to say that, those are the things that scare me. It also will address the discipline that must be with the Ministry of Finance in relation to coming with balanced

budgets. Balanced budgets are what we must come here with. Your first budget, in the first five months, is \$75 billion in deficit. It came so late that I am certain that a lot of the projects cannot be done before... It is very ill-advised that they are going to do that.

I understand that, as of 2nd August, 2020 to last week, the Government borrowed in the vicinity of almost US\$215 million. I am trying to verify this. Then they have a US\$34 billion project in line for the energy sector. I could understand the energy sector, but when there are so many things coming so fast *via* borrowings... We have prudent businessmen across there who understand that you cannot do that. I am urging that these be reduced by half because they could still take care of the debts that have been incurred.

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]: Mr. Speaker, you made a rule about people wearing their masks while they are speaking.

Mr. Ramjattan: What happened? Do you not want to hear me clearly?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, I feel a little uncomfortable with it on. In any event, while speaking here, I think I am keeping my social distance. It is all right. The Hon. Mr. Ramson would like me to put it on. I would wish to close on that point and to urge that this very wide gap not be granted. It should be less than that which could take care of the actual debt that we have.

I knew in the last five years, Mr. Jordan did his best to reduce it. It is important that we go there. Not to utilise that fact that we have some confidence in oil and all of that now that we are going way above.

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

Bishop Edghill: I would have thought that the extensive debate that we are engaged in on the previous item would have sufficed and everyone who wanted to express a view would have used that [*inaudible*] are extremely similar.

Listening to my Colleague, the Hon. Mr. Ramjattan, I think some things are missing. If for the sake of argument, he agrees, but I do not agree, but he proposes, that we on this side of the House, including my Colleague, Dr. Ashni Singh, would be reckless where borrowing is concerned. When

one goes to an international financial institution, that recklessness would be put in check. You would be unable to draw down a dime. This is because they would have to ascertain your level of indebtedness as it relates to the size of your economy, your level of indebtedness as it relates to your capacity to generate income and your long-term projections and the sectors that are bringing in revenue before they even give you a dime.

Mr. Ramjattan would be familiar with a term ‘conditionalities. For the first disbursement’. You have to meet certain criteria. Mr. Ramjattan, every time you make that argument about us being able to borrow, it is an admission that the international financial institutions have confidence in the PPP/C’s Administration and management of the country, and they are prepared to lend us money for Guyana’s development. Every time I learn, experience wise [*inaudible*] Dr. Singh sits, negotiates and have his technicians fine tune developmental dollars to come to Guyana and we get it. It is a vote of confidence.

10.29 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I know that you are a well experienced man in the area of finance and economics. You will know a lot of the institutions accompanying loans and grants are what is called technical cooperation. They use that for institutional strengthening and capacity building. If our people were only able to manage \$400 billion and they are now managing \$600 billion, the capacity for management, monitoring, evaluation, controls, checks and balances, must be increased. So, accompanying the loans, are often times, capacity building and institutional strengthening.

It would appear that what we have here is a sour grape attitude; we did not get to do it and nobody else must do it. Nothing was stopping you from doing it. It was a lack of vision, leadership, capacity, and the ability to manage.

Today happens to be the 4th February and it has been just six months since the PPP/C is in Office. I want to demonstrate to the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, the capacity of the PPP/C. We left Government in 2015. At that time, the then President, Mr. Ramotar, had negotiated and secured a US\$50 million line of credit from the Government of India for the building of a road. That was envisaged by the now President, Dr. Irfaan Ali, while he was the Minister of Housing – that was to connect the back.... We had \$10 million and \$8 million in loan and grant for a ferry to go to Region 1. We had moneys available for the development of renewable energy.

Mr. Speaker, five years after, we came back to Government, everything that was left, was still parked; nothing was done. What was supposed to cost \$50 million, was increased to \$208 million. No moneys were disbursed. Do you know what we did? [**An Hon. Member (Government):** *(Inaudible)*] Yes, with the same financial wiz and Caribbean economist and specialist, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, who some of you have problems with because of his ability to lead, negotiate and manage. The Hon. Member sat with the President, the Minister of Public Works, and my Colleague, the Minister within the Ministry of Public Works, the Hon. Deodat Indar, and engaged the Government of India, to the extent that they worked even on India's Independence Day. That was the level of energy and excitement, that on a public holiday in India, the Government of India was working with the Government of Guyana, to get on the road – developing, financing, and reprogramming. That is the reality. The money was available, but they lacked the capacity, the wherewithal, to do it. We made the point earlier; we do not borrow to eat and drink. When we borrow, we have assets to show – value. We borrow to invest, create and open up new opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I heard a lot of fluff about the Skeldon Estate and how much money was borrowed on it. Part of the problem of why we are here tonight with the earlier Bill was because the borrowing by the then Minister of Finance, which was \$30 billion supposedly for GuySuCo and where was GuySuCo when we took it? In the last budget, we had to inject moneys. It was \$30 billion to revive GuySuCo and the pro-poor Government that it claimed it was, sent home 7000 sugar workers, closed estates, and punished people because of political reasons. That is what it did. Compare that to the PPP/C in Government and how it treated the bauxite Industry when it got into Government. The company that was managing it, was prepared to hand over for \$1 and walk away. Yes, the same Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo that you have a problem with, used his intellectual prowess and negotiating skills and retooled the workers of Linden, brought in investments, and saved the bauxite Industry. We have the Bosai Minerals Group Company Limited succeeding from the Omai Bauxite Mining Incorporated and the Russian Aluminium (RUSAL). Now under your tenure, the RUSAL and the Oldendorff Carriers are gone. You have the Midas touch; everything you touch, you destroy. That is the reality.

When I heard my Friend, Mr. Ramjattan, it would appear that in the developmental studio, the only button he knows to press is pause. We, on this side of the House are pressing the button that says play and let the progress continue. Let the real progress continue. Mr. Speaker, my

intervention in joining this debate, is again to lend support to my Colleague and to support the Government's initiative. This will give us the latitude, capacity, and scope to be able to present ourselves with the legal architecture that we could engage for Guyana's development and modernisation.

Look what has happened. We just had representatives from the United States of America's Export-Import (EXIM) Bank who came on a visit. They spoke to the private sector and told them how much money they have available to lend. The Canadian Commercial Corporation is ready to engage with Guyana. We had a visit from the Sheik Hamdam Bin Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Crown Prince of Dubai. Dubai wants investment in Guyana. We have people coming from all parts of the world – whether it is for investments in renewable energy, agriculture, forestry, oil and gas or manufacturing. The Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce will tell you that there are 30 expressions of interest. Thirty international brands expressed interest of building hotels in Guyana. Every time those things happen, international people – Fortune Global 500 companies, governments and institutions that manage large amounts of money – are breathing and saying, we have confidence in Guyana, and we want to work with Guyana.

May I say as I close, Mr. Ramjattan, through you, Mr. Speaker, by no means is the PPP/C claiming to be perfect. One thing I could say is that we have been good for Guyana. Everything did not come out 100% perfect. The only person who never fell off a bicycle, is the man who never rode. The only lady that never got burnt in her kitchen, is the one who never cooked. The only Government that never had a challenge in a project, is a Government that did nothing and that is the APNU/AFC.

At this late hour where I know there are lots of excitement, I do not want to prolong this but, I am saying, take notice Guyana. The people who came to you and told you to let the progress continue, that they won the General and Regional Elections, and held this country up for five months, by their actions of going against this motion, they want to hold up Guyana for five years. We on this side, will not allow it to happen because we have the determination, vision, the support of the people and backings of the world. Do what is right for Guyana; support this motion and let the progress continue.

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

Mr. Figueira: I really tried to pay attention to the Hon. Bishop's presentation. I conclude that he was really trying to impress the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, after all, that was his dream job. I really focused my attention on the real Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Singh because his views are the ones that I believe are important in this debate, most particularly.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to lend a viewpoint on the Confirmation of the External Loans (Increasing of Limit) Order 2021 – No. 3 of 2021, which addresses the increasing of the external debt ceiling. This is an Act which provides for a maximum value of debt that can be contracted by the Government from external sources. The proposed amendments aimed at increasing the loan limit from \$400 billion to \$650 billion, is a startling increase of \$250 billion. It is indeed worrisome and should be a matter of concern for all taxpayers.

It is important to recognise, no matter how much you try to clothe it and circumlocute around the issue, the fact remains that debt, is debt irrespective of if its internal or external. Debt is the contracting of resources to be repaid in the future.

10.44 p.m.

It has to be repaid some way, somehow, with or without interest. Someone has to pay the bill and it is usually placed on the backs of taxpayers – teachers, policemen and policewomen, doctors, nurses and sugar workers. All public servants will have to contribute towards paying this debt.

I will not stand here and say to this House that the Government must not or should not borrow moneys for developmental projects and other developmental pursuits. I will not. I unreservedly have no difficulty with Government borrowing because our history informs us that since Independence, successive governments have never run a balanced budget. We have always had deficit budgets. What is important is to make sure that our domestic savings are progressively increased, which will provide a means for the country to cover its current expenditure and aid in the development expenditure.

Throughout our history, we have not been able to finance developmental expenditure from our national budgets fully, which gave rise to us having to borrow locally and internationally. It is without saying that we do recognise the need for Government to borrow, but what is frightening

and what is scary is the present rate at which Government is borrowing. The new limit proposed is a clear indication of the level of borrowing that will be undertaken in the coming years. That is scary and is a matter of concern for all Guyanese. Mr. Speaker, I will tell you why. The nature of borrowing has evolved. During its evolution, countries like Guyana have benefitted from soft term measures, such as long maturity periods of 30- 40 years, grace periods of 10-15 years and low or no interest rates, *et cetera*. In recent times, Guyana has graduated, so to speak, from the soft windows of various multilateral financing institutions. Already, we have graduated from soft loans of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) and that was from 2019.

Additionally, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) provides Guyana with a blended lending portfolio, which is a mix of hard interest rate and soft interest rate, but it is increasingly bending closer to a high interest rate. The above stated is one of the scary things about wanting to borrow now, when compared to 10 years ago.

Secondly, there is the limiting of how much Guyana will be allowed to borrow from multilateral sources. As our per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increases, we would have graduated not only from the soft window but even the hard windows as well. An example right here in the region is Barbados, which can no longer borrow from the World Bank because its per capita income is too high. So, now its option is to go to capital markets to borrow, where the interest rates are mutable, coupled with other conditions.

What that means is when we are pushed out of the multilateral lending windows, to borrow loans that are harder, it makes the debt burden increase rapidly. My question to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance is, why is there a request for such an increase? Why a request for an increase of such massive proportions, \$250 billion? Could the Hon. Minister inform the House what these borrowings would be against? In my mind, all these moneys that Government is borrowing and intends to borrow in the future, clearly shows that it is being borrowed against future earnings from petroleum. When one looks at our balance of payments, with the exception of petroleum proceeds, none of the other sectors can provide the kind of foreign currency earnings to accommodate or facilitate this kind of borrowing. This very high appetite and unquenchable desire to borrow brings into question the Government's proclivity for questionable spending.

Regarding Order No.3 of 2021, though not averse to its logic, in-principle, we on this side are terribly worried for the Guyanese people and, in particular, future generations. It is said that a good father leaves an inheritance for his children. This Government and the intended purpose of this ceiling will leave the generations to come with serious debt. The country was regaled by the PPP/C about the borrowing of the Coalition Government, which had an external loan portfolio of about US\$462 million at *Budget 2019*. It is important to note that the external debt was on the decline and the country had even managed to close its debt with Trinidad and Tobago in the last five years. However, what is important to this debate is the quantum of the increase being sought for developmental services.

One must pay cognisance to the PPP/C's history with big developmental projects without feasibility studies. We are now hearing about a bridge across the river, four-lane roads, *et cetera*. Where are the feasibility studies for the proposed four-lane roads or the bridge across the Demerara River at the point where they want to put it? It is irresponsible actions like these with large loans which become large failures like Skeldon Sugar Factory, the Brazil to Guyana Fibre Optic Cable project, the Guyana Marriott Hotel Georgetown, *et cetera*. These so-called developmental projects left the country in huge debt. Millions of US dollars are still being paid on the backs of taxpayers for the costly errors of this current Government.

We should learn from our past or even from our neighbours next door. Suriname had embarked on several major developmental projects, building three bridges across several rivers, only to run broke soon after those investments, leaving the country in an economic mess. This House is being asked to up the limit by \$250 billion at a time when a five-month old delinquent Government's recklessness has ratchet up an external debt of approximately US\$250 million from August, 2020 to February, 2021. This is approximately \$54 billion in five months.

In light of this disappointing reality, I am informed that the Government is engaging in talks with the IMF for further loans, all of which are to be given against earnings from oil. What is troubling is the rate of borrowing which may be allowed by this amendment. The apprehension on this side takes notes of the character of borrowing, which is moving more in the region of higher interest rates over shorter periods, as Guyana's GDP improves, with earnings from oil, to that of a middle-income country. On the other hand, one has to be mindful of the trend unfolding as part of the PPP/C's macro policy, where the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility

for Finance speaks to the issue of the debt of the Dutch diseases in accounting terms. Thus, sidestepping the merits of contracting economic costs against accounting costs.

The above evidence in the PPP/C's posture on sugar where they make a loss in US dollars in each market to which Guyana's sugar is sold, but the PPP/C continues to put billions into the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). When one looks at the developmental projects proposed, it is important to ask again, where are the feasibility studies? It is these slush spending that is troubling and that will usher in the Dutch disease, Mr. Minister. Not all projects that appear socially and technically sound are economically feasible; GuySuCo is a case in point.

All oil economies are in a race to extract as much oil as quickly as possible because the world is on a course to reduce its reliance on fossil fuel and increase its use of electric vehicles and alternative energy. When this happens, who would subsidise GuySuCo? Who would pay for those borrowed loans, if not the future generations? In fact, the PPP/C presently punishes public servants to keep GuySuCo in a convalescent state. The returns on this type of borrowing, as proposed in No.3 of 2021, is only spoken of in present terms by this Government. We are never told what future generations would have to go through. Look at the management of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in relation to the billions of US dollars that this Government has borrowed thus far. We have increased deaths, chatter about increased testing and disjointed messages on prevention. The Government pays for advertisement that speaks about social distancing of three metres, but then tell minibus operators to have passengers seated inches apart.

I do support the need for responsible borrowing and developmental projects that are informed by studies and public consultations with the people who will have to pay for those said loans for those very projects. This proposed amendment, with the audacious ambition of raising the debt ceiling by \$250 billion that will add hardship on our taxpayers, I cannot support in good conscience.

In conclusion, I, therefore, call on the Hon. Minister to be magnanimous and amend this request to \$150 billion. That is the number we are prepared to consider and even support. Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I thank you.

Dr. Singh (replying): Mr. Speaker, as I had stated when we spoke on the previous motion, it was not my expectation that we would be repeating the debate or having another extensive debate on this second motion. Be that as it may, it was nevertheless, very interesting to listen to the arguments

made by our Colleagues on that side of the House. Indeed, many of the arguments that were offered were very revealing in many respects.

Much was said about borrowing policies and us borrowing or seeking to raise the ceiling for the purposes of borrowing. I do not believe anyone would doubt that, inherently and intrinsically, there is anything wrong with borrowing.

10.59 p.m.

Each one of us, in our private capacities, would have borrowed in one shape or form, at one point in time or another. Whether it was to buy a car, build a home or to purchase something on credit or on hire purchase, each one of us would have borrowed. I will tell you one thing; I did not borrow from the University of Guyana Student Society (UGSS). Inherently and intrinsically, I do not believe that there is any disagreement across the House on the question of borrowing.

We have been extremely careful throughout all of the time that we have served in Office, to ensure that we borrow responsibly and carefully and to ensure that the quality of debt that we contract is consistent with medium and long-term debt sustainability. One might ask why this matters. It matters because, when one examines how debt impacts on one's fiscal position and capacity to repay, the quality of debt makes a huge difference. If one borrows at favorable terms, that is to say, with long maturity, a long period to repay and favourable interest rates, then one's capacity to repay that debt is considerably greater than if one borrows at a more expensive rate and at a shorter term.

Throughout all of our time in Office, we have been careful to borrow and invest in projects that would ensure that we would be able to repay. Compare and contrast that with the track record of the APNU/AFC in Government. I will give one example which I think will make the point (*inaudible*). A lot was said about the NICIL bond. I think Hon. Minister Edghill spoke of the fact that a NICIL bond was raised by the APNU/AFC to the tune of \$30 billion, of which \$17.5 billion was drawn down. On the surface, that might seem unremarkable. Let us examine more closely the terms of this contract. I do not know how many people know the interest rate at which that \$30 billion bond was contracted. That notorious NICIL bond was contracted at a staggering interest rate of 4.75% at a time when the Government of Guyana, even the APNU/AFC Government of

Guyana, was capable of borrowing at 1% or less. You have to ask yourself, who was the beneficiary?

I know, Mr. Speaker, that you would know, but for the purposes of elucidation of this point, 4.75% of \$17 billion is \$808 million in interest alone per annum. Having drawn down \$17 billion, 4.75% interest cost in excess of \$800 million in interest costs alone, costs with which the people of Guyana today are straddled. That is the legacy of the APNU/AFC Government. I will tell you what. To ensure that those who concluded this transaction will profit from it, there is a clause that states that the Government cannot repay it early. So, the Government is locked into paying this 4.75%. It is very easy to come here and to engage in all sorts of glib talk when, in fact, that is the sordid legacy of the APNU/AFC during its time in Office. That is what they left for the people of Guyana to be straddled with.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, spoke, rightly and correctly so, of not *putting all of your eggs in one basket*. We cannot agree more. It would be important to not *put all of your eggs in one basket*. But if one scrutinises all of the policy pronouncements that were made by the APNU/AFC during their five years in Office, their sole economic policy was to wait for oil to happen. Nothing else mattered. Sugar did not matter and the industry was closed down; rice did not matter; bauxite did not matter; and other agriculture did not matter. Nothing mattered. The sole economic policy of the APNU/AFC Government was to wait for oil to happen.

In contrast, we in the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government have constantly emphasised the importance of a diversified economy. We have constantly emphasised the importance of a strong non-oil economy. We have constantly emphasised the importance of agriculture, tourism and services. We have constantly invested to ensure that the potential of those sectors is unleashed and unlocked. So, when the Hon. Member speaks of not *putting all of one's eggs in one basket*, we agree. But we believe not only in saying and uttering these words because they sound good. We believe in demonstrating by our actions and all of our actions point to a conviction that we must ensure the Guyanese economy is sufficiently diversified.

Let us take sugar. A lot of talk is being bandied around about sugar. You just have to turn to the 2016 Budget speech in which the APNU/AFC Government, on the basis of sugar production in 2015 and on the basis of the very Skeldon Sugar Factory that they like to speak about, boasted

about a recovery in sugar on the backs of the work that we had done to ensure that sugar production was maintained at an acceptable level. Then, promptly, as a result of their neglect, the sugar industry collapsed thereafter, notwithstanding the tremendous contributions and role that industry plays in sustaining entire communities and in providing important infrastructural services. It is easy to talk about sugar or the GuySuCo in simplistic terms. Contemplate for a moment the billions of dollars that the GuySuCo invested, over the years of its operation, in drainage and irrigation that benefitted the entire agriculture sector. Consider the community services that were provided, whether medical; the indirect benefits to suppliers and service providers; and the hundreds and thousands of people who benefitted, through the village economy, from the incomes that were generated from sugar. So, it is very easy for the APNU/AFC, our Colleagues on that side of the House, to come and speak on these matters in simplistic terms. But by their actions to close the sugar estates, by their actions to create a hostile environment for investors in every industry, including bauxite and in so many others, causing investors to leave this country or causing them to withhold their investments, they displayed that they were, in fact, the ones who were *putting all of their eggs in one basket*.

I believe it was the Hon. Minister, Bishop Edghill, who spoke about *cutting off one's nose to spite one's face*. If one considers the APNU/AFC's track record, do you know what that track record involved? It involves frustrating development in this country for narrow political objectives. Take one example. They like to speak about the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. Had they not obstructed the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, today, the Project would have been producing power. I hasten to add that private and credible, large, international, institutional investors signaled explicitly their interest in participating in the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. Despite this, for the sole reason that the APNU/AFC did not want the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project to happen, because they did not want the PPP/C to get credit for delivering hydropower to the people of Guyana, they frustrated, blocked and terminated that Project. Today, had they not blocked the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, that plant would have been generating electricity and would have been supplying to the entire grid. That is only one example. Today, by virtue of the position that they have taken to frustrate an application to create room for borrowing, for the purposes of financing development, is but the latest example of what the Hon. Minister, Bishop Edghill, quite rightly described as *cutting off one's nose to spite one's face*. I will tell you what. The people of Guyana are not as naïve as you might think.

11.14 p.m.

They demonstrated that on 2nd March. The people of Guyana are not as naïve as you might think. They are watching. They know who stood by them over the years. They know who advanced a progressive development agenda and who obstructed and frustrated progress. Minister Edghill spoke about all the projects we left in 2015 and came back in 2020 and found unimplemented. It is because the priority was not to implement developmental projects. The priority was to parade around and enjoy the pomp and ceremony associated with being in government, which the APNU/AFC so greatly loves. That was the priority; it was not to implement projects and deliver development outcomes to people.

Sir, there is not a single project [**Dr. Anthony:** The roundabout.] Perhaps, the roundabout and two arches. [**An Hon. Member:** D'Urban Park.] Yes, of course. How could we forget the D'Urban Park project? Sir, with the exception of the D'Urban Park project, two arches and a roundabout, there is not a single developmental project that the APNU/AFC can point to as its own initiative. I say so with no fear of contradiction. As I said, the people of Guyana know better. That is why the people of Guyana spoke, in the way that they did, on 2nd March, 2020.

We have outlined a development agenda and much has been said about it already. We are firmly committed to implementing it in a manner that will preserve the sustainability of the public finances. This is the reason these two motions are before this House.

I wish, once again, to call on my Colleagues on that side of the House to reconsider their ill-founded arguments and decide, when the vote is called, whether they want to stand with the people of Guyana in advancing development or whether they want to obstruct development in their vote today. The vote we are taking this evening is whether we want to vote in favour of development or vote against development. That is the vote we are taking.

With those remarks, I, once again, commend the External Loans (Increasing of Limit) Order 2021-No. 3 of 2021, and I move that this Assembly, in accordance with section 37 of the External Loans Act, Chapter 74:08 of the Laws of Guyana, confirm this External Loans (Increasing of Limit) Order 2021. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Question put.

Mr. Speaker: I will now put the question. Those in favour, please say aye.

Members of the Government: Aye.

Mr. Speaker: Those against the motion, please say no.

Members of the Opposition: No.

Mr. Speaker: The ayes have it.

Mr. Jones: Division.

Mr. Speaker: Let the bell for the Division be rung. We will just give the persons online an opportunity to get in position too.

Assembly divided, Ayes 32, Noes, 29, as follows:

Noes

Mr. Sears

Mr. Figueira

Mr. Sinclair

Mr. Jaiprashad

Mr. Jordan

Mr. Ramsaroop

Ms. Philadelphia

Ms. Flue-Bess

Mr. Mahipaul

Mr. Holder

Mr. Cox

Mr. Henry

Ms. Fernandes

Mr. Duncan

Ms. Singh-Lewis

Ms. Walton-Desir

Mr. Rajkumar

Ms. Hughes

Ms. McDonald

Ms. Ferguson

Mr. Jones

Ms. Chandan-Edmond

Ms. Sarabo-Halley

Dr. Cummings

Dr. Henry

Ms. Hastings-Williams

Mr. Trotman

Mr. Forde

Mr. Ramjattan

Ayes

Mr. Shuman

Ms. Veerasammy

Mr. Williams

Dr. Smith

Mr. Jaffarally

Dr. Westford

Dr. Ramsaran

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks

Mr. Narine

Mr. Datadin

Dr. Mahadeo

Mr. Charlie

Mr. Seeraj

Ms. Rodrigues

Mr. Persaud

Mr. Indar

Mr. McCoy

Ms. Parag

Mr. Ramson

Dr. Persaud

Mr. Croal

Mr. Dharamlall

Mr. Bharrat

Mr. Hamilton

Mr. Mustapha

Ms. Manickchand

Dr. Anthony

Bishop Edghill

Mr. Todd

Ms. Teixeira

Mr. Nandlall

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips

Motion Carried.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to Thursday, 11th February, 2021 at 10.00 a.m.”

[Prime Minister]

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I move the adjournment of the Assembly to Thursday, 11th February, 2021 at 10:00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Before I formally adjourn the Assembly, there are two announcements. Firstly, I would like to remind Hon. Members of a training that the Clerk and the staff of the Parliament Office will host for Members of Parliament. I think this is on 9th February.

Secondly, there was some amount of concern with respect to the time that we sought for the extension for the debate. I think we had amended the Standing Orders very early, on due to the COVID- 19, to allow the sittings to happen from 10.00 a.m. to 12.00 p.m., with a suspension from

12.00 p.m. to 1.00 p.m., then resuming at 1.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. and suspending again at 4.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m. and resuming, once again, at 5.00 p.m. to 8.00 p.m. So, that is why at seven minutes to 8.00 p.m., we sought the Prime Minister's intervention to move that these amendments be extended to complete the debate.

Hon. Members, this is good time to take the adjournment. The Assembly stands adjourned to 11th February, 2021 at 10.00 a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 11.28 p.m.