



OFFICIAL REPORT

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2020-2021) 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

19TH Sitting

Friday, 12TH February, 2021

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 2.12 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

*Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P.,
Speaker of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

(i) MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE’S PROGRESSIVE PARTY/CIVIC (PPP/C) (38)

Prime Minister (1)

+ Hon. Brigadier (Ret’d) Mark Anthony Phillips, M.S.S., M.P.,
Prime Minister,
Prime Minister’s Office,
Colgrain House,
205 Camp Street,
Georgetown.

Vice-President (1)

+ Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P.,
Vice-President,
Office of the President,
New Garden Street,
Georgetown.

[Absent]

+ Cabinet Member

* Non-Elected Speaker

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

+ Hon. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, M.P.,
Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs,
Ministry of Legal Affairs,
Carmichael Street,
Georgetown.

Senior Ministers (17)

+ Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,
(Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni),
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,
Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.
Government Chief Whip,
Office of the Presidency,
New Garden Street,
Georgetown.
+ Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Lot 254 South Road,
Georgetown.

+*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,
Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance
Ministry of Finance,
Main & Urquhart Streets,
Georgetown.
+ Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,
Minister of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight’s Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Dr. Frank C. S. Anthony, M.P.,
Minister of Health,
Ministry of Health,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P.,
(Region No. 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),
Minister of Education,
Ministry of Education,
Lot 26 Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ *Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P.,
Minister of Home Affairs,
Ministry of Home Affairs,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P.,
Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),
Minister of Agriculture,
Ministry of Agriculture,
Regent and Vlissengen Road,
Bourda, Georgetown.

+ Hon. Pauline R.A. Campbell-Sukhai, M.P.,
Minister of Amerindian Affairs,
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,
South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P.,
Minister of Labour,
Ministry of Labour,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
Minister of Natural Resources,
Ministry of Natural Resources,
Lot 96 Duke Street,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

+*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,
Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
Lot 229 South Road,
Bourda, Georgetown.

+ Hon. Nigel D. Dharamlall, M.P.,
(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),
Minister of Local Government and Regional Development,
Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
DeWinkle Building,
Fort Street,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P.,
(Region No. 1 – BarimaWaini),
Minister of Housing and Water,
Ministry of Housing and Water,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister of Human Services and Social Security,
Ministry of Human Services and Social Security,
Lot 357 East and Lamaha Streets
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Charles S. Ramson, M.P.,
Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports,
Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports,
Main Street,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Sonia Savitri Parag, M.P.,
Minister of the Public Service,
Ministry of the Public Service,
164 Waterloo Street,
North Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

Junior Ministers (4)

Hon. Warren Kwame E. McCoy, M.P.,
Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister,
Office of the Prime Minister,
c/o Colgrain House,
205 Camp Street,
Georgetown.

Hon. Deodat Indar, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight’s Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
Fort Street,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

Hon. Susan M. Rodrigues, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water,
Ministry of Housing and Water,
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Stabroek,
Georgetown.

Other Members (14)

Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj, M.P.,
Lot 71 BB Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.
Mr. Alister S. Charlie, M.P.,
(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),
148 Lethem,
Central Rupununi,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.

Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P.,
Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),
Lot 4 Public Road,
No. 66 Village,
Corentyne,
Berbice.

Mr. Sanjeev J. Datadin, M.P.,
Lot 60 Section ‘K’,
John Street,
Campbellville,
Georgetown.

Mr. Seepaul Narine, M.P.,
Lot 321 BB Seventh Street,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.
Mrs. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.,
Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,
Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.
Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.,
Lot 340 East Street,
South Cummingsburg,
c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.
Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.,
55 AA Victoria Avenue,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.
Mr. Faizal M. Jaffarally, M.P.,
(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),
Lot 16-30 New Street,
New Amsterdam.
c/o Freedom House,
Robb Street,
Georgetown.
Dr. Tandika S. Smith, M.P.,
(Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),
Lot 290 Area ‘J’,
Tuschen, North,
East Bank Essequibo.
Mr. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.,
Paruima Upper Mazaruni,
c/o Freedom House,
Robb Street,
Georgetown.
*Ms. Sarah Browne, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,
South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.
*Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture,
Regent and Vlissengen Road,
Bourda, Georgetown.
Ms. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.,
Lot 32 Crown Dam,
Industry,
East Coast Demerara.

MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)
(i) A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) (31)

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Joseph F. Harmon, M.S.M., M.P., <i>Leader of the Opposition,</i> <i>Lot 99 Mazaruni Street,</i> <i>Guyhoc Park,</i> <i>Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P., <i>Lot 10 Delph Street,</i> <i>Campbelville,</i> <i>Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, M.P., <i>Lot 410 Caneview Avenue,</i> <i>South Ruimveldt,</i> <i>Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Raphael G.C. Trotman, M.P., <i>Lot 3202 Pricese 3,</i> <i>Providence,</i> <i>East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P., <i>Lot 933 Block 1,</i> <i>Eccles,</i> <i>East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Dr. Nicolette O. Henry, M.P., <i>Lot 2227 Ozama Street, North Ruimveldt,</i> <i>Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Dr. Karen R.V. Cummings, M.P., <i>Lot 2 Belfield Housing Scheme,</i> <i>East Coast Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P., <i>Lot 3382 Caneview Avenue,</i> <i>South Ruimveldt Park,</i> <i>Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P., <i>Lot 48 Atlantic Ville,</i> <i>Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Christopher A. Jones, M.P., <i>Opposition Chief Whip,</i> <i>Lot 609 Conciliation Street,</i> <i>Tucville,</i> <i>Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P., <i>Lot 842 Eccles,</i> <i>East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>

Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P., <i>Lot 151 Durbana Square, Lamaha Gardens, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Coretta A. McDonald, M.P., <i>Lot 202 N, Fourth Street, Alexander Village, Georgetown.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 13 A, New Providence, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P., <i>Lot 18 Public Road, Johanna Cecilia, (Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P., <i>Lot 1285 EE Eccles Sugarcane Field, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P., <i>Lot 1110 Plot ‘B’, Herstelling, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P., <i>Lot 590 Good Hope, East Coast Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P., <i>Lot 1282 Block EE, Eccles, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Vincent P. Henry, M.P., <i>(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo), Shulidnab Village, South Central, Rupununi. (Culvert City Lethem)</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P., <i>(Region No. 1 – Barima Waini), Mabaruma Compound.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>

Mr. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P., <i>(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam), Lot 55 Henrietta, Essequibo Coast.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Ganesh A. Mahipaul, M.P., <i>Lot 14 Plantain Walk, West Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 88 Nelson Street, Mocha Village, East Bank Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 17 Block 1, Section F, Plantation Belfield, East Coast Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop, M.P., <i>(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Lot 40 Block 3 Craig Milne, Cove & John, East Coast Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Vinceroiy H. Jordan, M.P., <i>(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice), Lot 214 Lovely Lass Village, West Coast Berbice. C/o Christopher Jones</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P., <i>Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne), Lot 80 Babu John Road, Haswell, Port Mourant, Corentyne Berbice.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>
Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P., <i>(Region No. 8 –Potaro/Siparuni) Church Street Mahdia. Lot 4 Public Road, Stewartville, West Coast Demerara.</i>	<i>[Absent]</i>

Mr. Jermaine Figueira, M.P.,
(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),
Lot 136 2nd Street,
Silvertown,
Wismar, Linden.

Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P.,
(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),
Lot 90, Section C,
Wismar, Linden.

[Absent]

[Absent]

(ii) **A New and United Guyana, Liberty and Justice Party and The New Movement (ANUG, LJP & TNM) (1)**

Mr. Lenox R. O’Dell Shuman, M.P.,
Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly,
St. Cuthbert’s Mission,
Soesdyke Linden Highway.

Officers (2)

Mr. Sherlock E. Isaacs, A.A.,
Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.
Ms. Hermina Gilgeours,
Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

Hansard Division Officers (20)

Ms. Allison Connelly,
Chief Editor
Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,
Senior Editor
Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
Senior Editor (ag)
Ms. Latoiah Joseph,
Senior Editor (ag)
Ms. Carol Bess,
Editor
Ms. Shevona Telford,
Editor (ag)
Ms. Christina Ramroop,
Editor (ag)
Ms. Tesia Ellis,
Reporter
Ms. Indranie Persaud,
Reporter
Ms. Roseina Singh,
Reporter
Ms. Somna Karen-Muridall,
Reporter

Ms. Eyoka Gibson,
Reporter
Ms. Lushonn Bess,
Reporter
Ms. Bianca Cummings,
Reporter
Mr. Rohan Ramjas,
Reporter
Ms. Nadeila Allen,
Reporter
Ms. Celisa DeFlorimonte,
Reporter
Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician
Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician
Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Treatment of Opposition Members

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, late last evening, I received an email containing a letter from the Hon. Leader of the Opposition making a number of serious allegations against the Chair.

“Re: Treatment of Opposition Members of Parliament”

He declared that he and other Members were locked out on allegations of being instructed by the Speaker. He also made a number of other allegations against the Speaker; these will be dealt with subsequently. He also calls for an apology.

He asserts when referring to the alleged treatment of the Members of the Opposition of Parliament by Members of the Guyana Police Force:

“We understand that they were acting upon your instructions.”

I am disheartened and disappointed, but not distressed, that the Hon. Member holding such an important title in the National assembly while, being a practicing Attorney-at-Law, would intentionally traverse this route of allegations based on mere hearsay. Further, not only is he an Attorney-at-Law, but he has been a Member of this House for over 10 years.

It follows that to charge such irresponsible and damning allegations hurled at the Chair of the Speaker of the National Assembly is highly condemnable. It ought to be within his basic knowledge that not only are his assertions based on hearsay but, also, that the Speaker of the National Assembly has no jurisdiction over the operations of the Guyana Police Force. Further, his allegations of an order being issued to the police by the Speaker, simultaneously while presiding over the House, is ludicrous.

I add that the allegations of Hon. Members locked out and shut-in warrants a response. The 18th Sitting began with the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Members in this House. I note the Hon. Vincent Henry being the last to leave. I also note that Members from all sides, taking part in the fare in the Members of Parliament (MPs) Lounge. In addition, Members of the APNU/AFC greeted His Excellency, President, Dr. Irfaan Ali, with much loudness and enthusiasm. What happened outside the compound of this Parliament remains a matter for inquiry and the police.

Thank you.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Report was laid:

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Guyana for the financial year 2021.

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

MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE ASSEMBLY AND MOVED BY A MINISTER

Suspension of Standing Orders Nos. 10(2) and 38(9)(a)

BE IT RESOLVED:

That Standing Orders Nos. 10(2) and 38(9)(a) be suspended to enable the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance to complete uninterrupted the reading of the Budget Speech for 2021 at the Sitting of the National Assembly today, Friday, 12th February, 2021.

[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip]

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET FOR 2021 - MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2021

WHEREAS the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana requires that Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for any financial year should be laid before the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Constitution also provides that when the Estimates of Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly an Appropriation Bill shall be introduced in the Assembly providing for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet that expenditure;

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2021 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2021-02-12.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2021, of a total sum of three hundred and fifty three billion, eight hundred and thirty three million, six hundred and twelve thousand dollars **(\$353,833,612,000), excluding twenty nine billion, two hundred and forty seven million, and seven hundred and forty six thousand dollars (\$29,247,746,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.

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

Introduction

Senior Minister with Responsibility for Finance in the Office of the President [Dr. Singh]: Mr. Speaker, I rise to move the motion for the approval of the Estimates of the Public Sector and the Budget for the financial year 2021 and, in so doing, I wish to indicate that Cabinet has recommended that the National Assembly proceed upon this motion, pursuant to article 171, paragraph 2 of *the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana*.

Budget 2021 is the first full-year Budget presented by this Peoples Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration since we were given a new mandate by the people of Guyana in the historic 2nd March, 2020, General and Regional Elections. This Budget comes after the emergency budget of 2020, which was prepared under a compressed schedule, and arrived in this House well into the second half of the fiscal year, as a result of the protracted struggle to defend democracy last year.

That emergency budget delivered on this PPP/C Government’s promise to provide immediate protection and relief to the long-suffering people of Guyana and breathe some life into the then moribund Guyanese economy. Together with the subsequent appropriations approved for that year, *Budget 2020* provided for \$7 billion of the Coronavirus disease (COVID- 19) relief cash grants to

households across Guyana; \$2 billion of one-off grants to public sector employees; and \$1 billion in end year bonuses to front-line workers in the health sector and the disciplined services. *Budget 2020* reversed punitive and draconian tax measures, such as the value-added tax (VAT) on electricity, water, and cellular phones. It restored a subsidy on water charges for the elderly.

Measures aimed at jump-starting economic activity included the removal of the value-added tax on exports and on machinery, equipment, and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) for mining, forestry, agriculture, and manufacturing. Additionally, corporate taxation was removed on private providers of education and healthcare, thereby incentivising investment in these areas. An injection of \$7 billion was also provided to recapitalise the sugar industry. Meanwhile, the resumption of the Government’s house lot distribution and land titling programme, restoration of the \$30 million limit on loans eligible for Mortgage Interest Relief (MIR), and raising of the limit for low-income housing loans for corporate tax relief in the banking sector to \$10 million, combined to stimulate a restart of activity in the construction sector and made home ownership affordable once again. The list of reliefs provided in *Budget 2020* goes on.

In two short months we will celebrate 55 years of political independence. As we approach this milestone, it is worthwhile to cast our eyes briefly backward over those 55 years, particularly at independent Guyana’s economic history. That history indicates a succession of clearly distinguishable phases in the evolution of the Guyanese economy and a strikingly close correlation with the political history of the country.

The first phase from 1966 to 1992 was an era of State domination and economic decimation and left our country bankrupt. The second phase from 1992 to 2015 was an era of economic restoration and reconstruction, with widespread renewal and expansion, returned our country to solvency and creditworthiness, and put us firmly on a path to prosperity. Tragically, these gains were sharply reversed during the third phase, between 2015 and 2020, a period of renewed state domination and rapid economic retrogression and degeneration, made all the worse towards the end by the devastating effects of COVID- 19, and that period returned the country in the short space of five years to the brink of bankruptcy once again and the deep economic despair.

Being acutely aware of this history, scarred by pre-1992 memories and bruised and battered by the last five years, the

people of Guyana chose as they did in 2020. In doing so, they made a resounding statement about the direction in which they would like to go at this critical juncture for our country.

2.27 *p.m.*

And most of those who were still not convinced by March, 2020, certainly were by August 2020, having stared in utter disbelief at the events of the preceding six months.

As we look back at 2020, if there is one lesson we all must have learnt, it is the lesson of how interconnected and interdependent we are, both within our country and more widely as a global community. At home, we witnessed, in 2020, how the actions of a tiny few could so easily have subverted the will of so many. In our quieter moments, we must all reflect on where we might have ended up as a country if the will of the many did not prevail over the ill intentions of the few – isolated from the rest of the world, condemned as a pariah, and consigned to the dust pile of tin-pot dictatorships. Make no mistake of it, that tragic outcome would have affected all of us, not some of us.

At the global level, 14 months ago, COVID-19 was a mystery illness affecting a few people far away in Wuhan City. Today, it has infected over 107 million persons across 223 countries and territories, and killed nearly 2.4 million, some of them our neighbours and friends right here in Guyana. Not a single corner of the world has escaped the tentacles of COVID-19. If that does not teach us a lesson of how interconnected and interdependent we are, nothing will.

With that historical context in mind, let us be clear, 2021 will not be an easy year. COVID-19 is still with us, and the need to keep our people safe and to keep the economy alive is still very present. While we have already started administering vaccines, just a day or two ago, the speed of uptake and the time until herd immunity is achieved are still huge unknowns. Exactly when we will be returning to any semblance of normalcy is therefore far from certain. The matter is made worse by the fact that we are confronting these unknowns with limited fiscal resources, given the depletion and plunder of the public treasury over the past five years. But, recover we must, and recover we will.

On a far more positive note, if we look beyond our immediate travails, it is important that we appreciate the magnitude of the moment at which we now stand. For generations, our fore parents have dreamt of a Guyana where they and their children can work, earn, live, and age comfortably, saving and uplifting themselves steadily, free of despair, full of hope,

realising aspiration after aspiration, and with no reason or yearning to be anywhere but here. This dream would have renewed itself at every major point in our country’s history. Sadly, until now and for a variety of reasons, this dream has remained elusive despite the tremendous gains made when we were last in office. Many remained hopeful, but some lost hope along the way. Contemplate now that ours is the generation who might finally realise this dream, and the full magnitude of the moment we are in might be better appreciated.

The dream that has eluded us as a country for generations can finally be realised, not in the far future, but by today’s generation. Lest we be mistaken, this will not happen automatically. It will take bold and visionary, but careful and responsible, leadership. The path to prosperity, and by this, I mean not a fleeting glimpse of prosperity but lasting and enduring prosperity, will unavoidably require careful charting and steady navigation. Important trade-offs will need to be made and balances struck, most significantly between immediate needs and longer-term considerations. This is what the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government offers, the vision to chart the course we need to take, and the capability to get us there.

Only yesterday, His Excellency President Irfaan Ali in his inaugural address to this National Assembly spoke of the keyword of his Government being oneness, and he outlined his vision for One Guyana. There can be no more compelling philosophy for us than this concept of oneness. It is embodied in our national motto, and it must be equally embodied in all that we do. His Excellency also yesterday outlined a bold and exciting vision for our country across the entire spectrum of government policy and including a number of specific targets by which his Government will be held accountable. Guided by His Excellency’s vision as well as the People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s manifesto, on the basis of which we were elected to Office, our agenda for transforming Guyana will bring tangible and demonstrable betterment to all Guyanese. With the implementation of this agenda, Guyana will be an unrecognisably different place in every positive respect in five years’ time compared to where we are today.

In keeping with His Excellency’s vision, *Budget 2021* seeks to achieve the following objectives for all Guyanese:

- (1) Navigating COVID-19 for as long as it is around, keeping our population safe, containing further spread, treating those who are infected, providing vaccines as soon as they become available, and

reopening the economy progressively, and then fully, when it is safe to do so;

- (2) Ensuring a diversified and resilient productive sector, by facilitating large scale private investment in both traditional, new and emerging sectors creating 50,000 jobs in the next five years, and promoting entrepreneurship at the medium and small business level;
- (3) Initiating investment in catalytic and transformative infrastructure, including energy infrastructure to ensure adequate supply at competitive cost, and transport infrastructure to improve international connectivity and unleash domestic production and productivity;
- (4) Establishing world class social services such as education and healthcare, so that these services are available to the domestic population, but also with a view to entering the international market for providing these services to a regional and global clientele;
- (5) Improving the quality of public services and creating a conducive environment for doing business and interacting with government, including by deploying technology-based solutions, as well as reducing bureaucracy and red tape; and
- (6) Ensuring respect for the Constitution and the rule of law, maintaining good governance, safeguarding access to justice, and the preservation of a safe and secure environment for all Guyanese and visitors to Guyana.

With these objectives in mind this Budget ensures we recover as a country both from 2020 and from the last five years of trauma. It puts in place the policies needed to catalyse rapid economic growth in the near and medium term; and it lays the foundation needed to ensure that that growth is not transitory but is sustainable for the longer term.

Budget 2021 is therefore presented under the theme: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*.

The Global and Regional Economic Context

I will now review the Global and Regional Economic Context. From the global economic standpoint, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a catastrophe like no other, causing an economic shock much worse and much more pervasive than

the 2007/2008 financial crisis. Countries rich and poor, advanced and developing, have plunged into recessions as they adopted containment measures. With data now suggesting that some economies have started to recover, a less severe recession is estimated for 2020 than previously forecasted. Global output in 2020 is estimated to have contracted by 3.5%.

This revised position reflects some easing in the second half mostly in advanced economies – the United States (US) and the Euro area – as well as in China after lockdowns were scaled back and government support measures were rolled out. Advanced economies who were able to deliver direct spending and liquidity support are estimated to have contracted by 4.9% in 2020. Similarly, the contraction of output in emerging market and developing economies is estimated at 2.4% in 2020. As previously forecasted, output in all countries in this group, except China, is estimated to have declined. Notably, growth in China is now estimated at 2.3% for 2020. In the Latin America and the Caribbean region, economic output is estimated to have contracted by 7.4%.

Closer home, Caribbean economies felt the sharp effects of the pandemic as a result of their high dependency on tourism as well as the domestic containment measures. Latest available data suggest that the tourism dependent economies of the Caribbean are likely to have contracted by 9.9% in 2020, and individual countries in that group, by as much as 20%. Even in the commodity exporting economies of the Caribbean, overall growth in 2020 is expected to have been in the vicinity of a paltry 0.6%.

Mr. Speaker, as indicated earlier, COVID-19 is far from over and much uncertainty remains. Following the 2020 contraction in global output, the world economy is expected to see some recovery in 2021. However, this must be regarded cautiously as the world continues to manage the public health situation and contain downside risks simultaneously.

2.42 p.m.

Global output is expected to grow, in 2021, by 5.5%. Two key assumptions driving this outlook are the provision of additional policy support in some large economies, as well as the expectation of a vaccine that would result in strengthened economic activity later in the year.

Growth in advanced economies is therefore forecasted at 4.3% in 2021. In the United States of America (USA) and

Japan, 2021 growth outlook – projected at 5.1% and 3.1%, respectively – can partially be attributed to fiscal stimulus measures introduced at the end of 2020. The 2021 outlook for the Euro area, at 4.2%, incorporates lower activity at the end of 2020 combined with rising infections and reintroduced lockdowns. Recovery is also anticipated for the emerging market and developing economies group, which is expected to grow by 6.3%. Like the advanced economies, the recovery paths vary within this group and with significant differentiation expected between China and the other economies, as China’s containment measures and liquidity support appeared to have facilitated a strong recovery. For Latin America and the Caribbean, growth of 4.1% is forecasted, but within the Caribbean, the recovery is expected to be protracted, with growth of 4% in the tourism-dependent economies and 3.8% in the commodity exporters.

As a commodity exporter, Guyana remains exposed to developments on the global commodity markets and the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) introduced much uncertainty in these markets, with mixed effects across the main commodities we export. The average world market price of rice was US\$497 per metric tonne in 2020, 18.8% above the 2019 average. The average world market price for sugar was US\$0.28 per kilogramme in 2020, a 1.5% increase when compared to 2019. Global metal prices in 2020 were mixed when compared with 2019. The average price of gold in 2020 was US\$1,770.3 per troy ounce, 27.1% over 2019. The average price for aluminium was US\$1,704 per metric tonne in 2020, 5% lower when compared with 2019. The average price of Brent crude oil was US\$42.3 per barrel in 2020, 33.9% lower when compared with 2019.

Looking ahead, the world market prices for rice and sugar are projected to increase in 2021 by 0.3 % and 2.3%, respectively. However, gold and aluminium prices are projected to decline by 1.7% and 1.4%, respectively. The average crude oil price is projected to increase by 4% in 2021 but remain below the 2019 average.

Developments in the Domestic Economy in 2020

A. Real Gross Domestic Product

At the time of *Budget 2020*, it was hoped that the budgetary allocations and measures introduced would help to curb the spread of COVID-19, allowing for a faster return to normalcy. However, it very quickly became apparent that infection levels were significantly higher than reported by our predecessors in Office, reflecting the low level of testing. As a result, our Government was forced to keep in place several

emergency measures for much longer than anticipated, hampering the pace of recovery expected at that time.

Indeed, it has become evident that the shocks to our economy from the events of 2020 – both the pandemic and the protracted General and Regional Elections – were far more severe and far more lasting than we anticipated. As a result, our real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020 is estimated to have grown by 43.5%, somewhat lower than previously expected, considering that 2020 was the first year over which we were an oil producer. More strikingly, the non-oil economy is estimated to have contracted by 7.3% in 2020.

B. Sectoral Performance

a. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing

In 2020, the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors are estimated to have grown by 4.1%. This improved position is largely on account of growth in rice and other crops and livestock industries, which more than offset contractions observed in sugar, forestry and fishing.

The sugar growing sector is estimated to have contracted by 3.7%, with production falling to a low of 88,868 tons. This was primarily due to a shortfall of more than 17,000 tons in the first crop which, in turn, resulted from the protracted lack of capital investment in factories, which caused downtime and reduced the volume of sugar extracted from canes. Additionally, high rainfall in November and December resulted in the flooding of some fields and restricted access to canes.

The rice growing sector is estimated to have expanded by 4.8% in 2020. Paddy production reached 1,057,580 tons in 2020, 0.8% above the previous year. The increase was attributed to more hectares being harvested despite lower yields. The former improved by 4.4%, while the latter declined by 3.5%, due to the incidence of various diseases that affected the second crop.

With respect to the production of other crops, despite excessive rainfall in November and December, this sector is estimated to have grown by 6.6% in 2020. Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in increased demand for many fruits, particularly citrus. Like other crops, the livestock sector is also estimated to have grown in 2020, recording an increase of 5%. This was driven by poultry, egg and beef production, which are estimated to have grown by 10.4%, 34.1% and 3.4 %, respectively.

The forestry sector is estimated to have contracted by 8.1%. The overall decline is primarily driven by an 11.8% decline in sawn wood production, reflecting the marked slowdown in construction activity in 2020.

The fishing sector is projected to have contracted by 17.1%. This decline was largely as a result of fewer vessels going out to fish, due to lower domestic and external demand stemming from the pandemic. Production was further limited by inclement weather, as well as an extension of the closed season for shrimp fishing, from eight weeks to 10 weeks.

b. Extractive Industries

The mining and quarrying sector is estimated to have expanded by 303.7% in 2020. The overall growth above 2019 was driven by the emerging oil and gas and support services industry, which grew by 2,603.3% over the previous year, given that 2020 represented the first full year of the industry’s operations. In contrast, a sharper-than-expected decline was observed for the gold subsector.

One of the large gold mining companies ceased production in July, 2020 to facilitate a transfer of ownership and only resumed operations in November. As a result of this stoppage, as well as lower extraction by the other large company, the subsector contracted by 7.8%. The contraction in production by largescale operators overshadowed the small and medium scale miners, who declared 485,552 troy ounces in 2020, 8.3% higher than the previous year.

Turning to the bauxite subsector, the stoppage of mining by one company, combined with lower global demand for bauxite and disruptions to supply chains, resulted in an estimated contraction of 41.2% in 2020.

The other mining subsector, which comprises diamond, sand mining and stone quarrying, is estimated to have contracted by a staggering 42.7% in 2020. Diamond declarations declined as a result of lower global demand for precious stones, amid the global economic crisis caused by the pandemic. This resulted in lower prices. Domestically, as a result of the elections impasse, COVID-19 restrictions and record high gold prices, less diamond mining activity was observed. The prevailing political and public health challenges also resulted in a significant reduction in construction activity, with public sector projects grinding to a halt for several months, resulting in reduced sand mining and stone quarrying.

c. Manufacturing

The manufacturing sector is estimated to have contracted by 8.6% in 2020. Declines of 3.7%, 5.7% and 10.8% were estimated for sugar, rice and other manufacturing subsectors, respectively.

d. Electricity and Water Supply and Sewerage

In 2020, the water supply and sewerage sector is estimated to have increased by 8%. While this was partially due to new connections, it was also driven by increased sanitation activity as a result of the pandemic. Electricity supply is also estimated to have grown in 2020 by 1.2%.

e. Construction

As noted previously, construction activities were significantly lower than in 2019, largely as a result of restrictions put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19. While the relaxation of these measures in the second half of the year resulted in some improvement in the sector, it is still estimated to have contracted in 2020 by 6.3%.

f. Services

The services sector is estimated to have contracted by 9.4% in 2020. The overall decline could be attributed primarily to contractions in wholesale and retail trade and transport and storage. These subsectors fell by 28.3% and 30.2%, respectively, outweighing expansions in information and communication, real estate activities, public administration and human health and social work, which grew by 5.5%, 0.3%, 1.2% and 3.4%, respectively.

C. Balance of Payments

The overall balance of payments recorded a surplus of US\$60.6 million in 2020, compared to a deficit of US\$48.9 million recorded in 2019.

2.57 *p.m.*

The current account recorded a deficit of US\$651.7 million in 2020, 76.9% lower than the deficit of US\$2,823.7 million in 2019. The difference between the actual outturn for 2020 and the forecast resulted from a larger-than-projected merchandise trade surplus. The merchandise trade account moved to a surplus of US\$514.8 million, from a deficit of US\$2,473 million in 2019, reflecting the entry of oil exports into the balance of payments in 2020. This offset the lower-than-anticipated unrequited transfers and a higher-than-projected deficit on the net services account.

The net services account registered a deficit of US\$1,824.7 million in 2020, higher than the 2019 position by US\$892.5 million. This position was due to a larger-than-anticipated deficit on the non-factor services account by US\$216.2 million. In 2020, net payment for non-factor services increased by US\$907.6 million to US\$1.793.1 billion, when compared with 2019. This resulted mainly from increased payments for business services.

The surplus on the capital account was recorded at US\$720.9 million in 2020, lower than the US\$2,744.6 million in 2019. The shortfall resulted from higher outflows of private enterprises also associated with the commencement of oil production. Net foreign direct investments amounted to US\$1.824.3 billion in 2020.

Under the capital account, the net non-financial public sector position moved to a deficit of US\$190.3 million compared to a surplus of US\$147.9 million in 2019. The 2020 deficit was mainly on account of lower-than-projected disbursements.

The balance of payments surplus resulted in the Bank of Guyana increasing its external reserve position to US\$680.6 million, equivalent to 2 months of import cover at the end of 2020.

D. Monetary Developments

The money supply expanded by 13.7% to \$521 billion in 2020, when compared with 2019. The outturn in 2020 was attributed to increases in both narrow and quasi-money which grew by 20.5% and 5.6%, respectively. The growth in narrow money was on account of increases in the currency in circulation and demand deposits, which grew by 30.3% and 13.7%, respectively. These increases more than offset the decline of 29.6% in cashiers’ cheques and acceptances. The growth in quasi-money resulted from an increase in savings deposits of 11.1%, despite a decline in time deposits of 25.9%.

In 2020, net domestic credit by the banking system expanded by 15.9% to \$343.9 billion when compared with 2019. This position resulted from increased credit to both the private and the public sectors. Net private sector credit grew by 2.4%, to \$259.8 billion, on account of an increase in credit to all sectors with the exception of manufacturing, which contracted by 17.8%. Credit to the agriculture, mining and quarrying, services, households, real estate mortgage loans and other sectors were higher by 3.2%, 7.3%, 7.7%, 1.7%, 3.7% and 7.7%, respectively.

This reflects the decision to lower the reserve requirement ratio from 12% to 10% for the period 24th August to 31st December, 2020, in keeping with an agreement between the central bank of Guyana and the commercial banks in relation to COVID-19 relief measures. Total reserves deposited with the Bank of Guyana increased by 42.5% to \$125.6 billion, due to the reduction in the reserve requirement to encourage private sector credit. Reserves in excess of minimum requirement amounted to \$75.1 billion at the end of December, 2020.

E. Prices and Income

a. Inflation

The 12-month inflation rate at December, 2020 was recorded at 0.9%, mainly as a result of lower energy prices which offset higher food prices, largely driven by higher prices of meat, fish and eggs, vegetables and vegetables products.

b. Interest Rates

The interest rate remained low throughout 2020. The small savings rate declined by 5 basis points in December, 2020, when compared with December 2019, to reach 0.91% while the commercial bank weighted average lending rate fell by 22 basis points, to 8.96%. The 182-day treasury bill yield increased to 1%, from 0.89%, while the 364-day treasury bill yield remained unchanged at 1%, resulting from the competitive bidding for these instruments. The 91-day treasury bill also remained unchanged at 1.54%.

c. Income

In 2020, recognising the hardship of COVID-19 and, following the much delayed change in government in August, 2020, this People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government provided amounts totalling \$7 billion for every household to receive relief in the form of an unconditional cash transfer of \$25,000. This Government has also been clear and unwavering in its commitment to place our frontline responders first as we combat the pandemic. Indeed, they were first in line to receive the COVID-19 vaccines as they arrived yesterday. We put \$1.1 billion in the hands of over 19,000 health workers and members of the Disciplined Services. Additionally, a one-off payment was made to all public sector employees, benefiting more than 60,000 employees and putting almost \$2 billion in the hands of these employees. While some countries around the world reduced working hours and salaries for their workers as part of their pandemic response, this Government retained all public

servants at full pay, while allowing a rotational work system and work from home systems, where applicable, to mitigate disease transmission.

F. Fiscal Position

a. Non-Financial Public Sector

The balance on the non-financial public sector (after grants) amounted to a deficit of \$91.8 billion. This deficit is equivalent to 9.6% of GDP at the end of 2020 and is mainly attributed to a shortfall of \$2.9 billion in revenue, offset against the contraction in total expenditure of \$1.3 billion. Additionally, grants fell short by \$939.7 million.

b. Central Government

At the end of 2020, the operations of the central Government resulted in a deficit of \$90.5 billion, 9.4% of GDP. The deficit was primarily as a result of higher-than-anticipated expenditure requirements.

Central Government’s current revenue for 2020 totalled \$227.4 billion. Tax collection accounted for 96% of this revenue, amounting to \$218.3 billion. The increase in tax revenue above the 2020 estimate was the result of higher-than-projected collections from internal revenue and excise taxes, which grew by \$6 billion and \$1.9 billion, respectively. Internal revenue was higher on account of larger-than-expected collections from private sector corporation tax and Pay As You Earn (PAYE), which were \$3.7 billion and \$1.3 billion above the budget forecast.

The increase in excise tax collections above the budget projection is mainly due to the higher-than-anticipated collections from the importation of fuel products and motor vehicles. In contrast, collections from value-added tax (VAT) were \$2.8 billion lower than the projection, on account of lower collections from both imported goods and domestically supplied goods of \$2.4 billion and \$368.3 million, respectively. It would be recalled that this Government provided extensive relief on VAT, as a priority, in the 2020 Budget.

Similarly, customs and trade tax collections were below the 2020 forecast by \$1.3 billion, largely attributed to lower collections of import duties. Non-tax revenues totalled \$9.1 billion, lower than projected as a result of lower dividends received from the non-financial public enterprises.

Central Government’s expenditure for 2020 totalled \$325.5 billion, \$5.2 billion above the allocation provided for in

Budget 2020. When compared with the *Budget 2020* estimate, non-interest expenditure was \$1.6 billion higher than expected, on account of larger outlays on other goods and services and transfer payments. The increase in other goods and services was mainly on account of the payment, by this Government, of \$6 billion for electricity arrears inherited from the previous Government and owed by various government agencies, to the detriment of the finances of the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL). The growth in transfer payments arose from the COVID-19 relief cash grant, which we have rolled out across the country. Interest payments were \$394.9 million lower than the projection and capital expenditure reached \$76.1 billion at the end of 2020.

c. Public Enterprises

The overall deficit of the public enterprises at the end of 2020 was \$1.3 billion.

G. Public Debt Management

This People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government’s track record – established and so amply illustrated during our previous tenure in Office – of prudent debt management is well established and has been amply illustrated. We endeavour to preserve that track record by contracting financing and meeting debt service obligations at the lowest possible cost within acceptable risk parameters. This approach would engender the continued sustainability of Guyana’s total public and publicly guaranteed debt, which amounted to US\$2,592.2 million at the end of December 2020. Of this amount, total public debt comprised US\$2,589.8 million, while total publicly guaranteed debt comprised US\$2.4 million. Of note, this is the first year that our debt coverage has been expanded to include publicly guaranteed debt, providing a complete picture of our debt position.

3.12 p.m.

This is yet more testimony to this People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government’s commitment to transparency and accountability.

At the end of December, 2020, the ratio of total public and publicly guaranteed debt to GDP was 47.4%. Total public debt at end of December, 2020 was 53.3 % higher than at the end of December 2019, mainly due to the inclusion of a large central government gross overdraft with the Bank of Guyana, accumulated under the previous Administration, but which was previously not reflected as part of the domestic debt

stock. This move is intended to regularise and accurately reflect significant liabilities accumulated over the last five years, and to restore the integrity of Guyana’s fiscal accounts.

Additionally, all outstanding liabilities totalling about US\$67.5 million or about GY\$14.1 billion, under a government-guaranteed bond, issued in May 2018 by the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) under the previous Administration, are classified now as domestic debt due to the fact that this Government was required to meet debt service obligations under this bond in 2020. It would be recalled that the bond was issued with a full and iron clad government guarantee.

In 2020, total public debt service payments amounted to US\$92.3 million, an increase of 9.3% compared to the preceding year, on account of higher domestic debt service costs. Total domestic debt service payments, in 2020, amounted to US\$16.1 million, more than twice the 2019 figure of US\$6.3 million, due to the need for Government to meet debt service obligations under the NICIL bond. Conversely, external debt service payments shrank by 2.5% in 2020 to US\$76.2 million, mainly due to the completion of repayments under a rescheduled debt to Trinidad and Tobago.

Early in 2021, indeed just a few days ago, Government moved to increase the external and domestic debt ceilings from \$400 billion to \$650 billion and from \$150 billion to \$500 billion, respectively, both for purposes of regularising the outstanding liabilities inherited from our predecessors on office and also to accommodate new financing. We recognise that an increase, particularly in the level of domestic debt, is likely to materialise in the short-term, but we will be actively examining ways in which to contain this indebtedness going forward.

Sectoral Vision and Plans – the Agenda for 2021 and Beyond

B. Macroeconomic Outlook

Despite the ambition of our development agenda and our intention to roll it out in the shortest time possible, we will do so within a macroeconomic framework that ensures that we remain competitive and that addresses issues of both stability and sustainability. In this regard, we will remain ever mindful of the need to avoid the pitfalls that have beset many new producers of oil and gas and many resource-rich countries, including Dutch disease. We will safeguard the fiscal and debt sustainability that we have worked so hard to achieve by prudent contracting of new financing, careful targeting and

management of Government expenditure, strengthened revenue administration, and ensuring that the fiscal deficit is managed in a way that minimises any risk of crowding out credit to the private sector. The task before us is to ensure steady strengthening of the public finances from the parlous state in which we inherited then, while at the same time financing our aggressive development agenda.

We anticipate high rates of real economic growth in the immediate-term, reflecting the ramping of oil production, but moderating into the medium and longer term. We will ensure that those high rates of growth are accompanied by policies designed to minimise supply side constraints to avoid the risk of overheating. We aim to ramp up adequate levels of external reserves, ensure exchange rate stability, as well as interest rate stability and low levels of inflation.

C. The Low Carbon Development Strategy

It is no secret that Guyana continues to face disproportionate exposure to the effects of climate change given our low-lying coastal plain. At the same time, we make a disproportionate contribution to the global fight against climate change given our pristine standing rainforests. This has not changed, notwithstanding that we have become an oil exporting country. Our vulnerability to the effects of climate change, and our desire to respond as a proactive participant in the search for solutions rather than lament as victims, led to the vision of the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). The LCDS, as it is known, was a ground-breaking forest partnership agreement with Norway. It was a first for a developing country and the third largest agreement of its kind in the world. This agreement provided for Guyana to earn payments for climate services up to US\$250 million over a five-year period.

When A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government came into Office in 2015, they squandered whatever funds were available, and brought the release of the rest of the funds already earned by Guyana to a grinding halt. This culminated in the last payments from Norway being suspended. On top of this lost opportunity, a successor Guyana/Norway agreement for the period from 2015 to 2020 never materialised. Almost US\$30 million for existing projects has not been disbursed. More than US\$135 million that was earned by Guyana under this arrangement is sitting in bank accounts outside our economy. The Amaila Falls Hydropower Project (AFHP), which would have used US\$80 million of LCDS financing to leverage hundreds of millions of US dollars of private investment by major foreign

investors, was derailed. The opportunity to grow our payments from forest climate services after 2015 was never taken. Together, this is one of the most shameful economic legacies of the APNU/AFC Government, and it falls to this People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government to repair the damage. We will do this in three ways.

Firstly, in today’s budget, we are taking steps to unblock the more than US\$135 million that had not been released for allocation into projects. These resources will be invested primarily in renewable energy projects, and to strengthen the agencies involved in regulating the sector, such as the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC), as well as to advance ongoing projects such as the Amerindian land titling project, sustainable land management, and on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) access for hinterland, poor and remote communities.

Secondly, we are looking ahead and starting work to assess the emerging international markets for forest climate services. It is believed that these markets can contribute 75% of needed offsets to meet the Paris Climate Agreement, and global interest is growing. This is exactly the message that Guyana and other forest countries have been championing for over a decade, while pointing out that, in developing countries in particular, all societies need to rapidly grow low carbon opportunities if they are to diversify their economies away from traditional development paths.

Finally, later this year, we will prepare an expanded LCDS to take into account the opportunities and challenges that have emerged since the Strategy was first produced. We will expand it into a comprehensive development strategy. Needless to say, this will incorporate the fact that we are now an oil producer. In the updated LCDS, the Government will set out how Guyana can achieve the national transformation that the PPP/C manifesto speaks of, while also participating in the global economic transition that will take place in the coming decades. True to the original vision of the LCDS, Guyana can lead the way in meeting this challenge.

D. A Diversified, Resilient and Competitive Productive Sector

a. Oil and Gas

Our next objective is a promotion of a diversified, resilient and competitive productive sector. Since the announcement of the oil discoveries back in 2015, this Government has been unwavering in its position that Guyana must utilise these resources responsibly and transparently to catalyse

development and create opportunities for all Guyanese. Since we assumed Office, we have come to find that the capacity for management of the oil and gas sector remains severely underdeveloped to ensure that resource extraction is efficient and profit share is maximised. The previous Government appears to have spent the last five years wasting time instead of ensuring that every opportunity was aggressively pursued to expeditiously equip our regulators to safeguard our national patrimony.

While oil and gas may bring many opportunities, like any other extractive sector, it also brings with it its challenges. In addition, the window of opportunity for the extraction of this resource is finite, added to which the global shift to renewable resources places further pressures on the long-term timeline.

Our vision for this sector has previously been elaborated in the *Budget 2020* and by His Excellency in his Address to this honourable House yesterday and on other occasions. In the next few years, this Government will endeavour to invest in and create an enabling environment that will result in an oil and gas industry that is vibrant and, importantly, that generates positive spill overs for the rest of the economy.

In addition to strong local content policies, we will ensure that all best practices and principles are adhered to, so that our environment is protected while generating revenue that will transform our country, as I said earlier, into one that, in every likelihood, will likely be unrecognisable, in a positive way, in the next five years.

3.27 p.m.

On the subject of local content, one of the first tasks undertaken by His Excellency, the President, upon assuming Office, was to convene an international panel of local content experts for the purpose of preparing a local content policy. That work is considerably advanced and, once concluded, the outcome of that work will be enshrined in legislation for implementation.

It is expected that the Stabroek Block licence holders will continue with their aggressive and, so far, very successful exploration programme, and maintain their schedule of works for field development such as with Payara. The operator for Kaieteur and Canje Blocks, along with their partners, will also be conducting exploration drilling during 2021, hoping to repeat the same kind of success as in the Stabroek Block. Despite the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) setbacks, the smaller oil companies are optimistic that they will emerge

post-pandemic and recommit to their own exploration obligations with zeal.

The Government is working to create a strong and robust institutional and regulatory framework to better manage activity in the sector, including: amending the Petroleum Act, developing a model petroleum sharing agreement, exploring a revised petroleum fiscal regime, advancing the Draft Local Content Policy and associated legislation and advancing the Petroleum Commission Bill.

Commensurate with this outlook, is the inevitable developing of technical capacity, strengthening of institutions associated with the oil and gas sector and the collaboration with experts to achieve the most optimal outcomes. Some of the agencies involve includes the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) and the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), which need to be adequately equipped to discharge their respective important responsibilities in the sector.

b. Other Extractives

Over the past five years, the mining sector suffered the consequences of gross neglect and callous policies designed, it would seem, to be unfriendly to the sector. Nevertheless, the sector remains an important contributor to Guyana’s non-oil economy. Mining, despite the challenges it faced over the past five years, contributed 13.3% to non-oil Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020, 69.1% of non-oil exports in 2020, and employed over 27,000 persons.

After the traumatic events of 2020, we are only now, finally, witnessing some return of investor confidence. Going forward, the People Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) Government regards the mining sector as having an absolutely critical role to play in our economy.

To better ensure targeted and efficient allocations of both private and public resources, work on improved quality mineral mapping will be undertaken. Once completed, this will reduce environmental damage while improving production and licence allocation. To ensure greater transparency in the allocation of mining lands, a mineral property management system will be deployed, enabling applicants to track the status of their applications online.

i. Gold

As I indicated earlier, the overall output from our gold industry was severely affected by the cessation of operations by one of our large producers. With a new operator acquiring that mine, alongside this Government’s efforts to boost the

industry, significant growth is expected in 2021 and over the medium-term. As partial operations recommenced in mid-September last year, shortly after this Government assumed office, the company hired over 500 employees between the third and fourth quarters.

By November, mining and milling operations were fully resumed, and almost 5,000 ounces of gold were produced in the last two months of the year. Additionally, in the last quarter of 2019, the other foreign company suspended operations, and resumed in February, 2020. With multiple hindrances present throughout 2020, the company managed to attain only 57% of its target, producing just over 26,000 ounces of gold.

But by the end of the last year, things made a turn for the better when the operator of the Karouni Mine made a world-class discovery in an underground mine, which showed 131.93 grams per tonne of gold. This discovery not only highlights the exploration potential of the mine, but it demonstrates the potential to extend its life. With the development of that mine expected to continue over the medium-term, an initial production target of 22,000 has been set for 2021. At Aurora Gold Mine, the other large operator plans to produce 90,000 ounces of gold. In the second half of this year, works on the underground mine are expected to begin.

Despite the severe economic shocks that came with 2020, small and medium scale miners had a decent year. Over 390,000 ounces were produced in 2020, which is 7% below its target but 7.1% above its 2019 level. This is as a result of the suspension of some operations. The dealerships anticipate a better year in 2021 and expect declarations in excess of 400,000 ounces.

ii. Bauxite

In February 2020, one of the key bauxite producers suspended operations on account of industrial unrest and damage to company property. To date, no decision has been taken on resumption of this company’s operations. Though, there was continued production from the other companies, the performance of the industry was well below that of 2019, with overall production estimated to have fallen by over 65%. Having assessed the current state of the sector, a policy framework for bauxite development will be considered in 2021 in line with our manifesto promises for implementation over the medium-term. Suffice it to say, our Government will continue to do all that it takes to support growth and expansion in this sector.

iii. Sand

In 2020, sand production estimated to have fallen by over 40%, on account of the pandemic and political related slowdown in construction activity across the country. With both private and public investment expected to rebound in 2021, and grow over the next two to three years, it is important to ensure sufficient access to quality local materials.

iv. Stone

Comparing 2019 with 2014, stone production, which is a critical component for building our nation’s physical infrastructure, declined by an estimated 49.9%. Having assumed Office, in addition to removing value-added tax (VAT) on machinery and equipment and All-terrain Vehicles (ATVs) in our last budget, our Government, in December, issued a licence to a local company, that will operate what has the potential to be the largest quarry in Guyana and in the Caribbean. That quarry is expected to begin operations in mid-2021. The licenced area covers over 7,000 acres. The company plans to produce, approximately, 20,000 metric tonnes weekly.

Another three licences are expected to be issued within the first quarter, which will further increase production, and which will result in a collective ramp up in production of approximately 800,000 tonnes. This combined with additional storage facilities, should help to address supply hurdles that were experienced to date and support the soaring construction needs of both the public and private sector that we will witness in 2021 and years to come.

v. Manganese

A foreign investor is expected to commence manganese operations in Matthews Ridge, with over 100 Guyanese already hired to prepare for the extraction of the mineral, and another 400 to be employed when full operations begin later this year. The company is currently engaged in the Environmental Social Impact Assessment (ESIA) with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – a requirement under the Mineral License Application. They are in the design and construction phase of the mine, port and haulage system. Over the medium-term, the development of the mine will see the transporting of manganese to Port Kaituma, where a wharf will be constructed to accommodate vessels to transport the mineral from our port. The total manganese resource is estimated at 26 million tonnes, and the company is

expected to mine some 2 million tonnes per year, with the life of the operation lasting some 12 to 13 years.

c. Forestry

Successive PPP/C Governments have long recognised that our forest generates multiple sources of revenues and livelihoods, whether from the protected standing forests that contribute to the quality of air on the planet while generating payments for forest conservation as discussed earlier, or sustainable forest management which enables individual livelihoods to be built around the harvesting of our various species of wood or the rich untapped biodiversity.

In the five years prior to us leaving Office in 2015, the average growth rate in this sector was 7.9% and the average growth in export earnings for the period was 7%. Following that, for the period 2015 to 2019, the A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) completely reversed this. Production contracted by an average of 7.4%, and export earnings by an average of 8.6%. At the same time, the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) was pushed into bankruptcy.

Since we resumed Office, we have made significant strides in reversing this position. Financial sources were immediately provided to not only support the struggling operations of the Guyana Forestry Commission, but, also, to pay outstanding emoluments to the staff. The Commission is now being positioned to return to self-sufficiency.

Our Government has also adjusted the National Log Export Policy, effective from 12th October, 2020, to expand access to markets for our quality timber products. We have begun to set the path for sustainable production through improved monitoring and planning. Additionally, we removed the Value-Added Taxes on machinery and equipment, provided tax concessions on ATVs and reversed VAT on exports and on hinterland travel, all with effect from 1st October, 2020.

This Government is confident that, in the medium-term, the forestry sector will grow to become an even greater contributor to our diversified non-oil economy. The point, really, that I seek to make here, is that we do have a remarkable potential to developing a large vibrant and dynamic non-oil economy.

Still on forestry, in 2021, we will advance progress under the National Forest Inventory (NFI) programme. This initiative will provide specific information on the types, locations and quantities of timber within our forests. This will help to

improve national and concessional level planning. Notably, the last inventory was executed some 50 years ago. This year, \$250 million has been budgeted for the implementation of the second phase of this initiative with activities planned for Regions 2, 7, 9 and 10. This initiative will create a reference dataset on forest resources for long-term monitoring and decision-making and is expected to continue over the medium-term.

3.42 p.m.

d. Agriculture and Food Security

Over the past five years, the agriculture sector suffered callous neglect, being left in complete decay as if the intention was to consign it into complete non-existence. In stark contrast, this Peoples Progressive Party/Civic Government’s intention is that agriculture would be one of the major anchors of our non-oil economy. It has a core sole to assure food safety, improved incomes and great jobs, generate export earnings and reduce food imports, and catalyse value-added production, especially when we would have received a lowering of the cost of energy.

Notwithstanding the hostile environment in which the agricultural sector operated over the last five years, the sector accounted for 27.1% of non-oil GDP and 21.3% of no-oil exports. One could only imagine what the sector would be able to achieve in a favourable environment.

To ensure the sector is able to discharge its envisaged role, our Government would invest in opening new farm-to-market roads; clearing and preparing new lands; expanding the infrastructure in the intermediate savannahs; expanding drainage and irrigation networks to make new land available for small, medium, and mega farms; strengthening extension services through additional and improved facilities; traceability and certification services to reduce existing trade barriers; research and development; and coordinating and facilitating private sector participation in agriculture-based tourism. To complement these initiatives, we would build human resource capacity to deliver the services required to drive growth in this sector.

With this holistic plan for agriculture, Guyana is well poised to claim its long outstanding position as the food basket of the Caribbean – supporting livelihoods and transforming not only our economy but that of the Region. In 2021, expenditure in the agriculture sector is expected to increase to \$22.6 billion from \$18.3 billion.

i. Sugar

Hundreds of years of sugar cultivation, since Colonial Guyana, were brutally slaughtered at the altar of political expediency over the past five years. It was done in a manner that would long be remembered as one of the most unconscionable acts committed by that A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government. On assuming Office, we met a situation where 7,000 sugar workers were unceremoniously shoved onto the bread line, by a Government that displayed no concern for the social and economic hardships that the arbitrary decision to close the lifeblood of rural Demerara and rural Berbice would cause to ordinary people. The rippling effect of this action coursed through the entire coastal Guyana spreading shock, dismay, disbelief and a sense of hopelessness. Hundreds of thousands of people were affected directly and indirectly, small and micro businesses and small market vendors were decimated as businesses dried up, and entire communities were devastated.

While three sugar estates were closed, the other three estates that were reluctantly kept opened were left to limp along with little to no capital investments during the APNU/AFC tenure. By the time we entered Office, sugar production had plummeted to its lowest level ever and the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) was in dire financial straits. Notwithstanding the prophets of doom, this Government stands ready, willing and resolute to deliver on our policy and manifesto promises to the sugar workers and to all Guyanese.

In this context, we have appointed a new board and management. Together, the board and management are charged with the responsibility to conduct a detailed diagnostic of the industry, in order to reboot the industry to make it fit for purpose for sugar and value-added opportunities, including diversification into non-traditional areas. Work is currently ongoing on developing a master plan, estate by estate, to guide the future of the industry. Possible elements of that master plan that are currently being considered include the following.

The GuySuCo could concentrate increasingly on redirecting its efforts towards an optimised product mix, a shift away from the current low value bulk-sugar market. In this regard, the corporation could quadruple its sales into the packaged sugar market, both locally and internationally, over the next five years. To this end, the Blairmont Packaging Plant could be expanded by three new packaging machines and an expansion of the storage bond so that inventory could be

available, at all times, to service the international market with the world-famous *Demerara Gold* packaged sugar. Further, the Enmore Packaging Plant could also be expanded to five operational packaging lines.

At Albion, Blairmont and Uitvlugt, more than 60% of the access roads are in a deplorable state, and more than 50% of the fleet of land preparation and tillage machines were allowed to deteriorate beyond repair. Additionally, more than 40% of the cane transport fleet, particularly the punts, were left to deteriorate to the point of disuse. Targeted investments would be needed to correct the situation over the medium-term. Investments in cane cultivation will help to ensure that ratoons that are currently over ten years old will be replaced over a five-year period at the rate of 20% per annum, helping to revert to the standard procedure of replanting every five years.

On the matter of the three estates that were closed by the APNU/AFC Government, we are currently assessing the damages and the cost to rehabilitate these estates to make them profitable cost centres, including, but not limited to, introducing public-private partnerships, agro-industrial and agro-energy opportunities, pursuing product diversification and retraining, where necessary. Given the importance of sugar in the domestic economy, and the manner in which this sector affects overall socio-economic conditions in rural Berbice and rural Demerara, we shall continue to work with all stakeholders, including the private sector, in ensuring that the viability of this industry is preserved. To this end, *Budget 2021* provides an allocation of \$2 billion for critical capital works at GuySuCo.

ii. Rice

The rice industry has demonstrated resilience, as I mentioned earlier, despite the difficult environment in which farmers and millers were forced to operate in over the last five years. Our Government has taken steps to ease the farmers of the burdensome overhead expenses imposed on them by reversing the punitive increases in land rents and taxes on agricultural equipment, machinery, fertilisers and chemicals. For example, the rice farmers, under the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary – Agricultural Development Authority (MMA-ADA), would now see about \$1.3 billion back in their hands, annually, with the reversal of land rent increases.

By 2024, we expect a dramatic increase in annual rice production over the next five years, ensuring that the crop remains a mainstay in our agriculture output. The increase

would be propelled by enhanced research and development, adoption of new technologies and promotion of new high yielding varieties, increased maintenance of drainage and irrigation systems and farm-to-market roads, and establishment of new markets. In October 2020, a new high-yielding variety of paddy was released, which should produce seven to eight tonnes of paddy per hectare, one to two tonnes more than our current yield. By 2023, another high-yielding variety is expected to be released.

In 2021, six drying floors would be constructed at strategic rice producing locations to provide much needed support to farmers in Regions 2, 3, 5 and 6, and a soil laboratory would be established to facilitate efficient and economic production of paddy. Additionally, five long-reach sprayers would be acquired to control paddy bugs on dams and fields, efficiently; a motorised thresher would be purchased to aid in plant breeding experiments; a laboratory would be constructed for experimental trials on value-added rice products; a Post-Harvest/ value-added department would be established at the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB); and physical and sensory analyses would be pursued for shelf-life studies for rice and rice-based food products. These initial steps will position the rice industry to gain the momentum needed to achieve its targeted growth in the medium-term.

iii. Other Crops

The expansion of cultivation of non-traditional crops is critical for diversification of the economy. In 2021, support for the establishment of over 100 shade houses countrywide would be provided with a view to increasing the production of vegetables. To meet the high demand for planting materials for citrus, Government would continue to provide assistance which would benefit farmers, particularly in the Pomeroon, Region 3, and the Linden-Soesdyke Highway. Research-based extension support would be intensified for fruit production to improve productivity and meet the growing demand of domestic fruit juice manufacturers. To this end, over \$1.2 billion is budgeted to support the operations of National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI).

Coconut is the new frontier crop of the sector and is expected to take off over the medium-term. This Administration will fund the establishment of four new coconut nurseries at Wakenaam, Leguan, Canal No. 2 and No. 63 Village in Corentyne. These will each produce 1,500 to 3,000 coconut

seedlings, every three months. As such, farmers could benefit from high quality planting material at an affordable cost.

3.57 p.m.

Technical training on inter-cropping and cultivation will be provided to farmers to help them optimise their returns on investments. Support from Government will see the private sector investing in over 1,000 acres of coconut estates, in the near term. To support this effort, *Budget 2021* provides over \$70 million to support the Hope Coconut Industries Limited (HCIL).

Corn and soya bean also represent a major new frontier in the ‘other crops’ sector. In 2021, Government will cultivate 100 acres of planting material to support the production of corn and will make it available to farmers at affordable prices. This is intended to reduce the importation of this commodity and will augment plans for large scale corn and soya bean cultivation, expected under the Intermediate Savannah Development Initiative (ISDI), which I shall discuss shortly.

iv. Agro-Processing

In 2021, Government will invest \$832 million in agricultural infrastructure, including agro-processing and packaging facilities. These interventions will be done in Lesbeholden, Parika, Sophia, Saint Ignatius, Aranaputa, Karakara and the intermediate savannahs. Farmers will now have access to affordable state-of-the-art processing and packaging at reduced operational costs. Moreover, Government will provide laboratory services to agro-processors to ensure they can attain the necessary standards and certifications in a timely manner and at an affordable cost.

Government will also be taking steps to strengthen the cold-storage capacity for seasonal produce destined for exportation and agro-processing. In this regard, two freezer trucks and two 40-foot refrigerated containers will be procured at a cost of \$60 million for the New Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC). Furthermore, in 2021, agro-processors can expect to benefit from the New GMC’s one stop agri-business incubator, through which equipment and human resources will be made available to provide technical and marketing support to agro-processors. To support these initiatives, this Budget provides an additional \$293 million to the New GMC.

v. Livestock

Our Government remains committed to facilitating large-scale farming of livestock, working with the private sector. Through these partnerships, we will realise improvements in

the quantity and quality of meat and meat products produced for both domestic and international markets.

In 2020, Government invested in high-quality livestock to increase farmers’ access to better breeding stock for improved production and productivity. In 2021, Government will facilitate the establishment of processing facilities, develop certification processes and pursue access to regional and international markets for our local producers. Moreover, Government will support investors by developing livestock traceability capacity to improve the accuracy and reliability of data, which is fundamental to meeting food safety standards and farm certification and will help to promote exports. To support these initiatives, this Budget provides \$806 million to the Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA) in 2021.

I might add that, of this amount, Government will invest in a modular abattoir at Garden of Eden, which will serve to fill the existing local market gap for processed pork and pork products while creating more income-generating opportunities. Further, the construction of a modern abattoir at Onverwagt for beef and beef products will help transform the cattle industry.

vi. Fisheries and Aquaculture

This Government is keen to revitalise the fishing industry and has reversed increases in licence fees, removed taxes on fishing equipment and allowed fish exporters to reclaim VAT on inputs to production. Over the medium-term, Government will focus on supporting the development of inland fisheries and aquaculture through amendments to the aquaculture and inland fisheries regulations, finalise a strategic plan for the subsector and develop guidelines for sustainable aquaculture and ornamental industry, amongst other initiatives.

Currently, the cost of production for aquaculture products is significantly impacted by the cost of feed, which accounts for 60% to 70% of production costs. In an effort to encourage increased investment and productivity, Government will be facilitating feed-formulation research with the aim of reducing the cost of feed to below \$200 per kilogramme. A breeding programme for indigenous species is also being developed at the Satyadeow Sawh Aquaculture Station, where hatcheries will provide fingerlings at a subsidised cost to farmers. Work is underway towards addressing the reversal of the United States of America’s (USA) ban on catfish. This Government expects that the aquaculture subsector holds great promise as a source of growth in the agriculture sector,

as a whole, in the future. An amount of \$293 million is budgeted to support the growth of this emerging industry.

vii. The Intermediate Savannah Development Initiative

The intermediate savannah is considered a vast untapped opportunity for agricultural development in Guyana. It has the potential to produce both crops and livestock in an integrated production system that encompasses annual and perennial crops and small and large ruminant production. The commodities targeted for the intermediate savannah are corn, soya bean, aquaculture – of which I spoke about earlier – cattle rearing and orchard crops like citrus and fruits, all of which have great potential for processing. Government will provide an enabling environment by opening up lands, providing infrastructure and incentive support to transform the area and improve the livelihoods of the persons residing in the adjoining communities.

In *Budget 2021*, \$500 million will be invested in supportive infrastructure to catalyse private investment in the production of corn and soya bean in the intermediate savannahs. It is envisaged that mega-farms will cultivate tens of thousands of hectares, benefiting from the economies of scale in modern grain production, thereby leading to higher production and productivity. Meanwhile, small farmers will also be reoriented to modernise their agricultural practices.

viii. Drainage and Irrigation

The drainage and irrigation network is one of the primary support structures for the agriculture sector. Our agenda to promote production, diversification and flood risk management, and is reinforced by our substantial investments in this sector.

In 2021, this Government is reaffirming its commitment to supporting the drainage and irrigation systems by investing \$12 billion in critical interventions across the country. These include: construction and rehabilitation of pump stations at Adventure, Black Bush Polder, Cottage and Montrose, supporting over 54,000 acres of coastal farm lands; procurement of two excavators and a pontoon to desilt channels in the Pomeroon river, facilitating improved access to farms; and development of water harvesting mechanisms to support farms in the South Central Rupununi, alleviating the significant losses incurred in the dry season.

These interventions will result in a reduction of vulnerability and flood risks by promoting climate resilience. The

reduction of risk and losses will encourage increased production of rice, coconut, vegetables, fruits and livestock in these areas.

e. Sustainable Tourism

The global tourism industry is amongst the most affected sectors by the COVID-19 pandemic, with an estimated decline of 70% to 75% in international arrivals, when compared with 2019. In Guyana, visitor arrivals are estimated to have fallen by 72.5 % in 2020 – from 314,727 in 2019 to 86,503 in 2020. This decline no doubt was associated not only COVID-19, but also with the domestic political developments of 2020. With measures in place to limit the transmission of the virus, the tourism and hospitality industry came to a virtual standstill, halting travel experiences, in-person engagements and, virtually, every other aspect of the industry. Despite this, our Government recognises the tourism industry as poised for a rapid take-off once travel restrictions ease.

Guyana currently has in excess of 150 hotels and 30 resorts and lodges, with an approximate room capacity of 3,400. Most of these could be characterised as traditional and rustic establishments with only a small number of business-oriented accommodation properties of international standard. Against this backdrop, this Government immediately, upon assuming Office, invited expressions of interest (EOI) from private investors desirous of developing new hotel properties that would improve the quality and quantity of accommodation in Guyana. More than 25 expressions of interest were received and memoranda of understanding (MOU) concluded with potential investors. These projects are all privately financed and many of them involve major international hotel brands. It is expected that as many as six of them could start construction in 2021. These initial incoming investments will add an additional 1,000 hotel rooms in the near term and the others potentially could add a total of 2,000 to 3,000 hotel rooms in the medium-term, catalysing the development of the accommodation subsector and dramatically improving the overall industry standards.

Along with room capacity, the tourism sector has also been hampered by a skills gap at all levels with few opportunities for top quality training. To address this glaring mismatch between demand and supply, in 2021, work will commence on the construction of the hospitality tourism training institute. On completion, this facility will cater for more than 1,800 students to be trained and certified, annually. This will support the growth and development of this important

emerging sector, help to provide a world class experience in service delivery and put thousands of young Guyanese in work. An amount of \$185 million is budgeted to start this project in 2021.

4.12 p.m.

During the year, we will also seek to increase air connectivity and make access easier for airline operators and reduce costs for air travel. With Jet Blue having made its inaugural flight back in December 2020, Government will pursue partnerships with other airlines and aim to encourage airlines to establish new routes to Guyana, once travelling conditions begin to return to a state of normalcy.

The pandemic has created the opportunity also for tourism actors and operators to re-evaluate their products and offerings and re-examine the possibilities of expanding tour packages that would appeal not just to foreigners but Guyanese also, both local and in the diaspora. To improve the resiliency of the sector over the medium-term, the sector will focus on offering new products like unique culinary tours, excursions, soft adventure and experiential tours in an effort to diversify the tourism product portfolio.

Additionally, the domestic tourism market is yet to realise its full potential. The Government

has established regional tourism committees in a number of regions, and will work with them to help develop the local tourism product, including by more active promotion of event-based tourism and local *niche* attractions such as Easter on the No. 63 Beach in Region 6, Regatta at Bartica in Region 7, Rodeo at Lethem in Region 9, and the Fish Festival at Rockstone in Region 10 and, of course, the Safari Run.

f. Information and Communications Technology

The importance of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) for creating, catalysing and sustaining economic growth and development and creating jobs is more evident today than it has ever been. One of the first steps taken by this People’ Progressive Party/Civic Government as soon as we assumed Office was the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector and I hasten to point out that this was a campaign promise that we delivered 64 days after we took Office. This strategic move will stimulate greater competition and investments which will expand the sector and the range of ICT services available to the population as

well as reduce costs of various services to consumers and allow for more fibre optic cables to be landed in Guyana.

In fact, Guyanese have already benefited tangibly from lower rates and special promotions for data plans, while some operators have committed to major technology upgrades. At least one regional company has also signalled plans to locate all of their customer care operations in Guyana. Going forward, it is expected that liberalisation will result in significant interest in private investment in the sector.

This year, Government will establish the Universality Fund, a feature of the new telecommunications regulatory regime through which access to modern telecommunications services can be funded for our poor and vulnerable communities, including those in our hinterland regions. The Telecommunications Act and regulations provide for contributions to this fund from operators and we expect a minimum of \$360 million to be made available to the Fund this year. A plan is being prepared that will specify feasible projects to be implemented by the private sector which will boost connectivity for businesses in unserved and underserved communities.

Our Government will also move swiftly to ensure that the benefits of the liberalisation reach all sectors in the form of faster and cheaper internet service, this serve as a catalyst for ICT related business development and will make business more efficient and resilient and drive job creation.

In that regard, we already expect over 450 jobs will be created in the area of business process outsourcing (BPO) with the operationalisation of call centres at Tuschen, Enmore, and Linden, partly facilitated by decreased cost of internet service. Our Government will also be engaging with the business process outsourcing sector with a view to facilitating scaled up presence in Guyana and more rapid job creation in that sector. *Budget 2021* includes an amount of \$67 million to rehabilitate the facility in Linden which is expected to host the call centre there.

g. Industrial Development and Manufacturing

If I may turn now to the subject of industrial development and manufacturing. For so long, we have been forced to import or we have imported fossil fuels to generate energy. We have heard our manufacturers and potential investors belabour the cost of energy as indeed the key constraint to investing or expanding. In 2023, with the planned gas to shore pipeline at a proposed location along the West Bank of Demerara, Guyana will finally be able to expand manufacturing

opportunities, with a low cost source of energy, access to labour from surrounding housing developments and a ready road network. This will be the Wales Development Authority (WDA).

The Wales Development Authority will not only distinguish itself as the industrial centre of the Caribbean, it will serve the very immediate, relevant domestic purpose of mass employment generation. When in operation, the authority stands to employ well over 3,000 persons on a full-time basis in fields ranging from manual, technical, professional and administrative jobs, amongst others, across the various enterprises to be located within the precinct of the authority. This, of course, is not taking into consideration the myriad range of indirect employment that will be generated, which very easily will account for a figure well beyond that established for direct employment.

Mr. Speaker, the Government will commence work on the Wales Development Authority by drafting and passing the requisite legislation to create the authority during 2021. As we speak, consulting services are being procured to conduct the geotechnical, geophysical, environmental impact, and Light Detection and Ranging (LIDAR) studies to determine the location where the gas line would land as well as the sites for the drying facilities, co-generation plant, and essential petrochemical industries. The construction of the co-generation plant and laying of the pipeline will begin next year and finish during 2023. When the power plant comes on stream, the electricity cost will be a fraction of the current rate paid by consumers. The reduction in electricity cost is expected to attract large industrial, agro-processing, and manufacturing firms.

To make the Wales Development Authority even more attractive as an industrial zone, special incentives will also be provided to motivate investors to set up operations in Wales. This strategic policy initiative by our Government, providing tangible support to these non-oil sectors, will ultimately provide the enabling environment for the country’s diversification efforts to take root and become sustainable. In this regard a sustainable and competitive agriculture and manufacturing sector, that will be supported through the Wales Development Authority, will provide the groundwork for overall sustainable and robust economic performance.

h. Small Business Support

Our Government has always advocated small and micro enterprises as an important avenue for entry into entrepreneurial activity and as an area of endeavour with

tremendous potential to provide gainful engagement to thousands of persons. As we said recently, at another forum, the small businesses of today are the medium and large businesses of tomorrow. Amongst the main concerns for small business owners and new entrepreneurs in Guyana is the access to financing. To ameliorate this situation, we will utilise the Small Business Development Fund and will engage microfinancing institutions and the micro credit windows of commercial banks to stimulate investments and create jobs in the productive sector. Additionally, many of our fiscal measures, such as the removal of value-added tax on a range of items in 2020, would have immediately reduced the cost of doing business across the board.

In four short months of assuming Office, the ceiling in grant funding at the Small Business Bureau (SBB) was increased from \$200,000 to \$500,000. This served to attract greater registration with the Bureau. In 2021, Government intends to harness the business acumen of small businesses, incubate more business ideas and innovate these businesses, extend training and capacity services to create and sustain entrepreneurial opportunities for the small business sector. For this purpose, a sum of \$250 million is budgeted to replenish the Fund.

Additionally, Government has committed to the establishment of a National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Council which will radically reform the culture of entrepreneurship in Guyana and create an impetus for new entrepreneurs while supporting existing ones.

The National Quality Infrastructure (NQI), a reference laboratory and Electronic Single Window (ESW) are initiatives which aims towards the digitisation of the licensing process, are flagship projects that will improve the quality of products and services on a national scale, particularly, in the case National Quality Infrastructure and the ease of doing business and trade facilitation in the case of the electronic single window.

4.27 p.m.

Budget 2021 has provided a sum of \$135 million for the procurement of an Electronic Single Window system which is expected to be finalised and a further \$200 million to the National Quality Infrastructure Project. We will roll out a National E-commerce Strategy to ensure that local businesses harness the economic benefits of online markets. Our Government will also seek to enhance the successful development and operationalisation of start-ups and existing businesses through access to business incubator centres with

shared manufacturing and business development facilities. To this end, works commenced on the identification of suitable locations for the establishment of two new industrial estates. This period will also see the development of many other of *niche* programmes to support business sectors in the areas of tourism as well as ICT.

E. Transformational Infrastructure

a. Energy Expansion and Diversification

I turn now to transformational infrastructure: first energy. As I mentioned earlier, we have long recognised that the single biggest impediment to accelerated economic and social development is the absence of adequate, affordable, and reliable energy. Key challenges include dependence on an aged fossil-fuel based generation capability, inadequate generating capacity resulting in supply shortfalls, a very porous transmission and distribution network, resulting in high technical losses as well as high commercial losses.

Against this background, as I mentioned earlier, this Government, when we were previously in Office, had advanced plans to construct the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. I have already alluded to the unconscionable tactics of the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), who effectively stymied our drive to harness this important project. Their actions, and their actions alone, resulted in that project not being materialised. I am pleased to announce that the Government intends to reactivate efforts to ensure that our national grid is augmented with sustainable, cheap and reliable hydropower.

More immediately, Guyanese anxiously await the prospect of piping gas to shore. This, to which I alluded to when I spoke of the Wales Development Authority, will see cheap and reliable energy generated to meet our growing demand for electricity. Conceptualised as a 210 km pipeline to transport natural gas from offshore Guyana, the gas to power project will be the trailblazer to advance Guyana’s path to domestic energy security within the next three years. This transformational project includes the establishment a power plant to generate up to 250mw of power, the establishment of the industrial park, to which I referred earlier, and the creation of a local Liquified Petroleum Gas (LPG) plant to cater for domestic demand and for the export market. During 2021, detailed studies will be conducted to inform the Government on all of the relevant technical considerations as this project and bring the plant into operation by 2023.

Given the high levels of growth forecasted beyond the gas to shore project, our vision is to develop and exploit a comprehensive and diversified energy mix that harnesses our vast hydropower, solar, wind and biomass potential, conscious always of sustaining and preserving our pristine environment.

A sum of \$700 million has been budgeted for the installation of 10 mini-grid and 4 off-grid systems in 2021. This will provide a total of 1.472 kw of installed solar capacity, thereby generating 5,305 kwh of electricity. The areas which will benefit from this initiative include: Sebai, Iwokrama, Waramadong, Paruima, Kurukabaru, Annai, St. Monica, Karaburi, Capoey, Whyaka, and Loo Creek.

Additionally, solar farms will be installed at Mahdia and Leguan, and work will continue on solar farms at Bartica and Lethem. Moreover, two mini-hydropower plants, at Kumu and at Moco-Moco, will be tendered this year and construction will commence. The 150kw Kato Hydro Project is also be substantially completed in 2021. Sums totalling \$850 million have been budgeted to cover these initiatives.

Meanwhile, on-grid, we will continue to invest in the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) Inc. and encourage policy initiatives to meet and eventually surpass the ever-expanding demand placed on our grid. In line with this, the GPL Inc. is executing fundamental infrastructure investments, particularly to promote loss reduction and improve the performance of its power distribution networks. To assist in resolving the difficult financial situation in which the GPL Inc. was placed as a result of the accumulation of a vast sum of arrears by the APNU/AFC Government, *Budget 2021* provides a sum of \$2 billion to continue to clear the stock of receivable arrears inherited at the GPL Inc.

b. Transport Infrastructure

Our Government has mandated the articulation of a national infrastructure investment pipeline, which outlines current and future public sector investments that will create, upgrade, and rehabilitate the country’s infrastructural landscape from coastland to hinterland. In this regard, our infrastructure gaps will be met with major transformative investment initiatives, in every region.

i. Roads and Bridges

In 2021, Government has allocated \$25.6 billion for roads and bridges, of which \$23.7 billion will be spent on roads and \$1.9 billion on bridges. This will see investments being made

in upgrading a number of existing major roads and bridges, as well as initiating several new projects.

An amount of \$3.5 billion has been allocated for the commencement of the Linden to Mabura Hill Road, and tenders will be launched in the first quarter. A further sum of \$150 million has been budgeted for sectional rehabilitation of the Linden/Soesdyke Highway. In order to address the continuous traffic chaos on the East Bank Demerara Public Road, construction has already begun on a road linkage between Diamond to Mocha, connecting to an existing road network from Herstelling to Eccles. In *Budget 2021*, our Government has allocated the sum of \$1 billion to continue and complete the construction of a four-lane highway from Eccles to Mandela Avenue. This will significantly reduce travel time for tens of thousands of commuters who traverse this corridor every day.

Over the next few years, a dramatic transformation will be witnessed in our country’s roads and bridges network, creating new corridors for development in the agro-industrial, light manufacturing, commercial and tourism sectors, paving the way for massive residential housing development and easing congestion. I will mention a few examples of these major projects that we will see being unfolded in the coming months and years:

- the link between the East Coast Demerara Highway to Timehri, connecting our two major airports, the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) and Eugene F. Correia International Airport;
- establishing the Schoonord to Parika four lane superhighway, connecting communities throughout the West Coast of Demerara;
- developing the Parika to Goshen route, establishing a linkage for the trade and commercial centres of Parika with the central gateway town of Bartica;
- developing the Timehri to Bartica link, connecting the West Bank of the Demerara River at Sand Hills to Makouria on the Essequibo River crossing at Monkey Jump to Bartica.

These routes will be established with a survey alignment to be completed in 2021. Clearing of the right of way will commence while we mobilise financing for construction works.

Additionally, we will be constructing a major farm-to-market road from No. 58 Village, linking the Corentyne Coast Highway to the Canje Creek. This will open the vast acreage of arable agricultural land to benefit farmers across the region. Preliminary designs are being completed while survey and right of way alignment will be conducted, and works will commence in 2021.

Bridging of the Demerara and Corentyne Rivers will also take centre stage in this Government’s plan to revitalise our physical landscape and open developmental opportunities in surrounding areas. To accomplish this, we have forged ahead by inviting expressions of interest (EOI) for the design and build of the new Demerara River Bridge Crossing. To this end, we have received proposals from a total of 20 companies. Indeed, I had the privilege of joining my distinguished Colleague, Minister Edghill, at the opening of those proposals. Nine firms have been shortlisted and the process now moves to the second round where more detailed designs, costing and financial terms will be assessed. The new design of the high-span bridge will allow for free flow of maritime traffic as it will not require opening or retraction, and it will be built with a life span of at least 50 years.

4.42 p.m.

On the Corentyne River Bridge, the Governments of Guyana and Suriname have invited expressions of interest for the construction of that bridge. In preparation for this massive transformative project, we will commence preparatory works to upgrade the road from Moleson Creek to El Dorado with the ultimate goal, in due course, to extend to Orealla/Siparuta.

Amounts totalling \$9 billion have been allocated under the Miscellaneous and Other Roads programmes and I add further that an additional \$2.1 billion has been allocated to upgrade hinterland roads.

ii. Air Transport

On assuming Office, immediately confronting us was a modified and poorly redesigned Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA). This forced us to take drastic measures to remedy the situation to ensure that the project fulfils its commitment to be a modern international airport. In this regard, agreement was recently reached with the contractor to accommodate two more boarding bridges for a large transatlantic aircraft and to construct the superstructure and *façade* for the new commercial complex which will house additional duty free shops, restaurants, and lounges, and I hasten to add at no additional cost to the Government.

Looking to the future, we will place the CJIA back on track to be a regional hub.

In *Budget 2021*, a sum of \$2.5 billion is allocated for the further upgrade and modernisation of the airport to finance other major improvements including:

- Procurement of the two passenger boarding bridges to accommodate the said large transatlantic aircraft. This will bring the total number of bridges to six bridges;
- Rehabilitating the airline and airport administration offices; and
- Outfitting the commercial complex.

In addition, an amount of \$415 million is budgeted for the completion, upgrade, and rehabilitation of a number of hinterland airstrips.

iii. River and Maritime Transport

Under the previous Administration, residents and commuters travelling to and from the North West District were deprived the benefit of a modern ferry service, even though funding for the acquisition of the vessel had been secured. Since taking Office, this People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government has inked a \$2.6 billion contract to construct an ocean-going passenger and cargo vessel to ply the North West District route to bring relief to struggling commuters. Additionally, under the same project, funds have been secured and allocated to rehabilitate the Morawhanna, Kumaka, and Port Kaituma stellings. In 2021, \$1.2 billion has been budgeted to facilitate the implementation of this project. I add further that an additional \$500 million has been allocated to rehabilitate the M.V. Malali, the M.V. Makouria and M.V. Kimbia.

Looking ahead, the dynamics of our economy requires a reconceptualization of our maritime and river transport facilities. The traditional wharf facilities are already transforming to reflect shore-based operations to support the emerging oil and gas industry, while expanded manufacturing and trade activities will increasingly require modern port facilities. A critical aspect of our country’s transport infrastructure for the future is therefore the development of a deep-water harbour. This will provide an essential transit point for international cargo, even more so once the Corentyne River Bridge and the road to Brazil are complete. This Government remains engaged with potential partners on

the possibility of developing this critical infrastructural investment.

c. Sea and River Defence

The consequences of climate change, including rising sea levels, on Guyana’s sea and river defence infrastructure can have and has had devastating impact on Guyana’s economy given how many of our inhabitants and how much of our economic activity are on the low lying coastal plain.

Within two days of taking Office, our Ministers were deployed to Dantzig, to grapple with the devastation of massive breached sections of the Mahaicony sea defence. Flood waters inundated farmlands and residential communities, resulting in loss to property, livestock, and farming activities. The APNU/AFC Administration was negligent first in anticipating and then in addressing the situation adequately, causing our new incoming Government to deploy emergency arrangements to seal the breach which had remained opened, and threatening for over one month previously.

In 2021, a total of \$5.1 billion has been budgeted to further strengthen our sea and river defence infrastructure. Earmarked for this year is the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of sea and river defence infrastructure in areas including, Dantzig, Prospect, Content, Fairfield, Zealand, Cane Garden, Uitvlugt, Anna Catherina, No. 63 Beach, Manila, and Bygeval.

Government continues to keep close monitoring of our shore line, by reactivating the sea defence rangers, applying drone technology to monitor shore line movement and the erosion and accretion cycle, intensifying routine maintenance, and deploying stockpiles of armour rocks to strategic locations, all to ensure that quick response mechanisms are in place to avert breaches.

As we continue to make strident steps to protect our vulnerable shoreline, we have found that existing conventional hard-infrastructure solutions are expensive and are not always adaptable to rising sea levels and climate change vulnerabilities. It is for this reason that we intend to promote more natural interventions in the form of groynes and restored mangrove forests from replanting and natural regeneration. These we expect will prove to be valuable complements to our significant investments in hard structures. In 2021, a sum of \$50 million is budgeted to construct geotextile rubble groynes, and to conduct topographic surveys.

F. Investing in Our People

a. Health

I turn now to Investing in our people and, in particular, to the health sector. The year 2020 was an indelibly challenging one for the world in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our Government assumed Office and inherited a public health sector which was struggling to respond to the crisis. In addition, drug shortages and the lack of functioning equipment, which plagued the public health sector, forced an already poorly managed health system to be stretched even more thinly. The reach of Government health programmes for screening, testing and treatment was also challenged due to the reduction of movement of people as a result of COVID-19 measures.

His Excellency’s vision of transforming of our healthcare system is one that is world-class, and this will drive our actions over the next five years. In order to achieve this vision, our Administration intends to expand speciality level care, and, by extension, the menu of services offered to Guyanese. We intend to develop an adequate, well-trained, competent, and compassionate healthcare workforce, and to modernise and expand our health facilities to improve access to both primary and specialty-level care, while leveraging partnerships with the private sector and civil society. In this regard it would be recalled that, in *Budget 2020*, we removed corporate taxes on the potential taxable income earned by companies investing in private healthcare. To begin delivering on this vision, while addressing the challenges of the pandemic, our Government has significantly expanded the resources made available to the public healthcare system and we have budgeted for 2021 sums totalling \$53.5 billion.

In *Budget 2021*, to begin expanding diagnostic and speciality capacities across the country, we have provided \$1.8 billion for the purchasing of critical medical equipment for the public health sector. Of this amount, \$99.8 million rather is budgeted for re-equipping the National Ophthalmology Hospital in Port Mourant, the only one of its kind in the country, one that was established when we were last in Government and one that was abandoned and left to languish over the last five years. Once resuscitated, we expect that the National Ophthalmology Hospital in Port Mourant will provide an indispensable service for our people, particularly the elderly. Government also intends to spend \$322 million in 2021, for the acquisition of medical equipment, including such items as ventilators and anaesthesia machines, which will serve to expand the diagnosis and treatment capacity at

the National Referral Hospital. We have also budgeted an additional \$35 million to strengthen our emergency medical services capacity while we formulate a holistic plan to introduce an ambulance authority.

As we proceed along our first full fiscal year in Office, we are fully aware that COVID-19 continues to pose a significant challenge. Upon assuming Office, we immediately ramped up testing from conducting approximately 21 tests daily to 200 tests daily with a capacity of 2,000. This expansion allowed for the provision of a larger data sample to improve the Health Emergency Operations Centre’s coordination and response to the pandemic.

4.57 p.m.

Our Government has also strengthened disease surveillance, through the use of the COVID-19 antigen-based Rapid Diagnostic Tests (RDTs), which offers point-of-care testing and near-immediate results. Four GeneXpert machines have been procured for \$17.6 million and are to be deployed in Regions 1, 6, 9 and 10, with expansion of testing facilities to Regions 7 and 8 planned for 2021.

The health sector is adapting to the new reality of continual pandemic preparedness and heightened infection prevention and control. We have brought the Infectious Diseases Centre to functionality where we have treated 450 patients in the COVID-19 ward and 38 in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU). Additionally, as part of the ongoing COVID-19 response programme, \$2.1 billion was spent on critical items, including medical supplies, COVID-19 test kits, sanitising materials and personal protective equipment (PPEs).

For 2021, Government has made a provision of over \$750 million to support the rolling out of COVID-19 vaccines from February. This will happen in a phased manner, but will cater first and foremost, as I mentioned earlier, to our frontline workers, the elderly, and persons living with comorbidities.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair]

[Mr. Seeraj, Presiding Member, assumed the Chair]

While Government’s ultimate aim is to promote vaccination towards achieving herd immunity before the end of 2021, mask wearing, sanitising and physical distancing continue to be critical to containing transmission.

The challenges of the pandemic also mean that we must reassess our treatment of non-communicable diseases (NCDs). Persons suffering from chronic diseases such as

diabetes, chronic respiratory diseases, and cardiovascular ailments are at greater risk of mortality if they contract COVID-19. Our Government’s focus is on bringing to the forefront the prevention and curative aspects of chronic diseases, recognising that screening for these diseases needs to be scaled up exponentially. In 2021, we have reoriented ourselves to increase our outreaches to take healthcare and screening to communities, anticipating reaching at least 30,000 individuals, as we endeavour to minimise the movement of people which could exacerbate COVID-19 transmission. We have also made a provision of \$35 million for the establishment of a diabetic prevention and rehabilitation clinic at the Lusignan Health Centre.

With regard to HIV, we will intensify our partnerships with civil society organisations to encourage expanded testing and continued care, to ensure that persons living with the virus are able to remain on their anti-retroviral treatment, thereby curbing transmission. For related treatment and testing, Government has made a provision of \$900 million. With respect to our national and international target to end the epidemic of malaria by the year 2030, we shall be undertaking a mass distribution of 135,000 long-lasting insecticidal nets, with emphasis on areas deemed most vulnerable, such as mining towns and their nearby environs.

We will also be dedicating more resources to address mental health issues, suicide prevention and care, and expand access to psychiatric and psychological services, including the resuscitation of these initiatives in our hinterland areas. Further, we have allocated over \$70 million to address the shortage of essential medication for psychiatric patients. Additionally, Government will strive to ensure greater resilience and access to mental health services at a national level, through the construction of an 18-bed mental health ward at the National Referral Hospital, at a cost of \$26 million, and also through the review and revision of the Mental Health Act of 1930 – a sorely overlooked and outdated piece of legislation. I am sure, Hon. Minister, that you will have an opportunity to refer that Bill to the Special Select Committee when it comes before the House and propose amendments that you might deem suitable and appropriate, and I encourage you so to do.

The current state of infrastructure in health requires modernisation and expansion for which this Budget has allocated, \$2.8 billion. Within this sum, the continued implementation of the \$860 million Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Timely (SMART) Hospital Initiative will result in operationalisation of the upgraded Leonora

Hospital, and the commissioning of the upgraded Diamond Diagnostic Centre and Mabaruma Hospital in 2021, while works will advance on the Lethem and Paramakatoi Hospitals.

[Mr. Speaker assumed the Chair.]

This initiative will lead to improved flow design and infection control under more improved energy efficiency. Government will also endeavour to complete the construction of a polyclinic at Festival City and the remodelling of the Skeldon Hospital, all at a combined cost of \$88.3 million. As a result of this, this facility will now cater for surgical interventions, including an operating room, recovery room, and an Intensive Care Unit (ICU), among others. Other areas that will benefit from capital investments focused on providing surgical interventions are Aishalton and Kumaka District Hospitals, with over \$100 million earmarked for these projects. We are also examining the feasibility of establishing a maternal and child health hospital over the medium-term.

Still on maternal and child health, in a bid to strengthen our country’s capacity to cope with the particular health needs of our mothers and children and reduce associated mortality rates, this Government has committed, in 2021, over \$140 million towards the financing of maternal waiting homes and facilities at Moruca, Enmore and Kato, as well as \$100 million for the construction and retrofitting of the maternity ward and wing at the New Amsterdam Hospital.

In the broader area of reproductive health, this Administration intends to improve the coverage and range of family planning services, including wider contraceptive options, education and screening for gynaecological, breast and prostate cancers. We will also be rolling out sexual and reproductive health policy which will guide health sector interventions over the medium-term.

With regard to ensuring improved elderly health, we will expand the package of services to now include a community nutrition programme, expanded services offered at home visits and specific clinic days for the elderly, amongst other things.

b. Education

I turn now to education. To develop a world-class education system, we intend to ensure equal access to quality education, at all levels, for all children, regardless of their background, to increase and improve the quality and quantity of trained teachers, learning resources and materials, and to increase the

use of innovation and technology in order to improve education delivery and learning outcomes. Our Government will also intensify classroom monitoring to ensure we afford our teachers every opportunity to improve their pedagogical skills.

The state of the public education system inherited by our Administration, to put it mildly, leaves much to be desired. The sector is plagued by inadequate supervision and lack of accountability within the levels and this needs to be reversed immediately if we are to ensure that a well-balanced education is to be realised. Moreover, learning outcomes continue to fluctuate while the proportion of trained teachers across the sector – one of the core inputs to improving learning – has remained at approximately 71% since 2014. Further, the pandemic has caused the public education system to reconfigure how it delivers its mandate to the people of Guyana. In 2021, amounts totalling \$60.7 billion have been budgeted for the education sector.

The sector has moved to implement blended modalities to ensure learning continuity for all students, including a revamped Guyana Learning Channel Trust, benefitting over 130,000 students, and the distribution of printed worksheets and other materials to over 41,000 students in the hinterland, riverine and disadvantaged coastal areas. Additionally, almost 4,000 teachers were trained in the integration of innovation and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into their teaching-learning process via the Profuturo online platform.

The immediate focus of our Administration is pandemic preparedness, including the provision of PPEs for all students and teachers and the retrofitting of all schools with troughs, sinks and water systems to provide a safe learning environment across all levels. Even as we adjust education delivery to a pandemic-sensitive modality, our goals for the sector in the medium-term are set high. In order to deliver world-class education over the next five years, our administration plans to improve access with the construction and equipping of nursery, primary and secondary schools across the country with the necessary resources, inclusive of quality teachers, updated curricula and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) laboratories, worthy of a system comparable to international standards.

In 2021, we will conduct a review and mapping exercise with a view to increasing the number of schools across the country. In the interim, we intend to commence with two secondary schools in Region 6 and Region 9. Additionally,

we will commence work on a secondary school at Prospect where, I believe, the sod was recently turned. This school will help to address the growing demands on the East Bank of Demerara. In addition, the Abram Zuil Secondary School will be reconstructed to provide necessary facilities for learners on the Essequibo Coast.

5.12 p.m.

An amount of \$5.2 billion has been allocated for construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of educational facilities countrywide.

In the area of teacher training and development, we found that our teacher training college has made no significant improvement over the past five years. It still functions based on traditions deeply steeped in time. If we are to modernise our national education system, one of the first steps we must take is to modernise the way our teachers are trained. Thus, our Administration will ensure that the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) transforms to a fully online-compatible modality from application forms to tutorials to courses being offered online.

As the economy evolves, the education sector must be positioned and will be positioned to respond to the demands of the labour market. In recognition of this, the sector will aggressively intensify its efforts to increase enrolment in technical vocational education and training institutions as we endeavour to promote non-traditional forms of learning and life-long learning. An amount of \$884 million has been allocated to equip and retool technical and vocational training centres.

The University of Guyana (UG) will also be refashioned to better respond to the needs of a modernising Guyana, including through its technological advancement to ensure learning materials and courses are made available online. *Budget 2021* provides a total of \$3.3 billion to finance the operations of the two campuses of the University of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, a hallmark of this People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government’s vision for a top-tier education system is the establishment of an online learning institute that will deliver 20,000 scholarships over the next five years. In 2021, we plan to begin execution of this initiative, catering for the provision of over 4,500 scholarships, through a multi-agency formulation that includes the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Public Service and the Ministry of Labour. Government’s collaboration with Commonwealth of Learning and Coursera has already allowed us to offer more than 4,000

free online courses from various universities around the world to our people. Some 64,605 citizens are benefitting from online courses offered by these two entities of which, to date, 8,481 participants are teachers who have since registered or participated in at least one course. A sum of \$1 billion is budgeted to support the online scholarships to be granted in 2021.

c. Housing

The evidence that home ownership is one of the fundamental pillars upon which the Guyanese dream is built is indisputable. Our party, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, has long recognised this and has pursued a policy of creating decent and affordable housing for all Guyanese. It is opportune for me to briefly remind this honourable House that where once stood barren waste lands, marginal agricultural lands and open underutilised pastures, now stand thriving, booming and successful housing development schemes – a fitting tribute to successive visionary PPP/C Governments. The bustling communities of Eccles, Providence, Diamond, Parfait Harmonie, Good Hope and Grove are just a few examples of these schemes that are now huge bustling and prosperous communities.

Sadly, this drive slowed, and virtually came to a halt, when new and misconceived notions pervaded the unimaginative thinking of the last five years. The model for housing development adopted, then, proved to be inadequate, inappropriate and unattainable. This PPP/C Administration must now re-focus and has now refocused Government’s attention to provide for the welfare of our citizens, by creating new housing stock and opening access to lands for housing development. Recall that we removed, as soon as we returned to Office, VAT on locally produced building and construction materials, such as sand, stone, concrete blocks, plywood, logs and lumber, to enable Guyanese families to be able to afford their own homes.

In the housing sector, works are progressing apace to restore the lost vibrancy and vitality that once exemplified the sector. Before we demitted Office in 2015, a total of 22,964 house lots have been allocated during our last five years in office. In contrast, only 7,534 house lots were distributed during the APNU/AFC’s five years in office. The slowdown in distribution of house lots under the APNU/AFC Administration was due to a lack of a clear vision, policy and capability for the housing sector.

This People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government’s commitment, as reflected in our manifesto on the basis of

which we were elected to Office, is to make available and distribute 50,000 house lots across the country. The major partner in this exciting and evolving transformation will be the private sector and the household sector which, together with Government, will create the incentives and opportunities for affordable housing and invest their own domestic savings, in order to realise this dream of owning their own homes. Given our promise to the people of Guyana, we plan to allocate 10,000 house lots, as well as distribute 7,000 land titles across the country in 2021. Additionally, Government will construct 1,000 homes for low income earners and young professionals, as we strive to improve the standard of living of all Guyanese.

Additionally, Government has committed to the residents of Region 10 that they could look forward to the construction of 1,000 homes, through public/private partnerships and with community involvement in every step of the way. The diaspora will also be engaged in financing housing initiatives and will also benefit as re-migrant homeowners. In addition, a single window approval system for construction permits will soon be reality, considerably reducing the processing time from land allocation to construction.

In 2021, we have budgeted \$6 billion to further advance infrastructure and utility works in new and existing housing areas. Additionally, the sum of \$1.5 billion is allocated to continue infrastructure works in the Sophia, Diamond and Parfait Harmonie housing areas. In keeping with Government’s commitment of creating and enabling sustainable communities, the boundaries of this programme will be extended to include Victoria on the East Coast of Demerara. To this end, the installation of light emitting diode (LED) streetlamps and the upgrade of recreational facilities will all be a part of the programme. Under the Core Home Support and Home Improvement Subsidy initiative, the Government will be working towards providing subsidies to low-income households and successful applicants will be given a new housing unit at a subsidised cost or materials to improve their homes.

Our Government continues to engage stakeholders to address issues of squatting and informal settlements, by working to ensure that land is distributed in an equitable manner. We are facilitating the allocation of house lots to occupants of regularised squatter settlements and working with others to address the matter.

d. Water and Sanitation

This Administration aims to improve the water sector by increasing treated water coverage and access to potable water, reducing non-revenue water and modernising sanitation facilities across the country. Unfortunately, as we take stock of the existing situation in the sector, critical challenges and missteps were identified which persisted over the last five years. These included high iron content, low treated-water coverage, high levels of non-revenue water and a very low proportion of the hinterland population having access to potable water.

We also found a sector that was burdening on our vulnerable population as VAT had been imposed on water consumption and the water subsidy for pensioners had been removed. Within two months after we took Office, we ensured the reversal of these two draconian measures, benefitting of all Guyanese and, more particularly, our senior citizens.

This Government will correct the deficiencies of the past five years. We will ensure that all Guyanese are provided with improved service. In this regard, the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) has prepared a new 5-year strategic plan for the period 2021-2025. This plan is aligned with national priorities and advances the Government’s mission to provide clean, reliable and affordable water. Emphasis must be placed on increasing access to treated water coverage to 90%, reduction of non-revenue water, the modernisation of the sanitisation infrastructure network, integrated water resource management and wastewater treatment.

A sum of \$4 billion has been allocated, in 2021, to procure equipment and improve and expand the water supply systems across the country. There is provision for the drilling of new wells, along with the upgrading of photovoltaic systems (PV), storage facilities, distribution networks and service connections across Regions 1, 3, 7, 8, and 9. Furthermore, the upgrading of distribution networks across Regions 8 and 9 will be undertaken.

To address the issue of non-revenue water, Government has made a provision of \$275 million in 2021 for the procurement and installation of 20,000 water meters for residential and business areas across the country.

5.27 p.m.

Additionally, \$200 million has been allocated to expand the Sophia, Eccles, Covent Garden, Grove, Friendship and Vergenoegen water treatment plants to benefit over 50,000 residents. Furthermore, Government will upgrade the transmission mains between Church to Cummings Streets and

Cemetery Road to Mandela Avenue benefiting over 35,000 residents. We have also allocated \$100 million to procure electromechanical equipment for the rehabilitation of water production facilities.

On solid waste management, this Government is committed to promoting integrated sanitation management, through enhanced awareness on sanitation practices and solid waste management across the regions, to safeguard human health and the environment. In 2021, we have budgeted \$1.1 billion for this subsector and we will undertake activities, including the completion of the construction of Cell I at Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill Site and the upgrading of disposal sites at Rose Hall, Port Kaituma, Belle Vue, Lethem, Lima, Charity, Lusignan and De Edward. We have also catered for the preparation of temporary locations for waste disposal in Regions 2, 3 and 5.

e. Youth

Turning now to our youth, this Government has continually expressed the importance of our young people – our next generation of leaders. A signal moment after returning to Office last year, was the re-establishment of a Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, bringing it and its values, objectives and programmes back from having been placed on a dusty back bench by the previous Government. Every young person is entitled to be nurtured in a healthy, protective and supportive environment to develop their full potential. As such, in keeping with our promise to the people, His Excellency the President has established the Youth Advisory Council, which, as he indicated, will be “at the heartbeat of policy making”. We expect the Council to be operationalised shortly.

In 2021, we have budgeted \$90 million to expand the Youth Innovation Programme of Guyana (YIPoG) which provides grants to young people across the country, who successfully develop innovative solutions to address local issues and challenges. The Programme provides opportunities for youths to have access to and unlock innovative, creative, energetic and bold talents, all within the context of our low carbon economy, in line with our new and expanded Low Carbon Development Strategy.

The Government will also continue to generate opportunities for our youth to participate in the job market and in national development. In this regard, the Government intends to improve access to education from nursery to university, as I have already discussed when I spoke on education just a few minutes ago. In addition to that, the \$820 million Youth

Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Programme will provide training and stipends for Community Service Officers (CSOs) from 213 hinterland villages, to create employment opportunities and generate income for young people in the development of their communities. Additionally, Government has made provision, through the Department of Youth, of over \$85 million to deliver youth-targeted training in areas including robotics, oil and gas, climate change, the environment, information technology, and agro-processing. We will establish a national job bank and labour exchange to improve access to employment opportunities for job seekers, including our youths.

f. Culture, Sports, and the Arts

This Government is cognisant of the vast talents and skills of our people, which have gone unappreciated and unutilised over the last five years. In this regard, we will aim to develop and showcase the potential of our sportsmen, sportswomen, and artistes, both at home and internationally. We will endeavour to create the enabling environment to increase income generation for the culture subsector through partnerships with the private sector for the creation of galleries, museums and dance schools in communities across the country. These initiatives are also intended to augment our drive to create *niche* tourism throughout our country. For culture, inclusive of arts and sports programmes, we have budgeted, in 2021, sums totalling \$2.7 billion.

During last year, shortly after we assumed Office, we hosted a ‘One Guyana’ concert that showcased the culture of Guyana over a virtual platform, which attracted over half of a million online viewers. In 2021, we will develop a National Cultural and Creative Industries Policy to guide the development of the sector and reinstitute the Advisory Boards for the National Gallery of Art, Castellani House and the National Archives of Guyana. The National Trust will also undertake to update their legislation in alignment with modern trends in heritage preservation and to support their expanding mandate.

In *Budget 2021*, we have allocated \$30 million for grants to the cultural and creative industries, for which emphasis will be placed on original cultural and creative projects, with a credible and well thought out plan for commercialisation and sustainability. Additionally, a sum of over \$120 million is budgeted for capital works in support of the advancement and preservation of culture and arts, specifically: to improve seating in the lower auditorium, and sound and lighting systems of the National Cultural Centre (NCC); to improve visitors’ experience at the Castellani House; to rehabilitate

the dance studio of the National School of Dance; and to improve facilities elsewhere. A further \$36 million is budgeted to upgrade heritage sites at Fort Nassau, the Dutch Heritage Museum and the Indian Arrival Monument at Palmyra Village to improve facilities for the promotion of our rich and diverse history.

Our Government has budgeted \$1.5 billion in 2021 to facilitate the development of sport across our country. Of this amount, \$915.5 million is allocated for the improvement of community grounds, countrywide, to expand their use as parks and create premium, multi-purpose sporting facilities of international standards, commencing in Regions 2, 6 and 10. Other improvements include the installation of lights on community grounds, laying of synthetic tracks and upgrading of other sports facilities. The sum of \$618 million will be used to help host tournaments, maintain sports facilities and support sports associations. Of this amount, \$320 million is budgeted towards professional training of athletes and coaches as part of the Sports Academy programme.

g. Senior Citizens

Turning now to our senior citizens, our senior citizens, aged 65 and over, currently represent 6.2% of our population, and by 2024, this group is expected to increase to 7.2%. Our Government’s attention to their welfare is heightened especially now, in light of their vulnerability to COVID-19. By 2025, our elderly will enjoy better health, improved social safety net programmes and increased disposable income.

Upon taking Office in 2020, our Government reinstituted the water subsidy to our senior citizens, as a result of which, 28,270 senior citizens have benefited thus far. I am pleased to say, too, that as soon as we returned to Office, we announced our intention to increase the old age pension in keeping with our manifesto promise, and that promise has already been delivered.

Our Government has prioritised improved services to our senior citizens, with a focus on chronic diseases, aimed at decreasing comorbidities in the medium-term and reducing noncommunicable diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and hypertension, which affect many of senior citizens. We have taken steps to strengthen the delivery of health care services and our senior citizens will have improved access to primary health care services, drugs and medical supplies.

With effect from March, 2021, we expect that some private payment outlets will provide additional options for pensioners

to cash their old age pension vouchers. Our Government has commenced direct delivery and payment to shut-in pensioners, including persons living with disabilities, with 3,400 persons benefiting to date. Moreover, our Government will continue to support and improve the care facilities for our senior citizens.

h. Persons with Disabilities

This Government will champion and support the rights of persons with disabilities. In 2021, the Persons with Disability Act 2010 will be reviewed and amended. We will continue to deliver key services to this vulnerable group who are at risk of being discriminated against.

As part of Government’s charge to ensuring that persons throughout Guyana are given equal opportunities to access a complete range of healthcare services, in 2021, optometry services will be expanded to Regions 2, 6, 7 and 9 through the public healthcare system.

For the first time, there will be rehabilitation professionals stationed in each region. We will strengthen the provision of medical and therapeutic care, vocational and skills training programmes and the creation of jobs through private sector partnerships. Further, a sum of \$50 million has been allocated to the National Commission on Disability (NCD), even as we increase resource allocations to the Disability and Rehabilitation Services within the Ministry of Health. More importantly, Government will embark on the construction of a complex valued at \$30 million at Mahaica, that will provide training to disabled persons in the areas of life and vocational skills.

In addition, this budget allocates an amount of \$120 million for special programmes supporting the community of persons with disabilities.

i. Victims of Domestic Violence

Our Government is extremely concerned with the level of domestic violence and its impact on victims and their families. We took immediate action to address this issue on multiple fronts and we will continue to collaborate with communities, faith-based and non-government organisations (NGOs), to pursue actions that curtail domestic and sexual abuse in our country.

5.42 p.m.

We have significantly increased allocations to the organisations, providing support to victims of domestic

violence including, Help and Shelter which will receive over \$50 million this year. In addition, we will be developing multisector domestic violence protocols which will serve to improve the operational procedures across relevant public and private institutions and stakeholders.

In December, 2020, our Government launched the 914-toll free hotline to allow victims of domestic violence to report incidents and request assistance. This is being complemented by the \$1 billion spotlight programme which will see Government working along with stakeholders including, international agencies and Community Service Officers (CSOs) towards curbing gender-based violence.

We will establish a court superintendent department with a cadre of lawyers to lead prosecutions in each regional division for cases of domestic violence. A survivor’s advocates programme will also be implemented to offer emotional support and crisis counselling to victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse. This will be piloted in those regions with the highest reported cases. We must collectively show zero tolerance for any form of domestic violence.

j. Amerindian and Hinterland Development

By the time we demitted Office in 2015, we had already set, in train, planned interventions to issue several new certificates of titles for Amerindian villages. Twelve certificates of titles had already been issued by us between 2014 and the time we left Office. This is in stark comparison to the dismal performance of the previous Administration which, from 2016 to the time it lost Office, reluctantly issued only two certificates of title to our Amerindian brothers and sisters. I am, in fact, being corrected that it was not two, but one title that was issued, which is an even greater shame, if I may say so. Since our Government resumed Office, we spent the last few months of 2020 preparing the groundwork for re-energising the Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) programme to achieve its original target to title 68 villages. To this end, *Budget 2021* allocates \$630 million to expedite the granting of titles to Amerindian villages.

If I may return to a matter to which I had alluded to earlier. Severe hardships were meted out to our hinterland communities when almost 2000 CSOs were unceremoniously fired and the stipend of \$30,000 monthly, which was approved by the People’s Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) when in Government, was discontinued. In keeping with our manifesto promise of delivering better government services to our Amerindian brothers and sisters, we have, in only four

months of assuming Office, resuscitated the CSO programme by re-engaging over 500 CSOs, providing them with the previously established stipend of \$30,000 monthly. We have also trained 46 CSOs in information and communication technology (ICT) skills, returning support to the development of once neglected Amerindian communities.

We will continue to create employment opportunities for our Amerindian brothers and sisters to promote capacity development. To this end, this Government will: Employ 2,000 CSOs, maintaining our manifesto promise to the first peoples of Guyana; we will support economic activity in their villages including, providing support for purchasing of boats, engines and other inputs into generating economic activity; we will invest \$1.75 billion for the hinterland roads programme to enhance connectivity; and access; and, finally, we will award 196 scholarships, starting to bridge the educational disparities between the hinterland and coastal areas.

G. Improved Governance and Institutional Reforms

a. Governance

The overarching commitment by President Ali’s Administration to democracy, inclusive governance, transparency, and accountability lays the foundation for the manner in which our Government will operate. Our President has committed to pursue nation building, through a ‘One Guyana’ policy based on inclusivity, as elaborated during his inaugural address to this honourable House only yesterday. After the last five years of reversals, our Government has the welcomed task of returning Guyana to its days of former glory as was under the previous People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government. It is not a secret that our predecessors failed as a Government, and we are here, on this side of the aisle, to prove it. As we set out the medium-term trajectory for our governance agenda, we will seek to ensure greater participation of all Guyanese in our plans for the development of our country.

We will focus on making this Parliament a truly deliberative forum. Further, we will work to protect and preserve Guyana’s Constitution and the Standing Orders of the noble House. We all know that this was severely trampled in the last session with no special select committee. However, since our return to Office, two Bills have been sent to the committees for consultation with stakeholders.

It is noteworthy that all parliamentary standing committees have been established. Most notably, the Constitutional

Reform Committee (CRC) and the Committee on Appointments (COA) are meeting. Further, the latter has completed the process for the parliamentary nominee to the Judicial Service Commission (JSC), which expired since September 2017. We are proud of these achievements in a mere six months. However, when we contrast the affairs of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), regrettably, this Committee is still held at ransom and has not met for the past two weeks. This is preventing the Committee from getting on with the business of the people and preventing scrutiny of the previous Administration’s woeful mismanagement of the finances of Guyana during the past five years.

With on-going preparations for an active legislative agenda, as further outlined in the His Excellency’s address to this honourable House, a number of oversight measures to enhance transparency and accountability will be rolled out including, the establishment of a One Guyana commission, which will be enshrined in statute. This is yet another example of efforts being made by this Government to entrench a strong foundation for democratic rule and inclusive governance.

b. Justice Sector Reform and Strengthening

Our Government is firmly committed to ensuring that all citizens have access to, and are protected by, the justice system. To this end, we will continue to implement reforms to the criminal justice system, as well as to advance reforms to the legal system more broadly.

The previous PPP/C Government had commenced addressing the issue of backlog cases in the High Court. However, it would appear that these gains were not sustained, resulting in serious implications for both the justice system as well as the security sector. Over the medium-term, we will reprioritise the issue of reducing backlog cases, with particular emphasis on cases at the Court of Appeal.

Additionally, it is important to recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic has also placed additional pressures on the limited capacity of the justice sector actors. This is arising from the fact there have been reports that the pandemic has brought more disruptions with families and incidents of domestic violence has taken on new proportions.

To advance all of the reforms earmarked for this sector, the sum of \$4.6 billion is allocated for 2021. A sum if \$1.2 billion is allocated for the construction and equipping of new courtrooms as well as living quarters and supporting facilities at locations including, Port Kaituma, Mabaruma and

Vigilance. This will reduce travel time and cost for citizens requiring the services of the courts and to enhance access to justice. In an innovative response, container courtrooms were established to conduct virtual courts at the Lusignan Prison, all in an effort to align with the safety measures instituted in our fight against COVID – 19 and to harness modern technology in the delivery of services. These initiatives and examples will soon be replicated at other locations. In addition, more courts are expected to be opened including, along the heavily populated East Bank corridor.

The Chambers of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) will benefit from expanded office space to house more prosecutors who currently are unable to be hired because of the lack of office space. An additional 10 legal staff will be hired which will allow the DPP to address a larger case load over a shorter period of time and to address the current backlog. We will procure a software to better manage cases through their entire process. In addition, over \$100 million is earmarked for the maintenance of infrastructure and buildings for Supreme Court and the DPP Chambers which, together, will serve to ensure that improved physical facilities are available.

In 2021, the long-awaited Law Reform Commission will be established, charting the way to advance its work. In addition, the activities under the Support for Criminal Justice System programme will unfold, after a period of stagnation under the previous government. A sum of \$325 million is budgeted for this year for interventions including, strengthening of probation services and legal aid.

Further, we have initiated a programme with the University of Guyana (UG) which will see our law graduates who are unable to attend the Hugh Wooding Law School, being trained to prosecute alongside Public and Police Prosecutors. These candidates will be deployed to court houses throughout Guyana, augmenting the current complement of prosecutors and, thereby, reducing the time taken to administer related legal services.

c. Strengthening Local Government

Over the past five years, a spate of financial irregularities has plagued the Local Government Organs (LGO) alongside weak oversight and poor management of local government systems. Our Administration will right these wrongs. Already, our Government has signalled our strong commitment to maintain the legal and regulatory framework for the system of local administration through the development of local organs. To this end, the Local

Democratic Organs (LDOs) will benefit from technical support to perform their constitutional roles and functions, as well as to enhance leadership and capacity development for the provision of quality services in all the communities across the country.

In 2021, Government has allocated the sum of \$552 million to strengthen the LDOs across the 70 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and 10 Municipalities, to provide efficient services and to undertake developmental works for the residents within their boundaries.

5.57 *p.m.*

Further, an amount of \$1.1 billion is allocated for Community Enhancement Workers (CEWs) to continue to enable a clean and safe environment for residents within those NDCs. In addition, a sum of \$172 million is provided for capacity development, institutional strengthening and infrastructural works for the LDOs including, the rehabilitation of Parika, Charity and Mon Repos Markets.

- d. Public Administration and Public Financial Management
- i. Revenue Management

The Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), in its quest to deliver a modern and effective revenue administration, has responded to the needs of its taxpayers during the period of the of the COVID-19 pandemic. The GRA has introduced numerous process amendments to reduce the influx of taxpayers to its office. Additionally, the Automated Systems for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) World software was successfully implemented which allows for online submissions of declarations and e-payments. This is yet another example of the use of modern technology for the delivery of Government services.

In 2021, the GRA will pursue a number of initiatives to improve the delivery of its services including, the implementation of additional non-intrusive methods of customs examinations; very importantly, the implementation of the Single-Windows software; expanding e-payment facilities; completion of the roll-out of the remaining ASYCUDA modules; and first phase roll-out of the Optimal software, which is a powerful and flexible solution that brings together taxpayers information, transaction and communications within one single integrated user-friendly system.

The GRA has also continued to build capacity to address the emerging and unique needs of the oil and gas sector. This has resulted in the establishment of a Customs Petroleum Unit within the Customs, Excise and Trade Department and a Petroleum Revenue Department also in GRA.

It is imperative that the GRA’s capacity to monitor and audit the oil and gas sector be ramped up, substantially. To this end, in 2021, training will be delivered in the areas such as interpreting and analysing financial statements, oil and gas International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRs), cost recovery procedures, computer assisted audit tools and international taxation.

ii. National Insurance Scheme

It is well known that successive actuarial studies conducted over the years on the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) have highlighted the need for significant reforms to address issues related to the viability of the Scheme. Many of these reforms require serious review and consideration. These issues are not new. They have been around, and they have been documented in successes actuarial reports. The reality is the long-term viability of the National Insurance Scheme faces very serious threats. In 2021, our Government will undertake a comprehensive assessment of these recommendations made to determine a way forward.

Even as we undertake these analytical reviews, we must ensure that the NIS addresses the operational inefficiencies that currently obtain. Far too numerous complaints have been made, constantly, by contributors, over the years, regarding quality of service provision, missing documentation and records and incomplete contributions. The Scheme must ensure that these concerns are addressed with the utmost urgency. Contributor records must be updated promptly and accurately. Government has tasked the Scheme to set up a special project to address these operational issues. The work in this regard has already commenced.

Our priority is to ensure that the NIS brings all contributor records up to date and that they receive their benefits in a timely manner. In this regard, the Scheme is to be commended for taking a step-in using technology. In particular, the Scheme introduced, recently, the option for NIS pensioners to submit their life certificates *via* WhatsApp. Since then, several pensioners have been using the WhatsApp facility, calling the WhatsApp hotline, making video calls and submitting their live certificates live *via* the WhatsApp video call. We urge the embrace of more technological solutions, some of which, like this particular example, need not to

involve large sums of moneys or complexed technology but, in fact, can use simple and readily available technology applied to the particular problem in hand.

iii. Public Procurement

On assuming Office, Government quickly recognised that much of the public procurement systems, processes and procedures instituted prior to 2015 had been dismantled. Constant and persistent complaints abound, regarding excessive delays and slow processing of tender awards, much to the detriment and slothful implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) and, indeed, much to the frustration of the competing bidders. This situation has to be arrested immediately. This PPP/C Government took decisive action to restore public confidence and reliability in the tender process.

To this end, the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) will take a number of steps to improve transparency and accountability including, by developing a new website to provide information on procurement opportunities as well as to publish tender awards as required by the Procurement Act. We will reintroduce standard bidding documents, enforce the requirement to prepare and publish procurement plans, reactivate bid protest procedures and livestream tender openings.

The NPTAB will also collaborate with the Public Procurement Commission (PPC) to review the Procurement Act and Regulations and make recommendations for improvement, paving the way for e-procurement and digital submission of tenders. Additionally, the NPTAB will, more stringently, enforce compliance with the requirements of the Act by all budget agencies, as well as provide training to evaluators, bidders and all individuals.

iv. Data Systems Strengthening

We place the highest importance on data driven policymaking. Recognising the importance of good quality and timely data, we will be taking steps to strengthen the Bureau of Statistics and the statistical departments of the various line Ministries where they exist.

One immediate example where action will be taken to update our statistical framework is in the area of national accounts. Given the rapidly changing structure of the Guyanese economy as we become an oil and gas producer, it will become unavoidably necessary for us to rebase our national

accounts to a more recent and suitable base year, so that we are better able to measure value-added output in our country.

I turn now to foreign relations.

H. National Security

a. Foreign Relations

Our Government’s return to Office has seen the restoration of Guyana’s credibility in the international arena. Since this Administration took Office in August 2020, our President has participated in several international events. His interventions have signalled the importance with which our Government views Guyana’s role in the international community. His advocacy for the sustained economic development of small States, now with the global pandemic challenging such development, and the need to work collectively to build resilience, are calls that have elevated Guyana’s presence on the world stage.

The preservation of Guyana’s sovereignty and territorial integrity remains paramount. On the 18th December, 2020, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that it has jurisdiction in the case that Guyana brought in March 2018, following the decision of the Secretary General (SG)of the United Nations (UN) that the court was the next means to be used as the solution for the controversy that arose out of Venezuela’s contention that is the Arbitral Award of 1899, which had settled the land frontier between the then British Guiana and Venezuela, was null and void.

The ICJ will now proceed to adjudicate the case on its merits. This means that the court will issue, after considering the written and oral submissions of the parties, a final and legally binding decision resolving the controversy that has affected Guyana’s relations with Venezuela since independence. Our Government will not compromise, diminish or undermine the singularity, sanctity or solemnity of these proceedings and will, therefore, fully participate in and adhere to the Court’s final decision.

We know that all parties represented in this hallowed Assembly are at one in this national endeavour. Our Government, therefore, looks forward to us all going forward together as we continue to demonstrate to the world that we are at one in our fight to ensure that Guyana’s sovereignty and territorial integrity are preserved and maintained.

In the national fight to combat the global pandemic, the Government has also received much needed support from our

bilateral and multilateral partners which must be acknowledged.

To advance Guyana’s interests worldwide, we have allocated \$3.9 billion in *Budget 2021* for our missions and consulates to promote Guyana’s foreign policy. We will continue to consolidate our relationships with our traditional development partners and forge the building of new relationships. In this regard, we will be strengthening our diplomatic presence in the Middle East with the establishment of two missions in Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

This Government is committed to strengthening relations with the diaspora. We are aggressively pursuing their involvement in Guyana’s development agenda. As you would have heard from His Excellency, the President, in his speech to the National Assembly yesterday, his Government is in the process of establishing a diaspora council to ensure that the objective of engaging our diaspora in a structured manner is realised. We are also working to create a one-stop-shop for Guyanese overseas to engage in trade and investment through collaboration with the Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest). In 2021, it is expected that a virtual diaspora conference will be held after the finalisation of the Diaspora Engagement Strategy and Plan of Action.

b. Public Safety and Security

The security sector has long been plagued by issues of lack of public trust, poor response times and inefficient resource allocations. Our Administration, immediately, undertook upon assuming Office, to equip the sector to improve its ability to deliver on its mandate. We will ensure that every citizen; individuals and businesses and every visitor to our country enjoy a safe and secure environment.

6.12 p.m.

A sum of \$15.3 billion has been allocated to the Guyana Police Force, of which \$300 million is to be spent on the expansion of the land and water fleet across the regions to complement the existing fleet.

In the past, we had found Community Policing Groups to be a very effective complement to the work being done by the Guyana Police Force and involved the community in helping to keep their neighbourhoods safe and secured. Regrettably, over the past five years, the community policing programme was dismantled. In 2021, we would be resuscitating the Community Policing Groups. To this end, an amount of \$95

million has been allocated to help those groups strengthen neighbourhood patrols and visibility.

Over \$830 million has been allocated for the construction, rehabilitation, and maintenance of police stations, including Providence, Ruimveldt, Cove and John, Albion, Whim, Parika, Wismar, and others. We also plan to improve investigative and forensic capabilities of ranks by conducting training in 20 courses for 828 police ranks, along with an ongoing overseas training.

Turning to the Guyana Prison Service: Major works are ongoing to upgrade prison infrastructure. Work would commence, this year, on constructing three new blocks at Lusignan Prison, which would accommodate 600 inmates, while works are also progressing on the cells at the New Amsterdam Prison. Additionally, the construction of the Mazaruni Prison, to accommodate 220 high profile inmates, is expected to be completed during 2021. A sum of \$50 million would be expended towards training of inmates in the areas of anger management, literacy, agriculture, and culinary arts. Additionally, 30 incarcerated youths would benefit from digital skills training to support rehabilitation and social transformation upon exit from the prison system.

To finance these and all other initiatives, an amount of \$5 billion was earmarked for the prison service. In 2021, the Guyana Fire Service would receive a total of \$1.9 billion. Major interventions would include relocation of the central Fire Station at the congested Stabroek Market, and the construction of a new fire station at Eccles. Additionally, six water tenders and two ambulances would be procured.

I turn now to our macroeconomic targets for 2021

Targets for 2021

A. Real Gross Domestic Product

Guyana’s real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is projected to grow by 20.9% in 2021 with the non-oil economy growing by 6.1% – a significant reversal of the 7.3% contraction in 2020. This is premised, of course, on the assumption that a reopening of the economy takes place with COVID-19 restrictions being gradually lifted and is, therefore, subjected to significant downside risks.

On the sectoral front:

- a. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing

This sector, responding to the policy environment created, is expected to expand by 5.6%.

The restructuring of the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), along with the recapitalisation of sugar estates, would see some improvement in production and productivity. As a result, the sugar industry is projected to grow by 9.6%. The rice growing industry is forecasted to expand by 3.5%. Forestry, livestock, other crops and fishing are also expected to see major improvements. In the case of forestry, responding to the policy environment that we have created, this sector is projected to grow by 18.5% in 2021.

- b. Extractive Sector

The mining and quarrying sector is forecasted to grow by 39.1% in 2021. Significantly, this is driven by growth across all industries: oil, gold, bauxite, and other mining and quarrying.

In the oil and gas subsector, the daily rate of production, for 2021, is expected to be just over 109,000 barrels of oil per day. On that basis, this subsector is projected to grow by 46.7% in 2021. The gold mining subsector, which also suffered setbacks in 2020, is expected to grow by 4.2% in 2021, largely due to the resumption of operations at the one largescale gold mine which had suffered a stoppage in 2020, but also reflecting the response of the medium and small minors to the policy environment that this Government has created.

The bauxite subsector, which faced major issues in 2020, is expected to recover in 2021. Similarly, the other mining and quarrying subsector, which saw a significant contraction in 2020 as a result of lower demand, is projected to recover and grow by 19.8% in 2021, particularly with the anticipated scaling up of construction activities resulting in significant increases in the production of construction materials, such as sand and stone.

- c. Manufacturing

The performance of the manufacturing sector is projected to improve by 7.3% in 2021, partly on account of anticipated growth in sugar and, also, rice and other manufacturing. These three subsectors are expected to grow by 9.6%, 8.7% and 6.2%, respectively.

- d. Construction

With the resumption and expansion of public sector construction, through the Public Sector Investment

Programme, along with the rapid growth that is expected in private sector investment in key infrastructural projects, the construction sector is projected to grow at a very respectable 9.1% in 2021.

e. Services

Significant improvements are anticipated for 2021. These would follow the phase reopening of the economy, and an overall growth rate of 5% is projected for the services sector. This is largely driven by anticipated recoveries in wholesale and retail trade, transportation and storage, and financial and insurance activities. These are projected to grow by 10%, 9.9% and 7%, respectively.

B. Monetary Policy and Inflation

Monetary policy would be aimed at maintaining price and exchange rate stability, and expansion in private sector credit. For the year 2021, inflation is projected at 1.6%, due to expectations of increased economic activity as COVID-19 restrictions are lifted progressively with concomitant effects on commodity prices.

C. Balance of Payments

The overall balance of payments is expected to register a lower surplus in 2021, amounting to US\$59.9 million when compared with US\$60.6 million in 2020.

The current account is expected to move from a deficit of US\$651.7 million to a surplus of US\$65.7 million, mainly due to projected higher export earnings driven by a combination of higher export volumes and prices of export commodities. Export receipts are projected to increase by 46.4% to US\$3,788.8 million. This reflects projected higher export earnings from all commodities. In particular, crude oil exports are projected to increase by over US\$1 billion.

The capital account is expected to move from a surplus of US\$720 million to a deficit of US\$5.8 million reflecting higher projected outflows of private enterprises despite projected increased foreign direct investments.

I turn now to the fiscal operations of the non-financial public sector.

D. Targets for the Non-Financial Public Sector

a. Central Government Operations

Total Central Government’s current revenue for 2021, net of inflows from the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund,

popularly called GRIF, is estimated at \$257.9 billion, which is 13.4% above 2020 collections. Tax revenue collections are projected to grow by \$23.8 billion to reach \$242.1 billion in 2021, and non-tax revenues by \$6.8 billion to an estimated \$15.8 billion.

The 2021 tax revenue outlook is on an account of an anticipated 8.4% increase in income taxes, as a result of intensified activity in the private sector. Withholding tax – largely driven by remittances from companies involved in the extraction of crude oil – is expected to grow by 13.9% or \$4.6 billion above 2020. Expansion is also expected from collections of customs and trade taxes, which are anticipated to grow by \$3.3 billion to \$24.6 billion in 2021. Collections from excise taxes and VAT are targeted at \$40.1 billion and \$53.6 billion, respectively. Non-tax revenues are estimated to grow by 74.7% in 2021 on account of higher collections of royalties, special transfers and Bank of Guyana profits.

Central Government total expenditure for 2021 is projected to reach \$366.9 billion, which is 12.7% above the \$325 billion spent in 2020. This is driven, mainly, by an anticipated increase in expenditure for an intensified Public Sector Investment Programme.

Non-interest current expenditure is targeted at \$256.7 billion or 6.2% above the amounts expended in 2020. This is driven primarily by growth in transferred payments and employment costs of \$9.1 billion and \$7.7 billion, respectively. The higher anticipated transfer payments are largely due to a significant increase of \$2.6 billion allocated for educational grants to nursery, primary and secondary students across the country. In addition, subsidies and contributions to local organisations as well as old age pensions and social assistance are expected to increase also.

6.27 p.m.

Capital expenditure is projected to expand to \$103.2 billion, 35.6 %, above the amount expended in 2020. This is attributed to the advancement of major infrastructure projects.

The overall deficit of the Central Government is projected to be 8.7 % of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), compared with 9.4 % at the end of 2020.

I am pleased to inform this honourable House that the size of *Budget 2021* is \$383.1 billion, Guyana’s largest budget ever, and it is financed with no new taxes.

b. Summary Operations of the Public Enterprises

Public enterprise receipts are anticipated to increase by 25.7 % to \$146.8 billion in 2021. This outlook could be attributed mainly to higher expected receipts at Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) – driven partly by Government’s intervention to clear arears, to which I alluded to earlier – and the Guyana Oil Company Limited (GuyOil), which is projecting a 17% increase in sales volumes. The deficit of the non-financial public sector is projected at \$100.9 billion or 9.8 % of the GDP.

Measures

I turn now to Measures. In addition to the wide range of public investment projects and initiatives announced earlier, all of which will stimulate economic activity, create jobs and generate incomes, *Budget 2021*, also proposes additional measures aimed at bringing relief to the many businesses and households that have been experiencing financial distress over the past year and beyond. These measures also deliver targeted interventions aimed at specific sectors and spheres of activity that are particularly important both to households and businesses.

A. Reducing the Cost of Basic Food and Other Household Items

- i. Restoring the VAT Zero-Rate on Basic Food Items and Household Necessities

During the PPP/C’s prior tenure in Government, an extensive list of basic necessities were zero-rated so as to ensure that the VAT did not lead to an increase in the cost of these goods and services or become burdensome on taxpayers. However, the APNU/ AFC, over its term in Office, moved a number of these items from the zero-rated category to either the standard-rated or exempted category. In fulfilment of another one of our manifesto’s promises, we will restore to the zero-rated status all of the food items and other basic household necessities that were previously zero-rated at the time we demitted Office in 2015. It is another promise delivered. These items include basic wheaten flour, basic breads, oats, unflavoured cracker biscuits, cooking oil, locally produced bed linen such as bedsheets and pillowcases, toothbrushes, *et cetera*. Still on the category of Reducing the Cost of Basic Food and Other Household Items, there is Reducing Water Tariffs.

- ii. Reducing Water Tariffs

Water is essential to all aspects of our daily lives, both at the residential and the commercial level. I wish to announce a 5%

reduction in water tariffs across the board, targeting all levels of consumers.

B. Reducing the Cost of Construction and Home Ownership

- i. Zero-Rating Certain Construction Materials

As I have indicated during the course of my earlier presentation, the construction sector is a key sector and contributor to our economic development. Along with the significant developments that we will see taking place within the sector over the medium term, this People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government has committed to providing 10,000 house lots annually. We have worked tirelessly to clear the backlog of applications and to promote home ownership across the country, while providing access to financing, recognising as we do, how important homes ownership is to the economic empowerment of individuals and families. To aid the achievement of this vision of home ownership for all Guyanese, we are proposing to zero-rate the value-added tax for the following items:

- a) Stone imported for construction and housing from the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). It will be recalled that our Government had previously zero-rated this with a sunset clause expiring at the end of June 2021;
- b) we are now extending the zero-rated status until further notice; Secondly, locally produced pre-stressed concrete piles;
- c) Thirdly, locally fabricated mild steel beams for building construction. Many of these, even if they do not affect home construction, they will nevertheless affect the cost of construction in the business sector; and
- d) Fourthly, this is of particular relevance and interest to home construction, locally manufactured roofing, and Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) products for building construction.

We will also continue to monitor the cost of other basic construction materials, such as cement and steel, and examine the possibility of applying relevant taxes in such a manner as to serve as a adjustor from time to time, to cushion the impact of imported price fluctuation.

- ii. Reducing the Duty on Industrial Grade Cement

Furthermore, as another boost to the construction sector, we are proposing to reduce the duty on industrial grade cement from 15% to 5 %.

- iii. Increase in the Low-Income Mortgage Loan Ceiling

In addition, to the ceiling on low income mortgage loans, it would be recalled that we announced last year, an increase from \$8 million to \$10 million in the ceiling on low income housing loans that may be obtained through commercial banks, under the Low Income Housing Loans Programme, supported by this Government. I thought that was a necessary qualifier.

This year, we would like to announce a further increase in that ceiling from \$10 million to \$12 million, which will make housing loans more affordable to borrowers within that range.

I might add that we will also, in due course, examine the appropriateness of extending this programme to include other financial institutions such as insurance companies, depending on the legal framework. Members of this honourable House would be aware that the framework currently applies to commercial banks that have been designated and approved mortgage finance companies, by way of order issued under the Income Tax Act.

- iv. Increase in the Ceiling for Housing Loans at the New Building Society

The New Building Society Limited (NBS) has been an important source of financing for home construction and home ownership over the years. Currently, the ceiling on loans that the NBS can grant is \$12 million. We are proposing to approve an increase in the ceiling to \$15 million. This will also enable borrowers desirous of borrowing within that range, to access financing more affordably from the NBS.

C. Reducing the Cost of Connectivity

Our Government has been proactive in working with stakeholders in the diffusion of ICT across all sectors and regions of Guyana, as a means of economic and social empowerment for our citizens. The swift liberalisation of our telecommunications sector and the ensuing benefits that competition has brought through lower prices and a push to improve services, have delivered on the initial step of our promise and vision for enhanced ICT services. To continue along this path, Government is proposing to remove the value-added tax on data for residential and individual use.

D. Reducing the Cost of Transportation in the Hinterland

In our 2020 Budget, value-added tax was removed from all-terrain vehicle (ATVs), for mining, forestry, agriculture, and manufacturing. To further reduce the cost of transportation for hinterland communities and operators, the Government will remove the duty on ATVs for use in the hinterland.

E. Supporting our School Children

The APNU/ AFC Government, during its tenure, effectively demolished the social safety nets that were put in place by the PPP/C Government, which had sought to protect the most vulnerable in our society. In its 2020 Budget the PPP/C begun to take steps undo these misdeeds. Budget 2020 also announced a number of initiatives to be implemented from 2021.

As promised last year, we will be introducing a cash grant of \$15,000 per child to be given to the parents of children in the nursery, primary, and secondary schools in the public-school system.

F. Supporting the Elderly

Also, as promised in *Budget 2020*, we will be increasing Old Age Pensions from \$20,500 to \$25,000 with effect 1st January, 2021. This will benefit over 60,000 persons and put an additional \$4 billion of disposable income in their hands.

G. Supporting the Vulnerable

I now wish to announce that we will also be raising the public assistance payment from \$9,000 to \$12,000 monthly, benefiting over 13,000 vulnerable persons, and providing an additional \$500 million in disposable income to these individuals.

6.42 p.m.

H. Capital Gains Tax

At the time that we demitted Office, no capital gains tax was payable on assets that were owned for over 25 years. In 2019 the APNU/AFC changed this policy and abolished the 25-year limit. We are proposing to reinstate the original position, whereby the sale of assets that were owned for more than 25 years will not attract capital gains tax on their disposal.

I. Restoring Government Zero-Rated Status

To reduce the cost of Government’s delivery of goods and services, we will restore the zero-rated status for VAT purposes that the Government previously had in relation to the importation of goods and services or rather in relation to the importation of goods and works and services purchased by a budget agency of the Government. Mr. Speaker let me say that again. This applies to budget agencies, Government Ministries, and agencies. In relation to budget agencies listed in the schedule to the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA), so this is a status that would be enjoyed only by budget agencies listed in the schedule to the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act. Those agencies will have their zero-rated status restored in relation to the following, in relation to goods when imported and works and services purchased by them.

The annualised cost of the measures we introduced last year exceeded \$40 billion, on an annualised basis. The further measures we are introducing this year are expected to cost an additional \$10 billion. Taken together, that puts in the hands of the citizens of Guyana an additional \$50 billion of disposable income.

Conclusion

I will conclude as I began, this Budget comes to this House at a time of extraordinary challenge, both to our country and to the global community in which we live. But it also comes to this honourable House at a time when Guyana faces epic opportunity. The choice is ours whether we wish to be weighed down by the challenges before us, or to be buoyed by the opportunities before us.

This People’s Progressive Party Civic Government has charted a course, outlined in our manifesto and elaborated by His Excellency the President that, once followed, will see us seizing those opportunities and will guide us to a destiny of which our foreparents have dreamt for generations. The task will not be easy, but neither is it impossible. One thing is sure, the task will be made considerably easier if we have all hands-on deck, embracing the very spirit of oneness so eloquently elaborated by His Excellency the President yesterday.

Budget 2021 outlines a set of policies, programmes and projects which will not only catalyse economic growth directly but will also see billions of US dollars of private investment realised across several sectors of the economy. Over and beyond oil and gas, the opportunities in agriculture, in tourism and hospitality, in manufacturing, and in the service sector, this is why I belaboured the developments in

each one of these sectors as I addressed them in the substantive body of this budget speech, really to make the point that each one of these sectors hold remarkable promise for the future of Guyana. Over and beyond oil and gas, all of these sectors are pointing to remarkable investment opportunities, and tens of thousands of jobs being created in the shortest space of time, these jobs translate into incomes and those incomes translate into prosperity, both at an individual level and inevitably, at a national level.

The choice is ours, each of us at an individual level, whether to stand aside and be a passive spectator as Guyana navigates this exciting phase in its history or whether to get on board and be an active participant in the making of this modern history. That choice is ours, but make no mistake of it, this is the moment for which generations of Guyanese have been waiting. This is the moment.

Even if you are not occupying your seat today, we call on you on that side of the House to join hands with us and, of course, no disrespect intended to the distinguished Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly. We call on you to join hands with us as we seize this moment and chart a course through the challenges of today, and there will be challenges, into an era of economic dynamism, and secure lasting and resilient prosperity for all Guyanese for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, before I close, permit me only to acknowledge the tremendous efforts made by all of my Colleagues in the Cabinet and their respective staff who exhorted tremendous efforts in preparing their respective budgets submissions and yes, I think a round of applause is eminently deserving.

Permit me also to acknowledge the contributions and submissions made by so many stakeholders throughout the length and breadth of Guyana, some of whom submitted written submissions and some of whom participated in face to face or virtual engagements, sharing ideas, making suggestions and discussing issues.

Finally, I trust that I would be forgiven for saving the last word for my own team at the Ministry of Finance, who over the past few weeks made it eminently evident to me why on my return to the Ministry, I really did feel like I was returning home. I thank them for the energy that they exhorted in preparing this Budget. It was not easy, as you can imagine, they invested tremendous long hours and I trust that all the Members of this House would agree that they did a phenomenal job. With those not so few words, the privilege is mine on this People’s Progressive Party/Civic

Government’s behalf to propose this *Budget 2021* for consideration and approval by this honourable House.

I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED,

“That the Assembly do now adjourned to 10.00 a.m. on Monday, 22nd February, 2021.” [*Prime Minister*]

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly now stands adjourned to Monday, 22nd February, 2021.

Adjourned accordingly at 6.53 p.m.