



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

20TH Sitting

Monday, 22ND February, 2021

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.05 a.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,
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+*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,
Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance
Ministry of Finance,
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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,
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+ Hon. Pauline R.A. Campbell-Sukhai, M.P.,
Minister of Amerindian Affairs,
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
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South Cummingsburg,
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+ Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P.,
Minister of Labour,
Ministry of Labour,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
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Ministry of Housing and Water,
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Ministry of Human Services and Social Security,
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+ 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,
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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.,
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c/o Freedom House,
41 Robb Street,
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East Coast Demerara.

MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)
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East Bank Demerara.

Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.,
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Mr. Vincent P. Henry, M.P.,
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Shulidnab Village,
South Central,
Rupununi.
(Culvert City Lethem)

Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P.,
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Mabaruma Compound.

Mr. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P.,
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Cove & John,
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Mr. Vincero H. Jordan, M.P.,
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C/o Christopher Jones

Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P.,
Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),
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Haswell,
Port Mourant, Corentyne Berbice.

Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,
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Church Street Mahdia.
Lot 4 Public Road,
Stewartville,
West Coast Demerara.

[Absent]

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.

(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)

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Chief Editor
Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,
Senior Editor
Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
Senior Editor (ag)
Ms. Latoiah Joseph,
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Ms. Carol Bess,
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Reporter
Ms. Roseina Singh,
Reporter
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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

20TH Sitting

Monday, 22ND February, 2021

Announcements by the Speaker 2527

Public Business – Government Business 2528-2628

Estimates of Expenditure 2021 - Budget Speech 2529-2630

Adjournment - 2631-2632

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Presentations on the Second Budget of Twelfth Parliament

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are about to continue the presentations on the second budget of this Twelfth Parliament. Before I call on the first speaker later on, let me just remind Members that, just six months ago, we had one budget presented and, only a few days ago, a training session for Members of Parliament. I trust that these two experiences will guide us to move forward in a very orderly manner, respectful of the Standing Orders.

Quorums at Sitzings

I also want to say to Members that it is becoming quite disgusting having to wait for a quorum. I may have to start deducting time from that of the upcoming speakers when we start late, just to put an additional whip in place to get a quorum going on time.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Papers were laid:

- (1) Audited Financial Statements of the Cheddi Jagan International Airport Corporation for the years ended 31st December, 2018 and 2019.
- (2) Audited Financial Statements of the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority for the year ending 31st December, 2011.

[Minister of Public Works]

REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES

The following Reports were laid:

- (1) First Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Appointments in relation to the Appointment of a Member to the Judicial Service Commission.
- (2) Second Report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Appointments in relation to the Appointment of a Member to the Local Government Commission.

[Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance – Chairperson]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2021

WHEREAS the Constitution of Guyana requires that Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure 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, Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Guyana for the financial year 2021 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 12th February, 2021,

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 further provision in respect of finance.

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

Mr. Speaker: We will now proceed with the presentations from Members. The first speaker today is the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise today to commence the Opposition’s contributions to the 2021 Budget debate. I must say, our presence here this morning is indicative of the fact that we take very seriously

the oath we took to represent the interests of over 215,000 Guyanese, who have elected us to serve in this House.

While I note that my Colleague on the other side, the Hon. Warren Kwame McCoy, expressed his hope that he would enjoy the pleasure of our company during these debates, I must say that, by the time we are through with these debates and by the time we are done exposing *Budget 2021* for what it is, a vapid, visionless, vacuous document, my Colleague may well regret his insistence on our presence here.

Before I do so Sir, before I consider the 2021 Budget, I wish to address two issues that have arisen quite recently. As one may know, we are not in normal times and, therefore, I do not propose to proceed with my address as if we are in normal times. I am cognisant of the time that I have – 30 minutes, plus five minutes. I am quite sure, because we on this side of the House are a bunch of qualified, competent individuals, that whatever I miss, Sir, my Colleagues will certainly pick up.

What I want to do is to address two recent occurrences, which I believe have very significant implications for parliamentary democracy. I am referring to the incidents which occurred on 11th February, 2021, where a number of my Colleagues and I, including the Leader of the Opposition, were excluded and prevented from entering into the precincts of the National Assembly. We were prevented from entering the National Assembly by armed police and we were advised that it was on instruction. Similarly, a number of our Colleagues who were within the precincts of the National Assembly had their movements restricted. I want us to understand that duly elected Members of the National Assembly had the freedom of their movements restricted by police. This is what is going on in a so-called democratic society.

As if that was not enough, later in the day, we had to be treated to the most crass commentary from no less a person than the Vice-President, where he said, in response to whether we would be here, that he was not sure, but he assured that we would come for the food. He assured that we would come for the food because this is the depth to which we have descended in this National Assembly.

I want to say, and let me make this very clear that, it is not lost on us, this reference to food. It is not lost on us that Afro-Guyanese, subliminally and otherwise, have been called ‘hungry belly dogs’. It is not lost on us. Let me say this: it is shameful that no less a person than the Vice-President would reinforce, promote and endorse this insult of Guyanese people. It is no coincidence that this same Vice-President is

constantly interviewed by a ‘social media activist’ – since the Guyana Press Association has made it very clear that he is not a journalist – who has publicly called and has endorsed Afro-Guyanese being labelled as ‘hungry belly dogs’.

Let me say this, some may find it funny, some may find it as something to be laughed away and some may want to take comfort in the fact that you know what, what was said is more reflective of the person saying it, than the persons being spoken about. Let me say this, I am not willing to do that because I am a student of history and I am acutely aware that the Nazis called the Jews rats and the Hutus called the Tutsis cockroaches. Students of history understand that the dehumanisation, the attribution of ‘less than human’ to a particular race of people, is a precursor to a terrible evil, and so it is important that all of us here in this National Assembly condemn it. We must condemn such utterances. Whether they are issued by friend or whether they are issued by foe.

Mr. Speaker, I must say, I look forward to you addressing this matter as these disparaging comments were made in the precincts of this National Assembly and about Members of the House over which you preside. I look forward, Sir, in the shortest possible time, to your condemnation of these utterances.

I want to say that, as Guyanese we have to do our part. We will descend into the depths of darkness that will take us generations to get out. We are at a crossroads and I pray that the angels of our better nature prevail. With that being said, Sir, I wish to turn my attention to the *Budget 2021*. I am aware that I have *eaten into my time*, but like I said, my able Colleagues will take up where I left off.

Let me first commence by saying thank you to the staff of the Ministry of Finance. Mr. Speaker, as you would have noted, they would have prepared two national budgets within the space of a few months. I am acutely aware that, while they do not craft the policies that inform the budget, the compilation takes toil and I know that no one appreciates this more than the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh. Which is why it was so disconcerting to see that there was no note of thank you was expressed by the Hon. Minister to the men and women who would have toiled endlessly at the Ministry of Finance to present this Budget. Nowhere in the speech could I find a note of thanks. I may have missed it, but I could not find it in that Budget Speech. I believe that this is simply indicative of just the contempt with which this Administration treats, and the contempt with which they regard public servants. So, I wanted to say, thank you very much.

As I am on the matter of the public service, it is not lost on any of us that the public service is comprised largely of Afro-Guyanese. [**Mr. McCoy:** Race again!] Yes, I am going to talk about race all day because it is relevant, it is pertinent and *y'all can't tek it*— but this is what I have to say. I will speak. In fact, it is downright undeniable that this Administration has embarked upon an ethnicization of the public service. The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) has made it pellucid that there is no place for Afro-Guyanese professionals in the public service and so, they have targeted us. What they are doing as well is, those of our Indo-Guyanese and Indigenous-Guyanese brothers and sisters who support us, have been targeted.

10.20 a.m.

What is more egregious, Sir, is that they are not quite content to stop at firing persons but they go to the extent of making their disapproval known to anybody who would presume to want to retain the professional services of these men and women. This is the kind of climate they are fostering in our country.

Let me talk about *Budget 2021*. There is nothing spectacular about this Budget. In fact, if I could find one spectacular feature, it would be the fact that, in August, 2020 when the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) was installed, it inherited an economy that was experiencing meteoric growth. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance has grudgingly admitted that the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2020 has mounted to an unprecedented 43.5% and that inflation was 0.9%. Yet, he spoke about trauma and the moribund economy they inherited. Clearly, the Hon. Attorney General did not advise the Hon. Member that he cannot abrogate and reprobate in the same breath. *It doan wuk suh*.

Let me say that it is impossible on every scale for a Government to change hands in August and by December those are the numbers. Instead, it is clear and unmistakeable evidence of the economy inherited from the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government, and evidence of the capable stewardship of the economy from 2015 to 2020. Numbers do not lie. These figures are in sharp contrast to the diatribe that proliferated the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance's budget presentation about 2015 to 2020 period being one of economic disaster.

Let me say this. The Minister's attempts, at paragraph 1.6 of his Budget speech, at revisionist history has not gone

unnoticed. The Hon. Minister must know that he is entitled to his opinion, but he is certainly not entitled to his own facts. What continues to escape my Colleagues on the other side is that this is the information age and, with one click on *Google*, one could find things and information is readily accessible. Right now, we have no appetite for misinformation and alternative facts, not in this information age.

Let me say that his entire Budget is riddled with inconsistencies and inaccuracies. All of this is symptomatic of an Administration that is bent on conscientiously maintaining some distance from the truth.

Because time constrains me, I would not be able to deal with everything, but let me say that we will, throughout the course of this debate, continue to expose what I term the very mendacious underpinnings of *Budget 2021*.

The reversal of value added tax (VAT). The Government has made much ado about the reversal of VAT on certain items, but the question must be asked: what mechanisms would the Government put in place to ensure that the benefits are passed on to the consumers? It is alright to make these attractive announcements, but we must be told what will be done to ensure those who are intended to be the beneficiaries receive the benefits.

I have noted the boast of *Budget 2021* being the largest budget ever passed. I would be the first to admit that in certain circumstances size matters, but certainly not with the Budget. We know that anybody with the most basic comprehension of these matters understands that the significance of the size of the budget really does not depend on when one is looking at it. We know that when a budget comes to the National Assembly, it comes with one figure and we know the year thereafter, it is revised and the year thereafter that it is revised and deemed final. It is not about the size. It is entirely possible that the \$383.1 billion would not be the final figure. Besides, it is quite appropriate to expect that, at least in nominal terms, the Budget will be bigger in each successive year. If we check, we will see that this has been the case since about 2005. I am not sure what is the big hoorah about the size of the Budget. Size does matter but let me say this: it is not the size of the Budget alone, but it is the economics of the Budget.

I am no Economist and I do not portend to be but I understand, at a very fundamental level, that the larger the budget, it is the larger share of one's income that is taken. The size of the budget is taken in the context of income and not in terms of the absolute amount of money expended in

any particular year. Let us put to rest the boast about this being the largest budget ever. It means nothing without context. Like I said, I am no Economist, but I understand that it is important to know and understand what percentage of the GDP the budget would take.

What is important, I understand and know, is the efficiency of the use of resources and the distribution of resources. How fairly and equitably have the resources been allocated? For example, we only need to look at a metric of allocation per region and we will see the disproportionality. When regional spending is examined, Region 4 is in the lowest, by far, per capita and we wonder why. All and sundry know that is the stronghold of the Coalition. This discriminatory nature of the PPP/C comes out even in their budgeting. Then, we have a President who wants to *palaver* and talk about ‘One Guyana and Oneness Corridor’ and right in the ‘Oneness Corridor’ the most horrendous discrimination is happening.

Let me say that it is important that we understand how the Budget is financed. Simply put, for the man in the street out there, this Budget is being financed by destroying a very sound tax base, which the PPP/C inherited, in preference to borrowing. Clearly, we are going to borrow ourselves to death. By the end of 2021, if everything goes right with this Budget, we would have racked up a debt of about US\$1 billion. In stark terms, that is equivalent to about five times what we have in the Natural Resource Fund. To put it in even more stark terms, if I divide the \$200 billion, which is the approximation of what the debt will be by the end of 2021, by 750,000, one understands the burden that that every Guyanese man, woman and child will have to bear. The corollary of that is that each person born in the next generation will be deprived to the extent that we keep borrowing. We are saddling our children and our children’s children with debt. Why are we doing it? Exactly what are we doing it for?

It is no secret that, in its previous incarnation, the PPP/C Government had a nasty record when it comes to the administration of the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). They now want to double it. Ostensibly, while there is nothing wrong with that, we are aware of the litany of failed projects over which this Administration has presided. There was the Skeldon Sugar Factory project; the Amalia Falls road; the Guyana Marriott Hotel Georgetown; the wharves that floated away; the Kato Secondary on which \$1 billion was expended and was not completed and the Coalition had to come and finish it. It is not only these big projects. There were also small projects, in every town and village, where

there was shoddy and substandard infrastructural works by contractors. That is what characterised their management of the PSIP. As if that were not bad enough, we have the Hon. Minister saying they intend to return to the pre-2015 policies, processes and procedures for procurement. May God have mercy on us. What was this period characterised by?

Let me give the House what this system yielded: sole sourcing of drug contracts, contract splitting, overpayment of contractors, inflated engineers’ estimates, blatant discrimination against contractors, the lack of a bid protest committee, poorly prepared bid documents and the limited publication of awards, to name a few. They are not in Government for one year and already we are seeing a return to this process and a return to this *modus operandi*.

They have fired all of the highly trained and qualified people at the National Procurement Tender and Administration Board (NPTAB). Guess what? They put the head of the PSIP as the Chairman of the National Procurement Tender and Administration Board, occasioning a colossal conflict of interest. Do you think they care? They do not care. They have appointed the man who is the head of the PSIP as the Chairman of the NPTAB, unmindful and uncaring even of the fact that the Procurement Act states that the Chairman of the NPTAB ought to be a fulltime member of staff of the NPTAB.

Under the Coalition Government, we saw the professionalisation of procurement in Guyana. We saw massive institutional strengthening through training and legislation. It is to be recalled that it was under the Coalition Government that the Public Procurement Commission (PPC) was sworn in. I anticipate that we are going to see some sloth in the reconvening of that Commission because, of course, it is intended that the Commission will take, ultimately, the place of Cabinet. Of course, we cannot have that because we have to maintain people coming *cap in hand* to the Cabinet, the powers that be and the three b’s to beg for contracts. This is what we are returning to and it is unacceptable.

Some of the interventions saw amendments to the Procurement Act, which occasioned issues such as registration of bidders. We saw the set asides for small businesses. Let me speak about small businesses under the Budget. Glaringly absent from the Budget is any specific relief measure to cushion the small businesses from the effects of the pandemic. In fact, micro, small and medium-scale enterprises have suffered the same fate in 2021 as they did in *Budget 2020*. We must appreciate that the paltry \$250

million that has been set aside for the Small Business Development Fund (SBDF) will make no appreciable impact. Despite the grandiose promises, the PPP/C Administration has once again failed small businesses.

It is no secret that the health, transport, particularly in the context of transport infrastructure, and the education sectors have traditionally been challenged in terms of being resourced. It is, therefore, important that, simply put, resources be allocated in manner that gets maximum results. This becomes even more critical because of the uncertainties which characterise the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. The pandemic has radically altered the way we operate.

In the context of education, the pandemic has radically altered the way we teach and learn. We were hoping that more emphasis would be placed on finding innovative and creative ways to ensure equitable access to education, through the use of information and communication technology (ICT), especially for the poor and underprivileged in our midst. It is good to have spanking new schools. We are not saying no and we are not against that, but, again, it comes back to the question of priority, where we are and the context in which we are operating and that is a COVID-19 environment.

10.35 a.m.

We were hopeful that it could be recognised that the optimal use of the resources just might be diverting those brick and mortar moneys into the education sector, so those children who do not have access to a computer and internet to access classes, remotely, would be able to have equitable access to education. Whilst the introduction of the \$15,000 cash grant is commendable, it is simply not adequate for our children.

The PPP/C Administration needs to treat teachers with a little more respect. I come from a family of teachers and it pains me to hear words disparaging of our teachers that are uttered. We are all grappling with the effects of COVID-19. Our teachers have families they have to navigate through these difficulties. Then, they have to help our children navigate the new normal. So, it is expected that the Government will treat our teachers with a little more grace and respect.

When we look at the health sector, when we consider that, as we sit here today, we are grappling with what I have said before is the most serious public health emergency in recent history, it is disappointing to see a budget that is devoid of a comprehensive road map to meet the challenges posed by the pandemic, to cushion the impact of the pandemic on the most

vulnerable and to ensure Guyana’s full recovery. For all the hecklers out there, putting the word ‘recovery’ on the label of *Budget 2021*, does not cut it and does not make it so.

Mr. Speaker, I understand what is happening. The PPP/C Administration is in the throes of cogitative dissonance. Remember, when the pandemic first emerged, it was a case where it was a hoax that the Coalition was perpetrating on the Guyanese public to hold on to power. Now, that you have assumed the seat, you do not have the wherewithal to treat the pandemic with the seriousness that it deserves. That is the problem that we have there.

The short-sightedness of the PPP/C Administration is really the stuff of legend. You have approved \$25,000 per a household. You made no attempts, at the beginning, to define this very nebulous term of a household. You have not engaged in any kind of community profiling to ensure that the most vulnerable are able to access the relief first. You have not done that. What is happening is that, in the context of this \$25,000 cash grant relief, a lot of requirements are being imposed. Persons have to present their transports, utility bills or an agreement of rental. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? These hurdles are only put in place when it comes to the APNU/AFC’s strongholds. What the PPP/C fails to understand is that, by discriminating in this manner, they are jeopardising all of our health. Guess what? The sentiment of the man on the street is *if yuh miss meh with di \$25,000, miss meh with di vaccine*. Because they cannot see their way clear out of a wet paper bag to shed this vestige of discrimination that just clothes them, they are jeopardising all of our health and jeopardising the recovery of this country from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, there is so much more to say. I want to say, Sir...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you can say what you have to say, you will need an extension of five minutes to conclude.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Cde. Speaker, I do hereby move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her presentation.

Mr. Speaker: The request is for the Hon. Member to get five minutes to conclude. Proceed, Hon. Member.

Motion put and agreed to.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Sir. I am so cognisant of the time. What I will do is shift my attention to the foreign affairs sector.

When I read the Hon. Member, Dr. Singh’s, comment on foreign affairs, I was firmly convinced that he clearly inhabits an alternate universe. He asserted:

“...return to office has seen the restoration of Guyana’s credibility in the international arena.”

Can you imagine that, Mr. Speaker? I beg to differ. A far more adequate statement would be that since the installation of the PPP/C Administration, we have seen a series of missteps, miscommunications and just all out mamaguying in the international arena. Since this Administration’s installation, we have seen the mismanagement of Guyana’s foreign and international affairs. We have seen the abandoning of sound foreign policy positions and the wanton disregard for and violation of decades old friendships. Guess what? We have to expect more of this because when one sells one’s soul to power, one is at the mercy of the benefactors. We could expect more of this erraticism in our foreign policy. We could expect our foreign policy decisions to be announced *via* tweet by third party states.

Do not let me talk about the Haitians and the disregard for our treaty obligations. I do not even want to talk about national security. A boat without engine with dead people evaded our authorities 10 miles from our coast. So, it looks like when it comes to national security, Guyanese have to decide *there but for the grace of God go I*.

In closing, I want to say that this Budget is not about the poorest in our midst. It is not about the hardworking public servants. It is all about ensuring the rich get richer, and PPP/C cronies with vested interests get the best of everything. It is an empty Budget insofar as 90% of the people are concerned. The PPP/C bungled with this Budget. They bungled, again, by not announcing an increase in public servant wages. They bungled, again, in an attempt to give a spurious explanation that the increase is in some line item that we are not even sure what they are using it for. They obviously have no coherent policy to address the public health crisis we are experiencing.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say, in closing, if you will permit me...I want to bring our attention to a painting that emerged some weeks ago, a painting by one of our young artists here in Guyana. I think the saga of that painting illustrated, in the boldest of colours, the putrid, pervasive perceptions that have been allowed to take root and grow in this land. In the

painting, what did we see? We saw the large, patriarchal, Godlike figure of His Excellency the President, Dr. Irfaan Ali; the smaller, cherubic intercessor between God and man, Mrs. Ali; and then the smaller, yet, mortal man, who just happened to be persons of Afro decent, reaching out, beseechingly, to the source of their sustenance. When met with justified outrage, the artist, apparently seeing the error of his ways, took steps to correct it. But what did he do, Mr. Speaker? It apparently required too much of him to elevate the downtrodden to equal size and standing and to acknowledge that we are all created equal. So, in a most poignant example of art imitating life in Guyana, he took his brush – his brush of authority and power – and he used it once more, not to elevate the indigent or dignify the downtrodden. Instead, he used it to obliterate them and painted in their stead, flowers – a denial that this problem exists. In so doing, his actions make a stunning confession and it admitted the belief of *plenty ayo over deh*, it admitted the belief of a lot of the Hon. Members over there, that Afro-Guyanese, the marginalised, the victimised and the oppressed in Guyana are dispensable. That is what it says. It says that our cries for justice, fairness and equality could be muted with the stroke of a brush. I have news. It will not be so.

I want to end by saying that we in this House are all artists of Guyana’s future and each new day presents us with a blank canvas. What we choose to paint each day will form an indelible part of the patchwork of our history. We decide whether we will paint apathy or ardour and whether we will paint bigotry or brotherhood. We decide that, Sir. All of us here will pass this way but once and we must now decide. We have to decide in this hour whether Guyana will be the land where the children of the *Chatree* and the daughters of the Dahomey will live together. We decide whether we will, in the words of Martin Luther King, “live together as brothers or perish together as fools.”

If President Ali is interested in making Guyana a better place for all, he must know that empty platitudes of ‘One Guyana’ will not cut it. He must know that this vacuous, vapid and visionless Budget, presented by his Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, which makes no attempt at fairness and equity, is not going to cut it. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, before I call on the next speaker, just three observations. I did not want to cut the Hon. Member because she was at her conclusion, but the reference to ‘*ayo over deh*’ did not cut it.

We need to continue to show great respect for Hon. Members and the House.

Secondly, the Hon. Member started her presentation with reference to an incident which occurred on 11th February. If we check our Minutes of the meeting of 12th February, I had addressed that.

Finally, it was said that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance did not give any appreciation or thanks to his staff. I sat in this National Assembly and heard reference...

[*Interruption*]

Hon. Members, I am speaking. We are going to get the verbatim records to put to the House what the Hon. Member said. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Labour, Mr. Joseph Hamilton, to make his presentation.

Minister of Labour [Mr. Hamilton]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [**Mr. Duncan:** Pholourie face.] You must stop having that woman jump out of your body.

Mr. Speaker, let me begin at page 17 of the Budget presentation by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh:

“...this PPP/C Government’s vision for Guyana was elaborated in the manifesto on the basis of which we were elected to office. That vision was further elaborated by His Excellency’s inaugural address before the National Assembly yesterday.

10.50 a.m.

Our plan for the near term is to keep people safe and continue to nurture the economy. For the medium term, our plan is to make Guyana an economic powerhouse, where every single Guyanese person can live, learn, work, and retire in dignity and comfort, where national prosperity is a reality and where individual prosperity is a realistic prospect for all who are prepared to invest their quite effort.

The achievement of that objective requires a broad-based resilient productive sector, including vibrant industrial and manufacturing sectors, creating jobs....for emergence of a dynamic, entrepreneurial and small business sector. Additionally, it requires an education sector that equips all of our people,

including those seeking alternative pathways to work, with the skills that they need to play meaningful roles in the economy of today and of tomorrow. Foremost among these would be technical and technology-based skills. Finally, it requires all of the other prerequisites to improved quality of life being in place, including world class health care, facilities and programmes to nurture our most vulnerable, as well as facilities and programmes to encourage and promote the talents of our young people.”

This is the language of scholarship

An economic thrust, a developmental pathway, studious in nature. Three days after, this is the response of the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

“The Budget is like a jet. The wheels are taking off. The cockpit is malfunctioning and the pilot is flying a dream. The Budget has not taken off as yet.”

One time it has taken off and then it has not taken off.

“It has crashed.”

Mr. Speaker, what we will have here – and you could have heard from the tone of the Hon. Member who spoke before me – is budget presentations coming from that side that would be puerile in nature, filled of banality, profanity and nothing that would uplift the people of this Co-operative Republic of Guyana. It is a people that is bankrupt of ideas; it is backyard conversations. They discuss political and economic development with rum shop *gaff*. [**Mr. Nandlall:** Standpipe argument.] It is standpipe argument and backyard conversation. There is no depth and no understanding of matters. That is why the speaker before me ought to present to this National Assembly...

I have been around in this National Assembly for 22 years. Mr. Speaker, you have been here longer than I have been. Today, I heard in this National Assembly the most shameless race-based conversation.

The speaker before me went on to speak about Afro-Guyanese. She is a Member of Parliament from Linden. What have you done for Afro-Guyanese in Linden? Your Government was in power for five years. Is Linden a changed place economically? The answer to that question is no. Is Buxton a changed place? The answer is no. Is Ann’s Grove a changed place? The answer is no. Is Golden Grove a changed place? The answer is no. Is Den Amstel a changed place? The answer is no. Whichever region one goes, the answer is no. It

is because the APNU/AFC did not deliver for the Guyanese people, regardless of whatever race they belong. You come into this National Assembly and speak all kinds of profane language and shed tears for Afro-Guyanese. You had your opportunity to deliver goods and services for Afro-Guyanese. What did you do? N-o-t-h-i-n-g.

The tone of this budget debate would be this Government of ours presenting to the Guyanese people a plan of progress and development. Over there, what we have is bankrupt thoughts; nothing of substance and nothing that would change the lives of the Guyanese people. That is the reason [**Mr. Duncan:** That is why your speech will be short.] You could shout how much you want over there, but the economic development train has left the station. You cannot stop it. You cannot hold it back. That is why, today, you are becoming irrelevant even among your own supporters. Nobody listens to you and your nonsense talk. Nobody cares about you because they know you have nothing to offer this country.

Many persons, recognising that the ship of nothingness is sinking, are jumping off. Who jumps off a good ship? There is a gentleman who would stand up here some day in this week, a fuel smuggler and a person who is a tax evader, and tell us about jurisprudence, law, constitution and good governance. Another gentleman, who has set up a gun licence corporation to benefit himself, would talk about how good his Government was. Then, there would be another gentleman who will stand up and speak about the virtues of APNU/AFC, but what did he do in Government? He did all kinds of corrupt transactions, selling out State lands with his signature on it. Then, ‘bangles, bed sheets and pillows’ would speak, also, about these virtues; a man who has taken the Government money and has bought chester drawer, bed sheet and pillow and pillowcase; shameless. Then, we would have the other lady who did not request a bangle like his; she wanted one that was a leaf.

Mr. Speaker, they should own them. Then, the great calypso would be sung very shortly. Liar the liar would speak to us about all of these virtual classrooms. Even though the teachers say they do not exist, even though the children say they do not exist and even though the media went to the schools and they do not exist, I am confident that shameless untruth would be repeated in this National Assembly.

Then, we would have, on that side of town, the man who used all kinds of fraud to acquire \$5 million of barber chairs and mirrors. He would speak about Afro-Guyanese and what we are not doing with them. This same gentleman threw out a

Rasta man and his wife who were on the land for 30 years; they were Afro-Guyanese.

Then, we would have the person who told great untruths to the Organisation of American States (OAS) and the leaders of this world. Then, we would have profanity coming from the lady who jumps out of a man’s body regularly. Speaking after the lady who jumps out of the man’s body regularly, would be Yuri’s cousin. I am told she is doing Ponzi schemes where she resides. Then, we would have the other gentleman who cannot account for \$155 million of Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) money. He would regale us with all he has done for the Amerindian communities.

I see that the other gentleman is not there. He took \$5.7 million of State money and he bought some flying pigs with it. If that profanity was not enough, the fraud committed was to purport to be a cooperative society when it was not; it was just a hustler’s society. The fraud is compounded by the taking of Government’s money and placing the pig pens on private land that belongs to his brother. These are the people who would come here with all kinds of righteousness and holiness and quote scriptures. The important thing is that the people of this country do not believe you at all. That is why you would stay over there perpetually.

The same conversation, Mr. Speaker, that you heard from the speaker before me is what they took to the population in 2020. Do you know what was the end results? It is the People’s Progressive Party/ Civic being victorious; that is the reason we sit here today as the Government of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

The Ministry that I sit over had four Ministers under that cabal. Do you know what happened? They brought labour relations and the structures to manage and supervise labour relations to nought. Four Ministers. One of them, I am told, the only good thing he had about him was the best Ministerial bar. [**Mr. Duncan:** Why do you not talk about the Budget? There is nothing to talk about in the Budget, *eh* Joe?] None of the things you say matters.

11.05 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Labour has six technical departments that were not nurtured. Our people were dying under the stewardship of this Government. They were dying in the mining pits and they were dying on the construction sites. Yet, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government saw it fit to not train and

employ more Occupational Safety and Health Officers. In a matter of five months, this People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government has increased the complement of Occupational Safety and Health Officers from nine to 30 – threefold – because we recognise the importance of the lives of our people on worksites. The Occupational Safety and Health Department is presently reviewing legislation to deal with the oil and gas sector. These people were in Government for five years and paid no attention to it. It is as if we did not need occupational safety and health.

Secondly, the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic came upon us. They did not understand that it was important to include, in the framework of managing COVID-19, the Occupational Safety and Health Officers. This year, we will ensure that, in every region of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, for the first time in history of this country, there are Occupational Safety and Health Officers to supervise the work of people.

Again, for labour relations, there were all kinds of advantage being taken on employees and, yet, they saw no need to increase the complement of Labour Officers. In five months, we will increase the complement of Labour officers from 16 to 26 and ensure that, in every region outside of Region 4, two Labour Officers are placed there. [**Mr. Duncan:** No increase for the public servants (*Inaudible*)] Nonsense, says the fuel smuggler.

The Central Recruitment and Management Agency (CRMA) of the Ministry of Labour: The role of the CRMA is to contribute and examine the social development of Guyana, providing effective and efficient employment services to job seekers and employers. Again, there was no strategy, no programme nor a plan to develop that Department. It was left in the hands of a pedestrian who purported to be a Minister, a man who the courts ruled was not even qualified to be in the National Assembly. The plan going forward is to improve the academic qualifications and our skills for job seekers. The Board of Industrial Training (BIT) was not utilised in the way for which the law said that it must. It was more designed to service Region 4 and Georgetown. Today, the Board of Industrial Training and its programmes will be expanded to every region throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. Never before has it happened.

We have already appointed Board of Industrial Training officers to every region in this country. We hope to train 3,500 persons, in the next year, throughout the length and breadth of this country. Recognising the importance of a

collaborative programme to deal with skills training, already, myself, the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports and the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security, have already sat to cooperate, collaborate and jointly execute programmes, throughout the length and breadth of Guyana, to give skills to the Guyanese people. What did you do? What have you done other than scream and talk nonsense? What have you done? [**Mr. Duncan:** We sold Pholourie.] You have put your stewardship on the line.

The Hon. Member who spoke before me said that there is no transformational programme in the Budget. Could you believe that? Could you believe that when the tender bids for the execution of the Demerara Harbour Bridge crossing is already out there? Could you believe that when the feasibility study for the Corentyne River bridge is already there? Mr, speaker, could you believe that when the project for the installation of lights on the Soesdyke-Linden Highway, for which *Bangles* could not do in five years, is on its way? The APNU/AFC is incapable of conceptualising anything big. The APNU/AFC went to the negotiations with ExxonMobil Corporation and, instead of asking for a \$280 million signing bonus, it asked for \$18 million and was happy.

The people are not fooled by your theatrics. You have now resigned yourself to dealing with the last straw that you have, and it was articulated by the Member who spoke first on your behalf today – race baiting and racism. Those are the only things that you have left; nothing of substance and nothing to speak about the development of this country. When you condemn any programme that we have in this Budget, there is no programme that you could put to match. You have no substitute for any project or programme.

The Hon. Member, some three minutes into her racist tirade, spoke about the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. She fabricated and did fiction writing about the matter. Let me make this clear: In passing, the Hon. Member took a swipe at my Colleague, the Hon. Prime Minister. This is the regular swipe they take at us who are of afro-Guyanese heritage. Let me say this profoundly: The intellect and capacity that is in the feet of Brigadier (Ret’d) Mark Phillips, your leader does not have it from his head to his toes. I hope that puts it to rest so that none of you over there could stand and start to continue again. You came primed not to speak to this Budget, but to speak racist talks in this National Assembly. That is what you all came to do.

I am saying that your racist conversations do not move us. We have a responsibility to the people of Guyana, and we

will ensure that we carry it out faithfully. Whilst we do that, you will be bystanders; you will be standing by, empty. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes, you will be empty. The only time this Gentleman had swagger in him was when he was in Government. Today, he is a beaten, downtrodden, backyard person. He has no stature in society because the Government has been taken away from him. *Bangles* is over there. Mr. Mc Coy did you bring your bangles?

We continue the training of our officers. Just yesterday, I had an engagement with the Chinese Association of Guyana. It is the first time that the Ministry of Labour will be ensuring that its officers are given language training to deal with the influx of migrants who speak Portuguese, Spanish and Mandarin. It was never done before. This Cabal did nothing. They could not, in their heads, conceptualise the need for that. The Ministry of the Public Service speaks. Trade union recognition [**An Hon. Member:** (*inaudible*)] I hope the girl or boy is going out. Which one is it?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I recognise that your time is up. You will need five minutes to conclude.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Mr. Speaker, I wish to ask for a five minutes extension in keeping with the agreement. Thank you.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Minster, you may continue.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, do you hear the screams over there? It is like when you throw hot water in a pig’s pen. It means that I have done well in the last half hour. The screams said: “No, Ms. Teixeira, do not give him five more minutes.” I will be very diplomatic in the last five minutes. I will not speak about the untruths to the Organization of American States (OAS), I will not speak about the Bangles and the leaf bracelets, I will not speak about gun licences and I will not speak about the fuel smuggling. Mr. Speaker, let me say this: [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] No, I will not speak about the classrooms that do not exist. What is clear?

11.20 a.m.

I started to put before this National Assembly profound statements. On page 17 of the Budget speech presented by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance... Even before the first speaker spoke, I predicted that there will be nothing to match

anything that would be said over here. There will be nothing to substitute because no substance exists over there. Banality, profanity and puerility is what you would hear. [**An Hon. Member:** Banditry.] Oh, my God. There is nothing that is progressive, nothing that is uplifting, and nothing that speaks to the economic viability and development of the lives of the Guyanese people. There is nothing that they could put on the table in the next four days; nothing. What is important to note [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] The next time you block the road you would know whose voice would go. Mr. Speaker, over the next four days we would be treated to profound and developmental thrust, we would be treated to thoughts that would develop this Country and then, over there, you would hear about the jets. You would not hear about how and what they will do.

Importantly, the APNU/AFC has three regions that it controls and I could predict that it will not come here [**An Hon. Member:** Two regions] Oh, is it two regions? They are decreasing. It has two regions that it controls. Do you know what? The APNU/AFC, with all that the speaker before me had to say, would not even come here and speak to a development plan for those regions that it controls. It failed to put before this National Assembly and the people of Region 10, a programme, a plan and something that is different to what is presented in our budget. The representatives of Region 4, the same thing... It would have nothing to say about agricultural development. It would have nothing to say about educational development coming out of the regions that it controls because, whether they are top tier, middle tier or low tier, APNU/AFC operatives are the same. They have nothing to offer the people of Guyana.

Our case is made and we will continue to make it. We are sure and we are confident, like the people of Guyana accepted our arguments at the March, 2020 elections and elected us to Government, that they would continue to support us to ensure that this country is transformed.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. The Hon. Member Ms. Chandan-Edmond, you may have the floor. [*Applause*]

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Please permit me to extend [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Are you having a problem hearing? Listen. Using the words of your comrade: *yuh* head probably hard. Listen and *yuh* would probably learn something. When it is your time to present, I am sure that you are going to agree with me that this is not a ‘justice for all’ budget.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to extend my sincerest condolences to the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, on the passing of her father. I trust that, during this period, she would find comfort in prayers. To the Hon. Attorney General, I extend belated birthday greetings to you and I would like to say to you that I am a proud mother of two children. All the credit goes to my husband.

I rise to speak on the Budget presented to this honourable House and to speak on behalf of all Guyanese. I stand on the shoulders of all those who continue to support the Coalition. More so, I stand here to represent more than half of the Guyanese population.

I thank the Hon. Minister Singh for his Budget presentation. However, unfortunately, once again, the PPP/C has abandoned the tenet of consultation as part of the preparatory process of a budget. They have failed to consult with the major Opposition party that represents more than half of the Guyanese population. Consultation should not be limited to the subsets of the PPP/C. This is a constitutional requirement. By not consulting with the party that represents more than half of the Guyanese population, I say to you that you have breached the constitutional provisions which are sacred and sacrosanct. I urge the Hon. Minister to return to what has become a tradition; return to consultation. Consult with the Party that represents more than half of the Guyanese population.

Within my parliamentary remit are the men and women who protect us: our policemen and women, our prison officers, our firefighters, and all the other honourable hard-working professionals within the security sector. I rise on their behalf as I rise on the behalf of all Guyanese.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has, undeniably, made this a most challenging time. Hence, there should be no hesitation by any sitting Government to ensure that our gallant professional in uniform receive proper and tangible allocations. Regrettably, in this Budget, there is no financial arrangement for them to speak about their heroism. Clearly, this Budget is not intended to ensure that they enjoy the ‘Good Life’. It appears that, once again, they will have to settle for a one-time small piece arrangement with no permanent increases and no twelve months of retroactive pay.

This is the reality: There was no salary increases under the PPP/C Administration in two consecutive budgets and I want that to resonate. To all the men and women in uniform, who have contacted me and who are afraid to speak publicly, I say to you [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I have a list here. If

you want to see the list, I am more than willing to provide it. I am more than willing to provide it to the Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy, and the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall. I say to you that I understand your pain, I feel your plight and your agony, and I am here representing your cause, to fight for your rights to be professionals and to be treated with respect. That is something you would not know about because we have never had to pull a gun on anyone. Unfortunately, the Government does not feel that way. But, rest assured, the Coalition will continue to fight your cause. To every professional in the security sector, I say to you: continue to be professional, remain resolute and resist the politicisation.

I now turn to the title of this Budget. A budget is expected to forecast the big picture. We expected a clear overarching strategy with clearly identified objectives to bring relief to the people and to your people, Hon. Member Mr. Dharamlall.

Guyanese have grown accustomed to big things under the Coalition Government. Unfortunately, this visionless Budget has dampened their hopes. It has shattered the hopes of the working class.

The nation expected measures that were relevant, targeted and proportionate to cushion the effects of the pandemic. Sir, we all know that the previous measures were discriminatory, they were not properly implemented and they left much to be desired. This Budget is no different from *Budget 2020*. We cannot discern from this Budget any measure that signals that the pandemic is under control. There is no significant wage increase much less any wage increase at all. There is no measure to put resources in the hands of the poor, but moneys are readily found to buy expensive vehicles for the elite. I am sure that my Comrade Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul will be speaking on this.

What was received by this House on Friday, 12th February was an assault on the working class. What we received was an exercise in Government’s undying commitment to wealthy friends. Based on the foregoing, the Budget does not address the real issue of poverty. It bears no relationship to reality. In the midst of a pandemic which has ravaged the economic lives of the global working class, you cannot speak of recovery, dynamism and resilience without including the two words that Guyanese are crying to hear: adequate relief.

For my Friends on the other side who do not know the meaning of adequate relief. I brought my daughter’s Grade 3 dictionary here for you.

The economy grew consistently under the Coalition, there is no need for recovery. What is needed is a programme to deal with COVID-19 so that the economy would stay under the progress that was left by the APNU/AFC Administration.

Mr. speaker, based on the foregoing, the title of Budget reflects a detachment from reality and it is insensitive to the plights of the citizens. If the Hon. Minister Singh had taken the time to speak to the people, talk with the banks, possibly discourse with the loan officers, tenants, landlords, vendors, our fisherfolk, our frontline workers then, possibly the word ‘relief... and for those of you who are heckling, I brought my daughter’s dictionary here for you to understand the context of the word ‘relief’. The word ‘relief’ has appeared in this title... I have here with me a list of all the persons who have contacted me.

11.35 a.m.

Their recurring questions to me are how they deal with this notice to quit and that they are out of a job and have nowhere to go. They are saying that they have received demands from Courts and Singers Guyana Inc., and that they cannot pay the instalments. They are saying that they do not have moneys to send their children to school and that they did not received the COVID-19 cash grant. These are the cries of the people, yet the Government does not hear those cries. If the Administration hears those cries for adequate relief, I can only conclude that it, simply, does not care. [Mr. Dharamlall: *Inaudible*] Pay your child support. Having failed to address adequate relief, what has emerged is an uncaring and an unconscionable Budget. There is no relevant, immediate relief package.

Where is the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) for small businesses to ensure that workers stay on the payroll? Where is the moratorium on rent payments or evictions? Families are being inundated daily with notices to quit their rented properties. They have nowhere to go, and a one-off cash grant of \$25,000 is clearly inefficient. After listening to the heckling of Hon. Mr. Dharamlall, I think he is trying to say that the \$25000 is clearly insufficient for his family. Where is the part on predatory debt collection?

Families all across Guyana begin the day in fear of calls from banks and other debt collectors. Their employment is of no fault of their own; they were either hit by the economic fallout of COVID-19 or they were sent home by this very uncaring Government on the mere suspicion that they are Coalition supporters.

Increasing old age pension by \$5,000, public assistance by \$3,000, and a \$5,000 reduction on a few items cannot cushion this crashing COVID-19 impact on the lives and livelihood of people. It is not even a drop in the ocean of economic oppression that poor people are enduring. It is for this reason that Guyanese were hoping that, after the reading of this Budget, they would have been awakened to immediate relief, but it has not come. Just like the disappearing boat, poof! There goes your relief. It is nothing but failure in governance. It is a failure for you to keep your oath to the people.

This Budget is the musing of a Government far removed from ordinary life and existence. The talk about the path of recovery, resilience and dynamism without consideration for immediate relief can only proceed from the lips of men and women who live in ivory towers. I urge you to take a break from your air-conditioned offices, your plush sport utility vehicles (SUVs), your designer suits and sunglasses, and walk among the ordinary men and women; hear their cries and see their plight. With what has been presented to this House, the Members on the other side are failing miserably. The former Minister of Finance, who has shepherded Guyana through five years of consistent growth, has opined, and I quote:

“The government’s proposed 2021 national budget lacks a comprehensive plan to chart Guyana’s economic recovery from COVID-19.”

Further, it comes as no surprise that the column titled *Peeping Tom*, dated 14th February, has labelled *Budget 2021* as – I think my friend has brought a few sweets here:

“This Budget throws a few sweets at the people while the contracting class will end up smiling all the way to the bank with a few corrupt politicians and public officials in tow.”

It went on to state that the Budget has no internal logic. The PPP/C budgets are tailor-made for the rich, but they threw a few crumbs at the poor to get them excited. As you know, Sir, the undeniable link between economics and security is a phenomenon that has been around for a very long time, but recent events have made it more relevant. This elitist and anti-working-class Budget, during a pandemic, is dangerous business. One cannot have a society where friends of the Government are feasting on steak and guzzling champagne while the poor people suffer with dry bread and sugar water. This is the reality. They are courting social unrest. They are threading on dangerous ground.

I now turn to the objectives and the vision of the Budget. There is one inescapable fact which has characterised this Government. They say the right things, but they do the wrong. There is propaganda over performance. They say what sounds good but, in action, it is a completely different story. When there is a disconnect between words and action, there can be no trust.

I turn my attention now to page 4 of this 77-page document, where the objectives being sought are laid out. I refer, specifically, the first paragraph on page 5. There is talk of ensuring respect for the Constitution and the rule of law. But the question is, what have we seen thus far from this Government? It must be recalled that this very Government came into existence by the smashing and the dashing of the Constitution. The rule of law was severely undermined by the process and nobody seemed bothered by these events. Words must align with action. If we are going to talk about the Constitution and the rule of law, and we want to be serious about public security, then that situation must be corrected. A large section of the Guyanese population remains pained at what has occurred and there is a permanent uneasiness amongst the population. They woke up around five, possibly six on the morning of 2nd March, they joined long lines in the sun, and they are now saddled with a Government that does not reflect the will of the people. I cannot see how *Budget 2021*, in its present form, can remedy this current situation, especially when the people who are executing same appear to be comfortable with this insecure circumstance. Words must align with actions if we are going to talk about the Constitution. The rule of law and the want to be serious about public security has to be corrected.

I have to state that, since 2nd August, we have seen the rule of law being weaponised to achieve political objectives. The hunting down of political opponents. For example: my Colleague right here, Mr. Christopher Jones, has had the sanctity of his home violated and his wife and children traumatised. Just last week, as my Colleague mentioned, there was a clear violation of the rights of parliamentarians as they attempted to enter and leave the Parliament. Can you imagine this? Legislators were locked out and their movements were restricted. This is unbelievable. Those who are responsible must be held accountable and responsible. We have seen the law activated to hunt down careful officials while charges were selectively dropped for Members on the other side. On this side of the House, my Colleagues are being charged for frivolous reasons based on politically motivated accusations.

I now turn to paragraph 1.14, objective vi, and there is much talk about maintaining good governance.

Yet again, this does not align with the actions of the Government. The concept of good governance was introduced by the World Bank in 1992. At its core, it consists of capacity and efficiency and accountability and transparency. It does not include the gutting of the public service by wanton firings at the whims and fancies of this Government – ruling the country without any consideration for the people and a blatant disregard for the people’s representative. It appears that moves are afoot to constrain the works of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). These extreme and unprecedented actions by this Government does not induce confidence, and it is difficult to see how this will change going forward. After all, bad governance begets bad governance and bad governments and bad governance produces inequity, suffering and a mistrust in the government.

In addition, under this section, there is much rhetoric about safeguarding access to justice. In the chronicles of this Budget presentation, I do not think that we can find a sharp difference between what is being said and what is being done. If the families of three teenagers who were brutally slaughtered and murdered cannot have access to justice under this Government, who can have faith in the system? We continue to call for justice for these teenagers. The family members of these teenagers are calling for justice, hence their constant presence with placards at the Office of the President calling, pleading and demanding justice. Having carried out a slash and burn assault on the access to justice since 2nd August, it is clear that this Government sees justice through the prism of a zero-sum political gain. For this reason, any talk about access to justice by this Government has to be considered a crude joke. The critical pillar on which this Budget rests is directly tied to the nation’s security. It is a promised empire built on sand and it is certainly a set up for failure.

I now turn my attention to Section H, between pages 64 to 67, with the heading:

“National Security

b. Public Safety and Security”

As a parliamentary representative whose portfolio includes national security, albeit to a limited amount, public safety and security, I cannot be more frightened for this nation’s security under this Government. Since 2nd August... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Henry, I can hear you clearly.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: The nation has seen its foreign policy steeped in cloak-and-dagger secret arrangements. Secret deals are everywhere, and the nation’s security seems to have been placed on the bargaining table to maintain political power at all costs. The nation is still waiting on full disclosure of the bilateral Shiprider Agreement and the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement. The Leader of the Opposition has not been briefed and, to my knowledge, this honourable House has not received an update. This Government has been less than transparent. No amount of national security concerns can justify this state of affairs of what we have gotten ourselves into.

11.50 p.m.

Sir, the question is: What are the national security concerns for these secret deals? The Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, stood at the lectern like a stranger to the truth and fed this honourable House with a series of inaccuracies. He said:

“...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 to equip the sector to improve the ability to deliver effectively on its mandate.”

Sir, what could be further from the truth? It was the Coalition Government that restored public trust after years of phantom deaths, death squads, and rogue police. We restored the Guyana Police Force (GPF) to a professional institution and that is something we are very proud of. We have established a command center and a smart city. We moved Guyana from tier two to tier-one in the Trafficking in Persons Report index. We implemented an expansive 911 system and the exhaustive list goes on. Looking at my time, I would not be able to expand on the exhaustive achievements of my Government.

Sir, please respectfully allow me to highlight and correct a few of the misrepresentations made by my Hon. Colleague on the Government’s side. Without any doubt, I can conclude that the Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, has been either misinformed or mistaken. When the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) was elected to Government in 2015, our Administration inherited a situation of unchecked crime and lawlessness. One would recall the rampant incidents of interpersonal violence, robberies, and white-collar crimes; one would recall too the unspeakable number of attacks by pirates; one would recall

that the attacks against the fishermen by pirates were an almost daily occurrence; one would remember that on 1st December, 2007, 15 boats were attacked in a single day; one would remember the tears and pleas of the victims who survived those attacks and one would recall the grief of the families of the victims who were mercilessly thrown overboard to drown, after the pirates had taken their boat’s engine and their catch. Fortunately, the attacks came to an abrupt end when the APNU/AFC Coalition was elected to office and measures were implemented to curb the plague of piracy. The Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, misdiagnosed the problem and now, like a bad doctor, he tries to deliver what can only be described as bad medicine. The same promises and the same bad medicines were fed to the citizens for the last 23 years, and the same rhetoric and disconnect are being repeated to our people. The same methods are on display and they include the reality that the security services must execute the biddings of the political directorate. Sir, this is simply wrong. While in Government... **[Mr. McCoy: Inaudible.]**

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. McCoy, we are hearing you too.

Hon. Member, you have done well for the last half of an hour. We need an extension.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker, I do hereby move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. You may continue to conclude.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

While in Government for 23 years and after being installed for over the last six months, what we have seen is the wanton politicisation of the Guyana Police Force. Officers are not reporting to their superiors. In fact, they are reporting to their bosses at Robb Street. New officers of the Guyana Police Force are being enlisted, and within one month, they are promoted at the behest of the political directorate. The fundamental problem lies with the hunger of this Government for total power. The majority of men and women in uniform simply want to get on with their regular duties, but they are being marginalised and have to contend with the rogue elements within the Guyana Police Force. These rogue elements are misused for all sorts of wicked purposes, and shady unprofessional characters are being promoted to the top. The Coalition Government, under the leadership of Mr.

David Arthur Granger, returned the Guyana Police Force to a commendable level of professionalism after 23 years of absolute decimation, but in just six months this Government has dashed and smashed those efforts. Professional officers want to leave. Promotions are being decided at the Minister’s office at Brickdam and not at Eve Leary, where the issue ought to be decided with established due process.

I now turn to the drug trade since time is against me. I must register the strongest concern at this juncture of my presentation. That is, the Budget did not include a single syllable about the drug trade and its potential negative impact on us, as a people. It has been established that Guyana has now remerged as a major transshipment point for drugs reaching the United States of America (USA) and Europe. In addition, Guyana has recorded the largest drug bust while worldwide. My Colleague, Mr. Duncan, is going to touch on that. There is no mention of a national drug strategy master plan. The Coalition created the National Anti-Narcotics Agency (NANA) to ensure better efficiency and collaboration, and it was working efficiently. The installed Government dismantled it and sent home the Director, and has brought back *the foxes to watch the hen’s house*.

I now turn to community policing. If we are serious about national unity, oneness, and political maturity, the first thing that must be done is to have some regard for the truth. We must desist from a big falsehood designed to advance narrow political objectives. On Friday, 12th, the Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, stood at the lectern in this honourable House on the opposite side of truth by declaring, regrettably, that over the last five years the community policing programme was dismantled. For my sanity, I will assume that the Hon. Member did not consult with his Cabinet Colleague who oversees home affairs, albeit inefficiently so. His Colleague has access to the Ministry’s report for the period 2015 to 2020, and I refer him specifically to section 8. It was the Coalition that brought structure and vision to community policing after it was left bare pre-2015. It was under our Administration that community policing was done by the National Community Policing organisation, in conjunction with the then Ministry of Public Security. When we left office, or rather were bullied out of office, there were 236 community policing groups nationally, with a membership of 4,166. So, to say that the community policing groups were dismantled is the farthest thing from the truth.

Turning to the Guyana Prison Service (GPS), in concluding, I would say that the problem associated with the Guyana Prison Service is due to a lack of leadership. Let us call *a*

spade a spade. It is a lack of leadership at the political level that is the cause of this problem – crisis after crisis. Time will not permit me to list the litany of failures under the leadership of the Hon. Member, Mr. Benn.

In closing, I urge the Hon. Members in the honourable House with good advice: the hype will stay; the propaganda will subside; the storm of promises will disappear; and the Guyanese people will return to the harsh reality of life under this Government. They will remember how you have failed them under *Budget 2021*, and judgement will be delivered or rendered at the ballot box. If I were to lend my support to the Budget in its current form, it would be an abdication of my duty to the people.

Thank you, Sir. [*Applause.*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Member.

Hon. Member, Mr. Sanjeev Datadin, you have the floor.

Mr. Datadin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to make my humble contribution to the *Budget 2021* debate. Permit me, at the outset, to extend congratulations on two fronts. Firstly, I wish to offer my congratulations to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, and his team for their hard work in compiling the 2021 Budget.

Secondly, permit me, on a personal level, to extend best wishes to Mr. Abhai Kumar Datadin, my father, who is celebrating his 78th birthday today. Happy birthday to my dad.

Two of the speakers on the opposite side have raised some issues, which I will attempt to summarily address. I believe everyone has received an extract from the Budget speech which you had alluded to, Mr. Speaker. It states very clearly that Dr. Ashni Singh said:

“...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 submissions...

Finally, I trust that I will be forgiven for saving the last word for my own team at the Ministry of Finance...”

Again, the common thread of trying to rewrite history and trying to invent facts in the face of clear, unambiguous evidence continues.

If I may, I will deal with the comments that were made by the Hon. Member, that when the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) came to power the economy was meteorically growing. The economy ought to be separated from the non-oil economy and the rest of the economy. The non-oil economy was in free fall, declining by 7.3% with most sectors collapsing. Sugar contracted by 3.7%, forestry by 8.1%, fishing by 17.1%, gold by 7.8%, bauxite by 41.2% and manufacturing by 8.6%.

12.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, we have numerous things to mention like the Ocean View hospital and the barbershop, which we will get to in more detail. The Hon. Member who spoke before me said that the People’s Progressive Party did not consult before the Budget was presented, but that is simply untrue. There were consultations with all sectors, including other political parties. They consulted a wide range of the private sector, the labour movement and other political parties. If the Opposition does not want to attend consultations, then how can they be consulted.

The Hon. Member said that the Budget does not include the big vision and the people of Guyana have grown accustomed to big things, but that is rubbish. Not a single project, of any significance, could be highlighted as been done under the APNU/AFC Government.

It is said that the Budget does not include anything to indicate the pandemic is under control. If one compares what was inherited by the PPP/C Government when it came in power, how many test kits were there and how many tests were being done verses what is being done now, it is chalk and cheese.

The Hon. Member said the Budget focuses on wealthy people instead of providing adequate relief. It was that side of the House with the 400 taxes and it was this side of the House that removed them.

This Budget is intituled a path to recovery, economic dynamism and resilience; a most fitting and apt title, when we consider what has to be undertaken by this Government.

Mr. Speaker, I will seek your leave to focus somewhat on why a recovery is required. It is important to recognise that this is the largest Budget in the history of this country – \$383.1 billion. What is even more remarkable, is that it is

done during a worldwide pandemic. If that was not remarkable enough, it was done with no new taxes. In addition, not only was it presented with no new taxes, but this Government just reversed more than 400 taxes that have been in existence under the APNU/AFC Administration. It is still the largest Budget in our history.

Under the APNU/AFC Government, spending was unchecked, and we will get to how that happened. We are not a wealthy country; not yet. The last administration wanted the people to believe that when it rains one could go outside with buckets and get crude oil, that one could go outside with buckets and money would fall from the sky, but that is not and could not be true. We must manage that resource so that we may progress.

This Budget is part of a mandate. When the PPP/C went to the poles, it did so with a manifesto and included what is to be achieved in five years and the people supported it. Our President, Dr. Mohammed Irfaan Ali, said, in this House, that the manifesto promises must be met and delivered upon. This is the first step of the following years when those promises are going to be delivered. Many of the promises that were made in that manifesto have already been delivered. The reversal of taxes, the provision of housing, water and roads have already happened.

We must never lose sight that during the period of 2015–2020, under the APNU/AFC Administration, the nation suffered a period of taxation and spending to cause businesses in this country to suffer. So much so that the economy ground to a virtual standstill.

It is worth remembering that the period between 2015 and 2020, under the APNU/AFC Government, was characterised by a wanton disregard for the rule of law. The written law as it exists in our volumes, like the purple volumes there [pointing to the law volumes], were powerless against the perverse and obtuse interpretations lavished upon them by the previous Administration. The perverse interpretations of the Constitution and the Representation of the Peoples Act held this nation hostage and under siege. The English language, perhaps, has never been under such a severe threat – being murdered daily on the state radio and television, in the state media and, of course, by the special *Facebook* trolls who promote...

The race was on to convince the people that 33 was not a half of 65. They were trying to convince the people that the things that actually happened did not happen. The written law was treated as a fluid thing, being defined by the past

administration in any way they saw fit. When the legislation stated that one had to show the statement of polls (SOPs), they did that in their own way. When it stated that a chairman for the Elections Commission (GECOM) had to be appointed following consultations, again, they did that in their own way. English was under threat and that was not all. In Mathematics, the position of numbers was under assault. We were told that what we knew all our lives and what the entire planet learned in Mathematics was not true. The argument about the mathematical nonsense was professed firstly by friends and family of the Government, and rubberstamped by the then Prime Minister, Mr. Nagamootoo, who told this nation that there was some challenge on the way, and likened it to a third umpire in cricket; we have to recover. We must not forget that before we proceed. We have to correct that which was gone before. We have to put the economy on a firm footing; we have to right the ship.

Why do we have to recover? I have alluded to the perverse interpretations of law; we have to recover how those things were done. In simple English, there is now a reform process that will, hopefully, make things even clearer. The Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) had to correct what was done to appoint Mr. Patterson as the Chairman of GECOM. We had to go to the apex court for that. We had to go to the apex court in the case of Christopher Ram versus the Attorney General of Guyana, so that we can understand that 33 is the majority of 65. Those were things that we knew before the 2nd August. **[An Hon. Member:** *[Inaudible]* If you wait I will tell you.

Let us start with what was published by the *Guyana Standard*, and this was published by all the media houses. The *Guyana Standard* reported on the 9th August that the Government spent \$40 million on purchasing tickets for a Buju Banton concert. I like Buju Banton as much as the next guy, but for the State to take its resources...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I like Buju Banton too, but I would like to hear you conclude. Could we get someone to move an extension?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that my Colleague be given five minutes more to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Datadin: Again, on the 9th August, it was reported by *News Room* that there was a Director of Parks who was paid \$500,000 per month. The same person whose company was paid \$500 million for the D’Urban Park. It was reported on the 10th August by *News Room* and *Guyana Times* and on the 11th August by *Kaieteur News*, that the APNU/AFC Government appointed 23 persons of their membership to be political advisors that costed taxpayers \$7.7 million per month, and there was no evidence of any work being done. Following that, there was a report in *Kaieteur News* that alluded to the 20th July, 2020 report that the State Asset Recovery Agency (SARA) had spent approximately \$600 million and still did not recover a single paper clip of state funds. Money was being spent for what? Mercifully, the Hon. Attorney General of this House closed this Agency and stopped the bleeding.

On the 21st August, it was reported that a Member of this House received \$4.9 million for the establishment of a non-existent barbershop. It follows a report that was made on the 25th September in *Kaieteur News* that \$250 million of the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) programme cannot be accounted for. It was also reported on the 25th September by *News Room*, that the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, transferred state lands to persons who did not want and who did not pay for the lands. He also transferred lands to persons who only made a part payment, thus giving away the state lands. We have to recover from that.

12.20 p.m.

On 19th January, it was reported that the former Minister of Public Infrastructure had received bangles. Pictures of the voucher were published, which I made out to be \$502,000. Now, that report included a revelation that it was not only the bangles. There were household items, for example, bedsheets, and all of these were provided to the two Ministers in that Ministry.

On 8th February, it was reported that the wharf was being sold to BK International Incorporated for \$20 million when it was worth \$5 billion. There is no way that those excesses, with the \$93 billion in public debt, could be taken on board and we not right the course and then move forward. That is why we have to embark upon a path of recovery. We cannot continue the excesses and extravagance of the previous Administration.

If we focus on the magnitude of the task that has to be undertaken, my Colleagues will explain to the House item by

item how it is to be done. We have to account for what happened. We have to stop the bloodletting. The rules were so fluid it was as if they were written by Napoleon and Snowball and this was *Animal Farm*. The rules were changing daily. We have to bring that to an end. We have to start on the path to recovery.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, I think this is a very good time to take the suspension.

Sitting suspended at 12.22 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.36 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, just a few minor announcements before we move to the next speaker.

It seems that we may have to do something like what was done for the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, that is to have a raised platform for the microphones, because I am getting quite a number of comments with respect to the clarity of the people speaking and it is not doing justice to the presentations.

I made an observation. I know about the comments being made, for example, the heckles. If one wants to join in that part of the debate, please do it from one’s seat. Do not do it from outside of one’s seat. I have seen many persons, but I am not naming any of them.

We now move to the Hon. Member, Mr. Sherod Duncan. Please for your pleasant presentation.

Mr. Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Everything good Guyanese looked for in the Budget is missing. Two People’s Progressive Party/Civic Budgets later and the goodies for Guyanese disappeared like an infamous boat. The increase for public servants disappeared. The Hon. Member’s spouse... Vice-President Bharrat Jagdeo said that the boat, I mean the public servants’ salary increase, was spotted in line item 6141. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Hon. Dr. Ashni Sigh, said it was reported he that lost the salary increase as it was being towed to the National Assembly.

It is my privilege to rise with my Hon. Colleagues, on this side of the House, and add my voice in dissention to what purports to constitute *Budget 2021*. Maybe, we ought to interrogate *Budget 2021* dispassionately. Whether one looks

at this Budget as a composition, an academic work or as a fiscal policy framework for the next year, one keeps arriving at the same ineluctable and inescapable conclusion, as one of my law professors would say. That conclusion is that it has been found wanting in many regards.

Years ago, I read the text on writing style. As I listened initially to and subsequently read *Budget 2021*, it took me back to Mr. J.V. Cunninghams’s text, *The Problem of Style*. I remember him saying that ‘the way a thing is said affects its intelligibility’. That came back to me the way Mr. Martin Carter said some of his poems came to him, ‘full blown like the wind.’ ‘The way a thing is said affects its intelligibility.’

When one reads the work of Dr. Ashni Singh, *Budget 2021*, and one casts one’s mind on language, construction and deconstruction, one remembers that the analysis of a thing is not the thing itself. One holds the worker against the light of reason for what it is. One looks for theme, structure and coherence; the thing must congeal. This must relate to that. A main idea must have supporting arguments and sometimes emphasis to reinforce the main idea. Thus, the entire thing is held together as a work. It structures everything. This Budget is like the COVID-19 cash grant distribution which has no structure and, like the ‘pink slip’ that no one wants, it promises something that everybody knows will not come. It is a placebo; it is useless and it is worthless. *Budget 2021* is a ‘pink slip’ or, as the Attorney-at-law for Mr. Anand Sanasie, Secretary to the Guyana Cricket Board and Director of the Cricket West Indies, said of the Hon. Minister Charles Ramson’s decision to appoint Mr. Komal Ramkarran as the Cricket Ombudsman, that it is unlawful and of no effect. *Budget 2021* is a ‘pink slip’ – worthless and useless.

To appreciate *Budget 2021*, for instance on the issue of housing, one does not have to contend with the APNU/AFC’s policy on housing, one has to contend with the PPP/C’s own performance on housing. If one likes to read and, for instance, goes back to the *Budget 2000* which was presented by the Hon. Sasenarine Kowlessar, one will find the PPP/C talking about a house for every Guyanese and about revolutionising the housing sector. That was 20 years ago. They spent 23 years in Government and they are still trying to achieve this. *Budget 2021* is a ‘pink slip’.

In *Budget 2000*, the Hon. Sasenarine Kowlessar talked about regularising squatting communities. Twenty-three years later, the PPP/C is still struggling to regularise squatting communities in this country, as is prescribed by *Budget 2021*. Why is that? It is a ‘pink slip’ – useless and worthless. They

are not competing with APNU/AFC policy on housing. They are competing with their own performance.

Let me move you from year 2000 and bring you to the year 2010. The Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, then more fully in the Ministry as Minister of Finance was not curtailed, as the Speaker just pointed out – Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. Mr. Speaker, let me breathe after saying that. Again, in 2010, Dr. Ashni Singh is contending with the same issues on housing. He is proposing to this House 10 years later. Why? This Budget is a ‘pink slip’ – useless and worthless. As a matter of fact, go past *Budget 2010* to Ram and McRae’s pronouncement on *Budget 2010*. This is what Ram and McRae stated:

“The budget speech has been relegated to a spending list. Many of the projects are ill-conceived, insufficiently studied, poorly executed, badly supervised. Some are also subjected to nepotism and corruption”.

He talked about *Budget 2010*, but it seems as though he was talking about *Budget 2021*. It is a ‘pink slip’ [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Your slip is showing, Sir. Your pink slip.

I bring you past 2010 to 2014, and the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh was still in command. Again, four years later, they are still talking about the realisation of living conditions for every Guyanese through the development of sustainable, viable communities. Six years later we are still talking about the same thing. It is a ‘pink slip’ – useless and worthless. *Budget 2021*, Dr. Ashni Singh is still selling dreams to Guyanese. Now it is coined the ‘dream realised housing drive’, but they are really selling dreams, the same dreams from 2000 and prior. They are still selling dreams to reorganise, provide more housing for Guyanese and the list goes on.

What the PPP/C and the Hon. Minister, Mr. Collin Croal, failed to do in 23 years, they expected the APNU/AFC to do in five years. That expectation by itself is a ‘pink slip’. Thankfully, more and more Guyanese are recognising the ‘pink slip’ policies when they see them. This was Mr. Roger Roopchand’s comment on *Facebook*:

“Kudos to the Government for finally putting an alternative road along the East Bank corridor”.

However, he said:

“Let us step back and use our brain matter a bit. The congestion on the East Bank and even with the

Demerara Harbour Bridge is a result of the Government’s decision to build two housing schemes – housing over 100,000 people with absolutely no infrastructural development to cater for the increased number of cars.”

1.48 p.m.

It comes now as a hero but, what does it have in its hand to bring to the Guyanese people? It is pink slips, that is what it is bringing. What the Hon. Member, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, did not say to this House is what *Stabroek News* said in its editorial last November captioned ‘Land Corruption’ in reference to land allotments under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). This is the heart if its policy. In relation to the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU), the editorial states:

“Its most high-profile activity pertained to the purchase of land at Pradoville 2 at below market prices by senior Members of the PPP/C Government and their associates”

This is what the land policy is really about.

“One of the cases related to 19 fraud charges levelled against President Ali before he became Head of State in connection with the sale of state lands in the scheme.”

This is the heart of the PPP/C’s land policy; everything else is pink slips for the rest of Guyanese. When the Hon. Member, Mr. Anil Nandlall, and the PPP/C, disbanded the State Assets Recovery Agency (SARA), yet he preached about accountability and good governance – that is pink slip rhetoric. It is worthless and useless.

On the matter of squatter settlements, the Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water, Ms. Susan Rodrigues, told the *Demerara Waves Online News* on 26th August, 2020, that:

“...the only problem in starting the process is a lack of available lands.”

Yet it boasts about how many house lots it has given out, but it is the choice. On the squatter settlements, there are more than 30,000 squatters, 173 squatting areas throughout Guyana and more than 700 structures. It did not happen in the last five years; it was inherited. Its promise of housing and adequate housing for every Guyanese is really a pink slip promise, by the pink slip PPP/C.

When the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) took Government in 2015, there was a vision for the housing sector which was to facilitate a nation housed in a cohesive and sustainable communities, and to provide opportunities for all Guyanese to improve their quality of life by owning their own homes. The Government said that it was adamant, the discriminatory allotment of prime high-income house lots and bargain-basement prices to favoured friends and family is over. The Government embarked on a comprehensive layout of community planning and design, community infrastructure, land divestment and squatter regularisation.

In 2016, the APNU/AFC forged ahead with a programme of establishing cohesive communities in which service lots and other infrastructural amenities, including green spaces, parks and recreational facilities were provided to ensure an improved quality of life. New housing scheme developments commenced in areas such as Perseverance, Stewartville, Cummings Lodge, Prospect, Williamsburg and Amelia’s Ward. In the hinterland region the Government expanded the hinterland housing project and devoted billions of dollars to four communities identified to be upgraded to townships: Mabaruma, Bartica, Mahdia and Lethem.

By 2017, there was an ongoing review of the process of allocating house lots, given approximately 50,000 applications which we inherited on file and almost 30,000 low-income individuals who were part of that capture. Concerns about the low occupancy of many housing development areas led to reviews of the mechanisms used to enable ownership based on what was inherited. A lack of a holistic plan was revealed and that was inherited from the PPP/C. With regard to providing quality and affordable housing in well serviced communities, many of the recipients house lots remained unable to start construction, while others were allocated lots in areas that were woefully underdeveloped by the PPP/C and without basic infrastructure. The APNU/AFC corrected those deficiencies and worked to accelerate the completed infrastructural development of prioritised housing areas where the allottees indicated their readiness to begin construction.

By 2017, again, Government’s priority action areas in housing were initiatives targeting low- income and state employees. These initiatives involve comprehensive feasibility assessments of existing housing areas, squatting areas and land for future development. The consolidation of planned housing areas and the upgrading of regularised squatting areas were also part of the goals of the Government.

Given the huge demands for house lots and the limited availability of service lots for distribution, the Government piloted a project to construct apartments, condominiums and wooden houses in existing planned areas such as: Stewartville, Cummings Lodge, Perseverance and Amelia’s Ward.

By 2018, the work of the Coalition Government was ongoing, the housing sector continued to expand and it contributed to the growth of the construction centre. The role of Government entailed a comprehensive approach to housing which included, not units, but lots. It also included roads, drainage, sidewalks, lightings, social services and recreational facilities. Significant work was undertaken to consolidate the substandard state of community infrastructures in existing housing schemes across the country including Farm, Amelia’s Ward and La Parfaite Harmonie. Towards the promotion of the Government’s housing programme, two open exhibitions in Perseverance and Experiment were held where 61 homeowner sensitisation sessions were held as well. The sanitisation of the housing applicant’s database had also begun to ensure that it was reflective of the current demand for housing.

By 2019, a key area of focus for the Government was in the hinterland. The commencement of Adequate Housing and Urban Accessibility Programme, which saw the construction of poor houses for single family households, families living in untenable homes, uninhabitable homes, home improvements and consolidation of existing housing schemes. The initial phase targeted places such as Sophia. The consolidation component included road upgrades, sidewalks, streetlights and community facilities.

We do not see the same type of comprehensive policy coming from the People’s Progressive Party/Civic who are in Government. We do not. As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, if you are to weigh the squatting situation at Success and the same squatting situation at Canal Number 1, Conservancy Dam, you would see a *different stroke for different folks*. For instance, while the residents at Success were teargassed, shot with pellets, flooded by this Government; Conservancy Dam received light and water.

On assuming Government, the PPP/C attacked at Kingelly, West Coast Berbice, a land issue. This is where a veteran trade unionist, Mr. Lincoln Lewis, argued that those ancestral lands belonged to his forefathers. Instead of a judicious interlocutor, the Attorney General, Hon. Member, Mr. Anil Nandlall... It was reported that he told some Kingelly

residents ‘*Listen nuh, me nuh tell yuh?* If Lincoln Lewis interferes with your operation, your occupation, break down whatever physical structures he has.’

If persons occupy state lands illegally, and there is a policy which speaks to their removal, it should be applied universally. As we are reminded of the epithet: *justice is blind*. Yet, the leaseholders for the former Wales Sugar Estate maybe another exception to the rule. As the PPP/C Administration said that the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) Special Purpose Units could not explicate the process of removing them. We are now being told that the matter is being relooked at, given the fact that some persons complained that they already expended large sums on the land. The folks at Success said the same thing.

It is far easier to *break down anything than to build up something*. The nation is yet to hear, articulately, is the heart of the Administration’s land management plan instead of plasters being applied to sores. The squatters at Success will continue to look at those at Conservancy Dam jealously or, perhaps, even the squatters at Grove and elsewhere is wondering what is coming for the new year. Is it more pellets? Is it more tear gas? Are we going to be flooded out again? What comes next?

The PPP/C speaks about its manifesto, but its manifesto promises is a catalogue of pink slips. Guyanese, do you remember the promise of \$40,000 for old age pension? Two budgets later, you received a pink slip. Guyanese, do you remember the promise of \$50,000 ‘Because We Care’ cash grant? You have been pink slipped. Guyanese, do you remember the promise of 50,000 jobs? It is 50,000 firings because you have been pink slipped. Guyanese, do you remember the promise of a promise plan to fight crime? Is there anything as yet? You have been pink slipped. Guyanese, do you remember the promise for better management and renegotiation of oil contracts for the betterment of all Guyanese? Is there anything as yet? You have been pink slipped. To the thousands of students at the University of Guyana (UG), is there any free education as yet? You have been pink slipped by the PPP/C. Its promises are worthless and meaningless.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, noted in her submission earlier that the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibly for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, cannot approbate and reprobate all at the same time. In her noteworthy submission, she said:

“It is impossible on every and any scale for a Government to change hands in August and by December, these are the numbers. Instead it is clear and unmistakable evidence of the economy inherited from the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government and evidence of the capable stewardship of the economy from 2015 to 2020.”

It is worth repeating.

I said at the beginning that, the Hon. Members, Dr. Ashni Singh’s and Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo’s, Budget is a document with no structure. It is at war with itself. They come to the National Assembly and preached *doom and gloom* in 2020, and the previous four years. The Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh’s, Budget says something totally different. It is a document that is inherently flawed and it contradicts itself. I will give you some instances, Mr. Speaker. Under sectoral performances: the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors in 2020 are estimated to have grown by 4.1%.

2.03 p.m.

This is Granger’s pink slip or rather Granger’s green slip to this country. In the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh’s, Budget, he stated that the rice growing sector was estimated to have expanded by 4.8% in 2020. This is a green slip by Mr. Granger. He stated that the paddy production reached one million plus tonnes in 2020. Mr. Speaker, let me give you some more green slips compliments of His Excellency, Mr. Granger. [**Mr. Nandlall:** Where is Mr. Granger?] He is all over your Budget.

Dr. Ashni Singh stated in the Budget that additionally even with the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) restrictions and high gold prices, there was growth in the mining sector. The small and medium scale miners who declared over 485,000 ounces saw an 8.3% higher growth than the previous year. This is a green slip by the David Granger economy.

The Hon. Member went on to state that, in 2020, the water supply and the sewerage sector was estimated to have increased by 8% which was a green slip by the David Granger Administration to this country. Dr. Ashni Singh, also, said that the overall balance of payments recorded a surplus of over \$60.6 million and the merchant trade account moved to a surplus of US\$514 million. This is another green slip.

This morning, the Hon. Member, Mr. Joseph Hamilton, asked what the Opposition did for black people? We did not do for black people; we did for the entire country. Dr. Ashni Singh’s Budget stated the money supply, in terms of monetary developments, expanded by 13.7% which was \$521 billion in 2020. This is a green slip to this country. In the Budget he stated that growth in quasi money resulted from an increase in saving deposits by 11.1%. This is a green slip by Mr. David Granger to this country. Net domestic credit by the banking sector expanded by 15.9% which was \$349 billion compared with 2019. This is a green slip by the David Granger Administration. From this I could tell that the Hon. Member, Mr. Joseph Hamilton, did not read his own Member’s Budget and I could tell that the Hon. Member, Mr. Sanjeev Datadin, did not read the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance Budget because they would never make the statements they made.

I note the name of *Budget 2021*, “*A Pathway to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*”. By the admission of the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance’s, own Budget, it is a pathway by the David Granger-led Administration which started this country. This is what economic dynamism and resilience look like, even in the face of COVID-19, by the admission of the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance very own Budget.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I would have to apply a red slip. If you would like to continue, you would need a green slip from one of your Members.

Mr. Jones: Thank you. Cde. Speaker, I do move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his excellent presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Duncan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In examining the Ram & McRae, *Focus on Budget 2021*, – I use Ram & McRae as the base because the other side of the honourable House gets agitated when we use what it might deem tainted and bias sources. Hopefully, it could agree with Ram & McRae, who stated in their 2021 analysis of the Budget, that this very economic dynamism and resilient Budget thanks to the David Granger-led Administration, that:

“Transformational and prestige projects always excite but Guyana’s record with such projects has been far from uniformly successful.”

They noted the Del Conte road project under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic and the Skeldon Sugar Factory and their cost to the economy.

According to Ram & McRae there seems to be an assumption that there is unlimited available land for housing in the main population and economic centres. In fact, as seen in the Success squatting saga, there are some competition for land for agricultural, other purposes and the resolution will require a land use policy.

In closing, Sir Arthur Sir Ignatius Conan Doyle said:

“Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be the truth.”

The truth, the ineluctable and inescapable conclusion, is that *Budget 2021* is nothing but a big pink slip for this country. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. We now turn to the Hon. Member and Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water, Ms. Susan Rodrigues. Hon. Minister, you may proceed.

Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water [Ms. Rodrigues]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my presentation in support of *Budget 2021* and I wish to take this opportunity to congratulate the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and his team for their outstanding and phenomenal work in preparing this Budget. I wish to commend the Hon. Minister for his stamina when he delivered his four hours 40 minutes presentation. I wish to note that the Hon. Member, who opened the debates here, today, mentioned that the Hon. Minister did not thank his team and while that has been debunked already, because we have the extract from his speech and anybody watching from home could easily find the speech where his gratitude was expressed. I bring this up to make this point. If the Opposition could lie or could speak of an untruth that could be so easily debunked how could we trust anything that comes from that side of the House. The people know and this is why the Opposition is untrustworthy.

When I was sworn in as a Member of this honourable House on 1st September, 2020, I anticipated and was eagerly looking forward to the intellectual quality of the contributions and

debates that I would be exposed to. I had every intention to learn and to absorb as much knowledge as I could from the senior and career Politicians, and Lawmakers who sit in this House and had high hopes for the younger Politicians as myself, who would be afforded the opportunity to learn and to contribute fresh ideas that would unite our people and further enhance the development of our country. While the Hon. Members on the Government side of the House have not disappointed and have lived up to expectations, I cannot in good conscience say the same for the opposite side of the House. Contributions from the Opposition are void of content and substance. It seems to have lack of understanding towards the most elementary concepts of what is a budget and what a budget is supposed to do. As a result, it has resorted to present absolute falsehoods and relies on obstructionist, racist, vile, divisive behaviour and rhetoric to, once again, mislead its supporters and score cheap political points. *Case in point*, that is to the speaker who went immediately before me. A disservice is what it continues to do to its supporters and this country. Any functioning democracy needs a strong, competent, capable and honest Opposition. This is how democracy works, it is how governments are held accountable and it is how the people of the country get the greatest benefit. It is not this clown show that goes on in this honourable House.

The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change agenda and intention is to destruct, destroy and dismantle any good thing that comes to this House. This is evident in its failure to support good Bills that came to the floor of this National Assembly. Only recently, Bills with a human touch, Bills that showed, as a Government, we care about bringing relief to our people. The Small Business (Amendment) Act 2020 paved the way for small business to access at least 20% of Government’s procurement of goods, services and works. This Bill levelled the playing field and eliminated the disadvantages of the procurement process. Mr. Speaker, one of the common criticisms of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government – you heard it here today again – is that the PPP/C likes big business. The PPP/C was encouraging and creating the appropriate conditions for the small man to participate.

What did the Opposition do? It absconded from that debate, made no contributions, inputs or offered any recommendations on how we could further improve the conditions for small businesses to operate. Similarly, with the Deceased Persons Estates’ Administration (Amendment) Bill 2020 which lifted the burden from poor families, who after having lost a loved one no longer have to apply to the Court

for letters of administration or incur the financial burden of hiring an Attorney to do so on their behalf, as long as the estate do not exceed \$750,000. Further, thanks to the amendment a bank manager may pay to a claimant from a deceased person savings bank account, a sum not exceeding that same amount.

2.18 p.m.

Again, this was another caring and thoughtful initiative of our Government and dare I say, an initiative of the Hon. Member, the Attorney General, Mr. Anil Nandlall, Senior Counsel.

The Opposition did not see it fit to participate and to contribute to these meaningful amendments to the laws which would ease the pressure on poor people. It is because our Government would get the credit for passing the amendments, so it chose to boycott it. Further, it demonstrated and ratified ill intentions, in this House, through its unwillingness to support the Bills and initiatives that benefit our people. It does have the authority to speak to the measures in this Budget because it cannot be trusted. It is clear as day that it does not put the people first. It is not concerned with the welfare of the people of our country. It is consumed with fighting us and trying to make the People Progressive Party/Civic look bad, but it is not going to work. The people are watching. They know who is looking out for them. They know which Government has their back.

Now, I turn my attention to *Budget 2021*. This Budget totals \$383.1 billion but, notably, with no tax increases. Significantly, the annualised sum of all of the Budget measures from the 2020 and 2021 Budgets combined is \$90 billion, while the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change had increase tax collection, just the increase, by \$88 billion, annually. In contrast, from August to now, just six months, we have put back into the pockets of Guyanese \$90 billion in annual savings.

Members, let us talk about the housing sector. The APNU/AFC entry into Government in 2015 marked the end of the housing sector. Mr. Speaker, please, permit me to elaborate. I know the Hon. Member, who spoke before me, went back to 2000, but I am going to bring it more recent. The PPP/C Government budget for the housing sector housing in 2013, I quote this so that I put it into context, was \$3.2 billion and in 2014 it was \$4.4 billion. This is just to give you a general sense of what the budgetary allocations for the housing sector usually amounts to.

In stark contrast, the APNU/AFC Ministry of Communities budget in 2015 was reduced to \$1.9 billion. Let us not forget that there was not a Ministry of Housing and Water, no clear housing policy, no vision, no housing drive, it changed Ministers as if clothes are being changed and, hence, the housing sector and the Ministry of Communities fell apart.

Let us talk about the records. In 2016, it attempted to redeem itself and allocated a whopping \$5.8 billion to the housing sector. The story of that year would be comical if it was not so tragic. In the *Guyana Stabroek* newspaper on 14th January, 2017, it carried this headline:

“CH&PA spent only 12% of budgeted \$5.8B in 2016.”

If this is not incompetence, then I do not know what is. The Minister of the Ministry of Communities, at that time, Ms. Valarie Patterson, said that she was definitely not happy to report. I do not know, if she was not happy, what about the people? She blamed the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA) for the shortcomings and attributed the shortcomings to the Agency been plagued by numerous human resource challenges, including unfilled positions, lack of capacity in some regard and untimely decision-making. She was the Minister, so who was she talking about, who has to make the decisions, who has to spend the money and who has to implement the housing policies? She was blaming everybody, but not herself.

It is the same staff who were there in 2016 that are there today. We did not fire anybody; we did not fire any technical staff. It is the same officers who are there today who are executing our mandate. It is the same technical officers who designed and are bringing to conclusion the Eccles to Diamond bypass road. They have already designed and begun procurement for the new four-lane highway linking Mandela to Eccles. It is the same technical officers who worked and design to prepare and allocate 3,600 house lots in our first four months in Office. The only difference is that now we have a competent Government in place. What was missing was vision, competence and leadership, but it has been restored because the People Progressive Party/Civic is back in Office.

It gets worse. In 2017, it was not taking any chances. It did not want to be embarrassed, again, and have to return the money to the Ministry of Finance. It decided that it would not give the CH&PA any money. Ms. Volda Lawrence, who presented the Budget in 2017 said:

“The Authority... has to access its own funds...”

There was no allocation from the central Government because it simply had no vision for the housing sector, so it would not be able to spend the money even if it was allocated.

If one wants to talk about track records as the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, who brought it up, let us make an honest assessment of the track records. It is public knowledge. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance mentioned it in his Budget presentation. The PPP/C Government allocated over 22,000 house lots in its last four years in Office, contrast that with 7,000 house lots that the Opposition allocated in its five years in Office. It is an honest assessment and it is the comparison that we need. The Hon. Member mentioned housing communities such as Perseverance and Prospect where it made allocations. It has the audacity to stand in this House to talk about a comprehensive approach when two years later, the residents in Prospect were without water. It was under our Government that they received water to their housing communities for the very first time.

The Hon. Member also mentioned squatting. Squatting is illegal. I wish to rebut him by joining this comparison between the two communities that he mentioned. He mentioned the squatting situation at Success and the Conversancy Dam in Canal Number 1. The occupants in Canal Number 1 were there for over 30 years peacefully versus what was going on in Success, which sprang up overnight and was a Ponzi scheme. It had to be dealt with. It was politically orchestrated, so we had to put an end to that.

Coming back to the housing sector, in any case, the APNU/AFC Government never prioritise the housing sector. A basic need such as shelter, it failed to see the importance and the impact that it has on our people. It was in violation of article 26 of our Constitution; the right of all Guyanese to have a proper housing accommodation. I guess that should not surprise anyone because that is its nature. The APNU/AFC are serial violators of the Constitution. It does not have any regard for people’s rights. It is the same bunch that attempted to rig our Elections. Let us do not get carried away with its attempt to reintroduce and repackage itself, now, as though it cares about the Constitution, people’s rights and the development of our country. Let us not forget who the Opposition is.

In the presentation of *Budget 2020*, the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, spoke about the restoration of the vibrancy and

vitality of the housing sector. I stand here, mere months later, and I can proudly report that it has. Our Government recognises the housing sector as a fundamental pillar of our economy. We, also, recognise that it has a significant impact on the lives of Guyanese. Our President has made it very clear that the welfare of our people is at the core of the Government developmental transformational development agenda.

Therefore, in keeping with our manifesto’s promise to provide 50,000 house lots over five years, we will be allocating 10,000 house lots and distributing 7,000 land titles this year. Other measures to encourage and promote homeownership in this Budget, include the zero-rating of construction materials, locally produced prestressed concrete piles, locally fabricated steel beams, locally manufactured roofing and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) products, among others. We have also reduced the rate of taxation on industrial-grade cement from 15% to 5%.

Further, we have raised the low-income ceiling for commercial loans from \$10 million to \$12 million and increased the New Building Society (NBS) ceiling from \$12 million to \$15 million. Additionally, in 2020, we increased the mortgage interest relief (MIR) from \$15 million to \$30 million. All these measures demonstrate a comprehensive approach, not just to promote homeownership, but to stimulate the economy and create jobs. This is us talking the talk and walking the walk by implementing the correct and appropriate policies to ensure that our vision sees the light of day.

The Opposition does not know anything about implementation and execution. It is easy to go on *Facebook* live and to jump ‘In The Ring’ and spew all sorts of irresponsible statements and rhetoric out there. It does not have any clue on how to implement and execute any of its visions or policies. That is why they are over there. [**An Hon Member:** It is all a *gaff*.] Yes. It is all a *gaff*.

The Government will also be constructing 1,000 homes for low-income earners and young professionals. Let me add to that, this has already begun in the Providence area. In addition, the 1,000 homes slated to be constructed in Region 10... We are not going to be like the previous Administration and make outlandish promises that we cannot keep. Let us take for example, in 2018, when the former Minister, Ms. Valarie Patterson-Yearwood was there, the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper reported on the 18th May, 2018, that:

“8000 houses by 2021”

In three years, it was promising 8,000 houses. It built 500 houses in five years, but it promised 8,000 houses in three years. Then, in 2019, in the period when it was illegal and it was just months away from elections, the *Guyana Stabroek* newspaper on 11th December, 2019, carried this bold headline:

“CH&PA aiming to deliver 5,000 house lots”

2.33 *p.m.*

We are all aware of the tragic dismal record of 7,000 house lots that they distributed in five years, but here they are, three months before the elections, promising 5,000 house lots per year. So, that is the record. It is all gaff – *gaffers*, on the other side – with no idea on how to implement and execute.

I will now go into some details on specific allocations in our Budget. The sum of \$3 billion was allocated for infrastructural works for roads, drainage, bridges, water network and land preparation for Region 2, Onderneeming; Region 3, Edinburg, Anna Catherina, Cornelia Ida, Stewartville, *et cetera*. In Region 4, we have Little and Great Diamond, Providence, Mon Repos, La Bonne Intention (LBI), Annandale, among others. In Region 5, we have Experiment; Region 6, Numbers 75 and 76 Villages and Ordnance Fort Lands, among others.

The sum of \$1 billion was allocated for the upgrading of roads in the existing areas of Region 2, in Onderneeming; in Region 3, Tuschen, Zeelugt, Zeeburg, among others; in Region 4, we have Farm, Covent Garden, Prospect, Peters Hall, *et cetera*. In Region 5, we have Hope Low Lands, Experiment, *et cetera*. For Region 6, we have Kilcoy Chesney, Numbers 76 and 77 Villages, Ordnance Fort Lands, among others. In Region 7, Four and Five Miles Bartica. For Region 9, Tabatinga and Culvert City; and Region 10, Amelias Ward, Wismar and Wisroc.

Our housing programme is spread throughout and across all our regions.

The sum of \$1 billion has been budgeted for the construction of the four-lane highway from Mandela to Eccles; while \$1.5 billion has been budgeted to continue infrastructural works in Sophia, Diamond, and La Parfaite Harmonie. The sum of \$80 million was allocated for the installation of borehole, discharge assembly and transmission mains in each of the following areas: Stewartville, Met-en-Meerzorg, Cornelia Ida, Edinburg, Anna Catherina, Prospect, Little and Great Diamond, Cummings Lodge, Parcels 1767 and 1768.

For developing and improving the efficiency of the single window planning permission system, \$100 million was allocated. This is the visionary type of leadership that we are talking about— moving the planning permission system to an electronic one. This is how we are now preparing for the transformation that is coming to our country. This is how we prepare. This is the type of leadership that is steady, consistent and has a wisdom to it. That is the characteristic of *Budget 2021*.

I will now move onto the Water Service Expansion and Management Programme. The Government plans to increase treated water coverage in keeping with Sustainable Development Goal 6 which is access to clean water; reduce non-revenue water (NRW) and modernise sanitation facilities across the country.

Under our hinterland water supply programme, the sum of \$344 million has been allocated. Given the aggressive nature of the programme, I will make mention of some of the new projects slated for 2021. The sum of \$40 million was allocated for the procurement of a new rig and well drilling materials to facilitate new wells in 2021. The sum of \$20 million was allocated for the procurement of photovoltaic (PV) systems, electromechanical equipment, pipes, fittings, spares and accessories for water supply systems. The sum of \$10 million was allocated for the construction of a pump station and activation of a new well in Port Kaituma; while \$14 million was allocated for the drilling of new wells, installation of PVs, storage, distribution networks and service connections for the communities of Waramuri, Horadia, Khan’s Hill, Wauna, Baramita, Arakaka and Matthews Ridge in Region 1.

The sum of \$10 million was allocated for the drilling of wells, upgrade of PV systems, upgrade and extension of pipe networks and the installation of standpipes for the communities of Kwebanna and Manawarin in Region 1. For Annai in Region 9, the sum of \$15 million was set aside for the upgrading of distribution network, rehabilitation of elevated trestle, service connections and the installation of PV systems. For Saint Ignatius, \$15 million was allocated for the upgrading of the distribution network. For the communities of Jawalla, Kamarang and Warawata in Region 7, the sum of \$50 million was allocated for the drilling of a new well, installation of a new storage trestle and distribution network. The sum of \$78 million, in total, was allocated for the drilling of artesian wells, installation of distribution networks, upgrading of PV systems, construction of elevated storage

trestles and service connections for several communities in Region 9.

The town of Lethem in Region 9, would also benefit from the construction of a Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) Lethem office, for which an allocation of \$15 million was made; making it easier for the residence of that community to access the services of the Guyana Water Incorporated. The sum of \$50 million was allocated for the installation of a water supply system at Kaibarupai and Monkey Mountain in Region 8. For the community of Taruka, the sum of \$21 million was allocated for the drilling of a new well, extension of pipe network and the installation of service connections.

Under our coastal water supply programme, the sum of \$500 million was allocated and includes the following activities: the sum of \$75 million was allocated for the procurement and installation of water meters; \$40 million was allocated for the procurement of bulk meters at well sites and district metering areas (DMAs) and; \$75 million, for the procurement and installation of meter boxes.

The Budget provides \$104 million for the procurement of service connection materials for 5,200 new services. We can look forward to wells in Wakenaam and Parika Backdam for which the Budget has allocated a total sum of \$100 million. The sum of \$101 million was provided for the expansion of the water treatment plants at Sophia, Eccles, Covent Garden, Grove, Friendship and Vergenoegen, benefiting over 50,000 residents. We have ...

Mr. Speaker: For your benefit, Hon. Minister, you would need an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for a five-minute extension for the Hon. Member to conclude her statement.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Ms. Rodrigues: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We are not afraid of going into details. We could stand here and list the details of our programme and our track record all day long because we know how to implement these things and we know that we would be back here to report that it has been completed.

Under our urban sewage and water programme, the sum of \$298 million was allocated for transmission upgrade from Church Street to Cummings Street and \$100 million was allocated for the procurement of electromechanical equipment for rehabilitation to production facilities for Regions 4 and 10.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to conclude, and, in my conclusion, I wish to caution young people; I have a message for them. I wish to caution young people, and everyone, to not pay attention to political rhetoric. Sounds bites such as ‘free up the weed’ has no meaning and does nothing, if responsible legislative amendments are not made in this House.

The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) spent five years in Government and did nothing to remove custodial sentencing for the possession of small amounts of marijuana. Now, the APNU/AFC is suddenly concerned about changing the law and they even want to go beyond that to remove custodial sentencing for possession of up to 500 grams, when we are recommending 30 grams. They want to sabotage that Bill. They do not want to make useful responsible recommendations that we can work with. They attempted to fool and mislead young people into not supporting a good thing.

Mr. Speaker, this Budget is a good thing. This Government is a good Government. Nobody deserves or has a right to be in Government, you have to work for it; you have to earn it and you have to prove your worthiness to the people of this country.

While the Opposition wants to divide and speak with racial undertones, our President speaks about oneness and unity. He stood in this very House and spoke about how he would deliver that oneness and unity which is backed up and demonstrated by actions in our short-time in Office, so far. And so, I caution young people, and everyone who are listening to these debates, do not fall into the trap of those creating mischief. Do not allow anyone to make you feel guilty about supporting a Government that is showing you that it is supporting you. Support good initiatives and support people who support you. Do not resist development.

Mr. Speaker, I fully endorse and support *Budget 2021*. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. I now call on the Hon. Member, Dr. Karen Cummings, to make her contribution.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to say that I am delightfully honoured and thankful to be given this opportunity to speak to this Budget Debate 2021. What we have seen here is a poor attempt by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) to copy the APNU/AFC framework for governance that offered a ‘good life’ to Guyanese.

In 2015, the Coalition had as its theme: *A Fresh Approach to a Good Life in a Green Economy*. In 2016, the title was: *Stimulating Growth, Restoring Confidence: The Good Life Beckons*. This was followed by the caption, in 2017: *The Journey to the Good Life Continues*. In 2018, just for the record, it was captured: *Transforming the Economy, Empowering People and Building Sustainable Communities for the Good Life*. And in 2020: *Our Plan for Prosperity: Protecting our People in a COVID-19 Environment; Strengthening Democracy and the Rule of Law; Incentivising Economic Growth and Job Creation; and, Enhancing Welfare*.

When one looks at this year’s Budget, captioned: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience* and when put in context to what proceeded, the cover itself is dismal and unpatriotic. It is coming at a time when Guyana celebrates its 51st Republic Anniversary and, if that was not enough, there was almost an attempt of plagiarism of the experts from former President Granger’s green state economy plan, which was conceived as a roadmap to guide Guyana along a sustainable path for years to come and to ensure that the citizens enjoy the ‘good life’.

Again, I quote, the former President, Brig. (Ret’d) Granger, when he spoke about the green state and said that it will develop the pathway towards a diversified and resilient economy.

2.48 p.m.

Does it sound familiar? The green state will promote the environment and steer the country towards the creation of happy households and happy people. So, Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh, the better idea would have been for you to have consulted with the past President and the former Minister of Finance, to better understand the way to achieve the ‘good life’ for all Guyanese.

The People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s (PPP/C) budget, follows the same old, same old, model of previous ones, where there is lack of equity in the management of resources

as it relates to the 10 Administrative Regions and where there is lack of evidence-based planning and decision-making to ensure there would be value for money. However, it does appear that money is given to source votes.

The APNU/AFC Coalition Government made every effort to teach people how to fish rather than to give them a fish. It was former President David Granger, who noted, as I quote an article from *Kaieteur News* dated 12th June, 2015:

“...the fight against poverty cannot be won through charitable handouts. ‘Neither will trickledown economics be the panacea for pauperization and privation.’”

In this regard, he stated:

“...providing jobs for Guyanese — particularly our young people — will be one of his government’s main priorities.”

The APNU/AFC Coalition’s poverty reduction plan, with its one-nation approach, was expected to reduce inequalities, remove obstacles to education, open opportunities to the disadvantaged and unite the coastland and the hinterland. The APNU/AFC Coalition had a comprehensive plan to eliminate extreme poverty. However, on the contrary, the normal pattern of the PPP/C’s Party is to allow for resources to be given to citizens who fail to remit their fair share of taxes and to have a budget where certain parts of the private sector benefit and where some businessmen who evade taxes, are rewarded.

There is no specific fund being allocated for the Decade for People of African Descent. This is universally recognised by the United Nations (UN) for the period 2015 to 2024 and indicates that the people of African Descent represent a distinct group whose human rights must be promoted and protected.

I have said in a previous debate, and I must reiterate it here today, that the PPP/C Government’s budget is full of ironies and eye-water. The ironies put the country in a state of anxiety, but the eye-water exposes the debt of the Government’s callousness and recklessness in spending, with little or no accountability.

In short, what the next Government of this country is saying is that *Budget 2021* is an economic bubble being created by the PPP/C Government. And what has made this bubble incredible, is the fact that the bubble is blown from borrowed money. There is massive expansion of the open market

operations of the Bank of Guyana. This is the so-called platform being used to stimulate the economy by making it easy for businesses and individuals to borrow money. But who are these individuals that we are talking about? It is certainly not the majority of the Guyanese populace, many of whom are living below the poverty line. The banks do not give incentives, so it fair to conclude that the banks are lending and will be lending to the cronies of the PPP/C and to persons in private sector who may already be rich in toxic assets. These toxic assets become illiquid when the secondary market for buying and selling, disappears. Therefore, if this is the trajectory that the nation will follow, Guyana can see a devaluing of its currency with a possible economic crash.

This economic course that has been undertaken by the PPP/C cannot be compared to the structure of economic prosperity, environmental security and social well-being that was developed by the APNU/AFC. The APNU/AFC Coalition’s green economy was not for a chosen group, but for all Guyanese, irrespective of race, colour or creed. In other words, no one was excluded because of how they looked, their heritage or their party affiliation.

Now, let me turn our attention to the pandemic which has overrun the world. The Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is responsible for two million deaths. At present, there are 109 million confirmed cases worldwide and the global economy may have contracted by a staggering 4.3% in 2020. Of course, in the Americas, there are 48.7 million cases, with the United States of America (USA) having 27.5 million confirmed cases and they are approaching 500,000 deaths. But in our own backyard, Guyana with a population of just about 750,000 people, has a whopping 8,357 confirmed cases and 190 deaths. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes, we just got that from the press.

The APNU/AFC Coalition, in our response to this dreaded disease, ensured that there was safety on the job for all medical personnel and technical staff. The APNU/AFC Coalition took measures to protect the vulnerable, especially those in special-care homes and shelters. We sought to address the social and economic impact on the livelihood of the Guyanese people, through the Rural Entrepreneurial Agricultural Project (REAP) and by the setting up of the Coordinating Agency for Small Enterprises (CASE). These developments run counter to the PPP/C’s firing of over 1,000 persons, most of whom were public servants, and as a consequence, has no means of sustenance. There is a similar figure for persons whose livelihoods are at risk, and yet, there is another category of persons, who will be living in extreme

poverty if the crisis persists. The latter category of persons still has pink slips, indicating that they are awaiting their COVID-19 cash grants from this illegitimate Government.

The former APNU/AFC Coalition Government definitely responded more effectively to the COVID-19 pandemic than the current Government because of our willingness to learn quickly from countries like our neighbour Brazil, the United States of America and China, itself, where the novel coronavirus originated. Engaging and co-operating with our international partners, and being meticulous with the information shared, were the factors responsible for our ability to keep the number of deaths to a minimum; indeed, to a two-digit number.

The APNU/AFC Coalition Government had recognised early, and we had knowledge of our limitations and constraints. Hence, we were able to act quickly and enlist epidemiologists from the USA through the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and our Caribbean Community (CARICOM) sisters and brothers, to help us devise solutions leading to an approach focusing on high risk situations for contagion by avoiding the Three Cs: closed spaces with poor ventilation, crowded places and close-contact settings. This approach was supplemented with the distribution of cloth masks and an early emphasis on contact tracing to limit superspreader events. There were also institutional constraints that allowed us to have some restrictions on individual liberties and economic activities. The APNU/AFC’s plan was clear. First, efforts were towards the containment of the public health measures. Then, actions were put in place to deliver and facilitate essential services. And then, there was an exit strategy where priority actions were highlighted to mitigate the wider impacts of the crisis and to return to the new normal.

With the PPP/C, there are *ad hoc* mechanisms with no comprehensive and concrete plan for the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, what the country has now seen is the poor handling of the crisis. Guyana remains at the highest tier – I think it is the tier four – where infection rates for COVID-19 are considered. As policy makers, we cannot afford to be reactive; we must be proactive in our response to vaccine hesitancy. Unlike Barbados and other sister CARICOM countries that have already received 100, 000 vaccines supplies, we agreed to, more or less, borrow and was happy to receive handouts to assist our populace. Of course, the Guyanese are glad that the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) – the global mechanism – will facilitate the delivery of vaccines to countries such as ours and we are

happier that world leaders have committed to end COVID-19 by ensuring that there is vaccine equity.

Infectious Diseases – on page 44, paragraph 4.112 states:

“Four GeneXpert machines have been procured for \$17.6 million to be deployed in Regions 1, 6, 9 and 10, with expansion of testing facilities to Regions 7 and 8 planned for 2021...”

This according to your book here.

I am asking the Hon. Member, Dr. Frank Anthony, to follow the science and more importantly, let the data and the evidence inform your decisions. Region 4 is the epicentre; Region 1 has about 1,019 cases and that is second in line and this is followed by Region 7, which has about 760 cases or more. Yet, the GeneXpert machine will not be deployed to Region 7 at the earliest opportunity.

Mr. Speaker, while I am still on infectious diseases on page 44, paragraph 4.113 mention is made of the Government bringing the infectious disease centre to functionality:

“Further, we have brought the Infectious Diseases Centre to functionality which has, between September 1 to December 31, 2020 treated 450 patients in the COVID-19 ward and 38 in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU).”

The fact that the Ministry of Health could have brought the Infectious Disease Hospital to functionality in four months, speaks well to the competency of the previous Government and the good wicket with which the Ministry of Health continues to bat on.

With the increase production of personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies on the market more readily now, the populace expects that there should be an increase in test kits and sanitising materials given to the persons who have been exposed to COVID-19. There should also be a significant reduction in the number of persons from the citizenry going home on isolation without health packages. Hence, the APNU/AFC Coalition welcomes the \$2.1 billion for the purchase of critical items, including medical kits, medical supplies, test kits, sanitising materials, and the PPE, though no mention is made of the amount of money being recorded for COVID-19 from donor agencies.

3.03 p.m.

And I have seen it nowhere here as to how much money you have gotten from donor agencies.

To achieve herd immunity, 70-90% of the population is expected to be immunised. But with the slow pace and the trickling of the vaccine to this country, the Guyanese populace wonders if herd immunity, whether natural or vaccine induced, will be possible in the near future.

The APNU/AFC Coalition awaits the green light from PAHO/WHO for the soonest elimination of filariasis from Guyana. And though there may be less persons accessing the malaria services, due to COVID-19, the APNU/AFC Coalition would like the mosquito treated nets to reach the pregnant mothers and the miners in a timely manner.

The cost of treating the human immunodeficiency virus / acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) as well as the years of lost productivity from early HIV/AIDS related deaths, remains a huge recurrent cost for Government. The APNU/AFC Coalition wishes that efforts be made to accelerate this programme, so that Guyana could reach the 90-90-90 goal set by the United Nations (UN) – 90% of persons knowing their status, 90% of those being treated and those who are being treated go to viral suppression.

Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs): The focus of the Ministry of Health must be on primary care. Emphasis must be paid on reducing the prevalence of non-communicable diseases which accounts for 70% of our health budget.

It is scary to note that Type 1 diabetes or juvenile diabetes is on the increase, as close to 200 children are in our registry. Apart from cardiovascular diseases, the cancers, and the chronic respiratory diseases – the common NCDs noted in Guyana – we also see the cerebrovascular accidents and the complications of hypertension and diabetes. These, of course, are exhibited in eye conditions such as cataract and glaucoma. Hence, at page 44, paragraph 4.111, it is reported that:

“Of this amount, \$99.8 million is budgeted for re-equipping the National Ophthalmology Hospital in Port Mourant, ...”

When this service was envisioned, there was no concrete plan made to ensure a continuous service of this initiative. So, this speaks to the poor infrastructure that the APNU/AFC Coalition met.

The construction of an 18-bed mental health ward at the national referral hospital at a cost of \$26 million is noted.

This is the APNU/AFC’s plan and we are happy that the same will be executed. I am happy that the Government is building on the legacy of the former APNU/AFC Government. We had commenced initiatives at our hinterland to address mental health issues, suicide prevention and care, and to expand psychiatric and psychological services.

Government has committed \$140 million towards the financing of maternal waiting homes and facilities at Moruca District Hospital and Kato Cottage Hospital as well as \$100 million for the construction and retrofitting of the wing and maternity ward at the New Amsterdam Public Hospital. It is the APNU/AFC Coalition’s wish that what happened to the Suddie Public Hospital does not reoccur, where the maternal waiting home at the Suddie Public Hospital was turned into a COVID-19 center. Proper planning should go into such an exercise.

We will be vigorously monitoring this project, to see how this \$860 million Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timely (SMART) Hospital initiative is being rolled out and operationalised in 2021, at the Leonora Comprehensive Diagnostic and Treatment Centre (LCD&TC), the Diamond Diagnostic Centre and the Mabaruma Regional Hospital; even as works advance at the Lethem Regional Hospital and the Paramakatoi Health Centre. By the way, if you are doing work at the Diamond Diagnostic Centre, put a little signboard up, so that people would know that they cannot go there and that they should to go straight to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). It is only when folks go to the Diamond Diagnostic Centre that they know there is no service given there and that they have to go to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. So, please, at least, put some signboard stating this.

The APNU/AFC Coalition project will also be paying keen interest to the construction of the polyclinic at Festival City, which commenced under our watch to serve the people in that community, in addition, to scrutinising the work to be done at the Skeldon Hospital for a whopping \$88.3 million.

In Budget 2021, I have noticed in this technological age an absence of moneys to improve the Geographic Health Information Systems (GHIS) – a system to integrate patient databases with census data and other information on: where patients live; where patients receive their care and where they enjoy community resources. Everyone knows the importance of data. It is not only for research, but such a tool can be used to support the Ministry of Health’s effort to improve the experience of patient care; to improve the health of regional

populations; and reduce per capita costs of healthcare. If efforts are not guided in this direction, Guyana will forever be information rich and data poor.

Mr. Speaker, as I conclude, the Government must invest in public health and ensure that health inequalities are acted on, so that the social determinants of health are addressed. It was Frank Dodson, a former Health Secretary, who said, as I quote:

“Inequality in health is the worst inequality of all. There is no more serious inequality than knowing that you’ll die sooner because you’re badly off.”

We must be able to protect our country’s most valued resource, its citizens. And, yes, I will add that there must be actual money put aside to compensate and pay our health professionals for the work they do, as development must include not only material wealth, but also include the welfare of its citizens.

Universal health is the goal of all countries in the world as the Sustainable Development Goal 3, indicates. Hence, to reiterate, there must be access to essential healthcare services, access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all.

The APNU/AFC Coalition firmly believes that primary healthcare should remain the fundamental strategic approach to realising the country’s health agenda.

I am alarmed at the harm this Budget is inflicting on Guyana. I am forced to ask, carest thou not that we perish? How can you to lay asleep when the pandemic is destroying lives and livelihoods?

Overall, this Budget is a hatchet budget – a hatchet job on the ‘good life’ leading to a great economy. At the core, it represents a breakdown in caring values and a breakup of the pathway towards economic growth for all Guyanese from Georgetown to the hinterland.

Finally, on behalf of all good and decent citizens and residents of this great Republic, I, Dr. Karen Cummings, cannot approve this Budget.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Dr. Cummings. We could now hear the contribution of the Hon. Member, Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo.

Dr. Mahadeo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Before I go on to my substantive presentation, I just need to inform the speaker before me, the Hon. Member, that we already have GeneXpert machines in Regions 1, 9, 10 and 6. And in this month, Regions 7 and 8 will have. Currently, we have the capacity to do up to 2,000 COVID-19 tests. There are antigen test kits in every single region.

Mr. Speaker, I will explain, and I will leave that [*inaudible*], you never used to do tests. People died and their diagnosis were never put. They died with symptoms of COVID-19 and we know that because testing in Guyana when ...[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Dr. Mahadeo, is that “you” to me?

Dr. Mahadeo: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Member, we know that when COVID-19 came to Guyana, how many tests were being done per day and how many were done per months – it was 20 or just over 20. Persons were dying with symptoms and when doctors requested to have the COVID-19 sample tests done, they were told, ‘no, just bury them’. How could we say that we had real figures?

To get a COVID-19 test done, we had a Minister who was not a doctor. She was not a nurse, she was not a technician and she was not a community health worker, but she had to agree for a COVID-19 test to be done on a patient, and she held the results. Those results were not made available to the doctors, who were managing those patients, until she decided.

The Hon. Member held those documents, which they did with nice fancy slogans, in the headlines. What I want to say is that while they had nice words there, the populace was being stabbed in the back by all of the new taxes and all the increases and the increase of cost of living in this country. And this is why they are over there, and we are over here. The Statements of Poll (SOP) and the recount said so.

I think, it was in 2015, we had an Hon. Minister Mr. George Norton who referred to the Hon. Member as “the brown girl in the ring, tra la la la la”. Today, I know that we also have some men with green and pink slips in the ring.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to move onto my speech, and take this opportunity to first congratulate the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, on a job well done. Also, to thank his staff for the long hours they put in to achieve this feat; it speaks to great teamwork. And, of course, the guiding hands of His Excellency the President and Vice-President, must also be acknowledged.

In 1992, and I take you back to 1992, we inherited a broken, destroyed and shattered country; a country where majority of its citizens had lost hope and were barely surviving day-to-day. Every sector was in a state of disarray. I was working at the New Amsterdam Public Hospital at that time and I remember the days of severe shortages of drugs and medical supplies, inadequate laboratory facilities and non-existent diagnostic equipment. The PPP/C worked tirelessly, from 1992, to painstakingly reduce the huge debt burden that the People’s National Congress (PNC) had put on Guyana and to elevate the standard of living day-by-day and year-by-year; to raise wages and salaries; to lay a solid foundation and to build the health system like a house, brick-by-brick and board-by-board.

My personal experience in Region 6, of not being able to access basic laboratory tests and not even a random blood sugar test at the regional hospital in New Amsterdam in 1992... By 2014 one could have gotten those tests at health centres. In 1992, at the outpatient and accident and emergency units, at the New Amsterdam Public Hospital there was a dispenser working, seeing patients.

3.18 p.m.

By 2014, doctors were working even at the health centres. In the Region 6, at Orealla and Siparuta, there were two doctors stationed there. By 2014, in Region 6, we had Guyanese trained specialists at hospitals. We were no longer totally dependent on foreign nationals to provide specialist services. The bed-ridden and elderly were provided care at their homes through the Extended Home-Based Care Service. Not only did the doctors, dentists and rehab staff visit the patients at home, but they got medicines and other supplies like walkers, urinals, bedpans, pampers, *et cetera* to the homes of these patients.

There were elderly care clinics at all facilities and special geriatric mega clinics across the region. Communities had a voice in the management of their health facilities through management committees and they got feedback from the facilities through community health facility days. Then came ‘Tsunami A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC)’ in the first half of 2015, destroying everything in sight; destroying not only industries but also destroying the beautiful health care system built so painstakingly by the PPP/C. This was not only in Region 6, but across the country.

We inherited a broken system in 2020. Most of the gains made before 2014 were dashed, destroyed, and shattered.

Even equipment that were donated were left sitting whilst the people, the citizens, had to pay. A typical example is the computerized tomography (CT) scan that was requested since 2014 and was received in 2015. Do you know when it started working, Mr. Speaker? It started in October 2020. Most of the other medical equipment were down, including Electromagnetic Radiation (x-ray) laboratory equipment and theatre equipment. They are not working due to no maintenance and no servicing.

There were poor procurement practices, and I say this without fear of contradiction because there is proof. I do not know if it was plain incompetence or corruption. I do not know whether it was a case of spending the moneys in such a way that some particular suppliers could have gotten the contracts. I do not know what practices or what rules were being followed. I do not know why the technical staff were not consulted. Unto this day, I still cannot understand how a veterinary anaesthetic machine was bought in Region 6 to use on humans. There is more proof of gross incompetence or complete mismanagement. The rehabilitation department of the Ministry of Health, this time centrally, around 2017, requested a piece of equipment to assist persons having lung problems. That piece of equipment can be used for persons who are in bed, like patients who suffered a stroke, patients have head injuries and who are having problems with their lungs. The request was made in the medically correct name for a medicinal chest vibrator, a vibrating equipment that is placed flat on the chest of the patient to stimulate the lungs. The then Ministry of Public Health bought this, a vibrating dildo, for the department to use. [*The Hon. Member displayed a sample of a vibrating dildo.*] This is what the Ministry of Public Health bought for their staff to use on the patients having chest issues. Could you imagine the consternation of the rehabilitation staff? Unto today, when they speak of it you can hear the disgust in their voices.

How can this be explained: was it incompetence, ignorance, corruption, or all three? If we had that piece of equipment it could have been used on the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) patients. But do you know what? Since last year, the staff were again trying to get the equipment, but it was not available. They were all sold out because of COVID. This is typical and classic of how the health system was managed in Guyana by the APNU/AFC prior to August, 2020. Again, I ask, was it corruption or mismanagement?

The foundation laid by the PPP/C pre-2015 was strong and we are building again. Like the legendary phoenix, Guyana is rising again. Services are being offered again, and, in a short

time, it has been taken to heights never achieved before. For five years, the National Ophthalmology Hospital (NOH) was allowed to deteriorate. Not only were medical equipment not working, the building was leaking, air conditioners (ACs) were not functioning, the staff were demotivated, there were no consumables, and there were no drugs and medical supplies. The once national pride became a national disgrace under the APNU/AFC.

In 2014, there was no backlog of cataract cases in Guyana. However, to date we have already identified over 1,200 cataract cases. This is an indictment of the APNU/AFC Government. No wonder it is common to hear the words: “Never again, APNU/AFC”. Two weeks ago, after major works and repairs to the building and equipment, the National Ophthalmology Hospital started doing surgeries once again. Sixteen cataract surgeries and a number of pterygium surgeries were done. This will continue. There is hope for the cataract patients once again in Guyana. Nearly \$100 million is budgeted this year to make this facility fully functional. Guyana is rising from ruins and destruction and is rising rapidly.

A theatre was being constructed at the Skeldon Hospital. The theatre was started in 2014, and in 2015 the APNU/AFC Government stopped that work. Instead, they had the rehabilitation department in there. In 2021, we have budgeted for an operating theatre for the Skeldon Hospital so that patients from the Upper Corentyne and the Corentyne River, Orealla and Siparuta, can get surgeries done right in Skeldon.

Services are being added to the Mibicuri Hospital. We will improve diagnostic capacity in that hospital, and, within the next few years, a laboratory and x-ray unit will be set up there. Our Government is going to fulfil and has already started to fulfil its manifesto promises.

In my visits to the hinterland communities, I have come to the conclusion that services offered to our people there are minimal. I was shocked to learn that quite a number of pregnant women went through their pregnancy without ever getting a blood test to determine even their blood count. This is a travesty. His Excellency, after interacting with communities across this country, has asked that all efforts be made to bring the health care services in the hinterland up to *par*. The PPP/C Government, in this term, is determined to make major changes. The needs of our people in the hinterland must also be met. We must make more services available to our people living in the hinterland and riverain communities by building facilities, providing staff, providing

transportation for staff and patients, and training more persons. All of this is being done in this years’ budget.

I am happy to say to this House that the Regional Health Officers (RHOs) with hinterland responsibility have all welcomed the new direction of taking health care to the people. They are working to ensure that over the next few years, all pregnant mothers, in the course of pregnancy, must be offered the opportunity to have their bloodwork done, to be seen by a doctor at least once, to have a dental check at least once, to have at least one ultra sound, and to know their status with a Voluntary Counselling and Testing (VCT) councillor, among other necessary and relevant tests. This has started and will continue to grow.

For the first time, there is a rehabilitation therapist attached to the Bartica Hospital in Region 7; for the first time, there is a rehabilitation therapist attached to the Mabaruma Hospital in Region 1; and we have a therapist identified to go to Region 8. With that, we would have, for the first time, at least one therapist in every region.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, for the first time I want to introduce something. Five minutes before you count down, I will show you this: two minutes. Hon. Member, you need to get an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for five minutes for my honourable Colleague to conclude his statement.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may continue to conclude.

Dr. Mahadeo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In short, I will just say, for Region 1, pre-August, 2020, there were 11 doctors. We are proposing to have 30 doctors there before the end of the year with at least 10 specialists in Region 7 and to also give them all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). For the first time, ATV ambulances for the difficult terrains will be introduced in the hinterland regions. Five will be going to Region 1, three boats and engines and one ambulance. Region 7 will be getting 33 doctors instead of the 18 that they had. Region 8 will be getting 14 instead of three. Region 9 will be getting 33 instead of 18. Rehabilitation surgical capacity at Port Kaituma will be established. At Moruka, a theatre will be completed, and surgeries will be done there. Surgical capacity will also be installed at Aishalton.

I move on to Region 6, and I want to bring from my constituents a big thank you to President Ali and team for already starting to fulfil elections’ promises of reopening the sugar estates and working to solve the problems of the industry as a whole. Reversing the increases in land rents and drainage and irrigation charges are promises already fulfilled. One might be tempted to ask why was there no progress in Region 6 over the last years, 2015 to 2020? After all, the PPP/C had won Region 6 and had a PPP/C elected Chairman. The answer is simple. The Regional Executive Officer (REO), who is the accounting officer, who decided and approved spending of the Regional Democratic Council’s (RDC) budget, and who headed the Regional Tender Board, was appointed by the APNU/AFC. According to the Regional Chairman, the REO, from 2015 to July 2020, did not carry out the mandate, the decisions and requests of the RDC. As such, the RDC did not get to carry out its planned works. Instead, as the head of the tender board, which by 2017 to 2018 had no PPP/C nominated representative, she supervised the sharing of contracts done in a questionable manner. The current RDC, through the REO, is asking for a thorough audit of the COVID-19 moneys that were spent. Over \$76 million was spent with no accountability. In 2019, the same REO approved spending on school buses. It is ironical that, from 2017 to 2019, the Region spent over \$20 million on repairing one bus, PVV 1992. This year, the Region has budgeted to purchase two buses at \$18 million each.

The REO is cleaning the mess, literally leading the cleaning in the region. The drainage and irrigation system was totally broken. They were awarding contractors, with canals to clean in Region 6. These contractors bid for the canal, won the award and did not know where the canals were located. Eventually, after three months, one of them found the canal and did a miserable job.

In Region 6, in this year’s budget, there was \$293 million for bridges and roads; \$237 million for education, \$159 million to repair buildings, and \$42 million for furniture; health, there was \$235 million for the Maternity Ward, Infectious Unit, at the New Amsterdam Public Hospital and the Skeldon Hospital.

In closing, the Hon. President Dr. Irfaan Ali is a man with a vision and a man on a mission. His mission is to ensure, as far as possible, that maximum is achieved in the shortest possible time. He is leading a well-qualified and dedicated team. On this exciting journey, he does not have days off, and neither does anyone of us working with him.

3.33 p.m.

There is much to achieve and little time in which to do it. Five years were lost due to the destruction of gains by the APNU/AFC Coalition.

His Excellency has spoken bravely of his and the PPP/C’s plans for the prosperity of Guyana. He continues to work to keep his pledge that he made during the elections campaign, as documented in the manifesto.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, there is a Standing Order with respect to using the President’s comments to influence a debate. However, what he said in the National Assembly could be used.

Dr. Mahadeo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The President’s views are challenging and shows his wide grasp of life. To quote him in this National Assembly:

“As a nation, we will not be judged only by the way we treat human beings, but we must also pay particular attention to the environment, our natural heritage and the way we treat animals.

My Government will support initiatives and invest in programmes that addresses all these issues, sometimes referred to as ‘soft issues’ but which importantly adds to the story of who we are as Guyanese.”

Onward to a brighter future. This Budget is plotting the path to recovery, economic dynamism and resilience.

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

Mr. Cox: Mr. Speaker allow me first of all to express New Years’ and Republic greetings to you and all other Members of this honourable House. I would like to also say congratulations to Ms. Sarah Brown, who I saw earlier, on the birth of her baby boy. It is my confidence that 2021 will be a year of esteem impartiality and fairness in this honourable House. I would like to remind that all Members of this honourable House are governed by clearly prescribed orders, and I would like to repeat ‘all Members’.

Before I commence my presentation on the debate of *Budget* 2021, allow me to express thanks to my Colleagues and all fellow Guyanese for standing strong, despite experiencing vindictiveness, intimidation, discrimination and harsh behaviour meted out, not just to us, but all Guyanese at large.

It is distasteful, shameful and undeserving of any remembrance.

I would like to address three comments made earlier by Members of the Government. I would like to start with the Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, who mentioned that he was not moved by the Opposition’s press or the Opposition’s issue where race is concerned. I am not surprised. We are not asking the Hon. Member to be moved. We are asking the people of Guyana to be moved because they are the ones who will speak, and they are the ones who will determine who sits in Government and not the Hon. Member.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Susan Rodrigues also highlighted a number of projects under her Ministry. The Hon. Member, Ms. Rodrigues would have done a better job if she had simply said thanks to the APNU/AFC for all the projects highlighted. [An Hon. Member: Dr. Van West-Charles... (inaudible)] Yes, to Dr. Van West-Charles for an excellent project implemented under the previous Administration. For that we must say thank you.

The last speaker, the Hon. Dr. Mahadeo, mentioned shortage of drugs. I would like to remind the Hon. Member that, today, on the news, he is on record as saying that the Government is preparing to address the needs of shortage or the issue of shortage of drugs. So, within seven months, the Hon. Member is addressing the needs of a shortage of drugs, and still in the same breath saying that the APNU/AFC had a shortage of drugs. Well, right now he has shortage of drugs.

Budget 2021 was presented under the theme: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience* – powerful words. On page eight under, Real Gross Domestic Product, in paragraph 2 of the budget speech, it is stated:

“...our real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020 is estimated to have grown by 43.5%.”

It is most fitting that the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and his team would have chosen such a theme, thereby, admitting that, under the APNU/AFC, Guyana’s economy has performed the best in all of history, despite challenges. Any progress of economic growth and prosperity in 2020 can only practically and principally be attributed to the Coalition while in Government.

During the reading of this Budget, there was no mention of any increases for the public servants – not surprising. Only last Saturday, during a meeting at Matthews Ridge, my Hon.

Colleague, my Friend, Mr. Colin Croal, the Hon. Member stated that, unlike many countries that had to lay off workers from the public sector and lowered wages and salaries because of the COVID-19 pandemic, Guyana did not do that. I am wondering if the Hon Member was trying to justify his Government’s decision not to announce any increases for workers’ salaries in the public sector.

What is more astonishing is the fact that the Hon. Minister of the Public Service, the Hon. Sonia Parag, went on national television and stated that it would be against the principle of collective bargaining to announce any increases prior to the Budget speech. Where was this Hon. Member when the Budget was being prepared? Did the Hon. Member invite the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU), the Guyana Teachers’ Union (GTU) and other unions to consultations? If the Hon. Member was so concerned about the principle of collective bargaining, then the Hon. Minister would have advised that unions to be engaged as part of the preparation for *Budget 2021*, thereby, rendering it capable of announcing a much-deserved increase in public servants’ salaries.

Mr. Speaker, Enrique Peñalosa said:

“A developed country is not a place where the poor have cars. It is where the rich use public transportation.”

I do not want to assume that does not happen here, but Guyana knows the answer. The Guyanese people knows the answer.

It was only one week before the reading of *Budget 2021* in the National Assembly, that the smaller political parties were invited to a meeting that they called, ‘A consultation on *Budget 2021*’. It is even fascinating that my Opposition Colleague, from the other parties, would have expressed pleasure in that so-called budget consultation. Was it a consultation, or was it a briefing to inform smaller political parties of what was already included in this Budget?

Every public servant, inclusive of teachers in Guyana, deserve, and I would like to put a figure here, a 20% increase in their salaries. I said it last year in the budget debate, and I am going to remind Guyanese and my fellow teachers in Guyana, it is this installed Government that promised 50% increases in salaries. The Guyana Teachers’ Union must never forget that it was under this PPP/C Government that teachers were told, if they do not like their salary to leave their jobs. It is such a disappointment for a Government who

promised huge increases and who cares for Guyanese and the public servants.

Education – it must be recognised that quality education is not only about access to education, but it also requires a reorientation of the education system that provides the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, which respond to individual, national and global needs and expectations. That is where we should be going with education in hinterland communities. Quality education encourages the development of critical thinking, which fosters the desire and capacity for lifelong learning. With that being said, the people of Mabaruma are disappointed that no provision was made for the extension or improvement of the North West Secondary School, which is presumed to be the premier secondary school in the Barima/Waini region. And, we wonder why.

We must not forget the achievements of the education sector under the previous Administration, and with such effective interventions, the people of the Barima/Waini region wish for those projects to continue. Lest we forget, it was under the APNU/AFC Administration that Guyana regained its rightful place as the best performing country at the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) in all the Caribbean. Ram and McRae in their analysis of *Budget 2021* called, *Focus on Guyana Budget 2021* stated that it would be unfortunate if the pattern in Guyana is for new administrations to reverse the policies of their predecessors without some objective consideration.

That is a concern for politicians in Guyana. We must seek to boost free education as promised and upgrade schools infrastructure, and those are just routine needs. With the current pandemic, there is an important need for innovative teaching methods, especially now. How are we engaging our hinterland students? Will it only be with worksheets? The only thing I am seeing are worksheets and more worksheets. The worksheets are not even reaching those students living in far flung communities. The manner in which this installed Administration seeks to manage the COVID-19 pandemic tells us that this disease is not going anywhere in the near future. Therefore, an imperative question is: what new measures are in place for 100% of schooling in a new and normal society? The COVID-19 is not going anywhere. We must adopt to this new normal, and the Ministry of Education lacks that normalcy or that adaptation to this new normal. The University of Guyana (UG) and the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) have all proposed to go fully online. While this is a step in the right direction, a few concerns linger, especially in hinterland communities.

Are there provisions for students in the hinterland communities to readily access this training? At this time the Government should be moving to provide free internet services for all primary and secondary schools across the hinterland communities in Guyana. There should be a project where every school child in Guyana will be given not just a \$15,000 one-off grant, but a tablet or a computer to access online learning.

3.48 p.m.

Moreover, there must be institutional strengthening that will transform education in Guyana to respond to sustainable development. This transformation must seek to advance quality education through galvanised pedagogical innovation that promotes a shift in the education system’s methodology, in order to achieve the desired objectives. That is what is lacking in *Budget 2021*. Where are we and where are we going? Hinterland students and teachers are at a great disadvantage.

Consequently, extensive partnerships and networks within sectors are imperative to the implementation of any such policy.

We must ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development, sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace, non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity. As I read *Budget 2021*, I am still looking to find where policies and projects will promote such in our education system, especially in hinterland communities.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will need an extension for sustainable continuation.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. Hon. Member you may proceed.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to touch on agriculture in Region 1. Over \$19 million has been budgeted for agricultural programmes in the Barima/Waini region, and the only provisions I am reading are estimates provided for poultry pens. What is going to

happen with our farmers in those far flung communities that are constantly flooding? What provisions are in place for them? Why not invest in greenhouses in communities like Kamwatta, White Water, and Wauna, which will create job opportunities for those farmers and their families; thus, bringing in a large income, especially now that the pandemic has posed serious threats to families and their personal incomes.

Again, this Budget, with all its makeup and fancy flamboyant glares, only presents to this Parliament what needs to be done but there is nothing to say how it will be done. That is the concern.

Another vital piece of creating consistently accessible roadways is ensuring that all roads are climate-resilient, improving transport conditions, which will boost local agricultural industry and reveal new economic opportunities for persons living in rural areas. That is what the people of communities across Guyana, in our hinterland communities, need.

Under health, specific attention must be paid to the health of our Indigenous peoples with a vision that targets the vulnerable groups and our Indigenous people are considered a vulnerable group. It was under the last Administration that the Discipline Services were considered professional. It is sad that, after seven months, under my Colleague, the Hon. Minister, Mr. Robeson Benn, that the police force and the military have all developed and adapted their own responsibility as they go to serve hinterland, rural and Indigenous communities.

It was only last week that two incidents, allegedly of rape, by officers of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) and the Guyana Police Force (GPF) were reported in the media, both in Region 1. Where are we headed? Those are the persons who are supposed to be protecting our Indigenous people. Those are the persons sent there to protect us at the borders. It seems as though they are protecting something else, and the Hon. Minister must seek to address that as a very important issue.

Social assistance in communities of hinterland regions, and I am specifically talking about Region 1. The Probation Officer stationed at Mabaruma is a Councillor on the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) of the Barima/Waini region. It is unprecedented that such, a person is employed. What are the provisions made for equitable distribution or addressing the needs for persons who really need social assistances? Is this another political appointment that will seek to repay the PPP/C and their supporters?

In conclusion, my final remark on *Budget 2021* is that it is not a people’s budget, it is not pro-poor and certainly not public servant’s friendly. I urge the members of the installed Government that we need to strengthen efforts to combat poverty and to provide support and material assistance to economically disadvantaged families, notably those living in rural areas, and to guarantee the right of all children to an adequate standard of living. It is sad that *Budget 2021*, with all its flamboyant flares, does not adequately seek to fulfil such visions and wishes of my Indigenous brothers and sisters. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Williams: As I rise today in this honourable House, I would like to wish all my Guyanese brothers and sisters a happy 51st Republic Anniversary. As we celebrate the journey of our beloved country Guyana, let us celebrate in mind ‘oneness’, one Guyana, as our motto: *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*.

Today marks the 6th month since the People’s Progressive Party/Civic assumed Office and is presenting its 2nd budget to the people of Guyana. In 2020, this Government came to the people with a plan for prosperity that brought relief in 100 days to the Guyanese people, to all sectors of the Guyanese population, regardless of their affiliation.

I want extend my gratitude to the Peoples Progressive Party /Civic Administration and Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, his staff and team for presenting this full year 2021 Budget that will take the Guyanese people to a path of recovery. I reiterate, Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, recovery we must, recovery we will.

As I listen to the Hon. Member, who just stepped out of the House, speaking about people having to decide who will be the Government and not the Hon Minister. That is the result, we are here because the people spoke for themselves, on 2nd March and 2nd August.

Before I go further, the Opposition, the APNU/AFC on the other side of the bench, fails to realise that the Government is elected based on its track record. And so, when they are reminded of their track record it hurts because the truth hurts. In 2015, as the Hon. Member on the other side mentioned, 20% salary increases the APNU/AFC came in their manifesto in 2015 – 20% increase for teachers, public servants and disciplinary forces. Instead, they increased their salaries by 50% and left the public servants in darkness.

When we presented our manifesto, we presented a five-year plan, but the Opposition seems to not understand the manifesto.

Today, we have a Government with a vision. Today, as we debate *Budget 2021*, I want to welcome the other Opposition Members in the ring. As we are here to debate in the ring, we are here to represent the people of Guyana. We are not here to divide people. This is the right place to address people’s issues, not at the ‘Stabroek Square’, but here in Parliament, here in Guyana.

Towns and villages in the hinterland could feel relief from this Budget, after all the heavy taxes and value-added tax that were laid upon the Guyanese people between 2015-2020. Those taxes are being removed by this Government, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, since it assumed Office on the 2nd August, 2020. The hinterland villages can now enjoy improvement of transportation, after the duty is removed from all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) by this Government.

As we speak about employment, Members on the other side of the House speak about vindictiveness. The APNU/AFC, in 2015, fired more than 2,000 youths in Guyana. Now, the youths of today are much happier after we assumed Office. They are now employed as Community Support Officers (CSOs), and more will come on board in this *Budget 2021*.

I can recall when the then President David Granger was asked about employment, he said, that there was no possibility that the Government could simply start employing the young people. He further went on to say that they could not promise to employ every one of them, it was not the Government’s responsibility to provide jobs and that there was no way that the Government could give each and every person a job. Instead, he asked the young people to go on the streets and sell cook-up rice, guava cheese and jam. How can you expect our young people to go on the streets and sell cook-up and every day we eat our cook-up at home? Where is the market? [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] Thank you, Hon. Member.

Youths in the hinterland, right now, are enjoying the relief from this Budget. As I speak, in 2015, the then President David Granger came with a 10-point plan for hinterland villages but, the APNU/AFC failed to deliver their 10-point plan.

Today, in the *2021 Budget*, \$700 million has been allocated for solar electricity for hinterland communities. In the 10-point plan, ‘happy households programme’ was there to ensure investment in economic projects but, again, the

APNU/AFC Government failed to deliver within their time in Office. Within the six months, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic fulfilled its promise to the people of Guyana, not only to the Amerindians but, to the entire Guyanese population by injecting a \$25,000 cash grant to every household in Guyana. That brought relief to the homes that were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

4.03 p.m.

The Hinterland Education Support Programme was also on the 10-point plan. That plan was to provide breakfast, textbooks and exercise books. I want to show you, Mr. Speaker, as I record in this House those exercise books that were given to the hinterland children when the APNU/AFC was in Government. I have the evidence here of what the hinterland students received in every school. It is half books. [Mr. Williams displayed books in the National Assembly.] Today, education will be improved, not only through exercise books, but through smart classrooms and learning channels will be introduced to the schools.

Today, we are yet to identify the former ministry of boats and bicycles and we are yet to find out who was the former minister of boats and bicycles. I listened to the first speaker when she mentioned that \$15,000 is not enough for the school children. Today, I want to ask: what did the APNU/AFC do for the school children when they squashed the \$10,000 ‘Because we Care’ cash grant? What did they replace it with? There was nothing. The children had to suffer. Today, the school children have benefitted from the \$4,000 uniform cash grant allowance and \$15,000 per child will be delivered to the school children in 2021.

The importance of information and communication technology (ICT) is more evident today than it has ever been. The Hinterland villages were left behind. I have a record here from a resident from Kako in Upper Mazaruni requesting, from an Hon. Member of the Opposition, a radio set in modern times. I want to assure you, Mr. Speaker, that this Government will deliver information technology to all Amerindian villages. It would not only be to Kako but to the people of Upper Mazaruni, Amerindians at large and to the other groups that were not connected. This would be to improve communication.

Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) Project – when the People’s Progressive Party/Civic demitted Office in 2015, it had planned interventions to issue new certificates of land titles to Amerindians villages. The APNU/AFC, upon assuming Office, dismissed the performance of the PPP/C Government.

From 2016 to the time they lost Office, they reluctantly issued only two certificates. This is not a myth. This was admitted by the then Minister of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs, Mr. Sydney Allicock, when he said that his Coalition Government did not issue any certificates to Amerindians villages. That is why he is not here in this House.

Mr. Speaker, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, when it resumed Office, worked tirelessly to re-energise the Amerindian Land Titling Project for Amerindian people. The Amerindian Land Titling Project was dormant for five years. The PPP/C has allocated \$630 million in *Budget 2021* to expedite the granting of Amerindian land titles. The villages are waiting with confidence for their titles to be granted.

Budget 2021 is a fulfilment of the PPP/C’s manifesto and the Government will deliver its commitment to the people of Guyana. They know that we can. We are their Government. Amerindian development is on the Government’s agenda. The Government of the day will improve roads from farm-to-market in all regions, more specifically from Kako to Kamarang to Waramadong in Upper Mazaruni. Already, Amerindian villages in Region 7 have benefitted from a whopping sum of over \$200 million in village grant that were distributed last month.

The People’s Progressive Party/Civic has increased the Presidential Grant Initiative that we started. There was no new initiative that the APNU/AFC left. We will continue to finance our initiative.

The health sector – health will be improved in all regions, not only in Amerindian communities. [**An. Hon. Member (Opposition):** What about the drug shortage?] I am hearing about drug shortage. We need to understand that we are addressing the shortage that you left for us to address. As I mentioned earlier, this Budget does not only cater for one sector.

Agriculture – agriculture in hinterland villages was condemned by the previous Government. This Government will be the peoples’ government and we will remain here as long as we deliver our commitment to the people of Guyana.

The People’s Progressive Party/Civic has charted a course, as outlined in our manifesto and as elaborated by His Excellency. One thing is sure. If we have all hands embracing the spirit of oneness, as elaborated by His Excellency – ‘One Guyana’....I call on the other side of the House to join us in supporting this Budget into an era of economic dynamism

and secure lasting and resilient prosperity for all Guyanese for generations to come.

The civil society is pleased with the measures set out by this Government which are largely considered and reflected in the national Budget for 2021. To this end, the Budget is indeed a people-focused budget, which is healthy to facilitate growth based and inclusive growth the of economy in terms of job creation and new social programmes.

It gives me pleasure to commend and support this \$383.1 billion *Budget 2021* which was presented in this House. I ask Hon. Members on the other side to join with us and to work with us and not to divide. This is the people’s Parliament and not at the Stabroek square. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, I think this is a good time to take the suspension. Could we please return at 5.00 p.m., my time? That clock is just about two minutes fast. We have the Flag Raising Ceremony this evening and so we want to conclude by 7.30 p.m. Thank you.

Sitting suspended at 4.11 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 5.03 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. Please be seated. It is an honour for me to call on the Hon. Chief Whip for the Opposition, the Hon. Member, Mr. Christopher Jones, to make his contribution.

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. Permit me, like my Colleague earlier, to extend condolences to the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, Mdm. Gail Teixeira, on the passing of her father. We on this side of the House hope that herself and family take comfort in the words of Psalm 30:5 which state:

“Weeping may endure but a night but joy cometh in the morning”.

May his soul rest in peace.

I certainly want to take the opportunity, as well, to extend our appreciation to the staffers of the Ministry of Finance, particularly those from the Budget Agency. We know that, in the preparation of these budgets, they would have been long nights and even weekends away from their family members. For that, we want to register our appreciation to them.

The content herein, however, comes from the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, who, I must say, has missed the mark. If I am to use the words of former President of the United States of America (USA), Donald J. Trump, the Hon. Minister has missed the mark bigly.

On Friday, 12th February, like scenes from a scary movie, the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance presented a document to this House under the theme, *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. I must submit that this document, to capture accurately the intended purpose and trajectory it aims to take the country on, should be renamed and must be renamed ‘a path to tragedy, economic deprivation, economic degradation and failure’. This would be most fitting given the pillars on which this travesty was built. My Colleague before spoke about the need for consultation. Of course, she alluded to the Constitution of Guyana, a living document in which is enshrined, in article 13, the rights and roles citizens have in the decision-making processes of the State.

When one looks at budget presentations from several Ministers of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic years gone by, during the debate, Members of the Opposition, whether it be the Working People’s Alliance (WPA), the People’s National Congress (PNC), the Alliance For Change (AFC) and the list goes on, in their presentations made reference to the non-consultation on the part of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic.

I want to place on record, here and now, that the APNU/AFC Government, in putting together its first budget in 2015, extended an invitation to the People’s Progressive Party/Civic for consultation, which they attended. Every year after that in which an invitation was extended to them, they did not turn up. In preparation for these budgets, the Opposition was not consulted and we are the principal stakeholders. If one is to use those numbers from the Elections Commission (GECOM) that were used to install the regime, one would see that it speaks to the APNU/AFC’s 49% of the electorate. Therefore, if the PPP/C is serious about ‘One Guyana’ and oneness and the ministry of happiness, one would have expected them to have held consultation with us.

After listening to a five-hour presentation of the national Budget, one gets the impression that Guyana is immune to the Coronavirus disease. Here again, in 2021, like *Budget 2020*, it does not speak of a COVID-19 recovery plan for those small and large-scale businesses that have suffered tremendously,

due to the debilitating effects of the pandemic. Some of those businesses were forced to close permanently. It is no secret that hotels and other entities in the tourism industries have seen major decline in business, resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs.

5.08 p.m.

More than 1,500 public servants were terminated by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic during the pandemic. It would be remiss of me not to mention the pain and agony the Guyanese people have been subjected to over the past seven months of this installed regime’s momentary term in Office. We have seen this regime’s blatant apathy for human life and wellbeing, with the magnitude of dismissals in the public sector, the politicisation of the Disciplined Services, mismanagement of public funds and gross ineptitude to adequately put systems in place to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. How could I forget the PPP/C’s blatant disregard for the rule of law? It certainly would be remiss of me if I did not mention the countless broken promises made to the Guyanese people who were deceived by a fiction presented to them in a useless document – the PPP/C’s manifesto – during the 2020 elections campaign. One could have read pages 1, 2 and 3 on the lamp poles on Sheriff Street.

Budget 2021 proposes to be based on a few objectives, which speak to a proposed path in which the country is expected, supposedly, to thrive. But what the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibly for Finance and this regime fail to understand is that their inability to address the challenges and economic hardship posed by the pandemic has left large numbers of Guyanese in a state of bother. Guyana has been placed on Level 4 of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC’s) index for COVID-19. Yet, the regime is bent on relaxing guidelines only to satisfy its cabal in the private sector, while bullying public servants to work in horrid conditions that put them and their loved ones at high risk of contracting the virus. It is a clear indication that the regime continues to believe, as it did during the early phase of the pandemic, that COVID-19 is a hoax. Its failure to adequately put systems in place and to bring to this honorable House a COVID-19 recovery plan are testimony to its incompetence and lack of leadership.

In my 2020 budget presentation, I emphasised that what was frightening to every Guyanese was the fact that *Budget 2020* was devoid of a COVID-19 recovery plan. It is even more alarming that, almost a year into the pandemic, this regime

has presented *Budget 2021* in this House, similar in scope and also devoid of a COVID-19 recovery plan.

The sum of \$7 billion was appropriated for disbursement to households in all regions of this country as part of the COVID-19 relief cash grant for the year 2020. However, this project has been a total disgrace and an abuse of taxpayers’ dollars, since many households in communities hard hit by the pandemic have not benefitted due to corruption, discrimination and a lack of empathy. In many instances, the tenants were overlooked, simply because of their alleged alignment with the Coalition, denying them the opportunity to benefit from the project, as if the project was only designed and intended to benefit supporters and friends of this corrupt regime; perhaps, it is exactly the intent.

From all appearances, *Budget 2021* does not cater for a stimulus package for small and large-scale businesses. There are no stimulus packages for those in the hotel and hospitality industries. There is no allocation which speaks to a second tranche disbursement of the COVID-19 cash relief. There are no funds that speak to those thousands of Guyanese across this country who are currently holding a pink slip and awaiting the second tranche of the disbursement. This Budget does not speak to that.

Let us talk about equity. It was under the APNU/AFC Government that this country saw major transformational development, infrastructural upgrades and new and transformative projects across this country in every region. Cde. Speaker, I invite you to go to Region 1, Barima-Waini. Of course, Sir, you are no stranger to the hustings of this country, being with The United Force (TUF). If you go there now, the instant you deplane, you would walk on paved roads built by the APNU/AFC Government. Those roads will take you all the way to the Kumaka Market waterfront. Under the PPP/C, the Kumaka Market was slipping into the river and for 23 years they did absolutely nothing. It was the Coalition Government that put the revetment in place and the vendors who ply their trade there now have access to a spanking new vendor’s arcade, built by the Coalition Government.

The next time you are there, Cde. Speaker, go to Hosororo Hill, where you will see a green space that was created for rest and leisure. Perhaps, you can turn on your radio, like many of the riverine communities, such as Hobodia, Hotoquai, Sacred Heart and Saint Monica and the island, are now able to do, and get access to *Radio Mabaruma 95.1 FM*. Communication and access to information was readily available under the APNU/AFC Government. Go to the

Matakai sub-region in Port Kaituma; the same could be said there. There is road constructed by the APNU/AFC Government – something the People’s Progressive Party/Civic did not do in 23 years in Office.

Let us go to Lethem. Roads have been constructed and streetlights have been erected, illuminating that bordering town with Brazil. I am happy that the Hon. Minister in the Ministry of Housing and Water is present in the House so that I could refresh the Hon. Member’s memory that there are 22 Indigenous communities in the Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo Region that now have access to potable water for the first time in Guyana’s history. This was in keeping with the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) under which Guyana pledged to reduce the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water.

Cde. Speaker, I invite you to go to the Potaro-Siparuni Region, Region 8, particularly Mahdia. Over 23 years under the PPP/C, we saw gold, diamond and other minerals being extracted from the region, but no development going back to that region. It was under the APNU/AFC Government that the entire road network in Mahdia was constructed. These are some of the hallmarks of the Coalition and there are many more, which I am certain my Colleague, Hon. David Patterson, will deal with.

Bartica, Lethem, Mabaruma and Mahdia were all bestowed with township status, after two successful Local Government Elections were held under the APNU/AFC Government, which the autocratic People’s Progressive Party/Civic never attempted to hold.

If one is to look at the voting patterns of those regions I mentioned, history would tell that Regions 1, 8 and 9 have always voted for the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. Notwithstanding that– that is why we speak of equity– it was under the APNU/AFC Government that those regions, for the first time, saw real transformational development. Equity. Fairness.

This nation is still coming to grips with a lack of leadership shown and the vindictiveness post 2nd August, 2020 where, to date, over 1,500 public servants have been terminated from their jobs without any justifiable reasons. These are mothers, fathers, husbands and wives, most of whom are the breadwinners of their respective homes. These people do not know how they are going to pay their rent at the end of this month, February. They do not know how they are going to pay their mortgage, how the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) will be paid and how the Guyana

Telephone and Telegraph Company (GTT) will be paid. The internet, which is critical now for their children to access education, they do not know how they are going to pay for that. There are school fees for the respective schools that the children are from. These public servants, who have been terminated by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, do not know how they are going to put food on the table tomorrow. There are car loans, University of Guyana (UG) fees, Courts Guyana Incorporated, Lucky Dollar and Singers Guyana Incorporated bills and the list goes on. None of these former public servants have any idea how they are going to pay these bills.

Meanwhile, at the end of this month, when those public servants have no idea how they are going to pay those utilities, PPP/C Members who sit in this House, who are also Ministers of the Government, will take home \$1.2 million, paid for by the remaining public servants and the taxpayers of this country. Apart from the \$1.2 million, they will have their light bills paid by the public servants and the taxpayers of this country. They will have their phone bills paid by the public servants and the taxpayers of this country. They will have both cellular and internet services paid for by the public servants and the taxpayers of this country. They will have security that will be paid for by the public servants and the taxpayers of this country. They will have a chauffeur paid for by the public servants and the taxpayers of this country. They will have access to a State vehicle paid for by the public servants and the taxpayers of this country and, of course, unlimited duty free afforded to them by the public servants and taxpayers of this country.

While the People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s Members of Parliament and Ministers of the Government enjoy the ‘big life’ or the ‘high life’, when one looks at this document, it does not articulate anything for the average public servant of this country in the coming months.

Budget 2021 is nothing but a fallacy to public servants, since the Budget presented by the Hon. Minister, inclusive of its measures, does not take into account the direct needs of public servants nor does it seek to satisfy the promises made only to score cheap political points. I can only describe the acts of this uncaring regime as unconscionable, cruel and unsympathetic. For the livelihoods of the hardworking public servants across this country, if we are to mirror this with the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), we see *Budget 2021* has in excess of \$2 billion for this failing industry that is supposed to be the mainstream of Guyana’s economy, but instead GuySuCo is the bloodsucker on the backs of the

taxpayers of this country. That is the reality. It was the Minister of Agriculture who posited, on the National Communications Network’s (NCN) *Budget in Focus* that “GuySuCo is not profitable” and all he wants is for GuySuCo to break even.

5.23 p.m.

Cde. Speaker, these are the words of the Hon. Minister. Upon investing billions upon billions of taxpayers’ dollars into this industry, moneys which could only be described as pouring moneys into a catastrophic abyss, Guyanese cannot and will not be satisfied with the notion that GuySuCo simply breaks even. This industry is dead and it should be laid to rest.

Fairness. Lest we forget, let me remind the Members of this honourable House that it was A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government that catapulted the minimum wage for public servants from \$39,500, pre-May 2015, to \$70,000 2019. During the Budget presentation, the Hon. Member failed to announce any increase in wages and salaries for public servants. Upon public pressure, the nation was then told that a sum of \$10 billion was allocated in the Budget for the revision of wages and salaries for public servants. Cde. Speaker, as I mentioned before, you have been in the hustings of this country for a number of years. If I could use the creole term, you have been in the hustings for *donkey years*, and you know the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. In their manifesto, which could only be located on Sheriff Street’s lamp poles, they posted page four on lamp pole four that public servants would receive 50% increase in wages and salaries. Sir, in this Budget – and you know the political party I speak of – would they not have plastered an increase, similarly like they did on the lamp poles on Sheriff Street that public servants would receive 50% increase?

If I am to juxtapose what played out in budget presentation 2020 when questions were asked about whether public servants would have benefitted from salary increases, we were told then, too, yes, public servants would receive increases in salaries, only to learn, a few days before the conclusion of the year, that they would receive a \$25,000 one-off grant. While, on the other hand, the sugar industry benefitted twice from *Budget 2020* and now *Budget 2021*. Where is the equity?

Before my time exhausts itself, I would like to make reference to the paragraph 1.6, on page two of the Budget speech, in which the Hon. Member chronicled phases, as he referred to it. A particular phase that he referenced is from 1992 to 2015 and he stated:

“An era of economic restoration and reconstruction...”

If the Hon. Minister is chronicling events from 1992-2015, one would have expected the Hon. Member to take the opportunity to inform *all and sundry* of some of the atrocities that occurred during that period under their Administrations.

I would like to posit 1997 when former President, Ms. Janet Jagan, threw the court writ over her shoulder. The then Elections Commission Chairman, Mr. Doodnauth Singh, responded to her by saying that was good. For the rest of us in Guyana, we saw the beginning of the decay of democracy and the rule of law in this country. As an example, the said GECOM Chairman, Mr. Doodnauth Singh, went on to become the Attorney General of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic.

Of course, the Hon. Member did not chronicle the decade of death in this country under their Administrations. I make reference to when the streets in our villages and towns were filled with the stench of lifeless bodies. Then, a sitting Minister of Government, Mr. Ronald Gajraj, the former Minister of Home Affairs, was embroiled in having operated a phantom death squad in Guyana, which was responsible for the deaths of over 400 persons.. The Hon. Member did not chronicle the massacres that took place in this country under their watch during that period, 1992-2015. There were the Bartica massacre, Lusignan massacre, Lindo Creek massacre and the Agricola massacre. A then sitting Minister of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, Mr. Satyadeow Sawh’s, home was invaded, and he along with his siblings were slaughtered. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic did not even commission a Commission of Inquiry (COI) for its own sitting Minister who was slaughtered.

During that period, for the first time in Guyana’s history, a United States diplomat was kidnapped under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s watch. Sitting Ministers of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic had their visas revoked. Just to name a few, there were Mr. Ronald Gajraj, Mr. Clement Rohee and Dr. Leslie Ramsammy. During the period, 1992-2015, Guyana...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, did you say Dr. Leslie Ramsammy?

Mr. Jones: Yes. I said Dr. Leslie Ramsammy.

Mr. Speaker: I thought he was a citizen of the United States of America.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker, I am just making a point. During the period when the sitting Ministers of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic had their visas revoked, Under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Administration, the United States of America dubbed Guyana a narco-state. Even in an *Al Jazeera* news report, a reporter stated that the word on the street in Guyana was that the drug exporters exported drugs in everything, except the National Anthem. This was under the PPP/C.

When one wants to chronicle the history of this country, he must not be selective. In that period, a sitting Minister of Health, Dr. Leslie Ramsammy, used the Ministry of Health’s letterhead to purchase a sophisticated spy laptop. When a vehicle was intercepted by the Guyana Police Force (GPF) at Sparendaaam, they found the said laptop in the possession of a known individual. All of this obtained under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic.

We would like to juxtapose then to now. Of course, earlier my Colleague, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, sought to speak about the *elephant in the room*, about which no one wants to speak, but it is the reality. What she mentioned is factual. I will take the House back to the same 1992-2015 period, when no less a person than the Cabinet Secretary, Dr. Roger Luncheon, on being crossed examined as to why no African Guyanese were part of the foreign service, he said that they were not qualified. All of this obtained during that period. If one is to juxtapose the 23 years of the PPP/C to what has obtained in the past eight months, one would see the same pattern emerging once again. Within a few months of the PPP/C being in Office, we saw 1.5 tonnes of cocaine, which emanated from Guyana, intercepted. Then, in Belgium 11.5 tonnes of cocaine, which emanated from Guyana, were intercepted. It is like we said...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Chief Whip, I have to intercept you now to ask that you beg for an extension.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I respectfully beg that the Hon. Chief Whip be given five more minutes to complete his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Chief Whip, you may continue.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. Throughout the streets across this country, it is known that APNU/AFC said to our people *let the blow, blow blow*, but clearly, within a few

months of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic being in Office, it is let the cocaine flow and that has returned to this country.

Like the many crimes and murders, which are still unsolved, that took place during the period 1992-2015, which the Hon. Minister quoted, reference could be made here, today, to the three young lads from the West Coast Berbice – the Henry boys and Naresh Singh – for whom, to date, the families cannot get closure. These same stories occurred before and it is happening again.

As my Colleagues and I mentioned before, *Budget 2021* is lacking in equitable distribution across this country. It has no vision or plan. The Budget seems to be so disconnected between what is said here and what the intended objective is to achieve.

We cannot support this Budget. When we speak about democracy and, of course, ensuring that Section 13 of the Constitution, which is enshrined in that living document, becomes a reality... The Hon. Members who are heckling are doing exactly what they did during 1992-2015 in Parliament. They said to the Opposition that the Opposition could have their say, but they will have their way. The same thing has returned to this country.

As I said from the inception, if one is to use the numbers from the Elections Commission, which were used to install the Administration, it speaks to 49% - 51%. Altogether in this House, we represent this nation. If truly the People’s Progressive Party/Civic is serious about making real ‘One Guyana’ they would come to the realisation that, to move the country forward, the principal stakeholders who are sitting in this House must have a say in the decision-making processes of this country.

I thank you. [Applause]

Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister [Mr. McCoy]: Mr. Speaker, Colleagues on the Government side and those of the Opposition, from my own intelligence gathering, I am aware that the APNU/AFC intended to use two things to target me this afternoon –heckle me or walk out.

[Members of the Opposition withdrew from the Chamber.]

I have it written before they exited.

5.38 p.m.

My intelligence gathering must be commended. I am happy, this afternoon, that it is really a demonstration from the Opposition side that the power houses on this side will be the power houses. They will have to run continually for the remaining of this debate.

I listened all day to what the Hon. Members on that side said during this Budget debate. Guess which words came to mind? I will use the words of Lord Intruder of Trinidad and Tobago. In 1953, when he said, in that beautiful calypsonian song:

“Back to back, belly to belly, I don’t give a damn, I done dead already.”

The Opposition *Jumbie Jamboree* is what we heard from the Opposition side all morning. They came here, today, pretending to you and all the people of this country that they mean well and that they mean business. It is such a bankrupt and irrelevant Opposition that is trying to foist on the people of Guyana some goodness about themselves. We must tear down all of the masks behind these people called the Opposition. Mr. Speaker, we must take off the masks.

I heard this afternoon... well, maybe, I should start with what I heard this morning about the pink slip. I do not know if it was the showing of the Hon. Member’s slip or if he meant the pink slip that we are having the households sign for the COVID-19 cash grant relief. The pink slip, which is being used for the COVID-19 cash grant relief, is a slip that we are proud to be associated with in the People Progressive Party/Civic. This is because it represents the second phase of a programme that seeks to bring relief to the simple man and woman and to every household in this country. We intend to honour the pink slip just like we had done in the first phase. Every Guyanese, whether you go to Region 1 or wherever you go, is happy. They know that it is the best the Government can do given the circumstances and what we have as our financial resources available to us. You should hear, right across Guyana, the expressions of happiness.

We will continue to make our people happy right across this country during our first term, second term, third term, fourth term and fifth term in Government, because it represents who we are as a party and who we are as a Government. We are a Government that is always concerned about the welfare of the people. They know that the lies or the misrepresentations will not pass anyone of us in this House.

When the Hon. Member, Mr. Christopher Jones, stood, just now, to say that Ministers take home \$1.2 million per month is, absolutely, untrue. There is no Minister of this

Government, with the exception of the Attorney General (AG) and the Prime Minister, that takes home \$1.2 million; none. We are not the Government of the that carried up their salaries when they got into Government. We have not taken a single increase in salaries as a Government. They cannot compare us with them. Therefore, we need to set the record straight on that matter.

In our manifesto, and I have the electronic version on my phone, we spoke to several promises. One of which was salary increases for public servants. We never attached a percentage to those increases. So, when the Hon. Member, Mr. Christopher Jones, stood there this afternoon and suggested and misrepresented, rather, to this nation that the PPP/C’s manifesto promised 50% increase in salary, again, it is another lie. As I go along this afternoon, you will hear me speak to what our plans are in this Government and in *Budget 2021*, and what it means for the people of this country.

My contribution here this afternoon... Of course, I cannot continue without thanking the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, the Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, for his Budget presentation and for taking us through a programme for development and a programme of action that will see people’s lives, all across this country, get better in 2021. It is a transformative Budget. His Excellency in his inaugural message to us and the nation said that the Budget was framed to reflect the unprecedented juncture in our nation’s history on which we stand.

“We stand together on the cusp of what can be a new economic era of prosperity in which all will share now, and from which future generations will benefit.”

This note of caution was struck by President Ali, as he warned that we must not fool ourselves that this new economic era will happen without our collective efforts. His Excellency also admonished the honourable House to recognise and embrace the oldest realisation that:

“There has never been a greater moment when we, as Guyanese, need to stand as one to secure the benefits of our natural resources and to protect our sovereignty – the right to make decisions in our national interest – and our territorial integrity.”

Sadly, again, I must lament that the Hon. Members of the National Assembly representing the governing party, which is the PPP/C, were the only ones in this hallowed Chamber to stand shoulder to shoulder with the President as he so eloquently articulated the transformational agenda for our

first term in Office. We were the only ones here because those elected to attend the people’s business for development in sync with the Government – those in the Opposition benches – ate and then went on the road. They were outside doing, perhaps, what they are best known to do: protesting; heckling; squabbling; and, of course, trying to obfuscate and derelict their sacred duty of service to the people of Guyana.

Regardless of our moment in history, regardless of the historic nature of the occasion and regardless the expectations of the working-class people of this country, the Opposition seems hellbent in its true characteristic form on hell-raising just for the sake of it in, yet another spurious attempt to subvert democracy without the appetite for their lazy vacuous retort to racism and race baiting. Nothing upsets me the most than this kind of behaviour from the Opposition.

The only thing that could be analysed by the Opposition... Any given subject, from rain to romance, has ethnicity and it has race. It has nothing of substance, nothing that contributes to intellectual stability and nothing that will be able to say that it could be another shade or some other variable of a particular subject. It is totally and absolutely upsetting. We in this country must let this Opposition know that we will take away the last chord that they have, which is the chord of racism, because the people of this country want us as one and want us to unite now. They must not get away with it; absolutely not. The only thing that they could come here with... everything is through the eyes of racism, race and ethnicity. We heard the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir this morning. They are old brazen political skulduggery. The anti-democratic techniques, which raised their ugly heads last March to August in this country, must be made to crawl back under the rocks and allow this country to finally rise above the petty, visionless... and, finally, fulfil her true destiny.

This *Budget 2021* provides *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. And, it will do just that. This Budget will lay new foundations of resilience in our neighbourhoods and communities across this country, block by block and door to door, empowering and transforming the lives of Guyanese from Buxton to Berbice, from Liliendaal to Linden and from Lusignan to Kato, to exude the Opposition’s divisive tactics to confront their lazy dereliction and to resist all attempts of their unpatriotic derailment of our decade old march to fulfil our destiny.

Our Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance has laid the largest, boldest and

most transformative Budget to date. It is a whopping \$383.1 billion fully financed without any new taxes. Dr. Ashni Singh so, aptly, reminded this honourable House that the PPP/C Government has chartered a course outlined in our manifesto and elaborated by His Excellency the President that, once fulfilled, will see us seizing those opportunities that will guide us to a destiny which our fore parents dreamt of for generations. He hastened to caution, however, that the task would not be easy, neither is it impossible.

One thing is for sure... and seek haplessly to derail the unprecedented transformation coming to this country and to the homes and lives of all Guyanese. Let it be clear that the shenanigans and mechanism of the now irrelevant APNU/AFC will never again be allowed to stymie the progress of national unity and nation building. It will not jeopardise the coming prosperity of Guyanese and to wreck havoc on its own nation in its cowardly seditious attempt to subvert our democracy and keep its big lies alive in its selfish egotistical quest to try to resuscitate its political monsters of the dark days of yesteryear.

5.53 p.m.

The APNU/AFC must understand that it is now a relic, that it is an ideology of division and separation, and is no longer a viable option of profitable pursuit. It must smell its own obnoxious truculence and quickly come to grips with the reality that this is a new Guyana beckoning. This generation would not tolerate this type of behaviour.

As the Minister with responsibility for public information and communication, I must say that, in this beautiful country of ours, through the astute leadership of the Prime Minister and team and me, we have already been at the wheel for the past six months, with much progress, to clean up the melancholic mess of the last five years of the APNU/AFC. We have already, successfully, installed new and more competent boards at State agencies, which includes at the Guyana National Broadcasting Agency (GNBA), at the Guyana National Printers Ltd (GNPL) and at the National Communications Network (NCN). We have, successfully, installed management teams to take us forward and to make advancements in these entities. We have commenced building robust systems, both locally and internationally, to coordinate the information and communication two-way flow between the Government and the citizen to ensure that the people are aware of Governments’ policies, programmes, projects and how they could play a role and benefit.

We have been hard at work directing public concerns, appropriately, to the Government with regard to policy implementation while, at the same time, channelling treats designed to upset the tranquillity, stability and security of the State.

We have been working to improve the state of affairs across the media spectrum with regard to the adherence to universal principles of ethics and responsibility, the quality and accuracy of information and the swift evolution to more cutting-edge practices and platforms. We have also considered a robust integrated network for competencies by generating programmes and strategies to manage and build the image of the Government and the country. A revamping of the State media apparatus, which is in progress and a Government information department, along with other units, would be able to achieve this.

Through the regional and international media network, we are establishing partnerships that would allow for the effective marketing of Guyana and its products, while showcasing the vast opportunities in the new economic frontiers expected to build our new multidimensional economy. The Public Affairs Secretariat has already designed new integrated communication programmes, as well as initiatives to counteract the harmful race bating tactics of the Opposition with a view of fostering national unity in our diversity.

Following this seditious machination of the APNU/AFC Coalition to prevent the March, 2020 democratic return of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government, over the past six months, since the will of the people prevailed, we have been, painstakingly, repairing the broken stakeholders’ relation among faith-based organisations and civil society with a view to quickly rekindling the participatory approach to governance, which is a characteristic of previous PPP/C Administrations. Quite unlike the aloof, hierarchical and classist APNU/AFC, the Office of the Prime Minister and my secretariat have been out and about among the people with the rest of the Government. His Excellent the President, Dr. Irfaan Ali, has returned the Coalitions’ aloofness and arrogance on its head.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you would need an extension to conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask for a five-minute extension for my Colleague to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister, you may continue towards your conclusion.

Mr. McCoy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I may continue with stating that we have acquired state of the art virtual property, including equipment and domains and content sharing platforms to reach Guyanese audiences wherever in the world they might be because, this year, the transformation of our beloved country begins, and all progressive Guyanese must be involved. We all must be consumed.

Because of time, I would not be able to go as deep as I would like into many of the things that we have been doing in this Government and in the area for which I am responsible. I also want to say that the State media will be working very hard to make sure that we have a State media that could provide the needs to our citizens in terms of providing information and communicating to our populace in general.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, let me just correct myself. You started at 5.37 p.m. Your 30 minutes would take you to 6.07 p.m. You do have some time.

Mr. McCoy: Thank you. I am happy to know. Our strategy approaches and our approaches will advance the evidence of Government policies, build relationships with our key target groups and stakeholders, engage with other civil society organisations and communicate Governments’ work using all the platforms.

In this regard, the national development projects and programmes, national events, the work of civil society, local Government, security, education, culture, business, youth, innovations, sports, community transformation, national unity and patriotism, among a myriad of other areas, would now form part of the tapestry of our work for nation building. The Public Affairs Secretariat would leave no stone unturned in helping to bolster the image of our country on the international stage in underground girding of the development agenda of the Government and enabling free and open discourse with the people, while championing national and community achievements to inspire and lend impetus to the transformative momentum of the PPP/C Government. Our support and services would span the entire Government and spectrum and would be available for access to all.

The *Budget 2021* offers a transformative path for Guyana and all its citizens. Like the rest of the country that have been inspired and energised by the positive prospects of significant renewal, growth and transformation in *Budget 2021*,

Members of the Opposition in this honourable House could summer salt from their folly and join the rest of us on this path. They could still choose at this very moment or, perhaps, at the end of this debate, to turn about from their reckless abandonment of this country and support our efforts to unite this nation in common purpose, which is that of building *A path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. I would not be holding my breath to see that happen. Rather, I would take comfort in the groundswell of support coming in from all the corners of this country as the Guyanese people continue to, overwhelmingly, support progress and a Government that truly cares about their welfare.

Mr. Speaker, we had so much said about the Budget, not only by us on this side but by those on the other side as well, which, of course, is nothing much to go by if you listen to them all over there. The citizens of this country have all been talking about *Budget 2021* and what it means for them. Simple ordinary man and woman, they all have been talking about the *Budget 2021* and about what it means. Certainly, it means a lot to their lives, their families and is a lot and is enough to take them a step forward into their own development. This is just a sample. Mr. Speaker, if you look across the media, social media in particular, you would see the views reflected by the dozens and by the hundreds, perhaps. I want to say that this is by our own design. We designed this Budget and we designed a programme for the people. We designed it for people and, therefore, we expect them to understand and to be comforted and to be supportive of this programme. It is not a Budget that came to be in a way and fashion that the Opposition would like to suggest that nobody had an input, except the few of us here. Many of these individuals I just highlighted here and others, such as stakeholders and civil society, had an opportunity to make an input into *Budget 2021*. When the praises on the Budget... I saw on the social media, just a short while ago, a programme by one of these non-governmental organization (NGOs), AmCham Guyana or one of these organisations, talking about *Budget 2021*. I am sure that they would be identifying with all the good things and the measures in this Budget to be able to tell us that we have made a good attempt to bring a programme for 2021 that would improve their lives, improve business and make people happier.

Mr. Speaker, if you really examine the Opposition and all that they have been saying, and given the fact that have almost been, forcefully, removed from Government, their behaviour is common of the characteristics of bitter people. What are those characteristics? Generally, the characteristics would be reflective of their desire to make someone else suffer. They

are full of vindictiveness, they weigh in self-pity, they are looking for a fight, they have a sociopathic cry and they are drowning in animosity and resentment. Those characteristics, do they not aptly fit those on that side? Aptly so.

We have to understand that this country has had too much of the bitterness, too much of this type of behaviour, too much of the venom...

Deputy Speaker [Mr. Shuman]: Mr. Speaker, I stand on a Point of Order. Standing Order No. 46 (6), where the Hon. Member is impugning... my character. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, continue. Just be careful with respect to the Hon. Members on that side. If you are going to say all, I think the Deputy Speaker is making an observation.

Mr. McCoy: Thank you. Mr. Speaker. Mr. Shuman, the Hon. Member, is exempted from that. He is not part of that group. He has never been one of those persons I described just now.

6.08 p.m.

We have a good opportunity to bring this country together and to stop seeing it through the eyes of race. As we have seen, so far, from the Opposition – APNU/AFC – every comment has to do with race and ethnicity. Do you know what is really worrying as well? It is that, when they were in Government, they did nothing for some of the people. The certain set of people in this country who they tried to make claims as though they had transport for, they did nothing for them. It was all about a clique, a small group who took Government’s money and bought bracelets, brooches, beds and all the other things we have heard about. My Hon. Colleague, Mr. Joseph Hamilton, spoke about it this morning. They went on a journey to grab and to hustle. That is why they are out of Government and they do not even recognise it. The hustle is over.

It is for us, in this House, to make Guyana work for all. I say to you that we, on this side, are committed to making Guyana work for all of us by ensuring that the goods, services, the resources allocated in *Budget 2021* and those that will come in the future, are for every single Guyanese boy, woman, child and family.

With those few words, I would like to give my full support to *Budget 2021* and to say that we are on a good journey to prosperity. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. The Hon. Member and Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture, Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, please make your contribution.

Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture [Mr. Ramkissoon]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Permit me to join with those who expressed congratulations to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, and his team of dedicated staff members for, once again, producing the *Estimates of the Public Sector, Current and Capital Revenue and Expenditure for the Year 2021*, under the theme: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience* and for continuing to make all of us, as Guyanese, proud.

This Budget is presented to Guyana a mere six months since the People’s Progressive Party/Civic was declared the winner of the 2nd March, 2020 General and Regional Elections and Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali was sworn in as the ninth Executive President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

This mandate that was given by the people and the citizens of Guyana is one to restore constitutionality, to restore law and order, economic stability and sustained economic growth, and to return our dear land Guyana to her position of pride, respect and admiration by her citizens, locally and in the diaspora, as well as her friends and allies across the world. When the debate began this morning, the Hon. Member on the opposite side of this House began by telling us two things: one, she made mention of parliamentary democracy; and two, she resorted to tell this honourable House that she is a student of History. There is a saying:

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

More importantly, we must consider that those that failed to learn from history are doomed to repeat it. Lessons from the past provide valuable insights for the present and understandings for the future. Therefore, Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members of this House, it is important to look back in order for us to shape our future. In so reflecting, it is sad that the very Hon. Member is missing from this House... so that we could have given her some History lessons. Let us go to their history.

It is an undeniable historical fact that the People’s National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) – perhaps it has a deed poll and so it is now the APNU/AFC – rigged the elections in this country in 1968, 1973, 1980 and 1985. They also rigged the constitutional referendum of 1978. In 1992, 1997 and 2001,

when they lost the elections, the PNC/R organised protests that turned violent. Citizens of this country were beaten, robbed and harassed in the streets of the nation’s capital. The then Leader of the Opposition coined the slogan: *slow fire, more fire*. That is the history. That is why the Hon. Member had to go away this afternoon because history lessons were about to be taught to them.

This legacy and value system, within that political organisation, does not permit it to operate within democratic norms. As a matter of fact, the very Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA) of that Political Party is a result of the shenanigans we saw in our last General and Regional Elections. That political party is only about party paramountcy, totalitarian Government and lack of adherence to democratic norms. Of course, when I speak of the Hon. Members on the opposite side of this House, I am excluding the Hon. Member, Mr. Shuman, from this. Those Hon. Members ought to remember that the political party called the PNC/R was the party and the Government responsible for banning basic food items in this country and criminalising the possession of items such as flour. How could a Government, which decides what the people consume, allow the people to make a democratic choice of electing a Government?

The Government, under the People’s National Congress/Reform, nationalised and confiscated private property, resulting in its control over the economy. There was hardly any distinction between the People’s National Congress/Reform and the State and *vice versa*. Guyanese must never forget that the PNC/R’s flag was flown over the Court of Appeal. Today, these Hon. Members, on the opposite side of this House, who belong to the APNU/AFC, formerly the PNC/R, cannot come to this honourable House to preach democracy and parliamentary democracy to us. Members of that political grouping have no moral authority to speak about democracy. Twenty-eight ears of PNC/R dictatorship and rigged elections destroyed Guyana and reduced it to an officially described highly indebted economy.

When the People’s Progressive Party/Civic came into Office in 1992 – we were kids, we know what went on – we had a total national debt of US\$2.1 billion. Ninety-six cents of every dollar we earned went towards the repayment of debt. In 1992, our per capita income was a mere US\$250 and our Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was a mere US\$371 million. By 2015, when the People’s Progressive Party/Civic left Government, our Gross Domestic Product was US\$4,280,000,000 and our per capita income was somewhere around US\$5,580. By 2012, 10 cents of every dollar was used

for the repayment of national debts. That is what the People’s Progressive Party/Civic did for this country. It managed the affairs of this country in a very prudent manner.

The APNU/AFC – I call them the PNC/R – failed to fulfil every manifesto promise it made to the Guyanese people during its 2015/2020 term. The APNU/AFC’s much touted 100-day plan is yet to commence. Instead, we were hit by one scandal after the next. In the United States of America (USA), there was a famous television series called *Scandal* which was created by Shonda Rhimes. The APN/AFC has enough material for the revival of that programme. I will list some of them here: the D’Urban Park scandal, the Sussex Street drug bond scandal, the gold bracelet scandal, the Demerara River Bridge Crossing Feasibility Study scandal, the Larry London’s birth certificate scandal, the barbershop scandals and the COVID-19 hospital scandal. If those were not enough, we had the firing of 7000 sugar workers and 2000 Community Support Officers (CSOs) and the closing of four sugar estates. There was also the illegal appointment of the Chairman of the Elections Commission (GECOM), which was in breach of our Constitution. There was the loss of the no-confidence motion, the refusal to call an election and the illegal occupation of Government for almost 12 months. On top of that, to add insult to injury, we were told that we were listening to a campaign of decency and honesty.

There were blatant attempts to rig the General and Regional Elections and the intimidation and harassment of internationally accredited elections observers. When the APNU/AFC demitted Office on the 2nd August 2020, the Bank of Guyana Annual Report showed that there was \$83.2 billion in overdraft and the Treasury Bills were another \$77 billion. These are just grains of sand on the beach of the corruption under the APNU/AFC.

Our Government has taken a pro-active approach in managing the affairs of Guyana. We have taken very prudent economic measures to avert a financial crisis. From August last year, under the leadership of His Excellency the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, in a mere six months, we have a part of our progress report: We reversed value-added tax (VAT) on electricity and water; there is the provision of \$25,000 COVID-19 relief per household; there is the removal of VAT on building and construction materials and cellular phones; there is the removal of 25% corporate tax on education and healthcare; there is the removal of value-added tax on medical supplies; old age pension was increased to \$25,000, effective from 1st January, 2021; pensioners will benefit from free water services; there was the \$150 million

to support COVID-19 frontline workers; there is the \$15,000 cash grant for school children, effective from 1st January, 2021, which was taken away from the children of this country; uniform Vouchers allowances doubled to \$4000; there is the removal of VAT on hinterland travel and agricultural equipment; there is the reduction in drainage and irrigation (D&I) charges; and we began the process of re-opening the closed sugar estates. We placed \$7 billion dollars already towards this.

Our Hon. Minister in the Ministry of Housing reported, this morning, to the National Assembly that 3600 house lots were distributed from August to December. More importantly, we have taken the Government to the people of this country.

6.23 p.m.

Mr. Speaker permit me to now turn my attention to the agriculture sector. Agriculture is the backbone of our national economy. Successive People’s Progressive Party/Civic-lead Governments have long recognised this and have been placing tremendous emphasis on this sector. The previous Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Noel Holder, once said [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] He was, previously, and said that Government has no responsibility to farmers; that rice is a private business. That was not just a slip of the tongue. That represents the ideology of the People’s National Congress (PNC). An ideology that does not use the agriculture sector as the backbone of the economy, one which provides the basic sustenance for citizens and now materials for industrialisation. Mr. Charles Jordan once said:

“What people don’t understand, they won’t value; what they don’t value, they won’t protect; and what they don’t protect, they will lose.”

Obviously, the Hon. Members on the opposite side of this House, coming from the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change, by virtue of their actions and utterances, refused to acknowledge and value agriculture. In so doing, they not only lost the opportunity to take natural resources and convert them into wealth but also lost the right to govern in the process.

During 1957–1964 period while Dr. Jagan was in Government, he transformed the agriculture sector through sound agricultural practices, programmes and policies. It was during this period that Guyana was referred to as the ‘breadbasket’ of the Caribbean.

The Black Bush Polder agriculture scheme was one of the largest in Guyana, if not in the Caribbean. Sadly, after the People’s National Congress was placed into office post the December, 1964 General Elections, this gain was drastically reversed. Political pressures on food producers led to systematic destruction of Guyana’s food potentials as a result of the anti-agriculture policies. The first anti-agricultural policy was directed towards the rice industry. The Government then, under the PNC, undemocratically imposed the Guyana Rice Marketing Board. The People’s National Congress Government mandated that all the paddy be sold to Government at a low price. It then resold the milled rice at the world market at a higher price, but refused to pass some of the profits directly to the farmers or to invest it in the agricultural sector. Instead, the rice industry was used as a cash cow for the then PNC Government to fulfil its dictatorial agenda.

That PNC Government removed subsidies on agricultural inputs and agricultural equipment and machinery. In the mid-1970s, the PNC launched the ‘Feed, Clothe and House’ the nation (FCH) programme, which was a monumental failure because of its own spiteful programmes against the agriculture and the farmers.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we would need an extension for you to continue.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask for five minutes for my Colleague to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Ramkissoon: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Before the 2015 elections, the APNU/AFC promised the rice farmers \$9,000 for a bag of paddy and promised to transform the agriculture sector with incentives and subsidies. Those promises were never realised. Instead, active steps were taken to punish the rice farmers. There was the closing of the sugar estates, the putting on the breadline of 7,000 sugar workers and, adding insult to injury, the sugar workers had to resort to the courts against the Granger-led Administration for payment of the legal severance. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic, in the 2020 General and Regional Elections, promised the sugar workers and Guyanese that the sugar

estates would be reopened. We are aggressively working toward achieving the same.

The APNU/AFC Government increased land lease rental charges, drainage and irrigation (D&I) charges, introduced value-added-tax (VAT) on agricultural input and removed subsidies on agricultural machinery. Those draconian agricultural policies and measures imposed by the APNU/AFC Government were reversed by our Government in August, 2020 and October, 2020.

When this Twelfth Parliament brought the Bills to this honourable House to reverse all the increased fees and taxes imposed by the APNU/AFC, the Hon. Members from that side of the House, belonging to APNU/AFC, did not attend the session to defend these measures. I know and everyone knows that there is no defence. This reversal would result in almost \$1.3 billion annually going back into the hands of farmers under the Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary/Agricultural Development Authority, as pointed out by our Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance in his Budget speech.

The APNU/AFC launched a Commission of Inquiry (COI) into sugar and that Commission of Inquiry recommended that the estates should not be closed. The Granger Administration went against those very recommendations because it did not suit its agenda. The result, \$70 million of our taxpayers’ dollars went to waste. A \$30-billion syndicated bond was acquired by the APNU/AFC to reorganise the sugar industry, as they said. The sum of \$17 billion was spent and cannot be accounted for by the previous administration. We must never forget that there was an US\$18 million signing bonus that went into thin air; no one knew where it was.

I now turn to Region 3, the Region where I lived all of my life, in this country. That Region saw transformation in the housing sector under successive People’s Progressive Party/Civic Governments. We developed Tuschen’s new housing scheme, Phases One and Two; Zeelugt, Phases One, Two and Three; Zeeburg, De Willem; Uitvlugt Housing Scheme, Leonora Housing Scheme, Cornelia Ida Housing Scheme and La Parfaite Harmonie Housing Scheme. Mr. Speaker ask the APNU/AFC which one they created in Region 3. There is none. The people of this country, those who did not witness the PNC, have seen the APNU/AFC in action and that is why we are here, back in Government, and the APNU/AFC is in the Opposition.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Parliamentary Secretary within the Ministry of Agriculture.

I now call on the Hon. Member, Dr. Ramsaran to make his contribution.

Dr. Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, before I get into the meat of the discussion on the Budget, the key document before us, I would like to address the untruths spoken, I think, by one of the Members (*inaudible*) that the PPP/C never denied or never said there was (*inaudible*) pandemic. We need to get that over very quickly.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may need to speak directly into the microphone.

Dr. Ramsaran: All right, I am sorry.

Mr. Speaker, thanks for the opportunity to have a say on this topic. Before I get into the Budget discussion, I would like, for two or three minutes, to point out some inaccuracies. One of the speakers over there claimed, boldly and inaccurately, and I dare say that I think he did it deliberately, that the PPP/C denied that there was any pandemic. That never happened and it could be check. There was never such a denial. As a matter of fact, our radio station and all the media supporting us took the call to our Members to take the necessary precautions (*inaudible*).

Do you remember the big crowd that gathered to watch the ballot boxes that were being stolen? Do you remember that it was just around the time when the pandemic was unfolding? The Party took measures to get those people off the streets, although thousands of them wanted to come. We did it in a very orderly fashion (*inaudible*) the Ministry of Public Health and World Health Organisation (WHO). I would like to bring to that (*inaudible*) he speaks of lies. I do not like to use that word here but that might be one that we need to address.

Then he spoke about housing, implying that the PPP/C did not have a housing policy. It was under Mr. Greene, who was then the Minister of Housing, that the Ministry of Housing, of the PNC, was scrapped. I would just like to bring these things to the attention of, especially, the younger folks here and the younger persons listening. As a matter of fact, our current President was the Minister of Housing and Water. Those are two of the inaccuracies that I want to get over before I lose my voice cords, because they keep swelling from an infection and too much talking for the past few days.

Guyana is getting ‘back on track’ after a stressful tenure of the APNU/AFC Coalition. I just exposed two of the lies and I would now like to turn to the Budget. The Budget currently engaging our collective here, and delivered in this honourable House by the Minister, is one which was diligently, from all appearances, prepared by his hard-working team.

I would like to join with those who recognise the hard work of that team, most likely working into the night to get all of the details to double and triple check them, and say thank you to that team. This Budget is one of the main tools to return Guyana ‘back on track’ at this time. I would like to thank them for that. The Budget, like all other budgets, is a costed plan. In other words, it is not just bouquets that we want to give to the public or give to a particular audience, but we need to know where we are getting the moneys to provide those things. This Budget is a costed plan and it is coming at a challenging time.

I would like to remind you that this is a time when we have constraints in the economy and on basic life for citizens, brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. As a matter of fact, it has smothered Guyana and not only enveloped it. It is damaging the economy and, of course, it is creating many other issues that we have to confront, even mental health issues. We are not fully aware of it but there might be some mental health issues coming out of this stress. If one notices, for example, there is an increase in domestic violence. My theory is not that domestic violence would go away automatically, it has increased and has become more brutal – spouses killing each other. Usually there were, probably, one or two chops but now there is brutality with multiple stabs wounds and so forth. We are particularly at a difficult time. I am happy that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance has been able to present this plan that is so detailed, that I want to close my eyes and support it.

The Government has already addressed the public health threat that was pre-existing. That is, the budget was presented at a peculiar time – not only was there COVID-19 but the Government, through the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Finance, was already giving a lot of resources on the epidemic of chronic non-communicable diseases. Our population is at a state where it is susceptible to chronic non-communicable diseases like diabetes, hypertension or such things. It takes a big slice out of a Budget. That is what might be referred to as a pre-existing condition, for which Dr. Singh and his team, at the Ministry of Finance, had to find moneys to conduct the battle against.

6.38 p.m.

The two threats were: one, the epidemic that was pre-existent and which Guyanese, unfortunately, were not aware of. We eat as we like and we drink as we like, but the changes are catching on. I want to thank Dr. Singh for being able to generate and find the funds for the COVID-19 response, even after doing such a great job – which was interrupted during the five years when the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change was in power – of *putting a spoke in the wheels* of the growing epidemic of the chronic and communicable diseases. Thank you for that.

The Government of Guyana had taken care to ensure that the moneys or funds and efforts being given for the COVID-19 were not at the expense of the pre-existing epidemic of non-communicable diseases. Again, I must repeat, thank you. That is a great thing. In other words, both of the public health threats are provided for in this Budget. We see more clearly where additional COVID-19 related funds are being given. But, if one looks again, one will see it from a medical point of view or from a health sector point of view, that the chronic diseases are also taken care of. In other words, we would not like to save a granny or a grandfather from COVID-19 only to lose him or her to a non-communicable disease like diabetes or high blood pressure. We have to take care of both. I want to commend the Ministry and its team for being able to find a way, to find the internal resources to do that. Congratulations, on behalf of the medical profession, the health sector and, of course, Guyanese, especially those who are suffering from chronic diseases.

I, on my own behalf, would like to recognise, particularly, that this is something good to be done and that the doctor must be recognised. The Minister and team were engaged in a lengthy process. We see it not only in the health sector but in other areas. I want to thank you, Minister Singh. Many of the things that I can repeat here were already mentioned by our speakers on this side. I would like to reinforce that by supporting them. I am confident that you and the Ministry of Finance’s budget team met other stakeholders and that you were as diligent with them and mindful of their concerns as your team was when you met the health sector. In other words, this is not something being pushed down our throats. There was necessary time given to suggestions from the various line agencies – I think that is the term they use now. We want to thank you for that, and we hope that the other ministries will also endorse my comments in this regard, that the Ministry of Finance did take consideration of the suggestions and recommendations of the line agencies.

Before I continue into some of the good things that are in this Budget through the responsible Minister, I would like to turn to some of the negative things that we discovered. Here are my few examples to show what we are facing and the damage that we have to repair, the confusion, the lack of leadership, the lack of vision, and so on. These are the simple ones. The storage of tons, a big stock, of lubricants by the Administration in a building that was virtually a dwelling house. This was totally unsatisfactory, but they were stored there. What is more, when we took over, we found that the item had almost expired. Because of that, we did further searches and found that was not the only item. There were many different locations, ill-equipped and inappropriate for the storage of medication, and there were similar concerns. We are still looking at the damage that has been done. We will probably never have enough time and resources, especially human resources, to do the final tally. People in the Ministry of Health wonder if it is worth doing that because we have already lost these things. They have almost expired. I will give you one of the more glaring examples with the lubricants. What were they doing with so many lubricants? Who ordered them? There seems to have been confusion because many different people were ordering or doing the same work. We are putting that in order at the bond, or what is called the Materials Management Unit (MMU).

The health sector is being funded in terms of the physical structures. We are seeing that more new equipment is being bought and there is an effort at standardisation. I want to thank the Minister for that. At the same time, I want to say that equipment by itself, and even the best medication, cannot do the job of providing suitable healthcare. There has to be the nurses, the doctors, and the personnel. I would like to note, especially on behalf of the nursing profession, that there have been adequate resources to train and upgrade nurses. What the Government and the Ministry has been doing is not only creating the physical infrastructure and providing the medication, but providing training also. That is a key component of the approach of the PPP/C. There has always been an emphasis on training among the nursing profession and the doctors. This was done in this Budget and is a continuation of budgets from other times. New programme that are being added to the academic spectrum of these two sections of the work force. I would like to thank the Minister for that and I would like to use it to highlight to the doctors and nurses that many of these programmes are free of cost to the participants, the beneficiaries, and that sometimes we take it for granted. This is a good time to remind Guyana, to remind the parents and the recipients of these training

sessions – the nurses and the doctors – that they have a duty to pay back this good service to the Guyanese people.

I have taken up a few minutes and, I think, this is where I will stop. I touched on the two major issues with the frontline workers, the nurses and doctors. I would like to recommend that we give them all the recognition necessary. Remember, they are the first who need the protective gear. I do not want to talk about incentives, but they are the persons who need to have our recognition. Let us congratulate them.

I would like, in the meantime, to fully endorse the Budget. Thank you for the great work and, not only that, the approach by listening to the people, the activists and the various stakeholders in the health sector.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister.

Hon. Members, that concludes our business for today. Hon. Prime Minister, you have the floor.

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, first let me extend happy 51st Republic Anniversary greetings to you, the staff and all Members of Parliament.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday, 24th February, 2021.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity now to move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday, 24th February, 2021.”

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let me join the Prime Minister in extending *Mashramani* greetings to you and your family, to our staff, the media, and all of Guyana. Thank you very much.

The Assembly stands adjourned until 10.00 a.m. on 24th February, 2021.

Adjourned accordingly at 6.46 p.m.