



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

# OFFICIAL REPORT

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

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22<sup>ND</sup> Sitting

Thursday, 25<sup>TH</sup> February, 2021

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**PARLIAMENT OFFICE  
HANSARD DIVISION**

*The Assembly convened at 10.15 a.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**

### **Late Arrival, Absence and Virtual Participation of Members**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we have quite a few announcements this morning. First, the Hon. Prime Minister and the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh will join us later.

The following Hon. Members will be absent from today's sitting: The Hon. Vice-President, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, and the Hon. Dr. Jennifer Westford.

Yesterday, I received an email from the Hon. Member, Mr. Raphael Trotman, who is receiving continuous medical treatment. He has asked to be excused from being present in the Dome. I noticed that he has been online all of the time. He is following the proceedings online. A faithful person online, always, is the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson. I did not check, so far, for the morning, to see who is online. Those are the Hon. Members who are not going to be with us for some time today, those who will be absent and those who are joining virtually.

### **North-Western Corner of Dome Reserved for Media**

The top row, which I consider to be the North-Western corner, starting from the right of the young man with the nice coloured shirt, will be reserved for the media. Once that is filled, we are not going to allow any other media personnel in the National Assembly. I have spoken with the President of the Guyana Press Association, and we had a discussion with respect to this. That area would be reserved for the media.

### **Top Row on the South-Western Corner of Dome Reserved for Visitors**

The top row on the South-Western corner of the Dome will be reserved for visitors to the National Assembly. The seating is very limited. If persons want to come, like in most Parliaments, they have to write and request. The Clerk of the National Assembly will allocate those limited seats based on the requests and on a first come, first served basis.

### **Commentaries by the Media**

With respect to the media, I see quite a few commentaries in the media about what is said outside of persons presenting. I pride myself and I give myself a tap on the shoulder for being quite up to date with technology. I was not a Minister of Public Communications, but what I know from the feeds that are coming here is that it is very difficult to discern a person's voice and what they say in a heckle. Noise is noise, yes.

I get calls from all kinds of persons, including people who do not even have a *Facebook* account or a *Whatsapp* account, on what they heard. I just want to caution the media, again, with respect to what is reported. We do have people who monitor our feed, continuously, and who look at the comments on the page on which the parliamentary proceedings are broadcasted.

### **Members Quoting from President's Speech**

With respect to references to His Excellency the President, yesterday, I read Standing Orders 41(7) and 41(8) of the *Standing Orders of the National Assembly*. I particularly asked a few Hon. Members if they were quoting from the Address of His Excellency. We have requested, today, the Address which was made by His Excellency and we will circulate it.

Any reference to His Excellency the President, if you cannot quote me the page and the line, regardless of which Member is speaking, I am going to stop you. Let us put that to rest. We should have that Address later in the day. The Clerk of the National Assembly is in contact with the Office of the President to have the copies presented to Hon. Members.

As far as I know, we have not fully translated the presentation which was made to the National Assembly by His Excellency. The speech, I cannot tell you is 100% checked against delivery. Many times, when people speak and a speech is released, they would put, at the heading or the footing, that it was not checked against delivery. We have to be careful. I saw some Hon. Members falling into that situation where they are claiming things that was not said, especially with respect to the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh.

### **Podiums for Members Who Do Not Wear Masks**

We have established the two podiums. Persons wishing to speak without masks can proceed to the podiums. Everyone else will have to make their comments or interjections from their seats. If you want to speak without the masks, you could proceed to the podiums. When a person is finished, we will have it sanitised so that another person could use the podium.

### **Issue of Missing Laptop**

We dealt with the issue of the missing laptop yesterday. I saw that there are some other developments in relation to that situation on which we could update you later in the day.

### **Article 172 (1) to (4) of the Constitution**

The final comment that I want to make is with respect to article 172 of the Constitution. This is especially for people who are reporting. This article deals with the presentations or the privileges of the Hon. Members. This is the Constitution. Article 172(1) to (4) deals with privileges and immunities of Hon. Members who make statements in this House. I do not have to read it out. I think all of us are nimble enough to find the particular section in the Constitution.

Hon. Members, these are some of the few announcements that we have. I want to commend the Hon. Members for yesterday. I think it went very well. While we have a lot of new Members, many of us still need some refreshing. I do not mind coaching as we go along.

### **QUESTIONS ON NOTICE [For Written Replies]**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, there are five questions on today's Order Paper, and they are all for written replies. These questions, Nos. 1 to 5, are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, and are for the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs. The answers to all of these questions have been received and have, therefore, in accordance with our Standing Orders, been circulated.

#### **1. Ministerial Advisors**

**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:**

1. Could the Hon. Minister state the qualifications, portfolio responsibilities and terms and conditions of appointment of the Ministerial Advisors appointed by the PPP/C Government, within the Ministry of Home Affairs?
2. The criteria used in selecting these individual(s)?
3. What process, if any, was employed to determine whether these person(s) are of good character and are fit and proper to hold these high offices, especially, when they would be representing the Ministry of Home Affairs and by extension the Government of Guyana?
4. Please provide the National Assembly with their salaries, benefits, and allowances?
5. What additional costs, if any, are attached to the services which they render and for which the Government of Guyana and by extension, taxpayers are responsible?
6. What are the job descriptions of these persons?
7. Could the Minister state how be it that these Advisors contribute to the improvement of the Minister's performance?

**Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]:**

1. An Advisor to the Minister of Home Affairs has been appointed by the PPP/C Government who is eminently qualified and experienced in Public and Political Relations, Marketing and Graphic Design and in Parliamentary Procedures. Responsibilities encompass the foregoing areas and more.  
  
A three (3) years contract, six months' gratuity, vacation allowance and leave are the terms and conditions.
2. Criteria used are: integrity, knowledge and experience; initiative and an empathetic approach to problem solving.
3. Previous parliamentary experience as MPs, personal vetting by the Minister and the solid recommendations scrutinized ensured that capable persons of good character are selected.

4. Salary is GS:13. Gratuity is at 6-month intervals at 22.5%. Vacation Allowance is one month's salary and annual leave is 35 days.
5. Rental costs are incurred as are security and driver.
6. To provide advice to the Minister on tasks which he assigns or requests.
7. Tasks assigned to the Advisor significantly reduce the time and improve the quality of advice to the Minister.

## **2. Breathalyzer Kits and Tests**

### **Ms. Chandan-Edmond:**

1. Can the Hon. Minister state if all the Policing Divisions are provided with fully functioning breathalyzer kits?
2. Can the Hon. Minister state how many breathalyzer kits have been provided to each division?
3. Can the Hon. Minister state when each breathalyzer currently in use was last calibrated?
4. Can the Hon. Minister state how many persons were tested during the last quarter of 2020 and how many charges laid for persons failing such tests?
5. Can the Hon. Minister state the number of successful prosecutions achieved during the last quarter of 2020 against persons failing breathalyzer tests?

### **Mr. Benn:**

1. Regions #1 and #8 are yet to be given kits.
2. Kits per Division provided are: one (1) each to divisions #: 2, 3, 4A, 4B, 5, 6, and 9; two each to #: 4c, 7, and 10. Traffic HQ has an additional two (2) kits.
3. Breathalyzer kits rely on their original equipment manufactured calibration.
4. Two hundred and eighty-nine (289) persons were tested and one hundred and fifty-nine (159) charges were made.

5. Eighty-five persons were successfully persecuted on failing sobriety tests.

### **3. Businesses in Violation of the Covid-19 Emergency Measures**

**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:**

1. What are the number of business entities which have been in violation of the COVID-19 Emergency Measures as at the 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021?
2. What actions have been taken against these entities?
3. What plans does the Ministry have to curb such violations?

**Mr. Benn:**

1. Twenty-three (23) businesses were cited as of January 12.
2. Warnings and court actions were taken against violators.
3. To encourage respect for and enforcement of the law designed to prevent the spread of the pandemic.

### **4. Pregnant Female Prisoners**

**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:**

1. What is the protocol for pregnant women prisoners who give birth whilst serving their prison terms?
2. What is the state of Guyana's compliance with Rule 24 of the United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders?
3. What prison facilities and post-partum support do these women and babies have access to?
4. What is the frequency of their access to each other whilst the mothers are in prison?
5. What is the length of time that the newborn babies are allowed to remain within the prison facility and what are the procedures for these babies when they leave the prison facility?

6. What is the number of women who have given birth while serving prison terms in the last quarter of 2020?

**Mr. Benn:**

1. According to the Prison Act Chapter 11:01, Rule 240 a female prisoner may have her baby with her during the normal period of location and longer (to a maximum of twelve (12) months), if required in special circumstances, and the baby may be supplied with clothing and necessities at the public's expense. In addition, a separate room is assigned to the female who gives birth.
2. Since the establishment of the female prison, Guyana has always sought to comply with Rule 24 of the UN Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-Custodial Measures for Women Offenders. The rule states that Instruments of restraints (handcuff, body belt, foot chain) shall never be used on women during labour, during birth and immediately after birth.
3. The Guyana Prison Service provides several post-partum supports to women and babies such as:
  1. The mother and child are seen daily by the Prison Doctor.
  2. Their routine clinical schedules are maintained where they are allowed to visit to Family Health Clinic of the New Amsterdam Public Hospital.
  3. A special diet is provided based on the recommendation of the Doctor.
  4. The Prisoners ' Welfare Officer provides counselling to the babymother.
4. The baby mother is provided with daily access to the support services or based on clinical appointment.
5. Newborn babies are allowed to stay a maximum of twelve (12) months in prison with the mother. Upon completion of that time, the mother can place the child in the care of her family members or the child can be placed in care of the Childcare and Protection Agency of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security until the



mother is released from prison.

6. During the last quarter of 2020, only one (1) female inmate gave birth to a baby boy, while serving a sentence at the New Amsterdam Prison. The delivery was done at the New Amsterdam Public Hospital.

## **5. Police Officers Misconduct or Breaches**

### **Ms. Chandan-Edmond:**

In the last quarter of 2020, what is the number of police officers who have been accused of: -

1. Committing criminal offences?
2. Breaching disciplinary guidelines under various codes of conduct that guides the Police in their conduct and performance?
3. What action(s) have been taken to deal with cases of proven misconduct or breaches of the various codes of conduct?

### **Mr. Benn:**

Thirteen (13) ranks.

1. Breaching disciplinary guidelines under various codes of conduct that guides the Police in their conduct and performance.

Twenty-two (22) ranks.

1. Case files were sent to Court for criminal proceedings to be undertaken.
2. Administrative action files were sent to Commanders and Heads of Departments for defaulters to be sanctioned.

## **PUBLIC BUSINESS**

## **GOVERNMENT BUSINESS**

### **Motion**

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

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

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

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

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

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

*Assembly resumed budget debate.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Assembly will now resume the debate on the motion for the approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2021. The first speaker for today is the Hon. Member, Dr. Nicolette Henry.

**Dr. Henry:** Thank you, Mr. speaker. With your leave I rise to address this honourable House as part of the 2021 Budget debate. I continue to give thanks to Almighty God for this beautiful gift of life, for health, strength and the opportunity to serve the people of Guyana.

Speaking about the gift of life, Mr. Speaker, approximately 190 persons have lost their lives to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in this country. Additionally, over 1,000 public servants in this country lost their jobs during the worst public health crisis of this century. It is, therefore, only fitting that we take a moment to remember all those families that have lost loved ones to COVID-19 and those who are experiencing undue hardships which were brought on by the unjustifiable firing of over 1,000 public servants. For the purposes of Dr. Westford's statement, I want to say, irrespective of their race, and we did not racialise it, they are Guyanese people and they deserve our concern.

I also want to take a moment to remember our frontline workers and their families. Those are our unsound heroes who have kept this country going through the pandemic, despite being severely challenged by inadequate resources. In this context, I wish to register my disappointment with some of the presentations which I found most distasteful, especially from the point of view that, as legislators, we need to set the right example to children and our young aspiring Politicians.

In one particular instance, we had a Member of this honourable House, no less than the Director General of the Ministry of Health, who took time out during these serious debates to showcase his new sex toy. One would have expected that, in a time such as this...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, did you say his new sex toy?

**Dr. Henry:** Yes, that is what I understand.

**Mr. Speaker:** I think you should withdraw that, please.

**Dr. Henry:** Acknowledged and withdrawn. One would have expected that, in a time such as this, the likes of which has never been experienced before in over a century, a time when ministries and departments of health around the world are working assiduously to keep healthcare on track due to pandemic implications... The Director General of the Ministry of Health for this Co-operative Republic of Guyana, instead of coming to this honourable House and articulating and adumbrating

his Government's policy on healthcare, chooses to engage in a lewd course, vulgar and offensive demonstration that trivialises the issues relating to health and well-being of the Guyanese people.

**Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]:** I stand on a Point of order.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member...

**Ms. Teixeira:** Standing Order 40. The record of this House shows the context with which the Director General spoke. The Hon. former Minister is deliberately, consciously misrepresenting the record of this House and she should withdraw it. You asked her already and she did not do it.

*10.30 a.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, please withdraw and rephrase the comments made just now.

**Dr. Henry:** With your guidance, Mr. Speaker, the comments are withdrawn.

This is nothing short of a travesty and every right-thinking person must condemn it. We are not only representing our views or that of the people that voted for us, we speak for every Guyanese. It is on that basis, as representatives of the people of this country, that I hold the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration accountable, no matter how much it objects and how nasty it fights.

Yesterday I listened to the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security who spoke, glowingly, about her Government's plans to do many things, including addressing issues of family violence through the Spotlight Initiative. What the Minister did not say was that this initiative was signed off and greenlighted by the Coalition Government and that it is one of the many programmes and initiatives that the PPP/C inherited from the Coalition Government. It is undoubtedly a laudable programme that I have no problem with, however, what I am saying is that, as responsible representatives of the people, Members must seek to give recognition if it is due.

Guyana has found itself in a post-truth era. Since taking Office, the PPP/C regime has created an environment where objective facts are less influential and less critical than fabrication, emotion

and personal belief. In this post-truth era, fiction, confusion, cherry-picking of data, manipulation of information and public relations control have replaced engagement with facts.

Let me bring to your attention that the new school to be built at Prospect, with World Bank funding, is a Coalition project. In this particular instance, my Colleague and former Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, got the World Bank to agree to use additional International Development Association (IDA) resources for flood relief to consider another secondary school for Guyana. This school at Prospect is a product of the Coalition's successful interaction with the World Bank. Yet, we have some people, who should be honourable, walking around the place spreading untruths, saying this is a PPP/C project and a manifesto promise. This has been the case in several instances. I say to the people who are listening that this is a worrying development. Let me add that the antidote is not simply fact checking the truth. As responsible Guyanese, I ask you not to be thrown off-balance by this type of political discourse designed to trap and distract public attention and interrupt the background noise of conventional politics and public life.

This seems to be the trend. As I read Paragraph 4.123 on Page 47 of this year's budget presentation, I noticed the Ministry of Education had indicated that the implementation of blended modalities is something new. Let me say, blended learning is nothing new to anybody in education neither is it new to Guyana. In fact, in my 2020 Budget presentation a few months ago, I pointed out, very clearly, that the future of education lies in the application of an appropriate blended approach not limited to information and communications technology (ICT) – note the stress in the word 'appropriate'.

Let me clarify that the plan to support teaching and learning on an online platform, in partnership with ProFuturo Teacher Training Programme, initially, began in 2018. In fact, I travelled to Washington District of Columbia (D.C.) as Guyana's Minister of Education, some two years ago, to sign off on the partnership with ProFuturo, which initiated support for online platform learning for Caribbean countries. It is important to note that Guyana was the first Caribbean country to benefit from this initiative due to the staff's work at the Ministry of Education. A quick look at the Organization of American States (OAS) website will provide much more details. Yet, this is being touted, in this Budget speech, as something that is being implemented by the PPP/C regime. Here, again, we see the pattern. What is being proposed here is, precisely, what has already started under the Coalition Government.

I say to the people of Guyana, do not allow yourselves to be hoodwinked. Only the other day I saw some diatribe about the Coalition not leaving any smart classrooms. Again, a quick look at the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) website will indicate that even the staff of CARICOM, in January of 2018, experienced a hands-on demonstration of smart classroom operations in Guyana at Guyana's National Centre for Educational Resources Development (NCERD). Are we to believe that this is a joke? Let me say that no amount of public relations propaganda, no taglines can change this. It is a fact. I can tell you that a lot was achieved during the Coalition's term in Office. I can tell you that it took a lot of work from a lot of hardworking public servants to get that done and we must recognise that in this House – the tangible job done by a lot of hardworking ordinary Guyanese people, Kwame McCoy. Let me put on record...

**Mr. Speaker:** It is the Hon. Member, Kwame McCoy.

**Dr. Henry:** The Hon. Member, Mr. Kwame McCoy.

Let me put on record that, given the global focus and modifications in education, as a result of the pandemic, I was expecting to see, under the education sector of this Budget, a more robust and sustainable plan to mitigate the effects and the aftershocks of COVID-19. This aftershock would lead to the risk of regression of many students across the length and breadth of this country, especially those whose essential foundational learning, for whatever reason, was never strong enough to begin with.

You do not have to be a rocket Scientist to know that education delivery must include training of parents, community leaders and advocates, as a minimum, during the pandemic, especially when it comes to the delivery of education for our special needs students and our most marginalised groups. I have to ask if anyone, who is sitting here on the Government's side, can articulate where in this Budget the most vulnerable young people or the most at-risk populations are catered for in terms of in school and/or blended interventions. This is a serious matter. Parents are reaching out every day for assistance with remote learning. As these debates are ongoing, many students, including teenage mothers and other disadvantaged populations, including learners from lower income households and remote areas have not yet been engaged, meaningfully, for the new school year, which commenced sometime in the last quarter of last year.

Mr. Speaker, you do not even have to take my word on this. You only have to go on the various social media platforms, including the Ministry of Education's *Facebook* page and get a sense of what is going on. Based on what is out there, I think that it is both unfortunate and regrettable that so many people in difficult circumstances are not satisfied with the Ministry's effort. Yet, this Budget is void of any measure to address our most disadvantaged and marginalise students, specifically.

Let me take a few minutes to speak about what the Coalition inherited in the education sector in 2015. I can tell you, without any fear of being truthfully contradicted, that the country's history is rife with the gains made in the education sector during the Coalition's tenure. We had left the education sector better than we found it and the data speaks for itself. I heard a Member on the Government's side of the House say that the Coalition did not plant any seeds. I am here to say that I am proud of the seeds that the Coalition planted in the education sector. In fact, I am encouraged to say that the history of this country will show that your sitting Minister presided over a woefully underperforming sector prior to May, 2015. I shared the data and you can draw your own conclusions.

When the David Granger-led Government came into Office in 2015, we took over an education sector that was in crisis. The performance of the nation's children at national and regional examinations served as clear indicators. In 2014, for instance – you know who the Minister was – the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) results were appalling, as previous years, for which I had seen the data. We had about 13% of our students passing Mathematics at the National Grade Six Assessment. In five short years, we saw incremental improvements. We also improved the working conditions and remuneration package for teachers – the best they had gotten in decades. The long-standing issues of debunching, *et cetera*, were seriously addressed for the very first time. We had initiated curriculum reform after more than four decades. We, on the Opposition side of the House, know that a 40-year-old curriculum could not deliver the breadth of skills required for 21<sup>st</sup> century education delivery.

In 2018, after a hiatus of over more than a decade, the David Granger-led Administration commenced teacher's training and upgrading in Region 8. These are the kind of seeds we, on this side of the House, planted and the people of this country can accept nothing less than to keep the momentum and the gains we have made in education. Hon. Member Mr. Seeraj, do you not think

these are good seeds worth planting? I can go on and on and speak about the many seeds we planted that will continue to improve the lives and wellbeing of Guyanese people even after we demitted Office.

By now, it is common knowledge that remote learning poses a challenge for many students, especially for those with difficult circumstances and those living in far-flung communities. These challenges include little or no connectivity, lack of access to online education assessment and equipment, unfamiliarity with remote and distance learning techniques, worksheets not being marked, and little or no guidance to support learners, caregivers and parents. If these primary areas are not addressed, the old disparities linked to socio-economic status, ethnicity and special education needs will continue to emerge as fault lines in Guyana's education response. There must be a concerted policy effort to provide the necessary support and tools to all of our students in this regard.

In that context, I would say that a \$15,000 cash grant is not the end all to education challenges faced by the majority of Guyanese. This is the second Budget and the students from the University of Guyana (UG) are still waiting on free tuition measures to be implemented – a campaign promise by the PPP/C regime. Tell us about this campaign promise. Similarly, I have noted that the One Laptop Per Teacher (OLPT) programme has come to an end, sadly so. Now is the time, more than ever, that teachers need an electronic device to facilitate online and blended learning, which has become the new reality, given the COVID-19 pandemic. Electronics have become the new chalk and board. I earnestly ask that the sitting Minister of Education rethink this and provide teachers with the support and tools that they need to work in these challenging times.

As we look to the future, we have to ensure that the temporary disruptions of schooling do not become a permanent loss of education for many of our vulnerable people. Guyana has made significant strides in education delivery during the past few years. We cannot go back to the days when we just come up with wide policies like the No Child Left Behind automatic promotion. The people of this country have every right to believe in a better life as we proceed to develop our nation from year to year and from administration to administration. The people of this country must accept nothing less than to keep the momentum and the gains made in education. From all that I have seen so far, I can tell you that the people of this country deserve much better than what is proposed in the PPP/C's 2020 Budget, which I will call a 'punish poor people' Budget.



10.45 a.m.

When we think about how these debates are primarily to address how the resources of this country would be expended in 2021 and to raise the standard of living of our citizens, now and in the future, it is imperative that we do our due diligence and allocate resources based on those needs and not merely on constituencies and support base.

From what I have seen as the priorities in education, I cannot stand here, in good conscience, and support this Budget. There are too many glaring inadequacies, inequities and rank disparities that will result from the implementation of the measures contained therein. There is a noticeable lack of foresight to effectively deliver quality education to all the students of Guyana. It concerns me that we could return to what we had as education delivery during the 23 years of the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) governance. There are false beliefs that are grossly unfounded notions peddled by the PPP/C that all the Coalition's programmes were flawed. I do not know if they are listening to themselves. It is difficult to imagine how any political party that has been in Government for 23 years and had a litany of woes and failed projects, which I will not rehash in this honourable House, could turn around, in five short years, after demitting office, and paint a picture that it is the saviour for this country. It is quite laughable and that is why we have some commentators saying that 'Guyana is not a real place'.

As I wrap up, I would like to talk directly to the thousands of teachers, students and parents across the length and breadth of this country. We, in the Coalition, have heard your cries and we will continue to take your calls and engage entirely with you. We will be back in office and will continue the work that was disrupted. There is nothing new or different in this Budget. All a person gets is the same halfway, half-cooked, wild and ill-conceived policies that permeated the education sector during the PPP/C's 23 years in office. Guyana deserves better.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

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

Hon. Members, the feed to my computer has been restored. The Hon. Members Mr. Mahipaul, Amanza Walton-Desir and Roysdale Forde are online with us. And, least it be misinterpreted when

I said His Excellency Dr. Jagdeo, the Hon. Vice-President and Dr. Westford are absent, this is to indicate that they are excused from today's sitting.

Hon. Member and Hon. Minister of Education, the Hon. Priya Manickchand.

**Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]:** Thank you very much Mr. Speaker. A few years ago, the then Minister Mr. David Patterson, implored me not be harsh with the Hon. Member who just came before me and today I am going to apply it. Nobody takes the Hon. Member seriously. We would not either. but there are some untruths that we need to correct.

Before I begin, I would like to extend congratulations and thanks to the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. I would like to specifically recognise his staff led by the Budget Director who, on the eve of International Women's Day, I am happy to say, is a woman, Ms. Sonya Roopnauth. I am aware of the kind of work they put in for this Budget. This particular Budget had to be crafted very carefully. It is a Budget that sought to repair the damage done by unlawful extensions of time in Government, with an effort to rig an election; damage done by the ravaged economy and country we found; and damage done by COVID-19. We were trying to repair, even as we gave goods and services to the Guyanese people, and began to implement our manifesto promises. This is a hard balance. I am very conscience of how much effort that has taken and we are very grateful on this side of the House. I think I speak for the Guyanese people when I say, to Dr. Singh and team, thank you very much. We, on this side of the House, are lucky to have as a Minister Dr. Singh, who has return to this country with coveted service; service that other countries and international financial organisations sought over the last five years. We are lucky to have him here and we are very glad about it.

There is a perpetual and enduring quality coming from the Opposition. I think we all have to take a step back...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I think we would like to say the Hon. Members instead of them.

**Ms. Manickchand:** I was treating them as a subject. Sir, the Hon. Members of the Opposition, but I would extend it to all Hon. Members of this House. In 2021, we cannot use people's sexuality or sexual orientation, or what we believe it is or ought to be, to disparage people. In this House we

cannot, and it must be condemned; it must be rejected. It must be noted that people who call themselves friends of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) community are engaging in that kind of behaviour. I say now, to any person of the LGBTQ community, that you have a friend in us. We will not tolerate the disparaging or putting down of any member of the community or using the idea that someone could be, to disparage the person. Similarly, in the strongest language, I would like to condemn the usage of people's belief that there may be Members in this House who have reproductive problems. All over this country people are struggling with fertility issues, on both sides of the House. For people to use their own children as a reference point to hurt others in this House is reprehensible. It speaks of a calibre that is not worthy of being in this House, and it must not happen again.

Similarly, last night I heard from an Hon. Member of this House [*inaudible*] and it clear that he has a problem with women. It is very visible and audible. The only glimmer of hope that I found, in last night's comment, was that his own Member *upps* him. The conversation in here cannot be about the Members weight, hair or clothes. We are better than that. We have to be better than that. This country requires and deserves more. [*Interruption*] Sir, the Stabroek Market has opened. I should not do that because there are decent people at the Stabroek Market.

There are senior Members and we just heard one. [**Ms. McDonald:** You are talking about seniority?] The Hon. Member Dr. Henry is a senior Member. I think this is the problem of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC): after a defeat at the General and Regional Elections, they come here and continue to say they did nothing wrong. It is a different style of governance. When the People's Progressive Party/Civic lost – and I say that in quote because we still have a pending election petition which has not been heard; an inditement on the system – what did we do? We immediately said to the population: here are some of the things we did wrong, we are going to fix it and we are going to get back in Government. Five years later, we are on this side of the House. What is the APNU/AFC's style? They came in here and called the people of this country bloodsuckers and called the people of this country gullible; they are *stupidity*. The people of Guyana do not know that you mocked it up in five years. They have to be stupid to be voting for us. They thought them how stupid they are. They thought you how they could quietly dictate your life with an 'X' at the ballot box.

Mr. Ramjattan spoke of the untruths, mistruths and half-truths. It was Mr. Ramjattan who was on video saying is *ayo* people, when they fired the 7,000 sugar workers. This is why they have no interest in them. Then they come here and speak about race. [Mr. Ramjattan: And you all say is *abee* people.] The whole of Guyana is *abee* people. The selective raising of issues would do the Opposition no good. [**An Hon. Member:** (*inaudible*)] It is not my business to advise you. The former Minister, Dr. Henry, just spoke of the firing of people and she said it does not matter about the race. Her other Colleagues were not subtle. They spoke about the firing of a particular race of people. Mr. Olatocumbo Sam, Dr. Marcel Hutson, Ms. Melcita Bovell and a number of other persons were either fired or placed in positions where they could no longer work in the Ministry and had to resign. The difference with us is that these people are back on the job and this is why all those projects they started we are rolling them out now. You could not get them done.

The Budget clearly demonstrates a difference in style, philosophy and ideology between the two political parties. The APNU/AFC believed it was sensible, having declared the rice industry to be a private enterprise, to give an allowance for rice farmers to buy drones, so they could *shie* their paddy. This was their budget measure. Ours is to build drainage, irrigation and farm to market roads. This is the difference in our ideology. Their ideology was to take away the \$1.6 billion cash grant, after saying they could not administer it. Our ideology is to give it back and increase it. In the first five years of our administration it is going to be increased until it reaches \$50,000. Their policy was to make into a department the issue of housing. Our policy is to create a Ministry of Housing and Water and promise to deliver more than 50,000 house lots in our first five years. There is a difference in style and policies. Theirs was to tax the population.

Yesterday, Mr. Ramjattan said that no new taxes were applied. A total of \$83 billion more was collected in taxes, in 2019, than was collected in 2015. In 2015, the light and water bills did not attract value-added-tax (VAT). Those were new taxes the APNU/AFC added. [*Interruption*] Do you want me to borrow Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond's dictionary and define the word 'new'? There were 200 new taxes, 100 of which were reversed last year and some others we will do this year. There is a difference in the way we manage and apply the country's resources to the delivery of goods and services. The PPP/C manages things in a different way.

On the issue of the APNU/AFC starting projects. The APNU/AFC's problem was that they were fancy, sexy and sensational talkers. Everything sounded right and that is how they rode into Office.

Their problem was that they could not deliver. They started the Spotlight Initiative but could not deliver. The ProFuturo project was great for travel, and you heard the former Minister herself. I did not even know that. She went to Washington. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> August struggling... You went to Washington two years before on the people's money.

*11.00 a.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, this is the third time, you need to remember 'you' includes...

**Ms. Manickchand:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker, I did not hear you.

**Mr. Speaker:** 'You' would include 'me'. You are speaking to me, not anybody else.

**Ms. Manickchand:** Sir, I will try to avoid saying 'you'. The Hon. Member, Dr. Nicolette Henry, was unable to deliver on any of the projects she had begun. That was their whole problem. They started the Good Hope Secondary School, the La Parfait Harmony Secondary School and the Spotlight Initiative and could not finish them. We have to finish them. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*) Prospect school (*inaudible*).] They did not start the Prospect school, but I am going to get back to that. Anything they started...

The Hon. Member, Ms. Hughes, virtually, in this House last year, as soon as she said she had put smart classrooms in 11 schools, I received a message stating that was not true, but I left her alone. You are recovering from a brutal defeat. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] You could say what you want. We have begun to set up the smart classrooms. If you had listened, to the Hon. Member, Dr. Henry when she spoke, you would have heard that she steered away... She did not say that they are existing because those classrooms do not exist.

Hon. Member Mr. Shurwayne Holder spoke last night. Why did the Hon. Member not tell us about the smart classroom at the 8<sup>th</sup> of May Secondary School? That is because it does not exist. The press said it does not exist, the teachers said it does not exist and the students said that it does not exist, but they came back here and are insisting that the smart classrooms in those 11 schools exist. That is the epitome of what we are seeing playing out here – untruths that they believe themselves. The problem is that the people do not believe it. That is their problem.

If you want to know the effect of untruths, we do not have to look further than yesterday. People were told lies and untruths. The Coalition dissembled for five months. I am not even going to go back to the no confidence motion when 33 was not bigger than 32 and so on. We were told these things. So, when an Hon. Member of this House stood up and said that her laptop was missing, the immediate reaction on social media was *shi lie*. That is unfortunate.

**Mr. Speaker:** But we do not use the word ‘lie’ in here, regardless of if you are reporting.

**Ms. Manickchand:** Sir, I am quoting.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, we do not use that word.

**Ms. Manickchand:** I will take away the word ‘lie’. The immediate reaction was that the Russians *tek* it; the fourth Russian gone with it. The immediate reaction also was that it was not believable. This is a fantastic example: instead of the Hon. Member, apologising to all of us here, the Hon. Member, double down on that lie and spoke about going to investigate if any spyware was placed on her computer.

**Mr. Speaker:** ‘Double down on that lie’. You are around in this National Assembly a long time Hon. Member, please.

**Ms. Manickchand:** Mr. Speaker, it is important...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I do not want to stand on my feet against you.

**Ms. Manickchand:** All right. The problem with that kind of dissembling is that it makes the people who do it incredible. It brings other people, including the people you say you love and want to serve, into trouble. If one... You said that I cannot go on. The example would show that if an investigation would happen, given the fact that the Hon. Member stood and nobody else went to that area until the police came, then it would implicate her three Friends at the back. Those were the only people who were there in that interim. So, it would hurt your own people if you continue to dissemble and fib like this.

I heard a specific complaint – it came, just now, from the Hon. Member – that the Budget does not cater for the COVID-19 situation. This Budget is all about COVID, for education, but you have to know how to read the Budget. When we increase print and non-print by 9%, it is to cater for the

worksheets. When we increase janitorial by 26.4% it is to cater for the excess cleaning we know that we are going to have. When we increase cleaning and extermination services by 41%, it is for the cleaning we know that we will have. These are all line items under the Budget. When we say that we are going to buy over \$500 million worth in equipment to expand the learning channel, this is all a COVID response. I will come to that shortly.

Specifically, the Hon. Member, who spoke before me, said that we cannot go back to the ‘no child left behind’ policy. That one sentence epitomised the Ministry that was run by the Hon. Member. That policy was never stopped. She started the Ministry with the policy running. She left the Ministry, but the Government and the people of Guyana are still practising the ‘no child left behind’ policy. It is an automatic promotion policy. The Coalition had five years to change a policy that they are criticising. She came here and said that we must not go back to that, but that is exactly what she left in place. She is floating. That is the problem. The Hon. Member is floating.

**Mr. Speaker:** And again...

**Ms. Manickchand:** The Hon. Member, Sir. I live in perpetual hope that the sensible side of the Hon. Member will show up. I am always here living in that hope, but I was disappointed today. She did not show up.

The responses to COVID so far: let us talk about students. As Minister, Hon. Member Dr. Nicolette Henry was in office for 143 days after we shut down for COVID. The 143 days ended, for me, on Boxing Day. By that time, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> August to Boxing Day, we had done worksheets; employed the learning channel towards learning; reopened schools for the examination classes; put instructions on the radio and started online teaching. So, all of these fancy plans that the Hon. Member said that she had, she did not put it in place, even though she was in the Ministry for the same time that we were in the Ministry. It is important that we do not buy into those lines.

Let us talk about our own programmes now. What are some of the responses? For children, based on consultation with teachers, parents and students, we reopened the fourth, fifth and sixth forms. But we said, to the parents and students, that if you do not want to come that is fine, we will support your learning at home. When we opened, we made sure that all of the schools were cleaned and sanitised and that we gave to each student and teacher sanitising equipment, face masks, face

shields and vitamin support. Our little Guyana was one of the only countries that gave so many things to each student and teacher. This Budget caters for a continuation of that.

We went to the Guyana Learning Channel, and incidentally, it was available to the Coalition on 2<sup>nd</sup> March and on 11<sup>th</sup> March when they closed the country. They never used it. If you had seen the conditions there. The girls there have pictures of it. It was a junk house. We took the Guyana Learning Channel and begun scheduled curriculum instruction on that Channel. This Budget provides more than \$500 million to expand the Channel. So, instead of one channel, we will now have six channels dedicated to learning. We will be able to take that learning Channel to every single Amerindian village. We are giving to the villages televisions systems, solar systems, electricity and the satellites. The PPP/C Government is doing that. When we talk about equity, it cannot just be talk, it has to be something that we do that is tangible. That is what we are going to do with the Guyana Learning Channel.

We are also getting our own radio station at the Ministry of Education, so that we could dedicate radio to learning, because there are still some places in this country where radios are the only things that people get information from. In addition, we could reinforce some learning that has been successful on the radio before.

The worksheet programme will continue. I would have been glad to stand here and say, publicly, that the worksheets were left in place and I am rolling them out. Not a single worksheet was in place when we went in there, not a single plan and not a single draft. It is the same officers who are sitting and doing them now. All they needed was guidance, direction and a policy move. The same officers are doing them now; rolling it out. [**An Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*] And, yes, if there are words spelt incorrectly, these things take years to develop. The public servants of this country, those who say that they love, the Hon. Members on the Opposition... There may be spelling mistakes here or there, or there may be a sum that is wrong here or there. These things usually take years to develop, but we developed them in weeks, and I commend those officers.

What was our response to teachers? The teachers said to us that they were trying, but they did not know what to do; they did not know how to teach; they did not know how to innovate sometimes; they were not trained to do that. The same ProFuturo programme that former Minister spent our money on, and went to Washington, she never rolled out. We rolled that out in October. She said



it; it is right here. It was on the 5<sup>th</sup> May. We contacted the Organization of American States (OAS) and said that we want to make this national. From then to now, we have more than 5,037 teachers trained in innovation and more than 4,685 in information and communications technology (ICT). We did this for a total of 9,722 teachers. That was your problem, you could never get it done; admit it. Understand that is your weakness. Try to correct it and then, maybe, 20 something years later, you could come back over here. That is for the teachers who want to be trained.

Presently, we are going online fully. To my young – I do not know if he is young – new Member of Parliament (MP), the Hon. Member, Mr. Cox, from Region 1, fully online does not mean solely online. Fully online means that we are going fully online, but it does not mean it is the only way we will be training teachers. We are not closing the college. We are still going to have face to face education. When we announced this, we saw and we continue to see remarkable interest, so much so, in this year of COVID, we are going to have the most trainee teachers enrolled. When other countries are shutting down, five years from now, Guyana is going to be ‘spitting out’ the most trained teachers in this country. During COVID, we innovated and come up with a plan to make sure that we do not stop training, so that we would not have a deficit four or five years down the line. We now have the most persons enrolled to be trained to become teachers in this country.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what that means? [**An Hon Member:** (*Inaudible*)] An empty vessel is making a lot noise. There is a teacher now teaching in Kaikan. She is a single teacher. She has been teaching for eight years. She wants to do this. She cannot leave to come to college. We can train her where she is. She could deliver education to the children in Kaikan as a trained teacher. Nothing stopped the Coalition from doing this. We started this in the same 143 days that the Hon. Member, Dr. Nicolette Henry, had where she was like the *deer in headlights*. But it was not the *deer in headlights*. The problem was that they were trying to ‘thief’ or steal or rig an election – whichever of those is the most parliamentary word. The same time that we took to start this, they could have started it. We could have received a half of the programme that we would have continued. It was not there or put in place.

More than \$150 million in this Budget will be applied towards setting the infrastructure for it. What is the infrastructure? We must have resources online. Teaching online is not just teaching through *Zoom*. The students must have the benefit of textbooks, research materials and a library. We have subscribed to Elton B. Stephens Company (EBSCO), Notesmaster and other places.

Those things cost money. The Hon. Member, just stood in this House... Sir, at some point, we have to look at whether we should start to take people to the Committee of Privileges. I do not really subscribe to it.

*11.15 a.m.*

I think privileges are at the ballot boxes. That is where people tell you how they feel about the fibs you told. The Hon. Member just stood here and told us how she is saddened that the... [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] As a preposition. If I said the Hon. Member first that is the subject. Are you *stupid*?

The Hon. Member stood here and told us that she is saddened that we have collapsed the One Laptop Per Teacher Programme (OLTP). Sir, let me tell you truth about that. The APNU/AFC Government went into Office on a promise that they would collapse the One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) programme and give one laptop per teacher. That happened for one single year. It never happened again. For four years, teachers in this country never saw a laptop from them, and families from this country never saw a laptop from them.

Do you know what the real sin is, Sir? We are not collapsing anything. We are about restart a programme that we left in place. The bigger sin is that there is \$100 million sitting in an account where we had a revolving fund programme at the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE). We would help teachers and they would buy their own. We would subsidise a laptop and the money the teacher gives would be put back into the system, that would be the revolving fund. There is \$100 million and teachers are without laptops, tablets or any devices. This Member stands in this House to say that she is sorry that the programme has collapsed. She is mad. This has to be a mental health issue – to fib so blatantly when it is so easy to determine one is lying. That takes special reserves in your brain, that the rest of us probably cannot get into. That is why I said every now and then...

The PPP/C would restore the laptops for teachers who are being trained. That was abolished by the APNU/AFC. Even though money was in an account, they never used it for those teachers. They abolished the One Laptop Per Family Programme on the promise that they would do one laptop per teacher and that was never realised. Again, you were unable to finish the job. You are always

unable to finish the job. That is your weakness; you cannot get it done. You are exempted, Mr. Speaker; the Hon. Members of the Opposition. You simply cannot get it done.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, I do not want to be exempted, I want you to speak to me.

**Ms. Manickchand:** Technical vocational (TechVoc) education: We just announced, a week ago, that we had gone fully online with technical vocational education and training. Nothing stopped you. The five months that you were trying to ‘thief’ the elections, nothing stopped. You were so focused on the enterprise of rigging and conning the Guyanese people, rigging yourself into Office, that you could not do anything for the people you swore to serve. We went fully online with TechVoc. Again, fully online has limitations because technical vocational education and training is very practical. A lot of what was academic would be done online, but there would still be some face to face endeavours because of the practical nature of that course.

Coursera: To the general population, as a response to COVID-19, we have letters from the Commonwealth of Learning to the Coalition Government *via* the Member who spoke before me, begging her every two months to rollout Coursera, and it was not done. Coursera and the Commonwealth of Learning collaborated to offer courses for free to the people of the Commonwealth during COVID-19. It was a direct measure and response to COVID-19 recovery. This Minister refused to do it. We launched it in September, less than one month after I came into office. When we launched it, it was criticised by the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir. She said on *Facebook* – and it is just the epitome of the APNU/AFC – something to the effect that this is nothing new. She was enrolled and has done the courses. That is their problem. Once they could do it, the rest of the population does not matter. We started Coursera. Now, Guyana ranks number one in the world for interest in that online programme; number one in the world for members enrolled; and number one in the world for graduates. Let me tell you what that looks like.

**Mr. Speaker:** Before you tell me, Hon. Minister, you would need an extension.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that my Hon. Member to be allowed five more minutes to conclude.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister Teixeira. Hon. Minister, please continue.

**Ms. Manickchand:** There were 53,301 Guyanese citizens registered for this programme; 31,297 persons took courses, 9,473 persons received certificates and that amounted to 43,305 certificates. Forty-three thousand, three hundred and five certificates more than they had when you were in office. This is our people. Are you not glad to see our people registering for these courses? I reiterate to Ms. Walton-Desir, the Hon. Member, it is fine that she took the courses. They do not want anyone else to benefit from these kinds of things. This is the kind of selfishness. I have four minutes, Sir, so I am going to tell you about two more things.

The PPP/C is restoring the Because We Care Cash Grant. It begins this year with \$15,000. Every student in nursery, primary and secondary would get \$15,000 and that would grow until it reaches \$50,000. It is laughable, it is hypocritical, it is sad that Members of the Opposition who had five years and did not offer this and, more so, defended the snatching of this money from our children, would come here, now, and say that it is not enough or that it is not adequate. That just underlines for us how very hypocritical you are.

A big programme that we will begin this year is the national online learning institute. One billion dollars has been allocated in this year's Budget so that our young people... it is not limited to young people, but I suspect strongly that mostly young people would benefit from it. Our young people could get undergraduate degrees, could get masters programmes and could get Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programmes. There was a time in this country when Ministers of the Government were the people who benefited from this. Yesterday, one such former Minister stood up and said I have no apologies to make. What is wrong if I received a scholarship? Let me tell you what is wrong with it. Minister Sonia Parag says that we still do not know if you passed the course. Your \$10,000 could have catered for ten people to get full degrees: ordinary Guyanese people. The \$25 million that we give to one former Minister's children per year, 101 persons could have gotten a full degree on this programme. The programmes that we have are with the Indira Gandhi National Open University; the Jain Deemed-to-be University of India; The University of the West Indies Open Campus; The University of the West Indies Open Campus, Technical/Vocational and Occupational Education; the Berlin International University of Applied Sciences. These are the initial set of universities we are dealing with. It would benefit 4,540 students just for this year.

When APNU/AFC was in Government, it benefited five Ministers with the same kind of money. We served the people of this country and we do it without apology. The continuation of the arrogance, the dissembling and the deceit is working nowhere else but in the heads of the Hon. Members of the Opposition. It is not my place to advise them about what might be a useful course of action to take. What I could say is that we are going to continue. One last thing before I wrap up.

The Hon. Minister mentioned the Prospect school and said it was their project. The World Bank entered into an agreement with Guyana in 2014, before the Hon. Members took themselves into Government. We agreed that we would build a *state-of-the-art* secondary schools on the East Coast, one on the West Bank and two on the East Bank. Because they palavered and could not get it done – which is their signature trademark type of behaviour and governance – it became too expensive to do four schools. Three were done with an agreement with the World Bank that we would do a fourth. The Prospect school is the fourth.

I raise with you, Sir, that none of the schools that began are finished. Imagine, we ‘draw’ the school, we left the money and all they had was to do it. It took the PPP/C to come back into Government to finish those schools and to deliver our promise of universal secondary education.

I commend this Budget. It has not been easy. I am not going to make it sound easy. Education and managing the sector has not been easy. I am lucky and blessed that many of the persons who were fired by the APNU/AFC are back with us. Those were the public servants whose only fault was that they were loyal to the Government of the day, but who had spent their entire lives on education. Those are the persons along with officers on the ground who are rolling out these programmes with our guidance and with our expressed desire. The Hon. Member said that many people are dissatisfied. We are dissatisfied. We tried to address COVID-19 and the COVID-19 closures within weeks of getting into Office. It has not been easy and it would not be easy. If we could get constructive debate and contributions from the Hon. Members of the Opposition, we would happily take it. My style and our style at the Ministry is to consult.

We have been talking to teachers and parents all the time. Every time we are about to make a decision, we talk to them. We are going to continue that style. We invite the Opposition to join us. This country is going forward. The people of this country would thrive with or without the Hon.

Members. If they intend to continue this style of self-delusion, this style of dishonesty, this style of labelling the people of this country gullible and blood suckers, I do not think they have a role to play in the country. I do not think they have a place in this country. The people of Guyana would show you that time after time, election after election. We on this side of the House commit to honest, decent, dedicated service. We would give that to the people of this country in every single sector that the Government has. We promise to do that efficiently.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, do you have a problem with keeping time?

**Mr. Patterson:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I want to again raise the issue of the presenter speaking to the Speaker. If you look and you end up saying you and your, I will interject. Then you would have a little longer time when I interject because I will give you back your time.

**Ms. Sarabo-Halley:** Mr. Speaker, Point of Order 40 (a). I was trying to get your attention since the Hon. Member was speaking.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, the procedure is that you press your microphone and you stand on a Point of Order. then you tell me what the Point of Order is.

**Ms. Sarabo-Halley:** Thank you, Sir. No one on this side of the House has ever said that any Guyanese citizen is a blood sucker. So, I would ask the Hon. Member to withdraw that statement. The Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) is not a citizen of this country.

*11.30 a.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I do not see that as a Point of Order, again, I refer you to article 172 of the Constitution. Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes, your time will start from now.

**Ms. Fernandes:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am convinced that the Members of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) have perfected the art of theatrics. Based on the opening statement by the Hon. Minister of Education, I am convinced that theatrics is what guide the

Members of the PPP/C when they come into this honourable House. It is shocking that the Hon. Minister stood and made remarks in her opening statement as though the PPP/C Members of Parliament (MPs) come to this House and act with decorum. Persons listening to the live broadcast will not understand the level of vulgarity that comes to this House through the Members of the PPP/C.

To the Hon. Minister of Education, the word ‘she’ is not a preposition; it is a pronoun. As I said, the comments made by the Hon. Minister of Education was well put together and very theatrical. I could tell you that it was almost convincing but, there was one small thing that could not be dismantled. It could not have been dismantled because of the fact that, in 2019, Guyana saw the best ever Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) results under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition and under the stewardship of Dr. Nicolette Henry. It cannot be erased. Persons could come here and speak repeatedly of who can and cannot do but the results cannot lie. That is what we need to remember here today.

The President of the United States of America (USA), Mr. Joseph Biden, once said:

“Don’t tell me what you value, show me your budget, and I’ll tell you what you value.”

This Budget clearly shows what the PPP/C values and, more clearly, it shows what the PPP/C could not care less about. There is nothing in this Budget for public servants – absolutely nothing. There are no salary increases and bonuses. The PPP/C has no value for public servants. There is nothing in this Budget to benefit the working people of Guyana and no adjustments in the income tax. [**An. Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible*)] You would not know what that is. There was no attempt for the minimum wage to be adjusted. There was no increase to the income tax threshold. This is where it matters; this is where you show that you value the people of this country. There were no housing subsidies and debt relief; the PPP/C has no value for the working people of this country. There is no plan for higher education in this Budget. It copied the policies of the APNU/AFC. The PPP/C promised the Guyanese people free University of Guyana (UG) education. What in this Budget brings us closer to this promise? What in this Budget drives us to believe that it is on a pathway to actually create a system, so that we could have free university education? There is absolutely nothing in this Budget that brings us one step closer to free university education; these are the facts.

I find it hilarious that the PPP/C will come to this House, look Guyanese in the face and say that we promised free education in five years. Do you believe that the Guyanese people are so gullible that you can stand here in this House and say to them that it is within the next five years? The PPP/C is simply saying is that, today, it has presented a campaign promise for 2025. That is what it meant when it said, in the next five years. It is unacceptable; we cannot be so gullible.

With nothing to benefit the working people of Guyana in this Budget, the PPP/C now attempts to parade around the failure and pretend as if there are successes. The PPP/C comes with some illogical source of confidence to proudly proclaim that its hope and ambition is to deliver non-oil Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2021, which would be smaller than the non-oil GDP that was under the Coalition in 2019. This is the GDP facts; this is what was presented in the Budget in this House. This is a shameless admittance of complete failure by the PPP/C. As stewards of the Caribbean's largest oil producer, the PPP/C has the audacity to beat its chest and boast about the ambition to deliver three years of economic stagnation – that is what it presented to us. The self-respecting state men and women would resign in shame of such failure. Is it that the APNU/AFC's accomplishments, in building a strong economy in 2019, was so overwhelming that the PPP/C will now have to take three years to accomplish such a GDP growth?

This Budget speaks of paying a lot and getting little to nothing in return. As Mr. Warren Buffett states:

“Price is what you pay. Value is what you get.”

With the working man and woman getting no value from this Budget, it would be fair to expect that they would be asked to pay nothing. Instead, the PPP/C has laid before us a plan to deliver not only the worst three years of economic growth since the first term of the Jagdeo-led Administration almost 20 years ago but, economic stagnation hand in hand with the worst level of borrowing ever seen in this nation's history. This same PPP/C that campaigned boldly all over – internet, social media and newspapers – of the \$80 billion overdraft in five years, has in half a year ramped the budgetary overdraft of over \$90 billion with plans to reach almost \$200 billion in one and a half year. That is what the PPP/C has presented to this honourable House and to the Guyanese people.

Let me put this into context for you. In my 2020 Budget presentation, to this very House a few months ago, I stated:



“The 2012 Census reported that there was a total of 210,124 households. This Budget caters to borrow \$75 billion...

To further break that down, each household will now be burdened with the national debt increase of \$357,000 in a single quarter-year period to further enrich the wealthy.”

That was not bad enough a few months ago. The Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance came to this House and presented a report for 2020 showing revenues and income of \$227 billion and \$325 billion in spending. There is \$98 billion in budgetary overreach that has to be financed from one debt or another. There is a debt burden of \$466,000 that now rest on the shoulders of every Guyanese family. What do we have to show for this? We have absolutely nothing to show for this, except the burdens being placed on the shoulders of our upcoming generation.

The PPP/C is now trying to deceive the Guyanese people with false promises that this borrowing is being used to cover tax cuts that would lower their cost of living. That was what was said in this House. It is either the PPP/C has completely skipped the ECN1100 Introductory Microeconomics or it is deliberately intending to make fools of the Guyanese people. The upward stickiness of prices is a basic economic principle that one would expect any student of Economics and Policymaker who sits on the other side of this House to understand.

This economic principle was proven true when the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, stood in this House with pride and declared that the cost of the average consumer’s bundle of goods and services increased by 1.2%. To clarify my point, the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, stood right here in this House and said that the cost of living today is higher than it was under the APNU/AFC. This leaves the question, if the cost of living is higher... This was with no salary increase, mind you, and no reduction in Pay As You Earn (PAYE). These are the real things that you do when you care about the people as you profess every day – put money in their pockets. Where did the \$466,000 borrowed on behalf of each Guyanese family go? We know it certainly did not go into the small man’s pocket. It did not go there. We who represent the will of the Guyanese people ...

I want to make this point first. The PPP/C claimed that it consulted with Guyanese in the preparation for this Budget. I can tell you this, the PPP/C did not consult with the Guyanese people

when it was formulating this Budget. This is a message to every Member of the PPP/C, for all those who stood here and tried to justify the non-inclusion of the Opposition in the Budget consultation process should never utter the word ‘democracy’ in this honourable House. It shows full dictatorial tendencies that you would try to demand that constitutional office holders must bend their knees to the will of the PPP/C in an effort to be included in any decision-making for the persons that they represent – the elected Members in this House.

The PPP/C cannot speak to me about democracy as if it holds a monopoly on the concept. Yes, I can speak of constitutionality and no Member of the PPP/C should ever speak of it, because it is currently squatting in Office through an unconstitutional process. How dare you come to this House and speak of unconstitutionality, when the process that brought you to it was unconstitutional? How shameful is that? When the PPP/C comes to this House and speak of democracy and constitutionality, we must all have a good laugh. It may only be considered a mockery, in this House, to come and speak of democracy while practising dictatorship. It can only be considered a mockery in this House to come and speak of the Constitution, when it was not used for the PPP/C to gain Office.

The Guyanese people were not consulted in formulating this Budget. The people who are left with the burden of repaying the debt created by this Budget were not consulted.

*11.45 a.m.*

Not once were they ever asked what they wanted. We, the Members of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change, know that they were not consulted because, we, the Members of the APNU/AFC, represent more than half of the population in Guyana. We know that you did not consult with these people.

The People’s Progressive Party/Civic further boasted that it consulted with small parties. The smallest child in Guyana knows that those Parties functioned as sub-sets of the PPP/C in the last elections. In the very recount that it keeps talking about in here, day after day, presenter after presenter, the PPP/C agents were used to sit into stations because the small parties could not even muster representation to sit in these recount stations in this very compound. Do not speak to us about a recount process as though we do not know what it entails. Is it a joke that the PPP/C thinks it could look Guyanese in their eyes and tell them that oh, we consulted with the people who you

did not vote for so this Budget is all well and good? It is a mockery. This is the biggest insult to the Guyanese people; political sub-sets of the PPP/C who entered the political arena and who were all pronounced dead on arrival by the Guyanese voters, must not be the basis of consultation for the Guyanese people. Not one of the persons who the PPP/C claimed that it consulted with could claim a seat in this honourable House.

The Hon. Deputy Speaker of this House is here today after combining three parties list of votes and even then, it was not enough to mount up to the required number of votes for a seat in this House. He came into this House under difference of votes. How dare the PPP/C use those small Parties as a basis of consultation when they speak in totality of the Guyanese people? It would not be accepted in any point in time. The PPP/C only consulted with those who have been rejected by the Guyanese people. Is this the democracy that it speaks about? No one in the PPP/C could come to this House and tell me about democracy.

The Members of the PPP/C stood in this House, one after the other and spoke about the 2020 elections. I have listened to the PPP/C Members speak, day after day, and I must respond to the fallacy that the PPP/C is trying to portray in this House.

The Hon. Minister of Agriculture stood in this House yesterday and spoke of this building being monumental; this building is monumental. I spent one month in this very Dome during the recount. I spent one month and I where Mr. Ramjattan is sitting. Mr. Speaker, I could tell you that the reference that the Minister was making, he fell short to speak about the loud cries that came from the Members who represented the PPP/C at that recount when they were adamant that the observation report should not be read to the Guyanese people. They did not want the Guyanese people to know what was uncovered in those boxes. How dare the PPP/C comes to this House and pretend as if it is all righteous? We would not accept that. It has to be answered and would be answered right here, right now, today. Speaker after speaker, day after day, it came here and kept talking about democracy and constitutionality as though it has some monopoly on the concept. We will not allow it to go forward like that. The PPP/C ... *[Interjection]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Jordan, please if you want to shout, we have a large compound, you could exercise your lungs there.

Hon. Member, you would get back your time. Please continue.

**Ms. Fernandes:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The PPP/C comes to this House and speak as though any of what was uncover during the recount was ever approved and untrue. Let me tell the Guyanese people that not one of the frauds uncovered in those boxes were ever proven untrue and the PPP/C has to live with that fact. If the PPP/C believed that there were so many wrongs about the 2020 elections then, I suggest, each of them on that side of the House should grab a piece of paper and start writing their resignation, because all of you are sitting in here on questionable vote from the 2020 elections. Do not come and speak here as though you are self-righteous in this process.

If the PPP/C would have thought for one second that these claims of fraud was untrue then, I believe that it should have been happy to allow elections petition 88/2020 to go through, because it would have been able to prove to the Guyanese people that all of these claims made by the Coalition was not so. Instead, the PPP/C decided to do everything in its power to make sure that elections petition 88/2020 does not go through, because it knew that it would have been exposed, so the Guyanese people would have known the truth.

The PPP/C has no grounds to speak of democracy. I would not be lectured by any Member of the PPP/C on democracy when every aspect of its governance in the last few months is laced with dictatorship. What more proof do we need of dictatorial tendencies when the gates of this very precinct were closed and elected Members of Parliament were restricted free movements? The PPP/C cannot speak to me or any other Guyanese about democracy. The PPP/C is the perfect representation of the phrase ‘do as I say, but not as I do’. This is not pre-2015; this is 2021. The people of this great nation are not starved of information as they were before. Guyana would rise again for this is just a temporary setback in our lives.

As a Member of this side of the House, my job is to not simply come here and criticise the Budget because I am on the Opposition side of the House. My job, as every other MP sitting on the Opposition side of the House, is to present the truth about this Budget to the Guyanese people. My job is to remove the technical language that the Government used to confuse and mislead the population and to simplify the Budget, so that everyone could understand what they could benefit from and, more importantly, what they would be paying for and not reaping a single benefit.

The nation endured almost five hours of the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Ministry of Finance. He presented a Budget that was laced with 60% political *gaff* which meant absolutely nothing to the Guyanese people.

It was imperative that I had addressed that and all that I just addressed. The Government Ministers, who are supposed to be defending their Budget came and spoke little to nothing on the Budget and rather made it out to be one that had gotten a stamp of approval from the Guyanese people and spoke at length about democracy and constitutionality; I simply could not have left such utterances unanswered.

I am going back to the Budget now. The PPP/C named this Budget: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. These are strong words. One might ask what is economic dynamism? The term 'economic dynamism' refers to the rate and direction of change in an economy. This Budget is struggling to meet the economic growth of 2019. There is nothing dynamic about that.

When one looks at economic resilience, the concept contains two main components: one being resilience of an economy to observe an economic shock and the other, being the ability of an economy to adapt to changing circumstances and strengthen their ability to respond to potential future shocks. As all concepts in economics, there is a micro and macro concept attached to that. The micro aspect looks at how policies affect household and the macro aspect looks at how policies projected holistically affects the country. When one is looking to create economic resilience one of the key aspects is household financial security. Mr. Speaker, when we talk about resilience, we want to make sure that Guyanese, the simple families, your neighbour, your cousin, your uncle and your aunt would be able to withstand the pressures of the economy. That is the resilience that we should be speaking about.

We see this Government by its own admission firing public servants daily. Is that how it intends to achieve economic resilience? Is that the process by which it is using to achieve economic resilience so that to make sure that households are financially stable? It is firing them to make sure that they are resilient? It does not make sense. The Members of the Government [**Mr. McCoy:** It is a Ponzi scheme.] Sir, do not shout at me. You with *yuh* one Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) subject, do not shout at me. The Members of Government... [*Interjection*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, again, I direct you to speak to me. Shall I strike that out or would you ask that it be withdrawn?

**Ms. Fernandes:** Sir, I am so guided.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you.

**Ms. Fernandes:** Thank you, Sir. The Members of the Government day after day, MP after MP stood in this House and speak on everything except their Budget. It is as though, they themselves do not believe in it and when they do speak of their plans in this Budget, they say things like what the Hon. Member, Dr. Mahadeo, said last Monday. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Duncan...

**Ms. Fernandes:** May I continue?

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, please.

**Ms. Fernandes:** Thank you, Sir. On Monday Hon. Dr. Mahadeo stood in this House and said:

“For the first time there is a rehab therapist attached to the Bartica Hospital in Region 7.”

I implore that the Hon. Member stop doing whatever he is doing in his spare time and do some research. Under the 23 years of the PPP/C’s rule in Bartica, the Bartica Regional Hospital was neglected. The 23 years that it governed this country the Bartica Regional Hospital was neglected. Hundreds of persons died from the lack of basic health care in Bartica.

*12.00 p.m.*

It was under the APNU/AFC Coalition that the Bartica Hospital was upgraded to a Bartica Regional Hospital. Those are the facts. They are not debatable; you should not come to the House and debate facts. When the APNU/AFC took Office in 2015, there were three doctors at the Bartica Regional Hospital. That is the Hospital that serviced numerous communities in Region 7 and some from Region 10. The facility was so run-down that there was no functioning theatre to perform basic surgeries. The pregnant mothers in labour were placed in speedboats. Mr. Speaker, I want you to pay attention to this fact, because when we come here to speak to this House on the Budget, we sometimes miss the fact that the decisions we make affect real people –the real lives of people.

Pregnant mothers, under the PPP/C 23 years of rulership, in Bartica, were put into a speedboat with a 75 engine, covered with a plastic and were sent from Bartica to Parika to get an ambulance to Georgetown while they were in labour. That is because the then Bartica Hospital did not have the capacity to deal with any form of complications whatsoever. There were mothers who died and babies who died. Bartica wept for its daughters under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration. This is the fact. [**Mr. Persaud:** How come you did not die?] The Hon. Member is asking how come I did not die. I can tell you this, many times we come to this House and we speak of matters that we heard about. Many times, we come to this House because someone told us through the grapevines that this is what happened, but I was one of those lucky mothers – I was one of those mothers.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, your luck seems to be running still. Could we get someone to move an extension?

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

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

**Ms. Fernandes:** Thank you, Sir. It was under the APNU/AFC Administration that the Bartica Regional Hospital got a well-equipped river ambulance so that patients could travel in comfort. Persons could go and check the record because it is all over. For the Hon. Member, Dr. Mahadeo, to commend a Budget to this House that adds a rehabilitation therapist to a fully functioning hospital which it met in August, 2020, is a damn shame. The Hon. Member cannot come to this House and speak as though the PPP/C cares for Bartica. It appears as though the Hon. Member was in a slumber and has suddenly awoken and said that Oh my God, there is a place called Bartica and oh my God, it has a hospital. Do you know what? Maybe, I should mention something in my speech to take up some words. This is not going to be tolerated by the people of Bartica and, by extension, the people of this country. It would have been remiss of me to not correct the procession that he attempted to paint to the rest of Guyana, because he can never take that statement to Bartica – never. Absolutely not. He could never take that statement to any residents of Bartica. I can go further and, I think, I must make this final point.

It was under the PPP/C Administration... Again looking at the Ministry of Health in Bartica, because we are talking about person's lives. There was a little boy who fell and broke his arm. When he went to the hospital, was given pain killers and he was asked to go home. Within a matter of days, under the PPP/C Administration, the little boy had a swollen arm and he was asked to go back to the hospital. The doctors had to send him to Georgetown because they could have only afforded to send emergency cases to Georgetown. Do you know why he was sent to Georgetown? It was because the Bartica Regional Hospital did not even have a simple functioning electromagnetic radiation machine (X-ray machine). That is the legacy of the PPP/C. When that child got to Georgetown, at seven years old, his arms had already started to heal in the wrong place and the doctors had to hold him down and rebreak the arm so that they could fix it in place. This is the horror that Guyanese and Barticans experienced under the PPP/C Administration.

It was under the APNU/AFC Coalition that 20 doctors were placed at the Bartica Regional Hospital and several specialists were included. The theatre was working, the X-ray department was working and there was a fully functioning intensive care unit (ICU). The Computerised tomography (CT) scans were put in the Bartica Regional Hospital and surgeries were being done there. How dare the Hon. Member, Dr. Mahadeo, come to this House and speak of the Bartica Regional Hospital as though he met it in a deplorable state? That is shameful and it will not be tolerated.

I opened today by quoting Mr. Joseph Biden who said:

“Don't tell me what you value, show me your budget, and I'll tell you what you value.”

The PPP/C Members stood here, day after day and Member after Member, and told us what they valued. Then, they showed us their Budget and, now, we are telling them what they value. It places little to no value on the people of this country. With all that they have done, they have done absolutely nothing to lower the cost of living for Guyanese. Instead, they have added the larger debt burden on the working class, and it is the largest that we have ever seen before. That is *Budget 2021* for you, without the technical jargons and without the niceties that the Hon. Minister presented in this House. This is what *Budget 2021* presents to the Guyanese people.

I close by saying, once again, as I said in my Budget presentation last year, trickle-down economics is a myth; it does not work. If there is no direct transfer to the working class, there will never be any transfer to it except for the burden of the budget deficit. If the PPP/C cares about the working



class in this country, it would heed to the call of the Coalition and give public servants the 10% retroactive bonus that the APNU/AFC has been asking for, because that is the only right thing to do. That is the only way that the PPP/C can redeem itself from the atrocity of the Budget that it presented in this House.

I, thank you. [*Applause*]

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

*Sitting suspended at 12.08 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 1.23 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I now call on the Hon. Minister in the Ministry of Public Works, Hon. Member Mr. Deodat Indar. Hon. Minister, you may proceed.

**Minister within the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to, for the first time, show my entire face in the Assembly. Since Monday, we started the deliberations in this National Assembly, and I have heard a lot of misinformation I am obliged to respond to some of them.

The first speaker from the Opposition benches, Ms. Walton-Desir spoke about the Hutus and the Tutsis of Rwanda. She spoke about the Nazis and tried to stir up racial tension. There is a name called ‘Radovan Karavich’. Radovan Karavich was known in the Bosnian war, but he was captured and was taken to an international court where he was tried and found to be guilty of war crimes and genocide. That was done as recently as 2016, when he was found guilty.

The reason I raised this matter is because, we find that the arguments, most of the times, coming from the Opposition benches – I find that they have not returned from lunch as yet – most of the previous speakers who we heard circle around and have a racial undertone. This is a dangerous thing. From the no confidence motion, with all of the raucous leading up to the elections on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, Guyana, after we took it on 2<sup>nd</sup> August was a country that was broken at every bone. The country was divided deeply. To continue with these tensions and these racial undertones, after a Government has been lawfully elected and is in Office, are something that is on a dangerous path.

I know that this Parliament has a live feed and a lot of people around the world follow what is said in here from the diaspora, Guyana, and the Region. For us to continue down this path, I am saying that, it is a dangerous path and we must stay away from it.

I have to respond to the Hon. Member, Mr. Sherod Duncan. In his presentation remarks to this Parliament, he said that no help for small businesses was in the 2021 Budget and that the APNU/AFC did well for small businesses. It was something around that he said. I could not have gathered the exact wording from the *Hansard*, but something around what he said. I want to respond to that and I will respond to it by quoting the numbers.

Last night, I took the time to go through the Volumes from 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. I have the 2020 and the 2021 volumes, which were done under us. In those volumes, for 2015, the tax revenue that the state brought in for the state was \$135 billion. In 2016, it went up to \$142.8 billion. In 2017, it went up to \$171.1 billion. In 2018, it went further up to \$199.2 billion. In 2019, a single year, it moved to \$226.5 billion. In that single year, from 2018 to 2019, the tax increase was 13.5%. The question that we have to ask ourselves is, where is this tax coming from? Who is paying this tax? This tax, without a doubt, is paid by households, employees and corporations.

The long and short of it is that if one is to take 2015, at \$135 billion, and come to 2019, which is \$226.5 billion, there is a 67% increase from the base year. That is the record of the APNU/AFC Government. You cannot hide from it; it is in every Volume of the Budget.

*1.29 p.m.*

That is the record. How can you claim that you have helped small businesses when that money was somehow extracted from their pockets? It is added cost to them. That is why when we presented the 2020 Budget – when Minister Edghill did that – thereafter, we passed a whole lot of reversals of those same fees and taxes because they were hardship measures on the people. So, for the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) to claim that it helped small businesses is nothing more than untruth. The numbers are proof themselves. But what is even more dangerous, is in the years 2018 and 2019, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in 2018 was 4.4%, and in 2019 it was 5.4%. That information is not taken willy-nilly; it is taken from the World Bank's data. If one goes to the Bank's website, he or she will see it. So, earlier, when the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes – I think that is the Hon. Member's name – said

that in 2019 they had such explosive growth of the economy. It was 5.4%. I do not know how explosive 5.4% growth is that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) will have to take years before it builds that back. That is pure nonsense.

Last year – in 2020 – we recorded 43.5% increase in the GDP. That has absolutely nothing to do with the APNU/AFC's strategy or plan. And I will explain to you why it has nothing to do with their plan. The non-oil GDP went down by 7.1%. That is saying that the traditional sector suffered by 7.1%. So, for the APNU/AFC to claim that 2019 was this explosive year and only had a 5.4% GDP growth, it is utter nonsense. It is misleading the people and we have to call the facts out. If the Hon. Member would have just looked at the figures coming out of the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or even to the Ministry of Finance, she would have seen that it was 5.4%. So, I do not know where this explosive growth came from. But what is more dangerous here is that people were being taxed at an increased rate of 13.5%, while the country's income was 5.4%. This is a huge disparity. People were being taxed more than their earning capacity. And that meant that you were making the country into a pauperised stay – long and short term.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about their plan that they claim they have. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, before you talk about the plans, let me talk about unparliamentary words; the word 'nonsense' is one. I think you used that like three times. The second issue is, if you are going to refer to the Hon. Members, on the other side, please say 'honourable'. If you are going to refer, as the last speaker skilfully did, to or talk about the 'party' then you can use 'they'.

**Mr. Indar:** Alright, Mr. Speaker. I am much guided.

I would like to speak about the number of claims made by the Members of the Opposition over the past three days about them having this plan. The Members said that they, and the former President, Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger, had vision. And that is what we heard over and over again. If one looks at a report that was in the *Stabroek News* on 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2017, this was the launch of the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS). The Green State Development Strategy is what the APNU/AFC ventured into. That Strategy came late in their Administration. When one looks at that Strategy, it was just 184 pages of fluff. There were no deliverables in that Strategy. There was nothing in that Strategy to say, for example, that this is a piece of paper, as a plan for the country,

let us go do these five things. There was nothing there. That Green State Development Strategy was a failure. It was never implementable. So, to say that you have a plan – which I am sure a lot of the Members have not even read – is a farce.

Moving on from that, when the former President, Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger, was campaigning, on the campaign stage, a lot of people were asking, where was the plan for Guyana? He said that he had the plan in his back pocket. That is what he said. Now, imagine having an entire country to run and saying that the plan is in your back pocket. That is the sort of disrespect you get from leaders of a nation when you ask them of what the plan is for you and your family or for the children of this country, and they say to you that it is in their back pocket.

I also heard of people on the APNU/AFC's side talking about performance and efficiency in Government – these fancy words I heard. This is another report from *Stabroek News* dated 31<sup>st</sup> May, 2019, when their own Minister at that time, Minister Jordan said:

“Gov't continuing to work on improving public sector investment – Jordon”

Reading further in this report, it states, that as at 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2017, only 30% of the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) was implemented. For those who have never heard of the term PSIP, it is the Public Sector Investment Programme. Only 30% was implemented. If I hire a contractor and the contractor tells me that only 30% of the work was done in a year, obviously, that contractor deserves to be fired. If there is an employee who is only working at 30% strength, it means that employee is inefficient and way below the 50% mark. Here, we had an entire Government operating at the 30% implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme. And these moneys were in the budget and debated in this very House for programmes, as they said, would help people. So, here you were, starving people of resources; that is what it went down to, starvation of resources.

Again, I want to go back to the issue of their claim of not taxing. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, spoke about taxes. He said that we have carried up taxes and that they had collected taxes based on better administration. I would like to call him out on this one. On 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2020, here is the face of Mr. Godfrey Statia, who is the head of the tax agency. The Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) raked in \$226 billion in tax revenue for 2019 from 2018. This is what they gloated about. This was their Government putting both hands in people's pockets. That is what this was. If they

were gloating about increases in taxes, those increases came from households, the ordinary workers and from businesses, especially, the small businesses. Small businesses already had a long regime of increases in fees and a whole host of other things which were changed in 2017. They also moved from a zero-rated into a standard-rated value-added tax (VAT) regime; with a long list of things which were included – added cost to small businesses.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to the Hon. Member, Mr. Shurwayne Holder, who spoke about the APNU/AFC following the procurement laws. I do not know if this is a joke or what it is. The Member spoke of the quality of work under the APNU/AFC. I really thought that I should answer this because I found it to be untruthful. He then smuggled, ‘God is good’ in his presentation. But God is good. And the rest of the Members of the Opposition, in their presentations, smuggled in terms like, efficiency, integrity and honesty, which is fine on their part. But I would like to remind them that this is the same team that tried to rig an election. It is the same team that came here and spoke those fancy words that tried to rig the election. It is the same team that while in Government, had massive land giveaways on the East Bank, the East Coast, and the waterfronts of the country. It is the same team... [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes. It is the same team that was taking gifts from State agencies such as the Transport and Harbours Department (T&HD). The Transport and Harbours Department have in its liability over \$400 million which it has not paid the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). It means that the workers, of the Transport and Harbours Department, their moneys were deducted from their pay, but was not remitted on their behalf to NIS to benefit them in their old age. Those moneys spent on gifts; it was somebody’s NIS remittance. It was the same thing with the Demerara Harbour Bridge – span nine might collapse soon. The spans that open – spans nine and 10; span nine is troublesome. We have funds in our budget to deal with it, but that organisation should not be spending money to give gifts to anyone under the sun.

These things, they get under your skin, but to say that the procurement law was followed, then tell me about the Maritime Administration Department (MARAD). Tell me about MARAD that just found out, through an audit, that \$657 million was paid to a contractor, Courtney Benn Contracting Services Ltd., and one of its subsidiary, Brenco Shipping Company and where zero was given in return; no repairs were done and no spares were given. So, you cannot say that procurement laws were followed when there were these massive breaches. The sum of \$657 million could have given

65,700 children their \$10,000 grant. That is what you were dealing with; that was the kind of Government we had. And the people saw that. So, if we take the Guyanese people for fools, then I think we are seriously mistaken.

Mr. Speaker, I will move on.

I have to remind this House and the people who are looking, about the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA). That airport saw a massive scoping down of the works that were supposed to be paid, for the sum of US\$150 million. The scope was reduced by US\$23.7 million. This is a scope reduction for the same price. It is like if you are buying five apples for \$5,000 and the seller tells you that you will get three apples for the same price; two were pulled back. That is what it means.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, spoke about sugar workers, sugar and rice. I would like to remind this House that it was the APNU/AFC that put taxes on herbicides, pesticides and fertilisers. They did that, but we reversed it. I would like to remind the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, that he was the one that went on a press conference and talked about Russians trying to infiltrate an election where pencil and paper is being used. He called three Russian names: Stoli, Ivanoff and Smirnoff – I think it was something like that; a kind of vodka. Mr. Speaker, I could use the word, ‘garbage’. It is utter garbage.

I would like to now do a simple womb to tomb analysis or it can be called a cradle-to-grave analysis. It is about the stint of the APNU/AFC in Office. I found 34 items that stuck out and I would like to appraise the House. The first one is the massive set of tax increases, that we have been talking about since *Noah was a boy* in this House. The second is the land giveaways. The third is the shock and awe management style and philosophy of the APNU/AFC Government. That is what was witnessed. Every morning, it was a different kind of negative that one was being hit with. It is called a shock and awe principle of managing the economy. The APNU/AFC increased land rents to farmers, the tax on all the products from saw and lumber to shingles and plywood – everything they taxed. We had to fight the Forest Producers Association to have it reversed. They taxed education, something that is developmental. We had to make a royal fight for that. All the schools and the private sector came together – I was part of the leadership for the private sector at that time – to fight against this tax on education.

Water – when one goes to the masjid, one could find people washing themselves in water before they pray. When one goes to the mandir, it is the same; water is used when there is a function. The Christians, they use water to clean the churches *et cetera*. Every household use water for some good. The APNU/AFC placed 14% tax on 170,000 water users. And as a result, it is increasing the cost of living on people. They accused us of that, but they were the ones who did it; we reversed it.

If one moves down the line, data was taxed. The APNU/AFC do not even want our people to talk to each other. They taxed the data; we reversed that.

The electricity bill – energy cost is one of things that cause businesses not to grow because it is a high cost. With manufactures, commercial operations and micro-organisations, there is energy cost. Within households, children now are learning because of online services and they need electricity. The Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) has 205,000 customers. The APNU/AFC went and placed 14% VAT on electricity. How could you tax that? The PPP/C reversed that. This is the record.

Food items – a whole host of food items were in the zero-rated regime under VAT, where zero tax was paid on them. The APNU/AFC put them under standard-rated and 14% VAT was payable on them. Farming equipment, mining equipment and fishing equipment were all taxed – 14% VAT was placed on them. We reversed every single one of them. What did they do with this money? Were buildings painted? What did they do with this money? If they could show us what was done with the money, then we will have a better conversation, but show us what you did with the money.

*1.44 p.m.*

The Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes, just said that we cannot speak to her about democracy and the rule of law or something like that. I beg to differ; I will speak to you all, about democracy, for as long as I live. And I will confront you all, on democracy, for as long as I live.

The first thing is, former President Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger, breached the Constitution when he hired Mr. James Patterson at the Elections Commission (GECOM). A President of a country breaching his own Constitution that he swore to adhere to. [**An Hon. Member:**

(*Inaudible*)] It was the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) that said so. I will come to that; you wait and sit in your seat; you will get it.

The other one is the procurement laws, if one checks all the Auditor General's reports, you will find cases and cases of the Procurement Act being breached. If one looks at the legislation that they brought to this House under their regime – State Assets Recovery Agency (SARA). SARA is one of the most perverse piece of legislation which was raised, that I have ever seen on the face of the earth. Long reaching tentacles into people's private lives; that was the sort of thing we saw under the APNU/AFC Government. The APNU/AFC had embarrassed this nation by telling the world that 32 is not greater than 33. The APNU/AFC spent large sums of moneys to have legal representation all over – *they gotaying one dhal*, as they say – until the matter reached *res judicata*. *Res judicata* means that it has reached an end, but you all are just *gotaying one dhal* these legal matters, just to pay legal people.

Mr. Speaker, the APNU/AFC squatted in Office for five months after they knew that they had lost the elections. I want to tell them that I was there in the Ashmins' building when Mr. Mingo pulled out the spreadsheet, went on the platform and read from it. I was there in the Ashmins' building when the Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, threatened the United States of America, Britain, Canada and the European Union (ABCE) diplomats to revoke their accreditations. I was there with Dr. Ali, at the door, when they were speaking. I was in the building. I was there at the recount when I heard that they invoked and said that dead people voted. I was tasked with finding those people and we found hundreds of them who they said were dead. When the APNU/AFC said that these persons were dead, their families were upset because they were called "dead people". This was the sorts of things we had to endure. That is why I said when we went into Office, we found a fractured country at every bone because these were the things that caused that to happen.

I further say that this is the only Government in Guyana that enjoyed visa restriction – the only Government in our history, since our republic.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that they have to heckle me, which is fine, I have been heckled all my life. But tell me what happened to the US\$18 million; one of you, across there, just give an account for it. You cannot because we could not have found... [*Interruption*]



**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you were going great, but you just stepped across. It is the Hon. Members over there.

**Mr. Indar:** Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Hon. Susanne Rodrigues, in her presentation, talked about the Ministry of Housing and Water, at that time – the APNU/AFC did not call it the Ministry of Housing and Water – with a 12% implementation rate. There is no other term for that other than institutional laziness. It is institutional laziness for a Ministry to have a 12% implementation rate.

I want to go to this Budget. This Budget was prepared by the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance, and his team. The Budget presented by Dr. Ashni Singh and his team is a template for development. I will tell you, that in this Budget, just for Public Works alone, – the other Ministers and Members of Parliament (MPs) will do their share – I have picked up 24 items in this Budget under Public Works that shows how Government's money is spent, in the right way, to create social and economic formation.

The first one is \$70 million for Government buildings. This is for a new laboratory for the Ministry. There is \$890 million in here for 20 pontoons for the Demerara Harbour Bridge and the rehabilitation of span nine that is giving us problems. There is Public Infrastructure in here. The sum of \$367 million for lights, sidewalks and parking lots. For the Ogle to Eccles four-lane bypass road, the sum of \$1.060 billion is in this Budget for that. The sum of \$425 million for dredging and marine works, which includes the purchase of a new pilot launch and suction hopper for the dredger we have.

The sum of \$215 million for bridges for Better Hope, Good Hope, Cemetery Road, Big and Little Biaboo, Groenveldt and Leonora. Miscellaneous roads, alone, carry \$7.9 billion; urban roads, \$1.1 billion; the East Coast Demerara road extension, \$1.1 billion from Better Hope to Belfield. The Mandela road, \$2 billion; public and main access roads, \$378 million; hinterland roads, \$2.1 billion; Linden to Mabura road – 125 kilometres of road – \$3.5 billion. Farm-to-market access roads, \$400 million. The Schoonard to Parika road that is going to open massive amounts of farmland for investment and housing schemes; the studies in there are going start at \$200 million. The rehabilitation of the Linden/Soesdyke road is about \$150 million. The sum of \$1.3 billion for sea defence; sea and river defence, \$3 billion and waterfront development for Stabroek and Vreed-

en- Hoop, \$185 million. The repairs of Wakenaam, Fort Island, Parika, Supenaam and Leguan stelling at the sum of \$310 million. The sum of \$645 million for navigation aids for beacons and removal of wrecks in the Demerara River because of the heavy marine traffic there. The sum of \$500 million for the recondition and spares for ferries: Malali, M.V. Makouria and M.V. Kimbia.

The sum of \$345 million for air strips in the hinterland: Paramakatoi, Baramita, Karisparu and Eteringbang. The sum of \$2.5 billion for the CJIA expansion project. That is what we have.

This Budget has \$32.9 billion for Public Works. It is 32% of the entire spending for capital works of the country. The total amount of capital works in here is \$103 billion. The Ministry of Public Works, alone, has \$32.9 billion or 32% of the works. This is in keeping with the President's vision of massive infrastructure development. This is in keeping with our promise to the people, when we were campaigning, that we would build up and modernise Guyana. This is the template for development. It is right here, and I fully endorse it.

I want to talk about the artifice of decorum and the holier than thou attitude that some of our MPs, on the opposite side, come here with. Before the elections, these same MPs were on television, they were outside of this same building and they were spewing untruths to the public. The People's Progressive Party/Civic published every single Statements of Poll, which we had, on a website. I am going back to this democracy issue because it is vital for development. The reason it is vital for development is because no investor will come here to spend millions of dollars and only do it in a five-year cycle; it moves beyond the five-year cycle, to 10, 15 or 20 years. If one builds a hotel, it may cost US\$20 million; if one builds any show base facility, it may cost US\$100 million, so the payback period and the net present value (NPV) analysis, spans over an elections cycle. And for that very reason, there has to be a stable economic environment – a stable political environment. The APNU/AFC, from 2<sup>nd</sup> March to 2<sup>nd</sup> August, has created the atmosphere of a dictatorship because they did not come out of Office when they lost. They have not yet showed us and the world any SOPs; you should start by doing that. If you want to lecture us on democracy, pay the Guyana Chronicle its money. If you want to speak to us and lecture us on democracy, start by giving us a copy of your Statements of Poll then we can have that conversation. Once we get the SOPs, we will determine, firstly, that you lost and then we will have that conversation. But do not come and tell us the SOPs are also in your back pockets because it seems that a lot of back pocket operations are happening – you have your plan in your back pockets and you also have the SOPs

there too. You cannot do that; it is not right. If you continue, as an Opposition, to operate in a vertex, that means that you will not be able to speak to the man on the ground.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, someone has to pull five minutes out of their back pocket for you.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to give my Colleague many, many minutes, but I am restrained my dear Colleague, so I wish to ask for five minutes more to conclude.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister Teixeira. Hon. Minister, you may continue to conclude.

**Mr. Indar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Facial expression tells you what is in a person. It is an expression of what is felt inside. I saw the young MPs, on the opposite side, – the younger ones – the older ones, I could tell you that they can speak with a straight face, but the younger ones speak with a little more passion. But one could see some of the anger coming out – they vent angrily. I have read and I have learnt that anger is not a plan and venting is not a strategy. I will repeat that, anger is not a plan and venting is not a strategy. We, as the leaders of Guyana, must find a way to deal with the commonalities. The commonalities that we share for the people of Guyana, and for the betterment of Guyanese, we must start on some footing to have that happening.

I heard some people say that they will never support a budget coming from the PPP/C's side, but this Budget, apart from the infrastructure and the hard assets that it will deliver to the people of Guyana, there is a whole host of measures on the social services side, to help our people, to help the disabled, to help our pensioners, to help the elderly, to help children and to help the sick. This Budget has moneys allocated in it to deal with programmes. So, if you are saying that you will not agree with the elements of this Budget, it is that you are saying that you are saying that you are not agreeing to help the pensioners, to help the sick, to help the children and to help the elderly. Is that the position that we want to take as leaders in Guyana? I think not. But I do endorse His Excellency when he spoke in his opening remarks, in our Parliament, about oneness.

Mr. Speaker, children look at each of us, as we speak here – our children, our collective children – and they see our behaviour. We do not want to create a country where we have *share* miscreants

and *kavakamites*; we cannot do that. We have to have a culture where children are grown to show respect and to deal with each other in kindness. I hope for that for the leadership of this House. And I am asking my Friends, on the other side, to, at least, start with some of the truths; to start with some of the hard things like accepting that they have lost the elections and that they are in Opposition – that is the first part. Let us talk about democracy; let us have that serious conversation. But do not accuse us when you do not have a single shred of evidence to say that you have won.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that I have made my case today and I commend this Budget to the Parliament for approval. Thank you, Sir. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister.

Hon. Member Ms. Maureen Philadelphia, you may proceed.

**Ms. Philadelphia:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

As I rise to make my contribution to the subject at hand, I wish to thank the public servants at the Ministry of Finance, who would have worked tirelessly, in completing this document.

*1.59 p.m.*

*[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]*

*[Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.]*

Also, I want to take a timeout to extend condolences to the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, on the passing of her dad. I, therefore, ask that she finds solace and comfort, knowing that she is standing on the shoulders of her father and that to be absent in the body, is to be present with the Lord.

Please allow me to, once again, thank the Guyanese people who would have given their continued support to the APNU/AFC. And in so doing, I ask them to use the experiences gained from the many events of 2020, to brace themselves for 2021, knowing that their hopes were once again shattered by the big jet which landed on the shores of Guyana on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2021.

As I rise, this and every other day, I thank God for life. Even, as I thank God for life, I remember those families who often struggle to deal and to cope with the events of the day. Another day to COVID-19 and related deaths; another day to cocaine busts; another day to domestic violence; another day to wanton dismissal of public servants. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes, another day to jailbreak. Did I say jail? ‘Loose out’. Yes, and another day of the disappearance of a boat with dead bodies. But the funniest part of this movie is that the boat had no engine.

The shattered dreams are splattered with three ds. The three ds which I speak of, are not the three dimensional teaching aid that we use to ensure that concepts are taught effectively neither am I talking about the three ds that the Hon. Member, Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo, used in the House to entice lovers for sex toys. Rather, it speaks to disingenuous, disrespectful and deceitful.

Mr. Speaker, no less a person than the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, spoke of salary increase for public servants. It is the secret of the century, since the page in the Budget document that should speak to wages and salary increase disappeared like the boat with dead bodies – disrespectful, deceitful and disingenuous. Follow me, notwithstanding the fact that I am on this side of the House, I am House proud. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes, House proud.

I anxiously await the day for the Hon. Members, of the other side, to come clean with the truth, but rather, it is far from reality. I do believe, even as I wait, that the wait will take forever, since decency is not the norm. There is a difference between being honourable and being called honourable. Not every person that wears a crown is known to be a prince. Yes, I am House proud. I am House proud, not because of this faecal matter, but I am House proud because of this, that it was under the APNU/AFC Government that we recognised the input of public servants; that it was the David Granger-led Administration that would have established a public service college, where public servants are trained to be effective as they deliver on a daily basis.

I am also proud because of this – a water purification plant was installed at the La Bonne Intention (LBI). Prior to then, this is what we had for water, but God bless the APNU/AFC. We received this [MP displays toilet paper and a water bottle].

I am House proud and also a daughter of the East Coast, Region 4. Ever since May, 2015, to October, 2020, I know not of flooding. But December, 2020, several residents of the East Coast had to vacate their homes because of flooding. Why am I proud? I am proud because pumps were

erected on the East Coast, compliments of the APNU/AFC. We are still to see the other two pumps to be commissioned PPP/C at Hope and Belfield.

The Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, in his Budget document on page 47 states, and I quote:

“...to develop a world-class education system, we intend to ensure equal access to quality education, at all levels, for all children, regardless of their background, to increase and improve the quality and quantity of trained teachers, learning resources and materials, and to increase the use of innovation and technology in order to improve education delivery and learning outcomes...”

I dare say equity is equally important as equality.

The Hon. Member also stated, and I quote:

“... the public education system inherited by our administration leaves much to be desired. The sector is plagued by inadequate supervision and lack of accountability within the levels and this needs to be reversed immediately...”

Mr. Speaker, let me put on record, one would have thought that by now, even as education has adjusted to the pandemic and its modalities that there would have been some mechanism in place to take care of the financial burden placed on our teachers and other public servants. Rather, this document only seeks to address furniture, troughs, sinks, personal protective equipment (PPE), among other things. No consideration was given to our teachers, when teachers are the ones who are on the forefront ensuring the nation’s children are continuously taught. For those who mould the nation, we ask: how long should we wait from now for their contribution to be recognised? How long more do we have to wait to ensure that our teachers who impart knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to the learners, are adequately cared for?

Guyanese experienced an era where a one-hand man played a tune on a one-man band. I am House proud. It was under the APNU/AFC Government, between the years of 2015 and 2019, that teachers saw significant improvement of wages and salaries.

The learners will receive \$15,000 one-off cash grant. But while this is so, how many of them will benefit directly from that \$15,000? It is disrespectful, disingenuous and deceitful.

It was under the APNU/AFC Government that Guyana was dubbed the best performer in the Caribbean for the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) and the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) in the year 2019. As a matter of fact, it was under the APNU/AFC Government that the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) of the public schools came back to the top. And, of course, the performance of Region 4 remained constant. I turn to my Colleague, Dr. Nicolette Henry, and I say, thank you very much, Dr. Nicolette Henry and the hard-working staff of the Ministry of Education sector and, of course, our valued teachers.

I would have served in the teaching profession for well over 28 years, having served in five communities. The Northbrook Nursery School was without a security guard, even though that school was commissioned in the year 2000. Youngsters in that community, scaled the fence, gaining access to the outdoor equipment and the fruit trees.

The Newtown Nursery School was without security guards, even though that institution was commissioned in the year 2002. But what is worrying is that the staff and learners of that institution were faced with empty alcoholic containers at the entrance of the school every Monday morning.

The Lusignan Nursery School – a spanking guard hut which should have been advertised in the classified section of the *Stabroek News*. It was under the APNU/AFC Government that these and all other institutions in Region 4, received security guards. And, of course, on a 24-hour basis. I am House proud.

It was under the APNU/AFC Government that Sweeper/Cleaners no longer received a paltry sum of \$18,000 to \$24,000, but rather \$58,000 to \$64,000, monthly. And yes, for the first time, they enjoyed their year-end bonus. While, this is so, these contracted employees, after working the same hours and doing the same chores as their counterparts under the fixed establishment, are not remunerated accordingly. Shame, PPP/C! Shame! [**An Hon. Member:** That is what (*inaudible*)] That is the problem. Shame, PPP/C! Shame! I beg the question; will the contracted Sweeper/Cleaners be provided with bonus and incentives like the other contracted employees in the other sectors? Will these contracted Sweeper/Cleaners be put on the fixed establishment like their counterparts? We need to remember that these are the personnel that keep our institution clean, so that the nation's children could be educated in a clean and healthy space. Yes, I am House proud.

**Deputy Speaker [Mr. Shuman]:** Hon. Member, in order to conclude your presentation, you will need an extension of five minutes.

**Mr. Duncan:** Generous, Mr. Speaker, I crave five minutes more for my Colleague to finish her presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Shuman:** Hon. Member, you may proceed.

**Ms. Philadelphia:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am not taking off my shoe in combat, but rather I want to be comfortable as I bring the facts.

*2.14 p.m.*

The Hon. Member, Ms. Susan Rodrigues, passionately presented her budget of billions of dollars to be expended in 2021 for the improvement of water and sanitation, but none of those moneys were allocated to Region 4. Shame PPP/C! Shame!

The communities of Lusignan, Mon Repos, Triumph, La Bonne Intention (LBI) and other communities were plunged into water woes since October last. As a matter of fact, the toilets of some of the institutions in these areas cannot be used since water is not going into the buildings, as a result of poor water pressure. Sinks were constructed on the external parts of institutions and this is what some of the sinks look like as a result of the poor water pressure. [*Hon. Member displayed pictures of the sinks.*] When the pipe comes on at night— *drip, drop, drip, drop*. This is what is left – disingenuous, disrespectful, deceitful.

It was under the APNU/AFC Government that Barnwell North, Two Friends Housing Scheme, Lusignan Pasture and other communities in Region 4 received potable water, in quantity, quality and, of course, on a 24-hour basis. There are no longer the days of citizens having to take care of domestic chores which require the use of water before 9 p.m. or having to fill containers, in addition to having to wait until 6 a.m. for the pipes. I am house-proud. To Dr. Van West-Charles, I say thank you. As I speak, the water pressure in Region 4 is once again house pressure, like the Trinidadian calypsonian song: *Back to Basics*. The flow is so weak that residents are no longer enjoying the luxury of showers, rather they have to use bowls to dip water from buckets to bathe.



I wish to address an issue raised by the Hon. Member, Mr. Lee Gendre Williams, who reminded this noble House of His Excellency President Granger's encouragement to Guyanese of being entrepreneurs. It is better to be selling plantain chips and cook-up rice than to be told one morning that your service is no longer needed and you form part of the statistics. I say this, my Colleague on the Government side subliminal messages will not demoralise us. Plantain chips and cook-up rice are all Guyanese cuisine of which we all enjoy.

The Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport would have ventured into the village of Buxton, touting that moneys were given to improve the ground in that community. Under the APNU/AFC Government, we improved community grounds in all 10 administrative regions of Guyana. I need to put on notice that no amount of bribery will buy the Buxtonians. It was that very village that the PPP/C would have made into a wild west zone. Sons and fathers were murdered, and families cannot find closure. When one sought employment, one was turned back for originating from Buxton. A mother was gunned down while going to collect her child from school; the backlands were bulldozed. These are the things we need to remember. You will never buy Buxton. The Coalition stands by Buxton.

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, I am afraid your time is up. Please conclude.

**Ms. Philadelphia:** In closing, I ask the question why? Why I, I and I, a mother, an educator, a public servant, a Guyanese, should accept this as is? It did not cater for a public servant and, as such, I say no. I will not.

Thank you. [*Applause*]

**Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation [Mr. Todd]:** Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to represent the Government's side of this House and to present the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation's allocation and projection for the year 2021.

Before I go into the substance of the allocation for the Ministry, I would like to do some housecleaning. There are some matters that need to be addressed and put to rest – the matter of race politics. It is a very serious issue and, as a black Guyanese, on this side of the House, I have the prerogative to speak as a proud black Guyanese citizen. I have listened to the opening remarks

and the substance offered by the first speaker from the opposite side of the floor, the Hon. Member, Mdm. Walton-Desir. She went on to use race politics and ethno-politics by division to create further hostility in the Guyanese society. I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, it is not being heard by the working-class blacks in Guyana because I am going to those communities and I am hearing a totally different story. They are telling me that enough is enough. They are tired of the race politics and they are tired of the misrepresentation of the working-class blacks in this country.

That is a theory that the People's National Congress/Reform (PNCR) – led Coalition has perpetually used to confuse the working-class people in Guyana – predominantly the black working-class. We on this side of the House, are going to confront it today because this is a situation that should not persist in any 21<sup>st</sup> century society that wants to build a future for each and every citizen. On this side of the House, we are going to put that to rest by ensuring that each and every Guyanese citizen is fairly treated and fairly catered for in a society that is open, all-encompassing and has the value system that will allow each and every one to participate in the development process.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot speak without referring to data. There is a thinking on the other side of the House that, each and every black working-class citizen votes for the PNCR. That is the thinking. That is what they want Guyanese to believe but the last census of 2012, a census that is done every decade – one is due next year – puts black Guyanese at one-third of the population. Indians at 40%, mixed race at 20%, the lowest would be other at 0.03%, and Amerindians at 10.51%. So, it is an illusion coming from the other side of the House when they speak of the representation of the black working-class in Guyana. That thinking that they put out there, that the black working-class only votes for the PNC/R, is a lie and that must stop today and now. Enough is enough.

Guyana's population is 0.786 million. In the last Official List of Electors, it was 0.661 million; votes cast and counted were 0.46 million. The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) won the elections with 50.69% of the votes. The APNU/AFC or the PNC/R dominated Coalition got 47.34% of the votes. Understand me, I am not going to get into the mathematics of it because I understand the confusion I will create on the other side of this floor. I will allow them to go and do their homework and they will understand that it is statistically improbable for each and every black working-class citizen to vote for the APNU/AFC, when one looks at the numbers. So, please, go home, do your mathematics and come back with a different model– a model of inclusiveness,

a model that represents each Guyanese and a model that excludes race politics from the ideology. That is what you need to do. Stop it. Enough is enough.

This is supposed to be a budget presentation, so I will do my best to include the Budget in my narrative. Going back to some numbers; the PNCR has had 32 years combined in Office. Forget about 1964 to 1992 – that was a disaster, and it is well recorded in history. Let us focus on the most recent term they had in Office – 2015 to 2020. They had five successive budgets in 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019. We know why they could not have delivered one in 2020. Those events are well recorded. So they are no stranger to budgets. The reason why they are not on this side of the floor presenting a budget is because they were rejected by a majority of the electorate and that is why we have the privilege of representing the people with a Budget that was dictated, crafted and directed by them. That is why we are here.

*2.29 p.m.*

The PNCR led Coalition Government has had a disastrous history in this country. When one looks at the numbers in the budgets and how they were allocating their resources, it was a disaster for the five years in Office. Their policies were politically, economically and socially extractive. That meant that they exploited the State's resources, they excluded the citizenry from those resources, and they destroyed the economy through nepotism, cronyism, corruption and total mismanagement. This is why they are on that side of the House complaining because they cannot be on this side of the House to present a budget they could pilfer and take away from the people of this country. Enough is enough.

The reason the PNC/R led Coalition is not allowed to represent the people is clear. They lack the respect for accountability, transparency and the rule of law, which are key pillars for any electorate to judge a political party by. We on the Government's side of the House always adhere to good governance, the rule of law, accountability and transparency. That is why we are able to stand here today presenting a Budget that is for the people.

When one looks at the budgets coming out from the APNU/AFC, or as I like to say the PNC/R dominated Coalition, for the last five years, they left this economy in a vicious cycle, where they dominated the economy through manipulation, intimidation, subverting the rule of law and massive corruption. I cannot emphasise enough – massive corruption. This is why, in August of

last year, the people of this country decided that a new dispensation would be necessary to continue to manage the State's resources. This why, we on this side of the House, are delighted to be representing the people with a Budget that speaks to the people. Enough is enough.

I have excerpts that are verbatim, in quotes, from a document from the Hon. Members on the other side who have gone before me, who spoke about us referring to working-class Guyanese citizens as *hungry belly dogs* – the dehumanisation of Afro-Guyanese. They spoke about the downtrodden and were referring to black Guyanese. This is so sad. It is so disgusting that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have people who claim to be political leaders and are still holding on to race to use the working-class people who are depending on them to provide leadership. That is why, if one looks on this side of the House, one will find upstanding black Guyanese who are political leaders and who could confront the black Guyanese on that side of the House, frontally, because enough is enough.

We have been fanning out all across this country doing outreaches. I have had the good fortune of meeting with many Guyanese from all walks of life, race, political persuasions, and religion. They are all telling us the same thing that they have not seen the APNU/AFC or the PNCR-led dominant Coalition in their villages or their communities since the Coalition took Office in 2015. When we visit communities, there is an outpouring of joy and satisfaction that a Government that cares is coming to them one-on-one and face-to-face in their communities, listening to their needs, priorities and reminding them of our promises and thanking them for the opportunity to represent them as loyal and faithful servants. Something that they were denied by their own citizens who supported them, especially those in the Region 10 area, where I recently visited and who has given our President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, an A-grade so far for his performance and leadership in Government and the record shows.

I will turn to the 2021 Budget, but before I do that, I would like to encourage the Hon. Members on the other side, the Opposition side of the House, to read the *United Pathway to Prosperity*, the inaugural address to the Twelfth Parliament by His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. This was where he advanced the concept of 'One Guyana - Oneness'. A concept that speaks to unity, national integration: One People; One Nation; and One Destiny, with a commission to follow. A commission that will be diverse and representative of the values of the people of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. I encourage every one of you to read it.

We on the Government side of the floor, have benefitted immensely from the vision of the President, His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. This vision has informed the Budget, a Budget that is inclusive, transformative and put us on a trajectory towards economic independence and would encourage social enhancement and advancement for the people of Guyana. My Hon. Colleague, Dr. Ashni Singh, did not pull figures out of the air to put together the Budget. This Budget is an outcome of a journey. A journey that begun when we were in Opposition. One would recall that we held a national consultation back in February, 2019, where we brought together different groups, from all walks of life, throughout the length and breadth of Guyana, to listen to their concerns and to get their inputs so as to be able to drive the process. Recall also that, listening to those groups across the country, taking their inputs and plugging them into a framework, we were able to develop our manifesto, which we rolled out in November, 2019. That manifesto helped to inform the list of our candidates.

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members on the Opposition side, when I can hear you above the Speaker, I will draw your attention to Standing Order 45 (C). We have all been given this handbook, please refer to it. Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, you may continue.

**Mr. Todd:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. The consultation, along with the manifesto, informed the list of our candidates which was reflective of the people of this country, diverse in every regard. When all of it was packaged, we were able to win the confidence of the electorate and we were able to take Office with a mandate to deliver on the promises that we would have made in our manifesto and the List of Candidates that we would have presented to the electorate.

That took us to our Budget. Our Budget was informed based on the foregoing. Our manifesto has promises for five years. We were able to start that process with our first Budget notwithstanding, the emergency Budget having to deal with the failures of the past Administration. I would not go into that because I do not have enough time for it. I would like to focus on what we did for the people.

The 2021 Budget was informed on the foregoing and it is the largest Budget. It is one that is people-centred, pro-business, pro-poor and one that will stimulate and drive job creation through diversification, and value-added on a manufacturing base. That is the Budget and that is the history. There is no other political party in this country with political independence that could boast of a

budget that has always been reflective of the people of this country who have informed the direction on how we allocate our resources.

As it is said *pressure buss pipe*. They are leaving, but I have to continue. The budgetary allocation for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is to the tune of \$5.8 billion. Programme 1 has been allotted \$1.8 billion and refers to the headquarters in Georgetown. Programme 2, \$3.9 billion, which speaks to our overseas mission. [Mr. Duncan: Right.] I have the floor, Hon. Member. Thank you very much. Programme 3, \$55.5 million and this is allocated to our foreign trade department.

2.44 p.m.

The allocation given to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation was carefully crafted and aligned to give momentum to Guyana's foreign policy agenda.

For 2021, there is a concerted effort that would be placed on our territorial integrity. As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, we have a territorial controversy with our neighbour to the west, Venezuela and we have an International Court of Justice (ICJ) process. On the 26<sup>th</sup> February, the case management will take place. So, there is a keen interest in ensuring that moneys are allocated to this process to pay our lawyers and to ensure that we keep a robust Ministerial Advisory Committee on borders, which I might add also, is very diverse and inclusive. The Hon. Members on the other side would know that Mr. Carl Greenidge is the agent. He has been retained with the entire Committee. As Minister, I have added a few other members to give more breadth and depth to our mandate.

Mr. Speaker, moneys will also be allocated to a national public relations (PR) committee. A committee that will drive a national public relations campaign because it is felt that we need to be very proactive over the next several years by educating our people. This was also raised in the Foreign Relations Sub-Committee, where we all agreed that we should have a massive PR campaign, which would include our grade school children, right through to adulthood. This is to bring everyone on board to speak with one message – to be able to ensure that each and everyone understands the value of maintaining and protecting our territorial integrity. So, we are not going to spare any money in this effort.

We also are going to commit funds to regular stakeholders' meeting. We have had one so far where we are briefing our stakeholders and having our stakeholders be *part and parcel* of the process. We have also begun engaging the media, publishers and editors because we felt that it was necessary for the media to understand context, history and the process that we are embarking on, so that we all could have a national approach to treating this particular undertaking.

Apart from the Venezuela controversy and the process with the International Court of Justice (ICJ), we are also going to commit resources to the Guyana/Suriname Border Commission, which is very vital in maintaining and strengthening our relations with our neighbour to the East. Recently, we have also signed a Strategic Dialogue and Platform Co-operation, where we are going to engage on a bilateral level, on many fronts - energy, health, education and infrastructure. To broaden that engagement; also, there is the Guyana Shield Initiative. There are a lot of potential coming out of that. We are going to commit resources, as needed, to that engagement as well.

Moving on, we are going to focus on the expansion of our diplomatic representation. We are going as far as the Middle East. We have found that our presence in Kuwait has been beneficial. We are now expanding to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). There is a lot of private capital in that region, which will help us with capital injection, in terms of foreign direct investments, as well as public/private partnerships. We are looking to tap into that region through our foreign relations which will drive that process for economic co-operation and integration. We will have to commit resources to the missions and maintaining them. There will be some support provided by the Qataris and the members within the UAE.

We are also exploring the option of a mission in Ghana. This is a rollover from the previous Administration. We are now looking at the financial model and the benefits that could be derived from our presence on the continent. Resources will also be committed to our traditional partners. As you know and can recall...

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, in order for you to conclude your presentation, someone will have to grant you an extension of five minutes.

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, you may continue.

**Mr. Todd:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will try to be brief. We are going to strengthen our relations with our traditional partners. There are a few cooperation agreements that were already signed in terms of security, as well as economic cooperation. We will see a lot of movements in that direction soon in Guyana. We would have seen the visit from the United States Secretary of State, Mr. Pompeo. We have seen visits from my Brazilian counterpart. I am in touch or soon to be engaging my counterpart in Canada as well as the European Union (EU) countries.

Our regional and hemispheric integration is a priority as well. Resources will be committed to strengthening our integration efforts beginning with the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Single Market and Economy (CSME). We are going to establish a CSME Unit headed by an ambassador. Guyana has already taken back the helm of the agriculture agenda, the Jagdeo Initiative, which was abandoned by the previous Administration. I think it was not palatable to them, but it is a CARICOM initiative. We have reclaimed that, and we are going to push the regional food security and nutrition agenda.

Mr. Speaker, multilateralism is also an important pillar in advancing our foreign diplomacy. The Government is deeply committed to the multilateral world order. As a small state we recognise the importance of working through international fora to pursue our national interest. We believe that multilateralism is not a nomenclature or merely describing a system. Instead, we see multilateralism as a world outlook that recognises the inevitability of international cooperation as a best practice for developing countries to deal with the myriad of problems confronting our world today. We have successfully contributed to the diplomatic thrust of Guyana to safeguard our core national interest, enhancing the visibility of Guyana and creating an international environment that would allow us to pursue inclusive and sustainable national development.

We are going to commit resources to diaspora and migration. As part of that, we are going to develop data driven solutions to migration challenges; we are also going to produce a Guyana migration profile and a migration governance indicator assessment; and we are also going to give



considerable attention to economic diplomacy and bilateral agreements for promoting Guyana's growing economy through investment opportunities for international businesses.

In closing, I will like to leave this with this honourable House: political leaders, including blacks who believe in the practice of race politics, political opportunism and a budget that benefits them and not the people, will be found on that side of the House. Political leaders, including blacks, who believe in the practice of good democratic principles, inclusive governance, the rule of law and a budget that benefits the people will always be found on this side of the House. Enough is enough. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Ms. Flue-Bess:** I would like to start by sharing this African Proverb, which says:

“Examine what is said, not who speaks.”

I heard the Hon. Minister, Mr. Indar, earlier claims of misinformation, racial undertone, tension and all of these. Then I heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Todd, give a similar sentiment.

If one speaks on something, an issue that needs to be dealt with, I do not know how one could use that in a political undertone. If we have an issue, we have to deal with it. If it is not seen as an issue, it would never be dealt with. That is something that needs to be looked at.

As I stand to make my contribution to this national Budget debate, in my mind, budgets ought to bring hope and give the populace a pathway to improve their standards of living. As I peruse this Budget and reflect over the past six months, I recognise injustice, I recognise dismissal and displacement of innocent Guyanese workers, and the inequitable distribution of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) cash grant relief, carried out by the Hon Members on that side of the House. I wonder how this Budget brings hope and give that pathway to an improved standard of living or as the Budget suggests: how does this Budget bring ‘oneness’ to Guyana.

I examined the first objective in the Budget and, as stated on page four, paragraph 1.1.4, it says that:

“i. Navigating COVID-19 for as long as it is around...”

While the economy progressively opens.

Guyanese and the world have seen the navigation tool currently being used by this PPP/C Regime. The distribution of grant relief is plagued with discrimination and injustices. This was evident during the distribution of grants. There are police with large guns walking around the community with a group of PPP/C activists to distribute this money to selected households. I, as a representative of Region 4 would have tracked the distribution of the COVID relief from the Soesdyke/Linden Highway, Timehri, straight to Eccles. The children in the communities were terrorised just seeing the police walking into the communities with guns. I do not think any sensitisation was done to let the children be aware that this is the method that would be used. I do not even think that the citizens were aware that this would have been the method used. We are navigating, but we are terrorising at the same time because I am quite sure that the children were wondering why is it that the police were in their yards with a gun to share this COVID-19 relief. This was one of the navigating tools used by the PPP/C.

*2.59 p.m.*

I would also like to let you know, Mr. Speaker, that this discriminatory practice caused many to be distressed. Not only are many Guyanese being denied the right to access the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) relief through the PPP/C's method of distribution, but the amount of money distributed has caused distress to several Guyanese. I could recall visiting Second Street, Grove where I met a pregnant mother – full term – who complained bitterly of being deprived of receiving the grant because, according to the leader of that group, she was an intruder in the community. That remark was made because she was of a different ethnic group. That is discrimination.

It was sad for me, as a legislator in this House, to stand and see a mother cry for \$25,000. For a family of three, \$25,000 would get them some groceries and some personal care items. If they have a child, they might be able to pay for the internet and get some photocopies done. It basically would be valid for a week. This is against them being given a sum of \$100,000. We are talking about relief. A relief ought to bring hope to people or help persons to be shored up for a period of time until they could stand on their own and do something. I was really saddened to witness that.

When the grant reached Region 4, we recognised how much of the criteria was necessary. I have travelled to several communities and observed the process. If we are talking about creating one

Guyana, this is somewhere that would have been the perfect place to begin, by first doing the distribution in a clear and transparent manner.

Imagine, not only people of African ethnicity were deprived. People of East Indian ethnicity were deprived. Why is that? It is because the leader of the group told whoever was sharing not to give them because they were A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC). Now, one having to deal with that on a regular basis speaks so much to this discriminatory practice of bypassing people.

In Friendship, Mr. Speaker, there was another incident I would like to share with you. The people were given the money on 28<sup>th</sup> December. I think we were sitting here. I received a call. The next day, a vanload of police officers with the team leader turned up at residents' house in Friendship Squatting Area to collect back the money. What do we say to that? They demanded that the money be returned. Shame on them.

We continue to tread in dangerous times with COVID-19. They addressed the curfew; we have a curfew from 22:30 h to 04.00 h. This is the time they do not usually operate. Is it effective? How many persons are out there doing business at that hour? I would believe that the curfew for COVID-19 is to help stop the spread of the virus. That is my understanding. Therefore, an ineffective curfew does not tell the population anything. It was only two nights ago I spoke with some young people and asked what the curfew time in Guyana was. Do you know what the young people said? They said there is no curfew. They could drive as they like; they could walk as they like; they could do as they like. That is the message given. This is just an example or a sample of the grand navigation scheme presented by the PPP/C. Imagine, this scheme they are currently using still resulted in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) issuing an alert that COVID-19 in Guyana is at level four, very high, and persons should not travel. The U.S Embassy in Guyana's alerts and messages state that Guyana is at level three: reconsider travel to Guyana due to COVID-19. They tell people to exercise care and caution and so forth.

I would like to remind this honourable House that inaccurate information could only be accepted by those who lack access to information. It cannot affect anybody else. The people could go and check. Even the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office gave an advisory. The whole

of Guyana, based on the current assessment of the COVID-19 risk, should avoid travelling. Essential travel is recommended.

The Government presents this grand theme, *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. This theme raises many questions. It sounds good. It sounds beautiful. Questions on path: What path would be taken to recover from injustice? What path would be taken to recover from the inequalities? What path would be taken to recover from this pandemic? When we talk about dynamism, who is it for? Are we speaking about unemployed Guyanese and no increases for the public servants? Resilience against what? Is it marginalisation or unfair distribution of wealth? These are just questions that come to one's mind when one reads this Budget.

I was faced with a question last Thursday that had me stopped in my tracks. One of my students sent me a letter with his message at the bottom saying that his mommy was fired without any reason. What would happen to us? That question resonated in my spirit because I recalled, as a teacher, around 1997 when all was going on in this country, a student that lived at Buxton came to me a morning and said, Miss my parents were killed. What would happen to me? Those were the times I experienced that, as an educator, I could not answer my student.

Therefore, when I saw the Budget, I thought I might be able to find some answers for people. In the Budget, according to paragraph 1.6 on page 2, there were some historical periods highlighted. In the second phase, 1992 to 2015, all of these flowery descriptions and adjectives were given – economic restoration and all of that. What was missing in this particular paragraph is that it did not speak to the 400 unsolved murders and families that were reconstructed as a result of those atrocities. It did not speak to the economic genocide that was faced by African communities in this country. Am I to think that this has now returned under this *old time something come back again* PPP/C regime? I am faced with the exact question that I was faced with years ago and it is very sad.

Last September, a budget was presented and passed in this House as an emergency Budget. However, I, like many Guyanese, have witnessed that the only emergency, Sir, was the PPP/C cronies and their dreams. The distribution of the grant is the perfect example. How are the workers paid – the coordinator, the team leaders and the team members on the ground? Were they not paid

from the same COVID-19 relief money? It means, therefore, that many families would have to collect the pink slip because the moneys have to go there.

It is important to highlight that I hope the Members on the opposite side of the House would take the necessary steps and make use of our banking system, our Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and our post offices to continue sharing the COVID-19 relief grant. That way, you would eliminate hiring a whole new set of people and continue to deprive families that are so much in need.

As I recall my student's question, I wonder, am I to tell my student that somewhere in these 50,000 jobs, which are expected to be created in five years, that his parent would find a work? That has affected the student and many other students. Yesterday, when I listened to the presentation of the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security – I do not want to call names because I do not want to call the wrong name – spoke of supporting our children with the \$15,000 grant. Yes, that sounds wonderful, but, if the parent was fired from the job, the \$15,000 would not be able to serve the child's needs. The family has a need. Supporting the elderly with \$25,000. That is glorious and wonderful. I am happy for my seniors. But, if the senior is living with someone who was fired, the same \$25,000 would now have to be used to feed the family.

Supporting the vulnerable – we see parents who were laid off and have children with disability. It is not easy to deal with them. They collect the \$13,000. That is wonderful. Then, they have to study that they still have to feed the family.

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, in order to conclude your presentation, you would need that five minutes extension.

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, you may continue.

**Ms. Flue-Bess:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is important that we recognise that, according to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 25 (1):

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.”

Therefore, it is hoped that for these families or the fired workers, something would be put in place to ensure that they could recover and get themselves going again.

As the geographical representative for Region 4, in this Budget, only 2.5% of the total budgeted sum was given to this region. As I look at infrastructure, the only areas that would benefit from this Budget are a culvert at Triumph and bridges at Cane Grove, Better Hope and Mon Repos. What happened to projects for other communities like Friendship, which has issues with the koker that continues to flood and affect people, or the seas defence that is breached? What happened to Soesdyke? There are five kokers and persons continue to be flooded. These are projects that I would have expected to see in this Budget presented.

I have a list of all that was presented by the NDC – project that they would have had to submit and all of that – but it is sad to say that a lot of them cannot be found anywhere in the Budget.

In the Budget, the Government announced that local governance would be strengthened through technical support to help NDCs perform their roles. I am happy to see that. However, it is hoped that the NDCs would not be forced to spend their subventions on non-functioning lights and crusher run and other things for the community that the community does not necessarily need. It is hoped that the NDC’s voices would be heard.

In conclusion, I wish to turn my attention to the pitch for ‘One Guyana’. I love the pitch; it sounds great in speech and writing. However, oneness could never be realised when people basic human rights continue to be violated by this regime. Oneness would be achieved when equality, fairness and justice are guaranteed to all Guyanese. I close with this quote from Senator John Kerry on the budget. It states:

“This budget is like an Enron budget — smoke the numbers, cook the books, hide the truth and hope no one finds out.”

I thank you. *[Applause]*

3.14 p.m.

**Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Dharamlall]:** Mr. Speaker, I have to take off my mask. The pressure is going to hit them further this afternoon.

Before I get into what I want to say to you, please note that we have to put some context to the fallacies that have been promulgated by Members of the Opposition. I think such barefacedness warrants them being in the Opposition for a very long time. As a matter of fact, last year, I said that they were going to be the permanent Opposition. I think they are going to be the eternal Opposition.

Before His Excellency became the President, he had asked, in the 110<sup>th</sup> sitting of the Eleventh Parliament, this question to the Hon. Minister of Finance at that time:

“Based on this projection, what would the increase in allocation for salary increases translate to in terms of percentage of salary increase?”

At 1.51 p.m., this is what the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, stated:

“As I indicated, it would be presumptuous of me to suggest to the House that ‘x’ percent or ‘y’ percent has been budgeted. As I said, we are awaiting the restart of negotiations with the Teachers and the Guyana Public Service Union and at that time the percentages will be known.”

It is the same thing that Dr. Ashni Singh and everyone else has been saying in this House over the last few days. It is the very approach that the APNU/AFC is speaking out against now. It is their own approach that we are using to deal with this issue.

They also speak, glowingly, of the person who could not distinguish between Diwali and Phagwah, as their champion of education. I just want to remind this House that, in 1997, 1999, 2003, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014, Guyana had the top Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) students. Who was the Government then? Who was the Minister of Education then? Thank you, Hon. Member, Ms. Priya Manickchand.

The last few days, we have listened to the Opposition seeking to rewrite history, but I am happy that we have had the opportunity to debunk what they have been claiming. I actually was thinking

about preparing a speech this afternoon. I decided against preparing one because, in a debate, we have to respond to the make-believe of the Opposition. When I was perusing history and the track record of the APNU/AFC, I had a look at its performance over the last five years. Do you know what came to my mind? Oh my God (OMG). It was shocking. That was the performance of the APNU/AFC; it was totally shocking. That is how they performed.

They will continue on this path of discrimination, of political discrimination especially, but I want to share some facts with you. There is a programme called Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurship Development (SLED), which was administered by the last regime, the APNU/AFC. There is an Hon. Member by the name of Mr. Henry in this House. When I am finished reading these figures, you will know for yourselves how honourable that Hon. Member is. For Region 9, some \$155,489,990 passed through under the name of a contact person, Mr. Vincent Henry. They speak about Amerindian development. One name alone had in excess of \$155 million in 2019. I do not know if it actually went to that person but, there was a name. There was also another Vincent Henry Jnr. in Shulinab village. There was over \$5 million for one Vincent Henry Jnr.

They speak about this class issue. I just heard the Hon. Ms. Nima Flue-Bess speak about this, and many others alluded to it. There is a name, Christopher Jones, on this sheet. I am going to share it with you publicly just now. Christopher Jones of Aubrey Barker Road, North Ruimveldt – Precision Cuts Barbershop and Salon – was given over \$4,985,000. Here is what else the Region 4 people received. No one else received more than \$300,000, but that person received \$4,985,000. **[An Hon. Member (Government): Shame.]** Shame on them. And they speak about helping poor people. The last Government had no regard for poor people. It was only focused on self-aggrandisement. They speak ill of the COVID-19 relief cash grant. Do you know why they speak ill of it? It is because they know of the outpouring of goodwill that poor and deserving people have given to our Government for our distribution of the \$25,000. Let me let you know this, also, Mr. Speaker. I have the record. Every one of them over there and their families collected the \$25,000, including Ms. Annette Ferguson, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, Mr. Shurwayne Holder, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul, Ms. Maureen Philadelphia, Mr. Haimraj Rajkumar, Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop, the Pandit, Mr. Dineshwar Jaiprashad's father, Dr. Karen Cummings, Mr. Vincent Henry, Mr. Christopher Jones and all Hon. Members of the House.



They all collected it and then come here and denigrate the same thing. Your ungratefulness will have you in the Opposition for a very long time.

Do you know what else they do? They seek to denigrate the cash grant for the school children. We gave, in 2014, 167,000 school children \$10,000 dollars each; that was \$1.67 billion. The last regime, the APNU/AFC, took away in excess of \$8.3 billion from the school children of Guyana. Do you know what it gave the 167,000 children in public schools? It gave them 14 boats and 20 buses. That is all it gave them. I do not think any one of the buses worked for more than 2 months. It gave them 14 boats and 20 buses; that is what the APNU/AFC gave to the school children of Guyana. It is a shame on you.

I was in the Rupununi recently and do you know what the Amerindian people said? They asked me about this Five Bs that Brigadier Granger gave. You know, former President, Brigadier Granger, the one who is always absent. They were talking about the Five Bs and I said, yes, I read about it. Do you know what an Amerindian guy in Parabara said? He said that in town they probably gave the Five Bs, but in the Rupununi, they gave two Bs. I asked what were the two Bs and he said, 'bare blows.' That is what happened to our school children.

Do know what else? In late 2019 and early 2020 when they were campaigning, all of what they were claiming about development actually happened when the People's Progressive Party/Civic was in Government after December, 2018. Do you know the PPP/C was the Government since December, 2018? You know that we had voted you out. You know the famous three words, yes, yes, yes. That is what has gotten you there. Do you know what else has gotten you there? You have lost the trust of the people. Do you know why you have lost the trust of the people? It is because you continue to say disbelieving things to them. No one is going to support you.

You lack commitment. We must not allow you, 31 rabble-rousers, to rewrite the history of this country. We are going to expose you at every moment. Your inefficiency and lack of competence have driven this country to despair. Some of you now speak of people losing jobs. Did you care when 7000 sugar workers woke up one morning and lost theirs? Have you ever visited any of those communities? Have you ever visited any of those families?

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, I will remind you that, in this House, your address is also made to the Chair.

**Mr. Dharamlall:** Mr. Speaker, they have never visited and seen the despair in the eyes of those children, but they come here and speak of one and two instances, without providing any evidence. I genuinely believe a lot of what they are saying is make-believe. Do you know why? It is because two Members of Parliament (MPs) on the Opposition's side still sit as public servants, including Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul – who is not even in his seat right now – and Vincero Jordan. They are both public servants under the PPP/C Government. For that, you should be ashamed to speak about members of the public service being fired. Do you know who we fired? We fired the political appointees. In the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, political appointees were fired. The MP for Region 5 from the APNU/AFC spoke about what is happening there.

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Minister, I will again bring to your attention that the Members of this House are addressed as Hon. Members.

**Mr. Dharamlall:** Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Mr. Vincero Jordan spoke about Region 5. I cannot say he spoke eloquently, but the Hon. Member made a lot of noise. What the Hon. Member did not say about the infamous Mon Repos Freshwater Aquaculture Demonstration Farm and Training Centre was that over \$90 million was expended for a period of four years. Do you know what is the produce? There was \$1.8 million worth of produce, after the APNU/AFC invested over \$90 million. When the forensic audit is finished, somebody is going to.... Mr. Speaker, do you know why they are using the State's resources to buy bangles and bedsheets? It is because, in the very near future, the bangles and bedsheets from the State are going to wrap and lock many of them over there in the prison. That is why they are using the State's resources to buy bangles and bedsheets. We will continue to use State resources to put bangles around them and put them in prison. Those same sheets they are going to be lying on in prison. That is what will have to happen.

Do you know what the Hon. Mr. Vincero Jordan did not say too? When he was a representative of the Guyana Water incorporated (GWI) in Region 5, they started an office there for \$12 million. It took three years and they expended over \$72 million up to 2020 before we came into Office. That office is not yet completed. They are described as *sanctimonious gangsters* so we cannot expect better of them.

Mr. Speaker, do you know that two Members of Parliament still occupy Government quarters? I do not know if I can use this word in the National Assembly, but it is being covetous. Covetousness is a sin; it is one of the seven deadly sins. They will be written to be removed.

I heard some rabble-rousing on the opposite side from the Hon. Ms. Coretta McDonald. The Hon. Member has been very close to the PPP/C. As a matter of fact, before Ms. Coretta McDonald got on the APNU/AFC list, the Hon. Member had actually approached us to be on the PPP/C's list. Let the Opposition know; let them know.

3.29 p.m.

The initiatives of the People's Progressive Party/Civic are about bringing people together. Our Budget is aptly designed to rebuild this country because of the destruction that happened in the last five years. In the six months that we have been in Government, we have held over 2000 community meetings across the country. We have consulted, from day one, on *Budget 2020* and *Budget 2021*. The only people who did not want to be involved in the consultation process are the 31 APNU/AFC Members of Parliament. Those are the only people. In the regions, the Councillors of the APNU/AFC were consulted. In the regions, the villages that they claimed ownership of were consulted. As a matter of fact, the Hon. Member, Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, comes from Mocha/Arcadia.

I want to state, unequivocally, that the people of Mocha/Arcadia are very, very excited. The APNU/AFC could not and the People's National Congress (PNC) could not, but the PPP/C built Burnham Drive in Mocha/Arcadia. The PPP/C had to go into Mocha/Arcadia and build Burnham Drive. Shame on you because you could not uphold the legend of Linden Forbes Sampson (LFS) Burnham. None of you have the qualities of LFS Burnham. Do you know what? You are imposters; you are all imposters. You sit there warming the seats. Then, you speak about democracy. Could you imagine that the APNU/AFC have come into this building to speak about democracy?

Mr. Speaker, you were here yourself and you know what happened in this building. Many of them were holding up photographs and they were holding up toilet paper. Was it "House Proud" that you were using, Hon. Member Ms. Philadelphia? None of them could have held up the Statements of Poll (SOPs). Where are the SOPs? If you speak about democracy, put your SOPs where *ya mouth deh*. Bring your SOPs here. You were never able to. Do you know what? We believe in

democracy and we believe that, in a democracy, there must be a valid opposition. We respect you as the valid Opposition of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. You are the eternal Opposition of our country. God bless Guyana.

There are so many issues about efficiency. Tell me what they have done for this country. When we walk around into the villages, people cry and tell us that they went to former Ministers and officials and they could never have met or seen them. In Region 2, do you know who controlled the Regional Tender Board (RTB)? It was that guy's father. The PNC Chairman controlled the Tender Board in Region 2. Now, we have professional tender boards. We have tender boards from the Councils. We have inclusive tender boards. Do you know what else we are doing? In *Budget 2021*, every village in this country has an intervention. Every village in this country will continue, over the next five years, to get more interventions.

The President himself, when he spoke here, probably the best speech that has ever been made by a President in the Parliament of Guyana – much better than what the last President did when he came here and blew *hot and cold* – said that he is going to visit every village in this country. Do you know why? We are a Government of all of Guyana. We are representing all of Guyana. I heard and it hurt me when I heard the Chief Whip and the first speaker of the APNU/AFC, over the last few days, speak about representing their supporters. You are also supposed to represent the people of Guyana. Do you know what? You are just stuck in the past; you are one-dimensional. Many of you come to me, you know that, and the things that you say here publicly, you say differently in person.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what else? When I visit the regions – and I visit all of the regions – the Coalition Councillors come to me and say, “Minister Dharamlall, we have to work with you; those people, we made a lot of mistakes.”

One of the persons who made us stand here for five months, who held this country up for five months, came to my office seeking a contract. I asked what is going on. Do you know what she said? That person said that, despite them putting their name on that lawsuit, the APNU/AFC has turned its back on them. That is what they do to poor people. You have turned your backs on poor people. Do you know what? We are happy that the poor people have turned their backs on you. That is why the People's Progressive Party/Civic is in Government.

A lot of you like to quote the *Bible* but many of you have forgotten the famous saying that a man without vision shall what? Hon. Member Ferguson, “A man without vision shall perish.” That is what the good word states. “A people without vision shall perish”. And you know what is going to happen to those without vision. They are going to be in Opposition for a very long time. We have to rebuild this country and we have to fix all the community roads. Of course, the APNU/AFC does not understand what being poor is. Do you know why? It is because they lived the life of profligacy; they lived the life of the elite; and they drove in multi-million dollars Land Cruisers.

In three months of passing the emergency budget, we were able to fix over 250 community streets into asphaltic concrete. Instead of using the over \$1 billion to fix those community roads, APNU/AFC bought Land Cruisers. Instead of them fixing the roads, they were driving in Land Cruisers, which taxpayers paid for, in the potholes that they created in those communities. We are going to fix the roads because we build bridges; we do not burn bridges. That is our mantra.

We have a different philosophy from those people in the Opposition, the APNU/AFC. We have a Budget that focuses on the poor and we have a budget that also focuses on the businesses. Development cannot happen unless we have a pro-poor, pro-business budget. The APNU/AFC does not understand that philosophy. That is why they failed this country. We have so many poor people in this country and what have they done? Some 35,000 plus persons lost their jobs within the first three years of APNU/AFC being in Government. They cannot come here and say that anymore, so we have to remind the *Hansard* and we have to remind the People of Guyana.

The small miners, over 10,000 of them, lost opportunities under APNU/AFC. Do you know what they did? They formed the syndicates. Who owns the syndicates? It is a handful of APNU/AFC leaders. We do not have to speak about the sugar workers anymore because the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, basically said that they were gullible. The Chief Whip of the Opposition said that the sugar workers were bloodsuckers. I am the grandson of a cane cutter and that cringes me. In 2021, when we are trying to modernise this country, there still have people who disrespect sugar workers, who disrespects cane cutters, and who disrespects farmers in this country. The APNU/AFC, you have no role in the future of this country. With your current crop, you have no role in the future of this country. You cannot speak about competence.

In six months, if you go to any village in this country and you speak to any person, they breathe a sigh of relief that the last Government was voted out of office. They breathe a sigh of relief. Do you know what they told us? They said that what we have achieved in six months, it took the last Government five years and they still did not achieve what we have achieved.

We are going to rebuild Georgetown. The APNU/AFC left Georgetown to rot for many years. Between 2015 and 2020, Georgetown collected almost \$13 billion in revenue, and this is the current situation in Georgetown. One of the first things the President did, when he became the President of Guyana, was set up an Inter-ministerial Committee to rebuild Georgetown. Some \$100 million have been set aside for the restoration of City Hall. We are going to do it. The People's Progressive Party/Civic Government is going to do it. It is something that APNU/AFC could not do in over 30 years of being in Government. You did not do that, but we would do it and we would begin this year.

They spoke about development in Linden. Between 2015- 2020, the Town Council collected more than \$1.6 billion in revenue. Bartica collected over \$400 million in revenue. These are urban areas where most of the Coalition supporters reside. And what have they done? Do you know what? They used to reside there. Guyana and the political landscape are changing. Thank you, Minister Todd and Minister Walrond for those telling contributions and for debunking the myth that the APNU/AFC always think that they have transport over certain sections of our society.

We have over 500 roads in communities that would be rebuilt. We have 70 NDCs that would now see greater enhancement where governance is concerned. Governance is something that the APNU/AFC is scared of. By the way, they were also scared of elections too because they know that, in a free and fair elections, they were going to lose anytime and anywhere. We know what happened since 21<sup>st</sup> December, 2018. The country knows what happened. Do you know what else? Do you know why they are also scared of this year's Budget? It is because a lot of it would rebuild community lives. They are scared of Local Government Elections (LGE), too.

I would also like to commend the Hon. Minister for setting aside resources; we are planning for Local Government Elections in 2021. We have budgeted and we are planning. But do you know what, Mr. Speaker? There is a caveat; we cannot continue to have any elections in this country... anyone who believes in good governance and transparency and accountability could never have

Mr. Lowenfield, Ms. Myers and Mr. Mingo at the head of the Secretariat of the Elections Commission (GECOM). Never! We would not condone it. The majority of people in this country would not condone it.

As the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, I have the mandate of also announcing that date for LGE. Mr. Speaker, I would like for you to use your good office to bring to the attention of the public in Guyana that Mr. Lowenfield, Ms. Myers, Mr. Mingo must go; the APNU/AFC has already gone.

We have a lot of work to do. We really need these elections this year because a lot of supporters of the APNU/AFC are meeting me every day and they want to come on board. Some have also expressed their interests in becoming community leaders and community councillors for the People's Progressive Party/Civic. We would like... [*Interruption*]

*3.44 p.m.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker, Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul is my staff so I will not give out all of the details. With what has happened in the five years of the APNU/AFC, it is not going to take just one budget. When they were spending, they were extravagant. When they were spending, did they care about any one of us? When we were normal citizens, did you ever see any one of the Hon. Members from the other side in our villages? Did they ever come to speak to us about development? By the way, if it is that they are so serious about representing people, since Monday, have you seen the Leader of the Opposition for more than 10 minutes in this House during the Budget debate? Why are they absent? The people of Guyana must know that the Leader of the Opposition, who claims to represent ...

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, I might interrupt you here. To borrow from Hon. Mr. Manzoor Nadir, I do not want to see you go so quickly. You will need a five-minute extension.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I hate to interrupt my Colleague's rhythm. I would love to give him more time, as with many of my Colleagues, but I have to restrict him to five minutes, only, to conclude. My apologies, my dear Comrade.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you may continue.

**Mr. Dharamlall:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have a lot of work and we have a lot of cleaning up to do. We have been given a massive component to do sanitation works. Whilst we will be cleaning the garbage that was left by the APNU/AFC, we also have to fix the many landfills in the country. It is one that I think is a national issue, and everyone in this country has to take pride in the way they dispose of or the way in which they manage solid waste in the country. As a matter of fact, cell two is available to receive garbage. [**Mr. McCoy:** The APNU/AFC.] Not dead meat, Minister McCoy, but garbage. So, we are ready to receive garbage in the second cell. We will be spending quite a substantial amount of resources in some markets. For example: the Mon Repos market, which is one of the traditional markets on the East Coast and, probably, the biggest market on the East Coast, we will be spending an additional \$70 million to do additional expansive work to enhance that facility as well as the services that come out of that market. In Region 3, one of the top markets is also at Parika. We will be spending about \$30 million to do some refurbishment work at Parika Market.

Likewise, we will be doing similar amounts of work in Region 2. The Member of Parliament (MP) in the APNU/AFC, who is from Region 2, did not mention the callousness with which they managed Region 2 in their five years in Office. As a matter of fact, a lot of those who were squatting as vendors in front of the police station were given permission by the former Regional Executive Officer (REO) of Region 2. We have to tidy up Charity and we have to enhance the quality of services that we have in our communities. We have to continue to light up Guyana because the PPP/C is about the future. We have to shine the light on the future or chart the course for our country.

In our advancement of development in small villages by way of the Community Enhancement Workers (CEWs) Programme, we have to get more people involved. We have many small contractors who did not benefit from the last regime who are now benefitting from the PPP/C in governance. We intend to expand the support that we gave to all Guyanese. This year, we are going to see a massive expansion in the enhancement of many of our communities. One is going to see billions of dollars flowing. This is something that I do not think the last Government really understood. It did not understand that when one puts resources into communities and when one creates businesses in communities – pro-business – the people of the communities take ownership,



the people from the communities get employed, and both the domino and the symbiotic effects take place. Fifty thousand jobs are the minimum that we will achieve in five years because we are going to be starting from the bottom up. We are building Guyana brick by brick.

In Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan's village on the Corentyne, I do not know when was the last he was there, they say, *one, one dutty build dam*. The People's Progressive Party/ Civic will leave no stone unturned until all of Guyana benefits from the resources of this country. It cannot just be how the last Government had it, locked away amongst Ministers of the Government. It cannot just be how the last regime had it, locked away amongst a handful of elites. Every single Guyanese will get an opportunity to grow in this country; every single Guyanese will get an opportunity for good governance; and every single Guyanese has an opportunity, now, to play a role in the greater development of their country. Mr. Deputy Speaker, we have much more time to go and I have many more erstwhile Colleagues to continue this debate. I thank you very much and I look forward to all of you in this House supporting *Budget 2021*.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Deputy Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development. The next presenter is the Hon. Member, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As the Shadow Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, I thought that there would have been something of substance for me to rebut. It is very unfortunate that nothing of substance came from the previous speaker. Therefore, I wish to go directly to my presentation.

Another disaster has once again struck us here in Guyana, and it is *Budget 2021*. 'Disaster' is the word that best describes *Budget 2021* because, like *Budget 2020*, there has been a breach of our constitutional provisions. I reference article 13 of the Constitution, which speaks to consultation. There was consultation with subsets of the PPP/C but not with the political movement that represents hundreds of thousands of electors. You speak about oneness, but your actions do not match your words. Your words are devoid of any semblance of sincerity. Words must be aligned with actions. Every act of yours has been unfaithful and twofaced. Every act has been against the best interest of the Guyanese people. On paper, the APNU/AFC, in this honourable House, represents half of the country's population and, on the ground, support for the Coalition is

increasing exponentially. It is shameful that no consultation was held with the political movement which currently represents the majority, the true will of our people. If you do not believe me, Sir, go and speak with the ordinary man and woman in the streets.

The people of this country are yearning, they are craving, they are thirsty and they are aching for the return of the Coalition to Office. I say to them, here and now, hold your faith. Hold the line of battle comrades, joy comes to us in the morning, for an election will come again and what the PPP/C did in the 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2020 elections will never reoccur in this country. Never again will there be 49 ballot boxes with thousands of votes for a political party and no statutory documentation to verify the legitimacy of those votes. Never again will there be people who migrated and did not return to our country on election day but voted. Never again will dead people's names be ticked off as voted. Never again will there be missing poll books. Never again will there be unsigned oaths of identity. Never again will persons be seen distributing identification (ID) cards. I say, never again. Never again!

It is necessary for us, as a people, to demand of the Elections Commission (GECOM) to hold house-to-house registration. We must have a clean and accurate list of electors for the next elections in this country. The true will of the Guyanese people must be reflected in this honourable House. For every eligible voter, there must be one vote. Democracy must reign over dictatorship and development must overpower destruction.

*Budget 2021* is, again, certified evidence to concretise the fact that Mr. Winston Jordon is deeply missed by the Ministry of Finance. The first certified evidence we had was *Budget 2020*. The second was the motions to raise the domestic and external debt ceilings and, here now, we have *Budget 2021*. Again, I say to the People's Progressive Party, book a ticket and post that certified Accountant back to Dubai.

This Budget is devoid of any transformational projects that can catapult development, and this is not only me saying so. Almost all of Guyana is saying that this is a disastrous Budget. To further elaborate on my argument, I implore on that side of the house to read the *Stabroek News* editorial of 15<sup>th</sup> February, 2021:

“As had been feared, the government presented budget 2021 without having activated or replacing the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) Act. This Act is meant to provide the fiscal framework for rising revenues from the nascent oil and gas industry”

“For the second consecutive PPP/C budget, however, there was no adjustment in the income tax threshold, a measure that the working class has come to see as a pivotal tool in improving their finances while at the same challenging central government to spend less or to derive revenue from other sources.”

A number of ordinary Guyanese were glued to their television sets, social media pages and radios while the Hon. Ashni Singh engaged us in more than five hours of political rhetoric. They concluded that it was a waste of precious time that they will never be able to regain. Public servants were left with their jaws fallen, teachers cried, and doctors and nurses are still wondering what next to expect. On this note, I wish to make reference to a citizen from Windsor Forest. She said to me that she has seven grandchildren who work in the public sector as office assistants, teachers, and secretaries. She said that, under the Coalition, she was able to collect \$35,000 per month from them. They would visit her every month and give her \$5000 each but, for the last two months, she got nothing other than the visit. She said that her grandchildren told her that times were hard now. They said that everything in the shop was now carrying a high price and that they had not gotten any increase in salaries in 2020 and none was guaranteed in 2021. This is the sad state in which Guyana now finds itself. Hon. Mr. Jagdeo, in an effort to quell the daunted spirit of hardworking taxpaying Guyanese, took to his social media *Facebook* page and said:

“The fact is that over \$10B has been budgeted in the estimates under the head, ‘revision of wages and salaries.’ A huge part of that sum will go towards salary increases for public sector workers.”

Sir, I have examined every single page of the estimates and not once did I see the line item revision of wages and salary; not once. I must say to you though that, like the 2020 Budget, again, I have a document with missing pages and strangely so the pages that are missing are the pages relating to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development which is the Ministry I hold responsibility for on this side of the house. Could it be deliberate? I think so. I think it is deliberate.

The line item that speaks to ‘Other Employment Costs’ has an allocation of just over \$10 billion. I would like to believe that is the line item to which Hon. Mr. Jagdeo referred but let us not be hoodwinked by uncertain statements and ‘fluff’ coming from a bluff.

3.59 p.m.

That line item caters from new staff members and promotions in the public service, which includes our police, firemen and women and Guyana Defence Force (GDF) service men and women. May I remind this honourable House that, in 2020, an approved sum of over \$6 billion was spent from this very line item but, there was no salary increase for the public service workers. Sir, with no salary increase in wages and salaries, with no increase in the threshold, but an increase in the cost of living and the reduction of real income of our people, the Government is, therefore, returning us to an existence in poverty. I have the *Hansard* here where the question was put to the Hon. Bishop Edghill last year when we were considering the estimates. It was I who had asked the question concerning line item 6141. The answer that was provided by the Hon. Edghill states:

“As it relates to this question, at this particular time, I have no announcement for the public servants. What I can say to you is that, as the implementation of the Budget goes on, at the appropriate time, ...we will make a determination and the nation would be so advised.”

This was in relation to that \$6 billion. We are still waiting to be advised on what the salary increase.

I turn my attention to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. This is a Ministry that has, for the past 6 months, fallen from grace. Pre-August 2020, there was a Ministry that was headed by a gentleman who upheld *the Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana*. The Ministry had a Permanent Secretary (PS) who protected and preserved the rights of all the staff members. There was a Permanent Secretary that followed the rules and regulations of the public service and a Minister that did not interfere with administrative staff matters. There was a Permanent Secretary who was apolitical and who was appointed observing the rules that governed this great land. The former Minister had the greatest of respect for the Local Democratic Organs Act, Chapter 28:09, the Local Government Act Chapter 28:02 and the Municipal and District Councils Act, Chapter 28:01. At no time, under the APNU/AFC Government, were Regional Executive Officers (REOs) allowed to work against the elected councils of the region. At no time were the REOs subject to the direction of Ministers but, rather, that of the elected

council. Sir, at no time, were the Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) Overseers allowed to work against their elected councils. At no time were Overseers called by the Minister and instructed to go against the elected councils. It is the same for Town Clerks. The country now has two zealot Ministers who are directly interfering with the democracy of this dear land. There are flagrant violations of our Constitution which are causing pandemonium in our regional and local systems.

At this juncture, it is necessary for me to remind this honourable House that our Constitution is the supreme law of our land and article 74 (1) is explicit:

“It shall be the primary duty of local democratic organs to ensure in accordance with law the efficient management and development of their areas and to provide leadership by example.”

I am also forced to remind this house that article 75 of the Constitution is also explicit. Local Democratic Organs are autonomous and make decisions which are binding upon their agencies and institutions, and upon the communities and citizens of their areas. Let me remind Dharamlall and Anand Persaud, honourable as protocol dictates, that the Clerks of councils, the REOs, the Town Clerks and the Overseers are not at your disposal. They are creatures of their respective elected councils. They are to provide guidance and execute the mandate given to them by the council. Stop giving political instructions to these public officers.

Sir, I am a staff at that Ministry, and I can tell you that staff members are now working in fear and are accused of releasing information to the public. Staff members are being sent on leave without them requesting it, staff members' salaries are being withheld against the labour laws of this country, and no communication or correspondence is dispatched to the affected staff members. This is the level to which this Ministry has fallen. The only reason the Permanent Secretary is bowing to the political pressure of the Ministers is because she herself is political. Sir, if one has nothing to hide then why does one fear information coming out of one's Ministry? If you are the transparent and decent democracy you claim to be, then why do you fear the truth being revealed? Only the corrupt will want to cover their tracks and only the corrupt will punish their staff for exposing their heinous acts. Demonising staff in the public service arena is a practice by the PPP/C.

But, light is at the end of the tunnel and joy will return to the faces of the demoralised staff. Using the line from the famous movie, I say to all of you that we will be back; the Coalition will be back.

Six months into Office and, after throwing out the Deputy Permanent Secretary from his space, the Hon. Anand Persaud's major accomplishment, rather his singular achievement, was signing a permission paper granting a young lady a piece of land at Pigeon Island to sell plants and to construct a shade house. The young lady spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on the land and, with the stroke of the pen, the Hon. Dharamlall overturned Comrade Anand Persaud's major accomplishment.

Six months into Office and Comrade Dharamlall's major accomplishment was the purchasing of streetlights, 80 wattage brightness which cannot go higher than 15 feet for \$35 000 apiece. Four months ago, we in this honourable House approved \$105million for the Sustainable Livelihood Entrepreneurship Development (SLED) initiative. What Sustainable Livelihood Entrepreneurship Development programme was it spent on? Only the good Lord knows. Four months ago, more than \$17 million was spent on the Community Enhancement Programme for Georgetown but, yet, we have returned to the garbage city state. The Ministry is now requesting...

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, I will have to interrupt you and remind your Colleagues on the Opposition side about the use of cell phones as per the Standing Orders. Thank you.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Thank you, Sir, and I trust you will give me back my one minute. The Ministry is now requesting over \$100 million, and I bet my last dollar that the state of the city, a year from now, will be worst.

Sir, it will be remiss of me not to tell you that, last year, we approved \$5 million each for 70 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs), but only half was directly disbursed to the NDCs. A full dictatorship is now at the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. The formation of regional tender boards is, perhaps, the direct evidence to substantiate the rising of dictatorship and the burial of democracy at the Ministry. In regions where the PPP/C enjoyed the majority at the Regional Democratic Councils (RDC), tender board members were elected by the Regional Democratic Council but, in regions where they do not enjoy the majority, the members were selected by the PPP/C's surrogates. The Procurement Act of 2003, at section 10(2), requires that, upon request of all contracts awarded, it must be made public. These requests were made

months ago but, to date, there is no reply. What is it that you are hiding Hon. Member Mr. Dharamlall?

The Government has been working assiduously, through the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, to destroy communities and municipalities, and destabilise the services available to citizens. During the first six months in Office, the following were achieved: seven Regional Executive Officers were fired – moments ago Region 4 REO got her letter of termination – for no reason but to ensure bad management at the regions; they punished City Hall by not providing the Mayor and City Council (M&CC) with funds; dictated to NDCs how to spend their own funds; dismantled the annual mayoral conference and the National Conference of Local Democratic Organs (NCLDO); no funding for the Guyana Association of Municipalities; established Community Development Councils (CDCs) secretly in communities aligned to the PPP/C; awarded contracts to Minister Dharamlall's family company; demoralised the staff at the Ministry; instructed the Permanent Secretary who to give contracts; and ensured no Afro-Guyanese work in the Minister's secretariat.

Local Democratic Organs have reported to me that the Secretary of the Local Government Commission has illegally and capriciously dismissed local government officers without the law of natural justice taking its course. A man is innocent until proven otherwise and, in a democracy, a fair hearing is guaranteed. Comrade Anil Nandlall, you are failing this nation. You are the custodian of the law, Sir; you are supposed to guide your Colleagues; you are supposed to preserve the Constitution; but, you and your Colleagues, must now bury your heads in shame and accept that, with the blatant disregard and disrespect for our supreme law, you are a walking dictatorship.

Mr. Nickalai Pryce, on 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2020, instructed the Town Clerks of municipalities and Overseers of the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils to complete a baseline survey and submit it on or before 18<sup>th</sup> December, 2020 to the Local Government Commission. In the circular seen, the Secretary claims that the survey will assist the Commission to identify key and critical areas within the Local Democratic Organs and can be addressed to serve the needs of all stakeholders. It is my belief that this is a deliberate attempt by the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development to intervene and take control, against the Laws of Guyana, in the management and direction of the Local Democratic Organs. This deduction was made after examining the type of questions in the baseline survey.

There is currently no functioning Local Government Commission, since the life of the last Commission ended on 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 2020. My question to the Secretary is, on whose authority were you instructing Town Clerks of the municipalities and Overseers of the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils? Is it a certain Dharamlall or is it a certain Persaud? I do not know.

My advice to the ten Town Clerks, and 70 Overseers is to not comply with the instructions from the Secretary, since all 80 of them are answerable to the Commission and not a single individual.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic must respect the laws of this country and stop destroying the institutions of democracy. The focus should be on reconstituting the Local Government Commission and naming a date for Local Government Elections. The APNU/AFC is on record holding two Local Government Elections during its five-year tenure. Follow the Constitution of our country. Sir, the actions of the Ministers of Local Government and Regional Development lead me to conclude that we have *square pegs in round holes* who are intellectually circumcised.

4.14 p.m.

The recommendation is clear and direct. Hon. Mr. Dharamlall needs to follow the laws – the rules and regulations that govern the relationship between the Regional Democratic Councils (RDC's), NDC's and Central Government. It was Comrade Anil Nandlall himself who said, publicly, that the REO's are to execute the decisions of the councils. The Minister need to be more professional and channel decisions through established protocols and channels, and not by making a phone call here and there or sending a WhatsApp here and there. When they are confronted, they deny. This is wickedness and diabolical in all fronts. This abominable act must stop and if Dharamlall and Anand Persaud, honourable as the Standing Orders require me to address them, cannot be decent in their actions then they should resign.

Let us look at the allocation for the RDC's in this Budget under line item 6211 – Expenses Specific to the Agency. Region 4, with the largest council, has the smallest allocation per capita. Region 4 has far flung communities to service, also, but look at Region 1, line item 6211 moved from \$24 million in 2019 to \$45 million in 2021. All the PPP/C regions increased in the millions, but the APNU/AFC regions did not see such a large increase. Shame PPP/C! Shame!



Let us talk about rates and taxes at our local democratic organs. Just the other day the Chief Justice (ag) made a ruling and quashed the demand notes from City Hall which were sent to the owner of the Giftland Mall. The Chief Justice noted that the Chief Valuation Officer and the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development have not been following the laws since 2001. Chapter 28:04 Valuation for Rating Purposes Act requires properties to be valued every five years. This means that local organs have been collecting rates and taxes, illegally, since 2001. I know that the APNU/AFC started the process that was supposed to lead to the revaluation of properties. These Local Democratic Organs need to start collecting their rightful taxes. I, therefore, call on the installed Ministers to allow the Valuation Officer to do his job.

Due to time constraints, understandably, imposed upon me, I now turn my attention to Region 3: Essequibo Islands, West Demerara. Region 3 enjoys four Parliamentarians from that side of this House. The occupant of the highest Office of this land is from Region 3. The Finance Secretary is from Region 3. The Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Natural Resources is from Region 3 but, yet, thousands of Region 3 residents call my telephone and complain of being sidelined, complains about being traumatised by the powers that be, complains about wasteful spending, and complains about not receiving their COVID-19 cash grant, among so many other issues. The people of Region 3 have confirmed that they are facing hell, while the PPP/C cronies are doing well. Staff at the RDC are demoralised and are constantly facing threats on the job from the installed REO. Sir, it is a travesty in Region 3.

The PPP/C lackeys in region are gallivanting across the region, painting themselves as the ones who care and are saying that the coalition did nothing for Region 3. Well, let me tell you, Sir, what we did for Region 3. When we inherited Government in 2015, Wakenaam and Leguan had deplorable roads. We provided 100% asphaltic concrete roads around both islands. We spent billions of dollars on sea-defence infrastructure on both islands. We upgraded the primary and secondary schools on both islands. We provided street lighting to the islands and not streetlights like those you are giving us now, Comrade Dharamlall. We built ramps at Lanaballi, Hog Island, Hubu, Bonasika and other riverine communities. We built a proper road from St. Lawrence to Bendorff. We built farm-to-market roads in the region. Tuschen Phase 2 and Zeelugt Sugar Welfare Scheme got asphaltic concrete roads, light and water under the Coalition Government. From Saxakalli to Wakenaam and Leguan, including Alik, Morasi, Lanaballi, Beribisiballi,

Baboon Hole and all the other communities in the Essequibo River; Parika to Vreed-en-Hoop and Vreed-en-Hoop to Santa Mission; Endeavour and Sand Hill in the Demerara River, saw massive infrastructural enhancement, agricultural development and better healthcare delivery services.

Perhaps, the Education Delivery in our region under the APNU/AFC Coalition was the most remarkable. We made classrooms more conducive to learning, we built a special needs school in the region, we built several nursery and primary schools and the state-of-the-art La Parfaite Harmonie Secondary School. The soon-to-be constructed Prospect Secondary School is what we negotiated for. Do not jump sky high for projects you know nothing about, Hon. Priya Manickchand. Two school buses were made available for free transportation of school children...

**Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, in order to conclude, you would need a five-minute extension.

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

*Motion put and carried.*

*[Mr. Speaker assumed the chair.]*

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Hundreds of bicycles, boots, books and breakfast were made available to our children. We demonstrated care for the ordinary families in this country. We provided direct services to the ordinary Guyanese in this country. That is exactly why they voted to return us to Office but, of course, the Geo-politics, skulduggery and fraud at our last elections trampled on the will of the Guyanese People.

Right now, Region 3 has a lot of vacancies in the public sector but, according to the REO, he was instructed not to write the Public Service Commission (PSC) and not to advertise for the filling of those vacancies. The region is now punishing to get its work done because the PPP/C does not like the Public Service Commission. Do you know what it did instead? The PPP/C created a position in the health delivery programme as District Medical Officer, a position that is not catered for in the approved public service positions for Region 3 but, the Hon. Dr. Tandika Smith is the holder of that Office. When people want to talk about double dipping, they must keep their eyes on themselves.

The APNU/AFC, without a shadow of a doubt and without successful contradiction, was a Government for all of Guyana. From the mark of Punta Playa to where eastern currents run, to as far as Masakanarie or Gunns in Region 9, saw and felt development during our five years in Government. This installed regime now talks about oneness, which is nothing else but a whimsical farce. Look at who are being dismissed from their jobs. Look at where moneys are being spent. Perceived Coalition support areas are getting a football, cricket bats and balls, while confirmed PPP/C support areas are getting cash in their hands and economic projects. There is no proper accountability for the funds that are being disbursed.

If this regime really and truly wanted to consider the ordinary Guyanese people, they would have increased the income tax threshold and decrease the income tax rate. Tell the public servants what the salary increase is, and do not stand for over five hours and tell us about your pathway to corruption.

It was, noticeably, commendable that the Finance Minister recognised and accepted that significant growth and development occurred under the APNU/AFC, but it is sad that he created a Budget to increase corruption. This Budget has no comprehensive plan for COVID-19 and has the most inefficient measures to benefit the ordinary Guyanese. We have, right now, a Government of mendicants where their cronies are doing well, and the ordinary people are facing hell.

Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, the *Department of Public Information, Guyana Chronicle* and *News Room*, were literally begging the Guyanese people at Vreed-en-Hoop and Parika Stelling for a comment on this Budget; none was offered. I was prepared to give one, but the reporters told me that they will be fired if they take a comment from me. Let me tell you here and now what I was going to say to them. *Budget 2021* is hogwash.

I want to conclude by saying to the Hon. Ms. Oneidge Walrond who tried to justify the dismissal of staff, that article 147 (1) of our Constitution, the supreme document of our land, reads:

“Except with his or her own consent, no person shall be hindered in the employment of his or her own freedom of assembly, association and freedom to demonstrate peacefully, that to say, his or her right to assemble freely, to demonstrate peacefully and to associate with other persons and in particular to form or belong to political parties, trade unions or other associations for the protection of his or her interests.”

That is why when we took Government in 2015, we did not dismiss the Hon. Veerasammy. That is why when the list of candidates was created and the Hon. Member Dr. Tandika Smith was on that list we did not dismiss her. We embraced all the workers, we never expressed any form of dismissal for anybody that was on a political list because, we gave them a chance to work. They are Guyanese and they are entitled to work.

I want to further say to the Parliamentary Secretary, whose validity in this House is currently engaging the High Court, who stood in this House, during this auspicious period which will lead to Phagwah, and displayed how far away he is from the truth. It was no less a person than Former Speaker, Sase Narain, who cleared the air and set the record straight. The People's National Congress Reform (PNC/R), which was the People's National Congress (PNC) at the time, never banned flour from this country. He stood and said that we banned flour from this country. What I want to tell the soon to be expelled Parliamentary Secretary is that there is a father at Tuschen New Scheme, who lives opposite the Mandir he attends, who is mourning the loss of his 13-year-old child...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have to conclude now.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Yes, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** Not to wind down, but conclude.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Thank you, Sir.

What I want to tell the Hon. Member is that there is a father at Tuschen who is mourning the loss of his 13-year-old daughter and, as a Pandit, he should comfort that family by telling them the truth and seek forgiveness.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Before I call on the next speaker, I want to say to the persons who are presenting, if you are going to shout into the microphones, it is pretty difficult to get you clearly downstairs, and the press corps, by and large, stays downstairs. Shouting into the microphone muffles a lot of your presentation. It sounds good in here but, the feed coming out of here [*Inaudible*]. We will have to look at how we regulate the tone.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, please proceed with your presentation.

4.29 p.m.

**Ms. Pearson-Fredericks:** I would like to join my Colleagues on this part of the House to commend the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh and his team for presenting a comprehensive and transformative Budget, a Budget that would bring relief and meet the needs of the people – a peoples’ budget.

I would also like to say to Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, as I walked in Regions 2, 3, 4 and the other Regions, I was asked: Is Dr. Ashni back? I said, yes, he is back. Many of our Guyanese people – Amerindian and other ethnic groups – said to me, that is the man for the job; that is the man to handle the finances of this country. That was what was said to me, Mr. Speaker.

As I listened in this honourable House to all the ill-things that were said about the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, I want to say to him, ‘welcome home’. The Guyanese people welcome him. Thank you, once again, and to your team, for all the hard work that you put into *Budget 2021*, under the caption, *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*.

The word ‘recovery’, why this word? This word is important, it is real; it is applicable to our situation in the country now because we are recovering. One of my Colleagues said, a few days ago that from a tsunami, a tsunami came. While we are recovering from a tsunami, I would like to say that we are recovering from a disaster – a man-made disaster and not a natural disaster. This disaster was created by the APNU/AFC. I noticed that they just walked out. They have left because they are strangers to the truth. They do not want to hear the truth, but only the truth shall set one free. They all know that because they all quote the scriptures.

They have done this country so many wrong things. I will speak of some of the wrongs. Do you know the *Good Book* says, “forgive them for they know not what they do”? However, it is very difficult to forgive.

As I sat here quietly and listened to what was being said, I heard the Members of the APNU/AFC condemning the Budget. I heard them say, ‘that is our thing in the Budget’. Some parts of the Budget are their things. The APNU/AFC says, ‘that is our thing’. If it is your thing, and we brought it back, you should be proud to know that the PPP/C included your thing. But they are confused

because, while saying it is their thing, they still condemn the Budget. They are a group of confused people. We have all heard on this side of the House that some projects/programmes belong to them. In the same breath, we have heard that the Budget is 'useless' and that it is 'worthless'; it is 'a path to tragedy'. That is what we heard from them. It is a Budget to 'punish poor people'. One of the Hon. Members said that it is not a justice for all Budget. I did not know you were the Justice For All party over here. I kept hearing, every time they spoke on the Budget, about 'pink slips'. I have 'pink slips' in my hand here. The 'pink slip' will help me to remember some of the things that they did while they were in Office. If they are referring to the 'pink slip' that some of our residents or families have to sign before they receive the \$25,000, the 'pink slip' is a way for us to give account and be transparent in how the money is being disbursed.

They are strangers to the truth. So, the Hon. Members of the APNU/AFC will try to continue to mislead this nation. Every opportunity they get, their plan is to mislead. That is not new. What did they do when they were in office? They mislead the nation and they mismanaged. Incompetence was the order of the day. Sitting on the other side of the House, on the Opposition benches, it is still embedded in them to mislead. When people do not listen to them, they play their last card. What is the last trump card they have now? Racism, racial hostility and division. They are trying now to divide and conquer. No, Mr. Speaker, it will not happen. If we are to speak about racism and racial hostility, I should be saying that. I should be saying that because we faced many challenges because of our race. Yet, today, I can say, forgive them for they know not what they did. I can still stretch my hand out and say, hold my hand and let us walk together. Let us walk this path of recovery. The last card, the last trump card is now being played. But, Mr. Speaker, I want it to be known that, in Guyana, our motto is *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*.

In this House, His Excellency the President, Dr. Irfaan Ali, spoke about oneness. Wherever he goes he takes that message. Wherever we go we will take that message also. This is no fluff and bluff. We mean it. We here, have to make the difference. All the talks about cohesion, a Ministry of Cohesion and how much the Ministry of Cohesion did... I saw an Hon. Member waving a green book about cohesion. I have never seen that book. I do not know what it says. I would like to say that the Ministry of Cohesion and all the talks about cohesion was like a joke. When they went to the various regions it was like a party, a 'big sport'. That was what their cohesion was.

I said it before and I will say it again, cohesion should have started in this House. Instead of that, what is being said, what is being spewed, what is being directed, what is being thrown like bullets? Hate and racism. We cannot have cohesion here. So, there is a lot of work that has to be done by the APNU/AFC. We do not go out there and talk about race; we do not go out there and talk about colour; and we do not go out there and talk about ethnic division. We talk about oneness, one people, one nation and one destiny.

As I listened to the Hon. Members on the APNU/AFC side, I am amazed that now, once more, they have all the answers. It makes me remember, prior 2015, when they were campaigning. They had all the answers about how to manage this country. Some people believed them. What happened? They lost all the answers when they came into office.

Sir, I would like to say that they had a 100-day plan. I would like to ask this question: Could any of the APNU/AFC Members, sitting in this House, remember what that 100-day plan stated? If my memory serves me right, 21 things were listed there. How many of those things became a reality? I am wondering if anyone could answer that question. I want to highlight one. I know, at least, they did one thing. That one was the holding of the Local Government Elections, which they lost, in 2016, and in 2018 they *got licks like peas* and they lost again. Do you know what is called a bad loser? They *got bitter and sour*.

I wish to refer to the regional and national elections, and we all know what happened. I would like to say that I have walked the length and breadth of this country – every region and almost every Amerindian village. I had to talk to many persons there and many of them said to me that they had never seen a Minister or a representative of the APNU/AFC. Why was that? It was because they forgot what they promised the people and they failed to deliver. That is why, today, they are sitting on that side of the House. They have failed to deliver. They have always failed in everything. They failed to read and understand the document. They would not see the things that are positive and that would address the needs of the Guyanese people. They cannot understand them because they live above most of our people.

Here we are today, hearing that the Budget is useless, worthless, and it is punishing poor people but still we are hearing it is part of their ideas. There is confusion in the camp. There would be many more years of confusion for them.

4.44 p.m.

Let me go to the APNU/AFC's 2015 manifesto. It is shameful to know that they went to many of our villages and communities with their manifesto. What did they say about the Indigenous people? They had so loved the people; loved them, yes. They had said in their 2015 manifesto – which I may think many of them cannot remember – that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government will recognise the rights of the Indigenous peoples in keeping with international standards. They will uphold all the declarations and everything else. Where are we? The United Nations (UN) Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples clearly states that Indigenous peoples have the right to lands that they previously occupied, otherwise used or acquired. They have failed.

I wish to say, that 23 years, as the Hon. Member said... I wish to respond. Yes, the People's Progressive Party/Civic had 23 years to address land issues. Yes, we did address land issues. I would like to say that when we came into Office in 1992, although land titles were given under the previous administration, what did the then People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) do? They gave land titles without consulting our people and that is why we have so many problems today. They did that. Let me say further.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, before you can say further, you need an extension.

**Ms. Pearson-Fredericks:** Thank you, Sir.

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

*Question put and agreed to.*

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

**Ms. Pearson-Fredericks:** Thank you, Sir. When the PNC/R left Office, only one village was demarcated. Let me respond. In the 23 years, the PPP/C demarcated more than 100 villages and titled more than 26 new villages. When we left Office, we left a project; we left US\$700 million, coming from the Guyana/Norway Agreement. What happened? I would like any one of the Hon. Members on the other side of the House to tell this House, from 2015 to 2020, how many villages



they titled? The staff was there, the resources were there and everything was there. What did they do? We did work when we had rough times to find the money to do it; we still delivered.

I wish to make some comments about the Hon. Member from Region 2 – my Region. He lives there and I live there. I remember he said that the Rural Electrification Project is the brainchild of the APNU/AFC but that is wrong. Let me correct that. In the years 2010, 2011 and 2012, under the PPP/C, over 11,000 solar panels were distributed across the country to the hinterland regions. I want the public to know that when we left Office, we left 6,000 solar panels. What happened to the 6,000 solar panels? When we inquired, not one rural village received any solar panels under the APNU/AFC. What did they do with them? Is that how they cared for us?

I listened to the Hon. Member, Mr. Shurwayne Holder, when he said that there was massive development in Region 2. I would like the Hon. Member to pinpoint to me or to this honourable House where the massive development is. In 2018, under agriculture, \$19 billion was allocated. Hon. Member, tell this House how much of that money was spent in Region 2 or how much was spent in any of the Amerindian villages in Region 2. Bring it to the House and tell us.

Under health, the Hon. Member said that there was massive improvement. As of early January, 2020, there were no drugs or medical supplies in our hospitals. In November, 2019, we could not even extract a tooth at the Suddie Public Hospital or the Charity Hospital because, while they had the syringe, they did not have the needle. Was that massive development? I can bring evidence and facts to this House. These are facts. We live in the same Region and I am still looking for the massive development.

However, before I go, I need to touch on the Hinterland Employment and Youth Services (HEYS) project. This project is a complete failure. Again, I would like to ask the Hon. Member from Region 2 – my Region and his Region – could he identify how many successful businesses were established under the HEYS Project? We have nine villages and each village had 10 persons under the HEYS project. Could you find 9 successful businesses? I challenge you. It was a failure. Two weeks ago, when the Hon. Minister was in Region 2 and I was a part of that meeting, the Toshaos stood up and thanked the Minister for the CSOs and invited him to visit the village to see how the CSOs are performing. They stood up and said that. The APNU/AFC did us a lot of wrongs.

I, therefore, without hesitation, support *Budget 2021, A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. Yes, we are recovering with the help of God, the Great Spirit, Allah, Jah, or whoever it is. We will recover.

Thank you, Sir. [Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Member Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop to make his contribution. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

**Mr. Ramsaroop:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am honoured to be in the presence of Ms. Pearson-Fredericks whom I have known very well for a long time. We are here together. I am also honoured to be in the presence of the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh. I have been watching you for many years and I, finally, have the opportunity to be amongst you.

For the record, the ‘pink slip’ is for moneys owed to the people of Guyana. It is not for transparency. I also want you to understand that research has shown that whenever the PPP/C is in Government, racism in Guyana is at its peak. We can provide that research, Mr. Speaker. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] It was you who hired Mercury Public Affairs that created havoc in the United States.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I did not hire anyone.

**Mr. Ramsaroop:** The Hon. Member. Sorry, Sir; my apologies. The Hon. Member forgets that she is in Government so whatever questions she is asking, she can have the records for that.

However, yesterday, the Hon. Minister of Agriculture was speaking about the closure of estates. I want to ask him, who closed the Diamond and the La Bonne Intention (LBI) sugar factories? He, also, conveniently, forgot to say that the Wales Sugar Estate was already on the table to be closed. He also mentioned that they left a healthy economy, yet they were voted out in 2015. Why is that so? The APNU/AFC was rightsizing the sugar industry to make it profitable; we were not closing the sugar industry. So, the narrative that you are putting in the minds of the people to hypnotise them is wrong. If one understands business, one will understand that to make a profit, one has to manage right. Former President Donald Ramotar recently stated clearly in the press that the Guyana Sugar Corporation Incorporated (GuySuCo) is directionless. I did not say that. If I were

to put my terminology, I would say that it is like ‘an octopus on roller-skates’. That is what I would have said. If you could imagine that then you would understand what I am saying. The Hon. Member and Minister of Agriculture mentioned Hope Estate. I am proud to say that the APNU/AFC Government made it self-sufficient, but this Government has brought back the same old management that ‘run it down’ prior to 2015.

I am surprised that the Hon. Minister of Agriculture did not mention anything about fisheries yesterday in his presentation. There was nothing on fisheries. Why is that so? I know that he went to the Meadow Bank wharf to have a talk with the fishermen but did not mention anything in his speech about fishing. Do you know why that is so? It is because of the news that he had gotten; he could not take it. The fishing ground has been affected by the heavy drilling and high flaring that is happening from the pumping of hot water into the Atlantic Ocean. That is disrupting the entire seabed, but he will not say that. I can understand why our fishermen are taking risks going after fishes that are away from our territory and finding themselves in a lot of trouble.

The APNU/AFC Government, under the leadership of former Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Noel Holder [*inaudible*] is a silent killer and actions speak louder than words. It was mentioned in this honourable House, that we have not done anything for the agriculture sector but let me set this record straight. Yesterday, we heard from the Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan and Hon. Vincero Jordan.

During the period 2015 to 2019 a total of over 612 students graduated from the Guyana School of Agriculture in five programmes; programmes of new courses in apiculture, which is beekeeping, and aquaculture. At the National Agriculture Research and Extension Institute (NAREI), we have extended crop diversification.

*4.59 p.m.*

This has been a major achievement of NAREI over the last five years, enabling the Ministry of Agriculture to record a 29.5% increase in the production of non-traditional crops. For the Guyana Mangrove Restoration Project, we had increased the construction of coastal engineering structures, did hydrologic restoration, planted mangrove seedlings and the *Spartina* grass. There was the installation of geo-textile tubes, brushwood, dams and rubber mound groynes at strategic location in Regions 2, 4, 5 and 6. That is what we had done.

For the Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC), during 2015 to 2019, the average annual export of non-traditional commodities stood at approximately 10,000 metric tonnes with a value of about \$3 billion per year, with coconuts, pumpkins, watermelons, eddoes, pineapples and mangoes being among the top exports. That is what we had done.

Over the past five years the Guyana Shop has established partnerships with, at least, 13 entities in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 10. Notably, the Guyana Shop supplies Wine Vault, G&P Jaigobin and Son and Food Maxx. That is what we had done.

In 2016, Guyana became the 25<sup>th</sup> State to sign the Port State Measures Agreement (PSMA) which has now entered into force. Since the ratification of the act the Fisheries Department has worked to develop its technical proficiencies and capacity in the fight against illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing. If this was implemented, for the past five months, then we would not have had the issue of our fishermen being hijacked in other countries.

Sir, aquaponics training in secondary schools: The aquaponics unit conducted training at 17 secondary schools in Region 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 10. That is what we had done.

Sir, the observation, monitoring and control surveillance activity: In 2019, the Fisheries Department acquired vessels for the Department to perform dual roles – monitoring and surveillance activity. The brand-new vessel was acquired at a cost of \$99 million. If it was activated, then we would not have had the issues with our fishermen at sea.

The APNU/AFC Government established the Water Quality Laboratory at Brickdam. This \$83 million facility was the first ever in Guyana. It was officially opened on the 9<sup>th</sup> October, 2019 at the Hydrometeorological (Hydromet) Service on Brickdam. This laboratory monitors, examines and compiles data on the use of the country's surface and ground water resource. That is what we had done; the first ever.

The building of the climatological observational networks: Over the last five years the Hydromet Service had succeeded in installing new rainfall stations at Rewa and Wowetta in Region 9, bringing its total number of stations, to date, to 177. That is what we had done.

On the automatic weather stations: In February, 2018, Guyana received 21 Sutron Automatic water weather stations under the United States Agency for International Development's (USAID's)

Climate Change Adaption Programme. We deployed and installed nine of those stations in various regions of Guyana under the programme with assistance of international budgeting. The Service installed one station in Region 2 at Kabakaburi; one in Region 4 at the St. Cuthbert's Mission; one in Region 8 at Iwokrama; and 6 in Region 9 at the Surama, Pirara, Santa Fe, Kumu, Moco Moco and Aishalton. The Service also installed a Vaisala Station at Mabura Hill, which was purchased through international budgeting and procurement. This is what we had done.

Sir, yesterday, the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce spoke about the reduction of taxes on steel and construction materials. What he did not realise is that while that is done it is creating pressure in another sector, and that is the forestry sector. So, when we are talking about pro-private sector then we will have some serious issues. Since, I am on forestry, the Hon. Senior Minister with Responsibility for Finance, in the Budget, at paragraph 4.29, stated that production contracted by 7.4% and export by 8.6%, and he is totally right. But if he was here to understand what was happening with the macro-economics of our country, the trade war between China and the United States of America – China is one of our largest buyers of tropical hardwood in the world followed by India – then he would have understood that once those markets are affected then the exports would be affected. The COVID-19 pandemic also put additional pressure on the sector; no one tended to care about that.

In that very paragraph, also, it was mentioned that the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) was pushed into bankruptcy. I would like to set the record straight. When the APNU/AFC Government took over in 2015 there was about \$1.3 billion that was taken from the coffers of the GFC. [**Ms. Teixeira:** Who took it?] That is a very good question. Who took it? It was the Foreign Secretary who singlehandedly directed where the money should go. Let me tell the Members where it went. A sum of \$600 million was spent on a white elephant on High Street. We call him the *white elephant* man because when he puts his hand on something it either falls or stays. There was the US\$200 million spent at the Skeldon Estate, when he was the Minister of Agriculture. That is where the money went, and it left a tremendous hole in the Guyana Forestry Commission's coffers.

In paragraph 4.30, the Hon. Minister of Finance mentioned that the Guyana Forestry Commission would become self-sufficient. I have no doubt we all will love that but let me tell you the facts. This is happening by forcing the producers to produce. Many of the small operators received a document that has a number of whereas clauses. I thought it was a motion from the Parliament,

but it is a document that is asking or telling or forcing one to produce and if one does not produce the concession will be revoked. I would like to put on record that the APNU/AFC Government, under the leadership of Mr. Raphael Trotman, had extended the licenses from two years to three years so that the small operators could have gone to the bank. If that is going to be reversed, then, how could the forestry sector become self-sufficient? [**Mr. Bharrat:** *(Inaudible)* \$1.3 billion.] As I told you, Hon. Member, it is \$1.3 billion.

Under the same paragraph, I saw that there is the reversing of value-added-tax (VAT) and so on, and we really appreciate it. There was mention of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) but ATVs cannot ‘fetch’ logs. If one looks at the entire forestry sector and the small operators, one will only find a few. If one finds 10 then it is a lot. We do not ‘fetch’ logs with the ATVs; that is for the mining sector. If you had added to the Budget, and I know you could do it... I know the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with the Responsibility for Finance has a big heart, and if he would have liked to create an impact on the forestry sector, then he should have announced that he would give us duty free fuel. That would create an impact.

Paragraph 4.32, the National Forest Inventory: When I was looking at that paragraph, I thought I was looking at my 2020 Budget speech. Indeed, the last National Forest Inventory was done over 50 years ago, but you forget to mention, Sir, that, it was the APNU/AFC Government, again under the leadership of Mr. Raphael Trotman, that budgeted \$300 million for the National Forest Inventory. I did not see you mention it – we must give credit where it is due – but I am happy that \$250 million was given. That is excellent, but credit must be given where its due.

Sir, I am also happy to see that the Government is continuing European Union-Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (EU-FLEGT) program. I have serious reservations with this. Only this morning, I received a call from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) asking how many years I wanted on my licence – three or five years. Sir, when we embarked on and signed the voluntary partnership agreement we said to stakeholders and local small producers that we were not going to put additional pressure on them. In the history, one receives a call from the EPA to state if one has to pay \$20,000 or US\$100 a year for the license for either three or five years. This is an issue that we all have to address. We have never done that under the APNU/AFC Government, and that is wrong.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, we need to seek a license so that you continue for five minutes.

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much Hon. Member Mr. Jones. Hon. Member, you may continue to conclude.

**Mr. Ramsaroop:** Thank you Mr. Speaker. Why are we putting pressure by these agencies on our local operators? Why do we not go after companies like ExxonMobil? The big guns; that is where we have to focus. If we keep putting the pressure on the local operators we are going to put additional pressure on the forestry sector.

Sir, I continue to express my analysis of the *2021 Budget*. I read the Budget speech in depth and I can guarantee, beyond the shadow of doubt, that this Budget was not prepared by the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh. This is not his style and quality. As I told him earlier, I have watched him do presentations before. This was prepared by somebody who wanted some money here and some money there. That is what was in the Budget.

I am a little surprised and I want to commend the Hon. Member Ms. Susan Rodrigues for her presentation. As a young leader she has really set out her goals in what she presented. I am disappointed in the rest of the Members. Do you know why? It is because I thought we were here on a political campaign and not a budget debate.

The Hon. Minister of Finance could have asked the professional, Mr. Winston Jordan (proWJ), for guidance; a man who was with them all the time. He worked under both Governments and had the experience. If the Hon. Minister had consulted us, then we would not have had this kind of debate. He deliberately left the major Opposition out. It was also mentioned that consultation was done, and they called it pro-private sector.

*5.14 p.m.*

Could I ask if any consultation was done for the Civil Society Forum like the Policy Forum Guyana (PFG)? Were any consultations done for the [inaudible] Corps Association, Number 66

Fishermen's Cooperative Society, the Upper Berbice Forest and Agricultural Producers Association? Sir, you cannot say that there were consultations. This is a style of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). It always wants to talk about consultation and consultation. It has *one big table wit wan big shiny plate*. That is not consultation; it has to reach out to the people.

This Budget that is banking on loans for survival for certain sectors such as agriculture, will trap persons like farmers rather than give them more subsidies. It does not release any solace for those who lost income, due to the pandemic. This is a fake Budget that is not in favour of poor people. I see how the percentage of the poor people will increase while the percentage of those who are already poor will be worse off.

I, therefore, join the call to ask the Hon. Member, Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, to give the public sector a 10% increase and do not hide it under a line item, but make it clear that this is an increase for the public sector.

I want to put it on the record that I am not asking for anybody on the outside. Mr. Speaker, if you are to ask or do a survey for the very staff here, our parliamentary staff, they will tell you that they want an increase because things are rough. If I have to beg the Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance or shine his shoes for us to get this increase, I will do it.

With this in mind, I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, this is a good time to take the suspension. We will be back at 6.15 p.m.

*Sitting suspended at 5.15 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 6.15 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** We have circulated the address by His Excellency, the President, Dr. Irfaan Ali. Members have that, now, so you could quote directly from the words of the President in the National Assembly.

Now, I have the pleasure of calling the Minister in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, the Hon. Member, Mr. Anand Persaud. Hon. Member, you may proceed.



**Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Persaud]:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my contributions to the motion before this National Assembly for the approval of the estimates of the public sector and the Budget for the financial year 2021.

Firstly, I am honoured to represent this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government during its hallmark and historic presentation of yet, another budget in its six months' tenure in Office. I wish at the outset, to offer congratulations for a job well done by the Minister of Finance in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his budget team.

Never have I heard a more inspiring Budget presentation. This year's Budget, presented under the theme: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience* is indicative of this Government's commitment to further restart the pursuit for the Guyanese dream by enabling the macroeconomic fundamentals and policies in a safe, progressive, and productive environment; that could lead to growth and development for all Guyanese at home and in the diaspora.

The size of *Budget 2021* is \$383.1 billion as compared to the 2020 Budget that stood at \$329.5 billion, which is 9.6% or \$28.8 billion above the 2020 Budget. Finally, this Budget embodies the plans and promises that this PPP/C Government made to the Guyanese people which is for a better life through measures using a unique approach that will guarantee them a living standard, on par, if not better than our neighbours.

*Budget 2021* comes at a time when there is still the need for the Opposition's end to its policy of political gangsterism and political hypocrisy. It had all the time to do all what it wanted for the Guyanese people but, what did it do? It wasted the time. It plundered and stole the people's money or resources, break up and criticised everything that was working, failed to replace it and took the hard-earned jobs away from our people substituting them with perilous plans and unthinkable farcical ideas that never got fully off the ground.

Before I go further, I need to reply to the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul. It was a shameful and despicable presentation this afternoon. We, on this side of the House, are concerned and committed about the development of this country. Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul and the Opposition Members, please, stop blowing hot air in this Chamber. Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, you have flouted the

*Public Service Rules* by disclosing information of the Ministry. Further, to let you know, because you have flouted it you would be dealt with.

Let me remind the Hon. Member that it was on 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2020, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) led by Mr. Granger and his acolytes were trying to rig the elections and steal the democratic right of the Guyanese people to vote for a party of their choice. On that date, Mr. Michael Joseph who was the Finance Secretary at the Ministry of Finance said:

“It has been brought to my attention that several staff members are involved in discussions and posting on social media and public fora, matters concerning the Government’s business and political affairs.

As public servants we must conduct ourselves with regards to the tenets of the confidentiality and objectivity; being, the state of keeping or being kept secret or private of our knowledge of Government business; and a lack of bias, judgement, or prejudice while performing our duty competently.

Accordant to Public Service Rules in relation to Public Servants and the Press, members of staff by regulation, must:

*not at any time during his or her engagement make public or disclose to any person any information as to the practice or as to any other matters concerning the Government’s business, which may come to his knowledge in the course of his engagement and or involve in any political discussion whereby the operations of the government as a whole comes into the discourse.*

Anyone found in breach of this regulation shall be subjected to disciplinary action.”

It was signed by Mr. Michael B. Joseph.

I need to add that before a public servant is elected to this National Assembly, he/she must resign from the public service. You have flouted the Constitution of this country like Mr. Granger and his cabal did.

We, on this side of the house, will not waste our time in Office enriching ourselves with the things from our people such as the famous gold bracelet, expensive watches, chains, multi-million dollar food bills, drink bills and such excesses. It reminds me of the five Bs – Beds, Bangles, Bracelets, Bedsheets and Bands. How low can one stoop – bedsheets from the poor public servant. We are here to work and labour for our Guyanese people, putting our backs to the wheel of innovation, change and to make our industries develop.

*Budget 2021* aims at building cohesive and stronger communities and regions, through a no-nonsense approach, to the task of institutional and capacity building. This Budget keeps in line with our developmental needs and priorities. As you heard from the private sector, the business community, the normal man, the pensioner and the young people, *Budget 2021* has the incentives and the right plans this time around.

Last year, a total of \$28 million was earmarked to be spent under the Policy Development and Administration in the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development.

6.36 p.m.

This money was spent... [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] It does not mean stealing people's votes. It does not mean that. ... tackling the poverty reduction and job creation needs for our people. We spent the last six months making critical investments in our solid waste management programmes and local market upgrade which serves thousands of residents on a daily basis.

I am ashamed to say that the status of the project implementation and design, under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government... I heard horrifying stories of the game of politics being played with communities and municipalities throughout this country. The Ministry's projects and programmes were being waged as a political tool for control and influence. The Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) were starved of resources and the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) were not getting attention as it should. Some rehabilitation works were done, last year, to the La Penitence Market which made it more accessible to residents and more user friendly to the vendors. The East Ruimveldt Market could have been completed, due to the non-cooperation by the Mayor and City Council (M&CC). However, efforts would be made to have this market completed before the end of March, 2021.

Imagine the APNU/AFC spent millions of dollars on markets rehabilitation and today the percentage of occupancy of these markets is less than 40% – for example, the Kitty Market. The approach by the last Administration is confirmation that it was clueless when it comes to making lasting and sensible strategic investments. Today, I could proudly report that the first phase of the Mon Repos Market is almost completed. This market is among the biggest of the markets in Guyana. Local Democratic Organs (LDOs) received improve subventions where needed in the 2020 Budget, which made sure that there are public participation and consultancy with its constituency in the local governance arena.

In 2020, the Ministry equipped six NDCs with much needed furniture and equipment, was not catered for by the last Administration. A few buildings were constructed but, guess what? There were no furniture or equipment catered for it. Buildings were left unoccupied for months until the PPP/C Administration came to power on 2<sup>nd</sup> September, 2020. A review is presently being done for a three-year strategic plan and analysis for constituency with the national policy directive to determine its utility for future interventions for five municipalities: Linden, Bartica, Georgetown, New Amsterdam and Lethem.

In 2020, there were improved access to drainage and access roads across all regions. The construction of five culverts across the region were also completed. These would improve the roadways to reduce maintenance cost due to erosion caused during heavy rainfall, thereby benefiting approximately 12,000 people and it will come at a cost of \$18.5 million. The construction of revetment at Bamboo Dam, Charity, was done last year at cost of \$9.5 million to halt aggressive erosion of the banks of the creek and secured properties of approximately 50 residents that live in close proximity and approximately 200 farmers. Persons cannot complain now of political partisan any longer.

We upgraded roads in Herstelling, Buddy's Scheme, the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) Scheme and Covent Garden at approximately \$34 million. These roads would provide easy access to the ingress and egress for the residents within these communities.

In Region 5, \$10 million was spent on the general rehabilitation and upgrade of Ballfield Street, D'Edward Village to benefit the residents. Similarly, in Region 5, rehabilitation works to Bush Lot Cross Street at a cost of over \$12 million to benefit 50 households. In Region 7, the PPP/C

Government installed water systems at Wax Creek Primary School at a cost of \$7 million. In Region 8, the construction of an all-weather road from Monkey Mountain to Paramakatoi at a cost of over \$71 million, thereby causing a reduction in time and cost associated with transporting goods and accessing services in communities.

In Region 9, we saw the construction of a bridge at Powishnawa 15 feet(ft) x 56ft of concrete and wood structure at a cost of over \$12 million. There was no bridge that has ever been constructed at this location before. This would assist the easy and timely travel from the Region including the mining areas.

Finally, in Region 10, we continued to upgrade a track of land, the carriageway Millie's Hideout, at a cost of over \$13 million. This would lead to the continued enhancement and provision of easy transport network of farm produce from the farmlands in Berbice river communities to residents in Linden and Georgetown. The investment of this infrastructure is essential and it increases farmer's access to input and pout markets. It stimulates the rural non-farm economy and vitalises rural villages. It also increases consumer demand and facilitates the integration of rural areas into national and international economies. Therefore, the latter half of 2020, we at the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, did a remarkable task by having the projects completed and up and running.

Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, we have started probes into moneys that were allegedly squandered by the Ministers and others, including those who posed as businesspersons and started an incomplete barber shops and pig farms to name a few also, commencing all manner of questionable projects. Four name comes to mind: Christopher, Vincent, Jermaine and David – four corrupt names.

The APNU/AFC Administration spent its time taking the moneys from the Guyanese people and diverting it...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, I see, on the floor, the Hon. Opposition Chief Whip.

**Mr. Jones:** Cde. Speaker, Standing Order 41 (a). The Hon. Member is impugning improper motives on the names that he referenced in the House. We beg that he either withdraw it or apologise.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I do not recognise that as a Point of Order. He is impugning names. I do not know who those names apply to. As we would say, in the *Holy Bible*, Matthew, Luke...

**Mr. Persaud:** ...to its rich and greedy so-called businesspersons, allegedly. One could just look at the Demerara Harbour Bridge for a prime example of taxpayers' dollars going to waste behind poor policies of the APNU/AFC. There was \$488 million spent on a dull and humdrum project that did not amount to the functionality of the asphalt plant.

In an article of the *Guyana Times* dated 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 2021, my Colleague, the Minister of Public Works, stated:

“It is (non-operational). They’re waiting on some expert to come in with some part, to make it operational. And the excuse was COVID prevented that from happening.”

What a shame. Yet, the APNU/AFC wants to tell us about accountability and transparency. These double standards, on the side of the Opposition, resulted in millions being taken so to speak from our hard-working Guyanese to fund the now wasteful and directionless Cheddi Jagan Expansion Project, which we designed during our last tour in Government. This project had to be redesigned to make it compatible with the needs of a modern airport.

The thievery and in compassion to new heights was its installation of increased taxes on almost everyone who were struggling to make ends meet. As it is popularly said, *I do not know about you, but is the taxes for me*. More than 200 taxes, no coordinated approach, no phased approach and no sensible reason.

The so called ‘gangsterism’ had gone to newer heights. They were sucking the blood, like Christopher, David, Jermaine and Henry, out of an already devastated and physically, well known as, financially depressed Guyana. Let me be pellucidly clear, we, on this side of the House, believe in equality and equitable share of Guyana’s resources. We do not go to one village then skip the other, like what the APNU/AFC did. We believe every Guyanese would share our wealth regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or social class. Our vision is colour blind, when it comes to establishing a developed Guyana. The Opposition wants Guyana to believe that it is a saint and cannot do anything wrong. The entire country and the Guyanese people know better.

End your racism, APNU/AFC; stop dividing our country in your quest for power. All you did, in the last five years, was complain and lied in Office. Mind you, you would not be there for a long, long and very long time.

I now turn my attention and focus on *Budget 2021*. There is no doubt in my mind that there were massive amounts of irregularities and financial malpractices that occurred over the past five years. A closer analysis revealed that the Local Government Organs were weak and poorly managed, thereby it created limited service to the Guyanese people.

*6.51 p.m.*

Who is to be blamed? It is the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change cabal. It was too caught up in trying to hide from the media which had questions about its scandals. Let me say emphatically, that President Dr. Irfaan Ali's Government will continue to work on collaborating with all Local Government Organs to get the best possible results in 2021 and beyond. It will benefit from the technical support to perform its constitutional roles and functions.

This Government aims to adopt a long-term sustainable development plan to utilise the vast potential of communities, municipalities and regions to culminate an improved quality of life for all. The impact of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic had stymied local, economic and community developments and will continue to do so in the short and medium term.

We will continue to support community entrepreneurial businesses through the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) project. The SLED project is the deliberate intervention to promote economic development at the grassroots level in the Amerindian Village Councils (AVCs), Neighbourhood Democratic Council, municipalities and regions. The SLED project is intended to boost socio-economic development by increasing job opportunities and providing capital to local micro and small enterprises (MSEs).

During the APNU/AFC's time in Office, it spent huge sums of moneys from the SLED fund that benefitted members of its parties and cronies. Large sums of moneys were given to Christopher, Vincent, Jermaine, David and others, just to name a few at the front and centre. The APNU/AFC showed no remorse for the normal man, its handful of supporters or the ordinary Guyanese. It stickled its hand like pigs in a pot and pulled out the gold bracelet – what a shame.

We are quite different; we are a responsible Government. We have budgeted a whopping \$150 million in 2021 to provide economic opportunities for our people. This allocation will be an increase from the \$105 million provided in 2020 and it will support the expanded sphere of impact across all 10 Administrative Regions in different areas.

There is the provision of \$1.172 billion under the [*inaudible*] markets, NDC buildings and the community enhancement works. The People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration is committed to Local Government strengthening and development. Pivotal to such development, is the strengthening of the services provided by the NDCs and the municipalities. The APNU/AFC Administration neglected the NDCs – buildings were left in a dilapidated state with basic facilities absent which caused staff and residents to be forced to conduct business in an unsafe and undesirable environment. The APNU/AFC left its mark as to just how fragile our democratic structure could be but, we have corrected that.

In 2021, rehabilitation and construction works will be done on the Annandale/Riverstown NDC building, Aberdeen/Zorg-en-Vlygt NDC building, Leguan NDC building, Cane Field/Enterprise NDC building, Black Bush Polder NDC building, Number Fifty-Two NDC building and Number 74 NDC building. There is another \$130 million that will be invested in developmental works at Charity, Parika and Mon Repos markets.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Persaud, you will need an extension to conclude.

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

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

**Mr. Persaud:** Here are some of the PPP/C's manifesto promises that we have kept so far. We reduced the cost of basic foods and other household items. We reduced water tariffs, and the cost of construction and home ownership by zero-rating certain construction materials. We reduced the cost of connectivity. We supported our schoolchildren with a \$15,000 cash grant and for the elderly we increased Old Age Pension from \$20,000 to \$25,000 with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2021.



I heard during this debate from the 31 empty vessels making noise about salary increases.

Mr. Speaker, please allow me the privilege to inform these Hon. Men and Women on that side of the House to read the 2021 Budget in-depth. It seems they need fiscal glasses with 21/21 vision to see past their noses and understand English Language and Mathematics. Line item 6141 was previously known as the Revision of Wages and Salaries but, it is now known as, Other Employment Cost. It has more than \$10 billion budgeted for salary increases for workers under the Programme 031 – Policy and Administration. The APNU/AFC *can run around like headless chickens*, so that the Hon. Members, Mr. Sherod Duncan and Lt. Col (Ret'd) Joseph Harmon, could have something to entice the public with and achieve their one-minute fame on the Village Voice and In The Ring. They will have to punch harder in that ring. We on this side of the House, *float like butterflies and sting like bees*. We, on the Government's side, are livid and ready with this Budget.

All of these incentives being offered in *Budget 2021* will put us back on the road to economic recovery, even as the COVID-19 pandemic has set back the world economically. Let me emphatically state to all Guyanese to come on board and join with the PPP/C Government in the developmental transformation of this dear land of ours, which will commence definitely after the passage of this Budget.

As of today, we need to engage in the countrywide conversation for one common goal, one Guyana. Only then, we can achieve our National Motto of: *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*.

I stand before this honourable House in the hallowed walls of this National Assembly and commend the visionary Budget to this House as my PPP/C's Colleagues did. I extend commendations, once again, to Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his budget team who assisted him in bringing this Budget to this honourable House. Colleagues, here are two simple words to remember – 'One Guyana'. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, Mr. Anand Persaud. Hon. Members, we will now hear from the Hon. Member, Mr. Richard Sinclair.

**Mr. Sinclair:** Thank you very much, Hon. Speaker. I want to thank the electorate for allowing me this opportunity to come to this honoured House to say something about: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. First of all, I would like to thank the public servants who worked assiduously to help put together this missive.

I want to quote from page 13 of 77 that speaks to the labour man who stopped at Mr. Roger Hinds. Paragraph 3.28 states:

“In 2020, recognising the hardship of COVID-19, we provided amounts totalling \$7 billion for every household to receive relief in the form of an unconditional cash transfer of \$25,000...”

I would like to start on that point. This is what is called a *broken cistern that holds no water*. My Colleague talked about a pink slip before me. I would like to bring your memory back to after the last Budget presentation. I happened to be in a village on the Corentyne and I approached the team of people who were supposed to share grants to every household. Lo and behold, *a swarm of people...* [**Mr. Hamilton:** A swarm?] Yes, Sir. A set of people came to me to say that they were told, by the team of persons who were sharing the grants, who happened to be PPP/C acolytes from Brighton village, that in one house with tenants, I thought those tenants would need more money than the person who owned the house. They were told that they were not entitled to the grant. The owner of the house lives abroad but, they are living in the house.

The other thing too is that my brother was told, by the same team, that it had no pink slips. [**Mr. Hamilton:** Do you believe your brother?] He would not lie like you. I confronted the leader of the team and he promised faithfully that he would be back there on the next day. The team was driving a Region 6, Regional Democratic Council’s vehicle. The next day, I had to go and do some business about three miles away and I saw them lunching there also. I confronted the team and they promised again the second time that they would come the day after to deal with the pink slip that was not there. To my surprise, two days after, I saw them nine miles away. It would seem to me that this pink slip is very elusive. Therefore, I would say to this House, that is a broken promise; this household distribution is a broken promise.

Now, let me bring you to Region 8, Campbelltown. Campbelltown is where they selected the acolytes to share the grants. I thought when a person is sharing, he/she would do so from one

village to the next. Surprisingly, the team moved from Campbelltown after selecting households to Princeville, then to Microbe and all over the place. I am confused, at this point, as to what constitutes as household and house to house distribution.

7.06 p.m.

My conclusion then, like the concerns of the people of Region 8, is that this COVID-19 cash grant – the \$25,000 relief – is money that came out of the coffers of the PPP/C.

I am going to speak a little about the elections. There are four Members of Parliament (MPs), sitting in this Parliament, who sat at a meeting to select the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) of Region 8. If one wants to talk about corruption, that building was repaired at least three times before it went into use and that is prior to 2015.

I sat on the Regional Tender Board for the Region. And when one talks about equity and fairness, the persons who constitute that Tender Board were pastors, public officers and Mr. Richard Sinclair. The contractor, who had gotten all the contracts, was the Regional Executive Officer's (REO) friend, prior to 2015. Therefore, that building had to be prepared at least three times before it was liveable for students. What is surprising is where they sat at the head table, just behind there is the kitchen, but that kitchen was not convenient; and so, another kitchen was built. Broken cisterns – all they do is payback. It is payback for work that was done during the elections.

As a Parliamentarian, I was also invited to a COVID-19 taskforce meeting. At this meeting, even the police stated that they were still waiting to charge a person who broke the window of a hospital. Even in wartimes, people do not destroy hospitals. But this person – I do not want to commit myself – had gotten, at least, 17 contracts. In this yard, that contractor's son came out of this robotic class with me.

Mr. Speaker, there is another dimension to this thing. In 2004, I arrived in Mahdia, as a Head Teacher ... [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*) teacher.] A Head Teacher, and discovered that it took them six months to provide accommodation for the Head Teacher – that was from East Ruimveldt. It took them six months to offer a living quarter for the Head Teacher. However, they were going to give accommodation to an acting teacher – that is corruption. Added to that, I am privy to the fact that a person who had taken home a salary of \$45,000 between the time I arrived in Mahdia

and before 2015, that person was able to save and purchase an excavator for \$38 million. Auditors were asked to go in and audit that same department, but as it is practiced, just before an election, these persons had resigned; after the elections, they then go back to work.

I was privileged to work as a young teacher in another village. In that village, I happened to be a Poll Clerk... [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] it was 1975 to 1976. There is where I discovered that at 10.00 a.m., an elderly woman would come and vote with one name and an identification number (ID) and the same name and number would appear for a younger person, in the same afternoon. If one wants to talk about stealing an election, then that is stealing an election.

Punishments or rewards are sometimes offered to friends and cronies. Just recently, I visited a polling station and at this polling station, the Presiding Officers are friends of mine. Both the Presiding Officer and the Deputy Presiding Officer are teachers. I guess that they were given scholarships. They are now going to be in Georgetown at the University of Guyana (UG). Good. It is payback time. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Scholarships to study.

Here in my hands, I have a document. This document is a document from a frontline worker. This is a Government slip – it is a Government receipt. It is not the APNU/AFC Coalition's receipt. This document is dated 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2015. At the last budget debate, I spoke about this 'One Stop Shop'. This person cannot receive their title as yet, but there are others who have gotten theirs.

On Instagram (IG), I noticed that in a certain community on the West Coast of Demerara (WCD), thousands of persons would be benefiting from water supply. I took time off to go down to that same place. When I was there, I saw two concrete housing structure, so I am guessing that the rest would be bushes. I am guessing that those thousands of persons would be benefiting ...[*Interruption*]

**Ms. Sarabo- Halley:** Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 40 (a).

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you may have the floor.

**Ms. Sarabo- Halley:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Hon. Member is trying to finish his presentation. He is attempting to finish his presentation.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, what is your Point of Order?

**Ms. Sarabo- Halley:** Sir, I said Standing Order 40 (a). I am asking, if he continues...

**Mr. Speaker:** Where is the violation of Standing Order 40 (a)?

**Ms. Sarabo- Halley:** Pardon me?

**Mr. Speaker:** Where is the violation of Standing Order 40 (a)?

**Ms. Sarabo- Halley:** I am not sure that I understand what you are asking me. Do you need me to read Standing Order 40 (a)?

Standing Order 40 states:

“(a) by rising on a Point of Order, when the Member speaking shall resume his or her seat and the Member interrupting shall simply direct attention to the point which he or she desires to bring to notice...”

**Mr. Speaker:** I did not see anyone standing to interrupt. You stood to interrupt. So, I am asking for the Point of Order. I do not recognise that as a Point of Order.

Hon. Member Mr. Sinclair, you will get back your 30 seconds.

**Mr. Sinclair:** Mr. Speaker, how much more time am I entitled to?

**Mr. Speaker:** You have 30 seconds on the original 15 minutes and we could give you a five-minute extension.

**Mr. Sinclair:** In that same region, I walked the laterite roads and established a reading centre to improve students' literacy. That building was renovated by me and a Voluntary Service Officer (VSO) from Portugal [**Mr. Hamilton:** Are you a carpenter?] It is like a carpenter from the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC), where we sat together. That building which was renovated and stocked with books; became a storehouse. That is what you call... [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, please. I am finding it difficult to hear the Hon. Member, Mr. Sinclair.

**Mr. Sinclair:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

That is what is called corruption. So, when the Hon. Members, on that side of the House, want to hear something about corruption they must ...

Let us talk about this Budget. For me, this Budget is a broken cistern ...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, before you talk about this Budget, we would need to give you an extension.

**Mr. Jones:** Cde. Speaker. I do move if the Hon. Member could be given 10 minutes to conclude his presentation.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Jones, the Standing Orders have some specific directions. It also states that once there is an agreement on time allocation, we use that. The agreement we have is for five minutes extension.

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, I am so guided. I was hoping that the Hon. Chief Whip would have yielded, but I am so guided, Sir.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Member Mr. Sinclair your five minutes to conclude will start now.

**Mr. Sinclair:** Region 8 would like to have relief from tax measures especially taxes on water, as was announced by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance. In that Region, we mostly depend on water from the creeks. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Region 8. Therefore, this Budget measure for tax relief will not meet the ordinary people in Region 8.

Region 8 enjoys the privilege of a concrete road from the APNU/AFC Coalition Government. I am certain that those four Members of this Twelfth Parliament would have seen it and walked on it, including the Hon. Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister. But he was escorted by the person who is now a member of the Regional Tender Board and that member of the Board must report directly to a Member of this Parliament. That is a broken cistern [*inaudible*].

Mr. Speaker, that township has buildings in it that would require certain organised things. And here in my bag, I have some documents from persons from the North Pakaraima who need to have names but there is no registration office. There is no passport office, but it is now under construction and it is all thanks to the APNU/AFC Administration.

I want to demand that the teachers, nurses and the policemen... They are all looking forward for something tangible from this Budget.

Mr. Speaker, therefore, I could only support this Budget if it provides at least a 10% increase across the board in wages.

Finally, I am one of the teachers who worked and raised the Mathematics bar by 10%, but I am no longer teaching there. That is what the Hon. Kwame McCoy is doing with my region. The Government does not want to see developments.

*7.21 p.m.*

I would have been very if this Government side of the bench had consulted with the APNU/AFC people.

In fact, I had visited the Department of Education there. I offered some ideas, in terms, of what was needed for consideration in this Budget which I said to them was capacity building. Therefore, I think that I could extend the privilege to the Hon. Member of Parliament, my former student, for some capacity building.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member Mr. Sinclair. I guess your presentation was very well received because it was one of the loudest cheers we have had.

Hon. Members, I want to bring to your attention, from our handbook, page 57. This evening, two of the Members – the last two speakers – did quote [*inaudible*] from documents. Once you are going to quote from a document, you need to immediately submit those documents to the Clerk and the Parliamentary Reporters.

Secondly, as we continue to reach the high point of the Budget presentation, on that same page there is a list of words that we do not use in Parliament. This evening, I will ask, if we could refresh our memories with those words.

On that note, let me now invite the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarah Browne, to make her presentation. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

**Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Amerindian Affairs [Ms. Browne]:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

First, I wish to rebut a of the few comments made by the previous speaker. But, currently, I am lost in Region 8.

It is with much pride that I humbly rise to support *Budget 2021*. It is being presented to this National Assembly under the theme: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience* with a whopping sum of \$383 billion, financed with no new taxes. In the same breath, I join the many speakers, before me, in congratulating the team, from the Ministry of Finance and the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, for this well thought out and compiled Budget.

In the words of Dr. Singh, and I quote:

“With these objectives in mind this budget: (i) ensures we recover as a country both from 2020 and from the last five years of trauma; (ii) puts in place the policies needed to catalyse rapid economic growth in the near and medium term; and (iii) lays the foundation needed to ensure that that growth is not transitory but is sustainable for the longer term.”

*Budget 2021* is the second step towards achieving our manifesto commitment to the Guyanese people, since billions were already expended in our emergency *Budget 2020*. Already, the economy is growing, businesses are surviving amidst a pandemic and the country is progressing.

I wish to rebut the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, in his presentation, where he said that at no time did the REOs worked against the elected official.

In 2019, as an elected Vice-Chairperson of the RDC of Region 1, we were completely denied access to line item 6211 – Expenses Specific to the Agency – which was earmarked for the RDC’s functions. The Hon. Member also compared the allocation in line item 6211 for Region 4 to Region



1. May I remind the Member that line item 6211, in Region 1, caters for Toshaos' and Senior Councillors' stipends, of which an annual sum of \$8,640,000 is for a total of 24 Toshaos and an annual sum of \$2.4 million is for 10 Senior Councillors. Hon. Member, this is also included under the same line item 6211.

The previous Minister of Communities – now, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development – was more concerned with *Bulkan-ising* the country and imposing regional flags within a nation, when our sovereignty, at that time, was under threat.

*Budget 2020* saw investments in all sectors of the country's economy, especially, in the sector closest to my heart, investment in Amerindian development. Sad to say, that was the sector that was most neglected under the APNU/AFC's term in Office.

Many of the speakers, on the other side of the House, referred to hinterland development. The communities in focus were: Mabaruma, Mahdia, Lethem and Bartica. These areas alone are not the hinterland. What about villages like Kariako and the entire Barama River, that has never seen any Minister of the APNU/AFC Government, except for one, who went to the neighbouring Yakishuru to campaign days before the elections. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes.

Mr. Speaker, already in this pandemic, an allocation of \$1.7 billion was disbursed to Amerindian villages across the 10 regions, for villagers to execute projects of their choice, in an effort to help stimulate the local village economy at a time when we desperately need this intervention. Villages are buzzing with activities as the COVID-19 relief grant was given to complement the annual presidential grant – an initiative that was also birthed under the PPP/C Administration.

I wish to remind the Hon. Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams of when she asked in her presentation, what could \$10 million do for villages; I invite that Member to take a look at the brilliant proposals made by the village councils. As a matter of fact, many village councils are doing way better than the previous Government because the previous Government failed to implement any new Community Development Projects (CDPs), where villages had access to \$5 million under this project.

Hon. Member Ronald Cox, under the COVID-19 relief grant, villages across Region 1 benefitted from a total of \$542 million. In Region 2, the sum of \$105 million; in Region 3, the sum of \$23

million; in Region 4, the sum of \$47 million; in Region 5, the sum of \$15 million; in Region 6, the sum of \$30 million; in Region 7, the sum of \$216 million; in Region 8, the sum of \$208 million; in Region 9 – Hon. Member Mr. Henry – the sum of \$454 million; and in Region 10, the sum of \$92 million. That is an investment made by a caring Government, and that is just an addition to the 100 tractors that were procured in *Budget 2020* to be distributed among villages across the hinterland that have not benefitted from a tractor or trailer. *Budget 2021* caters for the chippers and ploughs to accompany these 100 tractors, so that our farmers could also benefit from the resources of this country.

Further, the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF) accounts for \$1.5 billion in *Budget 2021*. It continues projects for every sector, ranging from women, youths, sports, agriculture, education, and farm-to-market roads, just to name a few. I hope that my Indigenous Colleagues on the other side, with the exception of Mr. Shuman, will not say no to this development, then seek to justify their actions as they did before 2015, when the then combined Opposition in the Parliament mercilessly massacred the Amerindian Development Fund. Hence, giving us \$1. As a result, myself, other young Amerindians and other leaders had to take to the streets, in front of the Parliament Building, protesting for them to release our budget. Much to our dismay, counter protestors, sent by the APNU/AFC, lined the streets, hurling racial and vulgar comments to deter us. But we stood tall like a tree planted by the riverside; we did not move.

Evidently, like any other grouping, we too hold a special in this inclusive Government. The young, vibrant, energetic and efficient President, His Excellency, Dr. Mohammed Irfaan Ali, in his powerful inaugural presentation to this House, dedicated time to highlight our Government's views on the development of Amerindians. I am certain that his presentation, along with the projects that we have started to implement, and those that will be executed in *Budget 2021*, has left the Indigenous representatives in this House with nothing much to bring to the floor, since many of the interventions are already in motion. I know that many of them have now resorted to being ... for example, the Shadow Minister of Education.

The President, in his speech, committed to the updating of the Amerindian Act after consultation with every Amerindian community; something the APNU/AFC failed to do, having two ministers, who demitted office without leaving any paper trail of any of the work done.

The President committed to improving the lives of Amerindians by improving education, health facilities, and housing and infrastructure development. Already, there is \$630 million to expedite the Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) Project; again, which the APNU/AFC failed miserably to make into roads.

This Budget seeks to remove duties on all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) for use the hinterland. It is a welcomed initiative, especially for those of us living in the mountains where this is often our best or only mode of transportation. In *Budget 2021*, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs has earmarked nine ATVs for use in villages in Region 8, which were forsaken by the APNU/AFC. And no, Mahdia and Paramakatoi are not Region 8. There are four ATVs earmarked for Region 9. There are three buses for Region 1, and there are also boats and engines for a few of the riverain communities.

*Budget 2021* is fulfilling the commitment made in our manifesto to return the Young Ambassadors Programme (YAP), or the Community Support Officers (CSOs) programme, which was vindictively disbanded by the previous Government whereby *taking bread out of the mouths* of 2,000 young people across the hinterland. Those programmes were replaced with the Hinterland Employment and Youth Services (HEYS) programme. Mind you, this programme has been inactive for at least one year before the then Government was catapulted into the Opposition. The Hon. Member, Dawn Hastings-Williams, then came to this House asking us to keep the HEYS programme, which they themselves could not keep or maintain as a Government; not to mention, the millions unaccounted for under the HEYS programme. Shame! Shame! Shame!

In *Budget 2021*, \$820 million is to be utilised for the execution of the CSOs programme and the Youth Entrepreneurship and Apprenticeship Programme (YEAP), where youths from 213 villages will be trained in various disciplines. This training caters for training in oil and gas, climate change, tourism, information and communications technology (ICT) and agro-processing, of which Amerindians will also benefit from under this inclusive Government.

In addition to this, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs' budget caters for an intervention for women and youths in the form of additional grants for economic venture. Things are happening in Guyana. Yes, things are happening.

7.36 p.m.

We have already, disbursed our uniform allowance to every child in the public schools for 2020. Already, there has been an increase in the old-age pension. We have already received \$25,000 per household and yes, the pink slip for phase two. In the 2021 Budget, we will receive a \$15,000 cash grant for every child in the public schools.

Vaccination for COVID- 19 has already been given to our frontline workers, who risk their lives daily on the frontlines to serve us, for which we are extremely grateful.

Unprecedented development across the hinterland – already in our emergency Budget, over \$300 million was spent to upgrade hinterland roads and in *Budget 2021*, in excess of \$400 million will be spent to continue where we left off. And as I speak, I cannot wait to return to my home village, the Santa Rosa Village, Moruca sub-region 1, where I will be stepping out on a spanking new concrete road.

Mr. Speaker, I have noted that the geographical Hon. Member for Region 1 did not say much with regard to representation for his constituency. The reason for this is quite simple. We have been doing our job as a Government and, as a result, the Opposition is becoming irrelevant. Thus, I encourage them to reflect on the well-known local saying that *if you cannot beat, then you join them*.

The Hon. Member referred to agriculture development and lamented that the sums allocated were too small. It makes me wonder whether the Member was asleep for the five years his Government was in Office, when the support for Acoushi ants' bait or poison was taken from our people. That has return in *Budget 2021*. May I gently remind the Member that the then Minister of Agriculture never visited the agricultural communities in Region 1. But then again, after a certain age, our movements become limited.

The regional budget for 2021 for the agriculture development programme caters for the impoldering of 100 acres of farmland in the St. Anselm Village, Barima River. There was no farmland – none – surrounded by the APNU/AFC Government in Region 1. To add to this, the poultry pens, that the Hon. Member alluded to, are earmarked for the three resident schools in Matakai, Moruca and Mabaruma to aid in the schools' agricultural programme.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you will need an extension.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for an extension of five minutes for the Hon. Member to conclude her presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

**Ms. Browne:** In *Budget 2021*, the Kumaka District Hospital would be retrofitted to accommodate a theatre and an intensive care unit (ICU), fully furnished with operating tables, theatre lights, backup outlets and gas and vacuum systems. Additionally, there is the construction of an infectious disease building and a maternal and child health (MCH) building at the said Hospital. We will also be constructing a maternal waiting home for the Moruca sub-region, all, in an effort, to make our mothers safe and comfortable with the ultimate goal of reducing maternal and child deaths. There is also the construction of a vaccination cold storage unit at the Mabaruma Regional Hospital and the Port Kaituma District Hospital.

Upgrading of electricity – the Coalition Government promised 24-hour electricity to the town of Mabaruma and it did not deliver. Since assuming Office, we have moved the supply from 16 to 24 hours in Mabaruma, and from nine to 15 hours in the Moruca sub-region. In *Budget 2021*, we will also be establishing new grids at Kamwatta/Mabaruma and Kamwatta/Moruca.

We will construct schools in Tassawini and Matarkai sub-region and Yarikita in the Mabaruma sub-region. We will also extend the Santa Rosa Secondary School, the St. Nicholas Primary School, the Hosororo Primary School and the Matthew's Ridge Primary School. In addition, we will construct laundry buildings at the Santa Rosa and Port Kaituma Secondary Schools' dormitories.

I think that now you understand why the Hon. Member could not make a meaningful representation because it is all registered in *Budget 2021*, it was not done in *Budget 2020*.

I would like to close by making mention of His Excellency's speech at the opening ceremony of the Twelfth Parliament on 11<sup>th</sup> February. He said:

“As the President of Guyana and the Head of Government, my credo and the credo this Government is “Nation Building”.

The key word of my Government is “oneness”.

The essential character of my Government’s vision is “inclusion”.

Stop being defined by race.

Stop being defined by politics.

Start being defined by our one nationality, and by our common love for our one country.

Let us lift it up together

And by doing so let us lift-up each other and ourselves.”

*Budget 2021* is an exceptional and comprehensive document, that when implemented, will reflect one Guyana. Join me, my Friends on the other side, and support this Budget.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you and I commend this Budget to this honourable House. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member Ms. Browne.

It is an honour for me to call on the Hon. Member, Mr. Jermaine Figueira, to make his contribution.

**Mr. Figueira:** Mr. Speaker, I was informed that the devil was in this House – a traitor – and we on this side of the House, on behalf of all Guyanese, want to register our rebuke on behalf of that individual and let him know that he is not welcomed here.

I am happy to join my competent Colleagues on this side of the House, in congratulating the staff at the Ministry of Finance who worked on this *Budget 2021*... [*Interruption*]

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker ...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Minister Teixeira, you have the floor.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 40, what is the Hon. Member talking about – the devil being here? This cannot be said in this House. This is not...

**Mr. Figueira:** Sit!

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, I do not uphold that as a Standing Order.

Hon. Members, and especially, the Hon. Member, Mr. Jermaine Figueira, I heard you giving orders to the Hon. Member to sit. That is my job. Thank you.

**Mr. Figueira:** Thank you for doing your job, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, before I was rudely interrupted by the Hon. Member, permit me to congratulate the staff at the Ministry of Finance, who worked on *Budget 2021*, and to inform them that they are not responsible for the multitude of shortcomings in *Budget 2021* – a budget that is an invisible enemy of the ‘good life’ for the poor, our senior citizens and the hardworking public servants.

We, on this side of the House, will continue to expose the fanciful illusion of this Budget that is being foisted on the Guyanese people – a budget that does not in any regard, or in any serious way, addresses the real hardcore realities that confronts the poor, the vulnerable and hardworking people of this country. Equally so, it does not offer any real tangible and workable solutions for the devastating impact this deadly COVID- 19 is having on our society, especially for small businesses – formal and informal.

Before I adumbrate further, the APNU/AFC’s position on this fairy-tale, far from reality Budget, I wish to place on record, the sacrilegious precedent that materialised on the day of Mr. Ali’s inaugural address to this Parliament of this country. On that faithful day... [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have to show some respect.

**Mr. Figueira:** Mr. Speaker, His Excellency, Mr. Ali.

On that faithful and unforgettable day, the Gestapo tactics were released on the elected representatives of the people and were facilitated by the State. Elected Members of Parliament were physically assaulted, humiliated, berated and, most diabolical of all, were prevented from going into the Parliament to represent more than half of the adult population who voted for us. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I will interrupt you at that point because I made a statement on that.

**Mr. Figueira:** Mr. Speaker, your statement does not evade the fact that we were prevented from coming into the House. We were prevented by the State police...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you are again engaging in an exchange after the Speaker ruled, and I would not allow it. If you want to continue, please change that trajectory.

**Mr. Figueira:** Mr. Speaker, that is an irrefutable fact and...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, again, I am refuting that fact. I did, immediately, after.

**Mr. Figueira:** Mr. Speaker, that was what our great Poet, Mr. Martin Carter, described as a dark time, a season of oppression and evidence of a budding dictatorship. Permit me to make it abundantly clear, to all and sundry, that the APNU/AFC will not be silenced, either by the deployment of the Guyana Police Force (GPF), or by any obstructionist tactics in this House.

I have been asked, by the Leader of the Opposition, to shadow a Minister, who was the Hobson's choice; the Hobson's choice for this very important Ministry with a shared potential for fostering social cohesion on a national scale, with influence over our nation's greatest asset – our young people.

I took the pleasure of rereading my 2020 speech, a speech in which I offered the Minister who I know did not want to be at that Ministry, and by his daily actions, to date, it appears that those feelings still persist. But nevertheless, in Guyana's interest of our most prized possession – our youths – I provided the Minister with very profound, cogent and well-thought-out ideas for culture, youth and sport. The advice and ideas, with just an *iota* of effort and resources would have germinated, matured and would have had such a transformational impact, which would have engulfed the entire Ministry and catapulted across this country like shooting stars. But, we, on this side of the House, have seen through the emperor's cloth in that Minister. I urge reduced ignorance, reduced levels of pomposity, and unenvious arrogance, which have stunted the growth of the Ministry, and alienated the shared potential of that portfolio for social cohesion.

The Minister of Culture Youth and Sports did as much as possible, in the last months, to bully friendships and allegiance across different sports associations and even to the extent of weaponising the State's resources such as funding and access to venues, to get his way. While, on the other hand, he has not yet published a youth, sport or culture policy, nor has he published any established COVID-19 protocols, developed with any sport association for the recommencement of sports in Guyana. This is reckless, and places Guyana's sportsmen and sportswomen at risk.



7.51 p.m.

The Minister had a golden opportunity to formulate a vision and bring it into being for the Ministry, by first recognising that our differences in ethnicity, religion, cultural practices and talents in this country, are what makes us unique in the region and the world.

It is our differences that offer immense potential to move the Ministry beyond sharing balls, sports gears, keeping concerts, repairing aged infrastructure and ground enhancement.

Those primitive initiatives are welcome but, compared to what can be achieved for culture, youth and sport, I dare ask: what has this Minister done for culture, youth and sport in seven months? If I attempt an answer, I will say, giving the Ministry a very beautiful logo, designed by my friend. I put it to the Hon. Minister, and hope that he can recognise that it is our differences which set us apart in the region, and it is time for us to forge a cultural identity that is Guyanese. I call on the Hon. Minister to tell this House what Guyana is known for in the region culturally, as Jamaica is known for reggae, dancehall, their creole language; Trinidad for soca music and carnival, *et cetera*.

I trust the Minister will agree with me that it is time for 'brand Guyana'. We must stand out in the region and the world with a cultural identity that is so unique, so distinct and Guyanese to the bone, that we all as Hon. Members of this House and fellow Guyanese could be proud of it.

We need to market our music, our culture, our foods, our cook-up rice, that His Excellency bragged about, that it is his favourite meal; our pepper pot; and our seven curry. All should be marketed as Jamaica markets their blue mountain coffee, their jerk chicken, *manish* water, ackee and salt fish, or how Trinidad markets their doubles and *buss up shut*.

It is time and the time is now for 'brand Guyana', in music, dance, poetry, culture, drama, theatre, cultural tourism and community tourism. This should also include new copy right legislation so our talented artistes, musicians, poets and writers' intellectual properties can be protected. Clearly, the Minister has a lot of work to do, and posing for photo opportunities will not get it done.

With the largest of allocations for the Ministry going to culture, I see nothing transformational, no futuristic project to forge Guyana's cultural identity. The award of a mere \$1.5 million to the Theatre Guild, that teaches the fundamentals of drama, acting, *et cetera*, to our young people, shows the Government's position on culture.

These are some of the skills our young people need, which can be learned in the safety and comfort of their homes during this COVID-19 pandemic on a virtual platform. Now is not the time for hosting physical youth summits and fora, to place the lives of our young people at risk and the lives of those most vulnerable who they live with. This Government and this absent-minded Minister do not have a clue or care about culture, except to exploit it on ethnic and racial issues.

Youth - our young people remain our nation's most valuable assets and resource. It goes without saying that skills training is pivotal in preparing them, not only for the world of work but for the new and emerging working environment that COVID-19 has presented.

This is why the Coalition invested in the Kuru Kuru Cooperative College, Board of Industrial Training, our technical institutes, Information Communications Technology (ICT) Hubs across this country, robotics, programming, and the Bertram Collins College of the Public Servants, to name a few. All these and more were done by the Granger Administration because we value our young people.

The Minister has failed to link the youth programmes of his Ministry with the Ministries of Education, and Human Services and Social Security, all of which have a youth component. Is this why the Minister is silent on the closure of the Bertram Collins College of the Public Servants, which affected hundreds of young people?

When there were calls for justice for the young Henry Boys and Haresh Singh, the Minister was silent; the call by our young people for the fulfilment of the promise for free university education, the Minister is silent. On important matters for Guyana's youths, there is a deafening silence, and the Minister is voiceless.

Sports – presently, the Minister wants visits to the Guyana National Stadium to have his concurrence. So, apart from sharing balls and sport gears as his flag ship project, he now keeps a logbook of visitors to properties own and controlled by his Ministry – *controlfreakism*.

The Minister in his quest to be patron of all sport associations in Guyana, sends out an ill-informed and intimidating letter in December, 2020, telling associations not to discipline their errant members who partake in unsanctioned tournaments, less they will not be in his good book.

Several days ago, the Guyana Football Federation (GFF) banned several national players who played in an unsanctioned tournament, I wonder what the Minister will do. Mr. Speaker, would you imagine the GFF not getting clearance to organise football but, its national players in this COVID-19 season, are exposed in a tournament where no testing is mandatory? What should people do to Guyana? This is a question the Minister needs to answer. This type of management or lack thereof, speaks directly to the qualities of the Minister of Culture Youth and Sport, and his real interests. He is willing and ready to leverage the influence of his office to punish all those who are unwilling to join him in his political escapades. How else can one explain the call to order by the Ministry's missive, released on the 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2020, which instructs sports associations in Guyana to turn a blind eye to infringements of their rules? It was a dastardly act. An act which is a national disgrace to the extent that it compelled the President of the Guyana Olympics Association to pen a public letter enlightening the Minister on the rules of engagement with local associations who are bound by international sporting rules.

One would hope that the Guyana Olympic Association's letter would be of help, but we on this side of the House, know too well that the greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance, it is the illusion of knowledge. This is what presently haunts the Minister of Culture Youth and Sport, in his quest to show that he is in charge.

The Minister said that sports is his number one priority, and he has had since August, 2020, seven months and two budgets later, to appoint members to the National Sports Commission and nothing was done, equally, no appointment of a Director of Sport. I do not wish to explain to the Minister the importance of the individual to fill that vacancy. We have seen the callous ineptitude of this Administration in rewarding friends and cronies to important positions and offices in this country. This is probably why the Minister is still awaiting permission from his boss for his turn to follow suit. Let us see if competence across different sports disciplines will be the criteria.

It would be a great thing for Guyana if a female Director of Sport, who is eminently qualified, is attached to that portfolio. I am confident that all women Members of Parliament (MPs) in this House will agree with me that we need to give more of our women opportunities to serve at the highest levels of leadership.

We welcome the improved allocations for sports, but new money without a structured plan is wasteful spending. You have the bulk of the money in the 2021 capital Budget for repairs. Where is the new thinking? For example, like remodelling two new grounds in each region in Guyana for cricket and football, specifically, to have those sports played day and night in any weather. Note, I am not advocating for petty repairs to selective grounds. We need a plan that caters for all sports disciplines, from the primary, secondary to the tertiary levels, from the amateur to the semi-pro to the professional leagues.

We must work in sync with the Ministry of Education to formulate a plan, a programme that caters for all levels of sport. I know that the Hon. Manickchand would accept such a proposal but, you have to engage the Ministry. Additionally, there should be collaboration with all sports associations to formulate similar programmes to cater for students' participation after school, on weekends and on holidays.

We in Region 10, welcome the proposed investment of a new sporting facility that the Chinese Government offered to fund. We hope that some of the allocated sum in the 2021 Budget would be utilised to clear and prepare 20 acres of land at the Amelia's Ward/Millie's Hideout Zone for the placement of that facility, where the space for parking, commerce and other futuristic endeavours could be accommodated.

Region 10, undoubtedly, is the talent basket of this country. We have provided this nation with some of the best athletes in sports – sportsmen and women of all categories. We did all those things with the least of much needed facilities. Those achievements came because of one of our most prized facilities, the Mackenzie Sports Club which morphed over the years into and an all-purpose asset for different community events. Hence, it will be a great thing if the National Trust of Guyana, could provide the much-needed resources to upgrade the facility in recognition of its cultural heritage status to the community.

Moreover, we are happy that the final phase of the synthetic track that the Coalition brought to the community will be completed. I call on the Government to also consider, for the next budget, that the 5000-seating capacity pavilion with modern amenities will also be an added feature to the track in the future. Those plans are already at the Ministry, all that is required is the resources.

*Budget 2021*, coined under the theme: *A Path To Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience* is in itself most confusing, for it lacks the cohesion of a clear vision for Guyana and a road map for continued and consistent development, as was achieved by the Coalition under the judicious and astute leadership of an economic guru in that of Mr. Winston Jordan.

There was a systematic developmental plan, year after year, which was in tandem with Guyana's consistent economic growth pattern.

When one dissects the political toxic rhetoric in the Ministers' five hours plus speech, captured in the 77-page document, one would have a greater appreciation for why I said what I said.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, could you just allow us to move the extension so that we can go beyond the 8 o'clock?

**Mr. Figueira:** You are the boss, Sir?

*8.06 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Prime Minister.

#### **Suspension of Standing Order No. 11**

BE IT RESOLVED:

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

*[Prime Minister]*

**Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]:** Mr. Speaker, I ask that we suspend Standing Order 11 to continue beyond the time.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Standing Order suspended.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you will get back your time.

**Mr. Figueira:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker for that extended five minutes.

The PPP/C boasted and made promises in their unseen manifesto or should I say on their campaign posters about 50% increase for public servants in their first 100-day plan. Two budgets later, not a blind cent, not even their ritual 5% pittance for thousands of hardworking public servants who are struggling in these COVID-19 times.

It was the widening of the tax base by the Coalition that allowed for increases in salaries for public servants. Today, to be a public servant under the PPP/C Government one is an endangered person that is politically exposed. You are likely to be treated with disdain or fired. I join with my Colleagues, not in asking the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance to honour this 50% increase promised, but, more so, to accept our proposal of a 10% retroactive increase for all public servants.

The PPP/C criticised and disapproved the adjustments of Ministerial salaries in 2015, but on 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020, they took those same salaries quietly and offered nothing to the public servants. I will not venture to call them hypocrites or charlatans which the people have now seen...

**Mr. Speaker:** If you try that we will stop you for unparliamentary language.

**Mr Figueira:** I never called them so.

**Mr. Speaker:** I said if you do that, we will stop you.

**Mr. Figueira:** The Coalition increased public servants' salaries by 77% during its time. The lives of public servants were made better and job security was assured. This Budget is indeed designed for the ordinary people to get hell while the PPP/C and their cronies do well. The PPP/C Regime promised \$50,000 increase for senior citizens' pension. Two budgets later, they received only \$4,500 and they have given a false impression to the populace as if they are giving them \$25,000. It is \$4,500 they are giving senior citizens. This is another empty promise.

The biggest so-called promise is the creation of 50,000 jobs. We are now left to wonder if it meant 50,000 less jobs with close to 2,000 public servants fired in this COVID-19 pandemic. Many of whom were young people, many of whom were women and many of whom were the sole bread winners of their homes. Sir, I have been informed that the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) is also planning to send home hundreds of additional public servants across the country. I really hope that this is misinformation.

His Excellency told this nation on 11<sup>th</sup> February, 2021, that Guyanese should not be poor. He leads a Government and a party that have pursued a vicious vendetta against one particular ethnic group of Guyanese in this country. That does not go in tandem with Islamic beliefs. A Muslim - one who submits to Allah and one who submits to Almighty God, does not treat people like that, does not supervise over the unemployment of single mothers and does not supervise over the unemployment of the poor.

Over 90% of public servants fired by this Administration are of one ethnicity. It is no secret. Even though some may not want to accept, the reality is, the ethnic makeup of the public sector is abundantly of African Guyanese. Policemen, the army, doctors, teachers, firemen and firewomen and all the ministries, departments and institutions in this country, African Guyanese plays an important role in keeping the engine of government, and economic and commerce functioning. African Guyanese are the biggest consumers of private sector goods and services. This is how the Ali Administration is treating hardworking honest Guyanese, by firing them. What a shame. Is this what a caring Government does to its citizens? This 'one Guyana' that His Excellency talked about will not be achieved by fanciful speeches and selective tokenism of members of this community. This 'one Guyana' part of the President's speech is one of the most confusing parts because his words are not formulated into policies nor does it show itself in the actions of the Government that he is leading.

Mr. Speaker, since this Regime was placed in control of national matters, Guyanese fishermen are now experiencing troubling times with earning a living from their trade, due to Venezuela's illegal aggression in Guyana's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of the Essequibo river. While the Government continues to showcase its inability to manage properly and to secure our borders, Venezuelan gangs regularly invade our bordering communities, squatting and committing armed robberies. The Government continues to show callous disregard for the protection of our sovereignty. This is mind-boggling that the Government would rely on a domestic aircraft pilot and guest house operator as its National Security Advisor. Seriously, Mr. Speaker!

A former Guyana Defence Force Army Captain, who retired decades ago, is in charge of national security matters in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I think you are going to have to withdraw that because, as far as I know, the person you are alluding to is an Advisor. An advisor does not make you in charge. He is an Advisor to His Excellency.

**Mr. Figueira:** I am so guided, Mr. Speaker. I am still fearful that a man who has left the Force so many decades ago, in this 21<sup>st</sup> Century is advising the Government on matters of national security. Moreover, I see this as a gross disrespect to my fellow Lindenians. A man, a former Brigadier of the armed forces, the Hon. Prime Minister, who, instead of addressing the needs of improving Guyana's defence capabilities, unfortunately, is tasked to speak about soft COVID-19 enforcement regulations – to open businesses. How can we take this installed Administration seriously? The Hon. Prime Minister needs to engage in areas of his expertise and come out of this COVID-19 chaos that the three Ministers of Health have created for this country, placing the safety of every Guyanese at risk.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, so we can allow you to safely proceed, you will need to an extension.

**Mr. Jones:** I do move that the Hon. Member be given five Minutes to conclude his presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member, Mr. Jones. Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, you may continue.

**Mr. Figueira:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Foreign Policy - we were regaled by the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in his presentation where he enlightened us and reminded that this is “Black History Month” and that Black Lives Matter. What the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation has made very clear to this entire House, is that he has personified what an Uncle Tom is. I daresay that the Hon. Minister does not possess the sagacity nor the experience to speak on matters of blackness. He should remain quiet because he is a tokenism of the PPP/C Administration.

Guyana's international security and its foreign policy were never in a chaotic situation under the Granger's Administration. This is the cost that Guyana is paying for discarding the programmes



of the Coalition Government and working with the promise of Mr. Michael Pompeo, to publicly say Venezuela must have democratic reform. Why did we disband our non-interference in the sovereignty affairs of other countries? What happened to the position we would have taken not to be pawns of the east nor pawns of the west? The Government recently had to eject a Taiwan investment office after it had opened in Guyana. This level of disrespect shown by the PPP/C to one of our most formidable friend and ally, a relationship forged under mutual respect with the Burnham Administration for several decades with our Chinese counterparts, could have been fractured. This ‘rum shop policy’ that is externally directed can internally be costly to the country.

Education – the reintroduction of the Five Bs Programme, which offers a \$15,000 Cash Grant, will be accepted, Hon. Manickchand. It will be accepted by parents without question. After all, it is free money and, moreover, most of those recipients were not recipients of the COVID-19 cash grant. They are still in possession of the ‘pink slip’. I, along with my Colleagues, will encourage them to take that grant. I maintain that most parents and teachers, who will benefit from this allocation, have agreed in principle that the David Granger Five Bs Programme was a much more superior one. This is not a well thought out programme. I ask the Government, if they really care, it would be a sensible thing to stop trying to undo the Coalition’s good because it was not conceived by the PPP/C. Students are in need of ready access to schools. Boats, buses and bicycles helped those kids tremendously. They are also in need of book bags, note pads, data and hot meals. It has to be a continuous effort and not a one-off programme. I call on the Hon. Minister of Education to give this programme a second look. A lot of parents are struggling, Hon. Manickchand, in these difficult COVID-19 times.

GuySuCo – the Minister of Agriculture told the world in 2020 that Guyana is selling sugar at a financial loss to all of its foreign buyers, thus, one does not have to guess why the PPP/C continues to prop up GuySuCo with billions of dollars every month. The GuySuCo was allocated \$7 billion between August to December, 2020, and now, a further \$2 billion to subsidise the cost of sugar for wealthy nations. After seven months in Office, the PPP/C gives GuySuCo \$1.3 billion a month. This allows GuySuCo to produce sugar at US\$0.38 cents per pound but sells it to Europe and the United States of America for US\$0.16 per pound. Imagine, Mr. Speaker, we...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you will have to conclude.

8.21 p.m.

**Mr. Figueira:** In concluding, for the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport I further recommend for the Minister's serious consideration that the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport should give each registered sporting association an annual cash grant that is equivalent to 15% of its annual budget, using the average of the last five years. The Minister should leave his ball sharing, logbook checking to his Personal Assistant. The repairs of aged fences, washrooms, *et cetera*, can be carried out by the National Sports Commission (NSC) or the National Trust of Guyana. The Minister should concentrate on initiatives, new transformative projects across his portfolio. The Minister should...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you should concentrate on saying thank you.

**Mr. Figueira:** The Minister should publish the Ministry's sport, youth and culture policy for public consultation.

Finally, the Minister should fast-track his recognition that the differences in which...

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. Your time has gone two minutes ago.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** The Hon. Member, Ms. Veerasammy, please proceed with your presentation.

**Ms. Veerasammy:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Please allow me to congratulate the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance for delivering, so eloquently, his not-so-lengthy speech describing his visionary, people-oriented Budget. One that has something for every Guyanese, withstanding occupation, gender, race, class or geography. I would like to thank the staff of the Ministry of Finance and the staff of all governmental agencies responsible for the preparation of budget estimates.

I am proud to be part of this journey embarked upon by the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, taking governance to a higher level, exposing corruption and rooting out racism, while fulfilling our manifesto promises to transform the lives of Guyanese. *Budget 2021* is a fine example of what a people-centred budget should be like.

I would like to commend our young, dynamic President, His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, for delivering on his promise to rebuild Guyana and to take it to a higher socio-economic and political level. His understanding of the past and present dynamics motivated him to initiate the process of healing our hearts by creating a new social consciousness in Guyana through his 'oneness' platform, where generations to come can dream of living in real harmony. Let us all join His Excellency to transform our country into one where our people can live and work together as one in love and unity.

Before I continue with my presentation, I would like to note a point. Over the last few days, I have been listening to all of the speakers, most of the time, and there are a few things that came to my attention. One of them is that my Hon. Colleagues on the Opposition side generally condemned the Budget, but, yet some of them said that we replicated many of their programmes in the Budget, so they are condemning the things we say that they claim we replicated. Some of them reached out and made many requests; some of them claimed which it has no vision. Hon. Members, I am actually very confused because if this Budget lacks something, then come up with a plan, come up with objective proposals and ask for it to be included, possibly it can be.

The COVID-19 is here with us for almost one year now and, as a people, we have been learning to adapt to the COVID-19 guidelines to reduce the spread of this virus among us. We must continue to recognise and thank our frontline workers for working beyond the call of duty to save lives, while risking their own. During the last few days, the Hon. Members of the APNU/AFC have been attempting to rebrand themselves by disassociating from the five years they were in Government and to paint a different picture with their untruths and misinformation. The APNU/AFC was not interested in dealing with the virus when it came to Guyana in March, 2020, they were busy violating the Constitution and putting plans in place to rig the March, 2020 Elections. Who could remember the extent to which the Minister of Public Health went to hide the truth? Can you remember that all COVID-19 test results had to go to the Minister, who then decided what diagnosis should be written on people's death certificates and what the public should know? Can you remember that someone had to display severe COVID-19 symptoms before he/she was tested? More tests were done after people died, than when they were actually alive to find out what happened to them. In the meanwhile, that Minister was busy signing the declaration to rig the 2020

Elections, rather than sourcing testing kits. No amount of rebranding will change the truth about what the APNU/AFC did.

I must commend the PPP/Civic Government for the seriousness with which it responded to the COVID-19 crisis in Guyana. From almost no testing in March, 2020 to an average of 2,000 tests being done daily is a testimony that people's lives and wellbeing matter. The 2021 Budget promised that this aggressive testing will continue and that there will be adequate numbers of protective gears and equipment for those on the frontline to handle this pandemic. At the same time, we are all waiting, in anticipation, the COVID-19 vaccines so that the spread of the virus can be reduced and eradicated among us.

This Budget is indeed the pathway to recovery. Everyone has the right and will benefit from whatever this country has to offer, not a selective few who enjoyed the 'Good Life' during the past few years, while the multitude dreamt of it. The people of this country will never forget those five years when this august House was used to impose hundreds of draconian taxes to bleed the pockets of our people. This is a new era. This House will be used by the PPP/Civic Government to right the many wrongs that were done to our people. One by one, this House will reverse those draconian taxes to ease the hardships on our people. *Budget 2021* captioned: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*, is a strategy to intensify the developmental phase started by *Budget 2020*, fulfilling our manifesto promises to our people. Let us not forget that more than half of the 2020 budgetary allocations were used to repay moneys that were squandered by the APNU/AFC without parliamentary oversight. Moneys that could have been used to improve the wellbeing of our people in this COVID-19 environment.

Our Government was able to give a \$25,000 COVID-19 cash grant to households. Yes, my Friends, the 'pink slip' means liquid cash which will be distributed in the immediate future. The PPP/Civic Government was also able to give two weeks' pay to all frontline workers and a \$25,000 one-off cash payment to all public servants. This Budget is an inspiration, it has something for all of us, including public sector workers. According the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, this *Budget 2021* will return to the pockets of Guyanese almost over \$50 billion in disposable income.

The tax relief measures started with the 2020 Budget. Remember that value-added tax (VAT) was removed from drugs and medical supplies and from school supplies, *et cetera*? Remember the cost of the land tax was reversed to what it was prior to 2015 for Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary-Agriculture Development Authority (MMA-ADA) farmers? It is a known fact that Guyanese were afraid of the APNU/AFC budgets because it meant more taxes. *Budget 2021* has no new tax measures in it, instead VAT was removed from several items and that money will remain in the pockets of women to be used for other needed essentials in their families.

Our elders are smiling and in full praise of the PPP/Civic Government. Why? The 2020 Budget gave them \$25,000 COVID-19 cash grant and now they know that the 2021 Budget measures will further improve their lives and not tax them. Our elders must never be taxed, they paid their dues to society and must live the rest of their lives in dignity in our care. A more efficient and effective healthcare system will be established across Guyana, to pay attention to the psycho-social and physiological wellbeing of our elders. This is to ensure that our elders receive medical treatment in a timely manner and that their nutritional intake is compatible with their medical conditions. Our elders welcome the increase in their pensions from \$20,500 to \$25,000. Removal of VAT from water and electricity, restoration of subsidy on water and the removal of VAT from data and internet—believe me, a lot of our elders are internet savvy, so they welcome that too.

I would like to commend the young Ministers managing our housing sector. I remember that, in 1992, when the PPP/C got into Government, there was nothing regarding housing. The APNU/AFC – majority of Members in the APNU/AFC Coalition are Members of the People’s National Congress Reform (PNCR) – they went back there and almost crippled the housing sector. Could you imagine that? They brought their pre-1992 behaviour into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We have been witnessing, in the last few months, an upsurge in the demands for house lots and we can feel the positive energy emanating from that sector. According to the Minister in the Ministry of Housing and Water, Ms. Susan Rodrigues, more house lots were allocated in the last six months by the PPP/Civic Government than the APNU/AFC Government in five years. I have no doubt that our manifesto promises of 50,000 house lots will be surpassed. House lot distributions create jobs; jobs put moneys in the hands of families which will immediately improve their conditions of living. How could we forget? The lack of vision, as I said, has crippled the housing sector. Removal of VAT from construction materials and equipment and increasing the

loan ceiling are some of the measures to encourage everyone to become homeowners instead of paying rent. And I hearing that this Budget has nothing for anyone.

One of the Hon. Members from the APNU/AFC said that there should be a new law to prevent the Government from stopping projects. Well, I am telling you that if such a law existed, then I do not know what would have happened to you for scrapping so many of our macro-projects in 2015. The PPP/Civic Government will never stop any of the APNU/AFC's projects that have benefits for our people and our country. The APNU/AFC lacked the vision. What did they do? The first thing they did when they got into Government was to scrap the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. What happened with that project? They never considered the benefits to our people or the economy. Their poor judgement caused us to continue suffering from daily blackouts. By now, that project would have ended, and we would have all been benefitting from cheap electricity and we would not have been having blackouts today.

*8.36 p.m.*

People out there are saying that the APNU/AFC cabal is so callous. It maliciously halted the Speciality Hospital Project. Today, the hospital would have been completed and specialised care would have been provided for our people. Our Guyanese brothers and sisters are still travelling overseas for specialised medical care and intervention. This is wrong and this wrong will be righted by the PPP/C Government. Rebranding would not change the truth about the APNU/AFC.

Expectant mothers have a great lot to look forward to in this Budget. For one, a specialised hospital will be built to provide care for both pregnant mothers and their children. On top of this, birthing rooms would be built in several communities across Guyana and this will immediately reduce the risk of deliveries of our babies. I know this is a welcome initiative for our women. We await this with open arms in order to use the centres to bring babies, the new little ones, into the world to replenish the new generation. I pray that those new persons who come into the world do not be like some of the people in this House.

We must never forget the contempt with which our sugar workers were treated by the APNU/AFC Government. After they fired almost 2000 Community Support Officer (CSOs) from the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs in 2015, they went after public servants whom they assumed were PPP/C

supporters, many of whom were women too. Indiscriminately, they were fired. I do not have the time to call names, but we all know what their names are. It was in the media every single day.

If this were not enough, they turned to the sugar workers. As was established the day before yesterday by the Minister of Agriculture, they went against the findings of their own Commission of Inquiry (COI), closed the sugar estates and put more than 7000 workers on the breadline. The financial wellbeing of more than tens of thousands of people was affected. When they closed the sugar industry, they never went to those people and offered an alternative. They never found out what those families were going to do to send their children to school or put food on the table. When we studied sociology and psychology, we learnt about something called emasculation. Do you know what happened to those men? Because of it, they were committing suicide. As a Government, the APNU/AFC was so callous. It emasculated the men who could not provide for their own families. How could we be so heartless?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, we are very heartened to give you an extension, but someone has to move it.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five more minutes to conclude her presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, you may conclude.

**Ms. Veerasammy:** Mr. Speaker, the APNU/AFC cabal claimed that sugar is a black hole and a waste of money. Many times, in this honourable House, these words were used. Well, I would like to encourage them to read *The West on Trial: My Fight for Guyana's Freedom* and learn what sugar did for Guyana and Guyanese. More than that, I would like the Hon. Members to tell me if the more than \$1 billion spent to build the D'Urban Park was not a black hole. Let us not forget that the Auditor General's Report found that \$600 million cannot be accounted for. I would like to ask if the \$12.5 million that was used to pay rent monthly for the famous drug bond, which had almost nothing to do with medical equipment and drugs, was not a black hole. I would like to know if the millions spent on the feasibility study for the New Demerara Harbour Bridge (DHB) was not a black hole. Let us not forget the infamous single sourcing of drugs and medical supplies in the

amount of \$605 million. Yet, there were massive shortages of drugs at hospitals and health centres across Guyana. Sir, could you understand why they are referred to as the *sanctimonious gangsters*? They spent more than a trillion dollars of our taxpayers' moneys and have little to show for it.

Investing and reinvesting in our people could never be a waste of money. The reversal of taxes is investing in people. The removal of valued added tax (VAT) from food supplies and household items is putting money back into the pockets of our people. The removal of VAT from school items and drugs and medical supplies is putting money back in the pockets of our people. The removal of tax from agricultural items and mining equipment is putting money back into the pockets of our people and they say this Budget has nothing for the people.

Sir, indeed, the APNU/AFC gave public servants several increases in salaries, but why do we not hear the Hon. Members speaking about the more than 200 taxes they imposed on Guyanese? With those taxes, they gave with one hand and ripped it away with the other hand. As I said in a budget presentation some time ago, like a silent thief in the night when a person is sleeping, they come and steal from you. No amount of rebranding could change this. The reduction of taxes is a sure way of putting more disposable income in the pockets of our people. Increased wages and salaries definitely will come for our public servants.

The APNU/AFC Coalition did not care for the more than 50% of our population who are women. They left us out of their budgets. This injustice and disrespect, whether out of ignorance or arrogance, is now righted. Again, I say that *Budget 2021* has a lot for our people, including our women. If I must say, when taxes are reversed and removed, \$50 billion would be in the pockets or hands of women which they will take to the shops and stores and put food on the table for their children.

Steps are now being taken, and this is very close to my heart, to whip life back into the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute (GWLII). These steps will remove cronyism and party partisan politics from this institution and return it to what it should be – the premier women's institution of the Caribbean. I would like to thank you, Minister of Human Services and Social Security, Dr. Vindhya Persaud, for injecting life into this institution, and for using the institution. Take it to regional level where it could reach women in their hometowns and communities. They could be trained to be leaders so that they could take responsibility for their lives and influence decisions



that affect their lives. It should not be used to train party people across Guyana and leave out some because they are not supportive of a party.

We read the news every day. Cases of domestic violence continue to end in death. The 914 hotline is the first of its kind, one that we must all work to make sure victims of domestic and gender-based violence could make maximum use of when they need help. Domestic violence is our business. It is a human rights violation and we must all work to stop it in our midst, at home, in our communities or at work. We must encourage victims to speak out and ask for help and we must speak out on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves. We must let them know that they are not alone, and we must help them. One death by domestic violence is one too many. Let us all practice zero tolerance and stretch our hands for the victims to hold on to.

To live in the Guyana we all dream of, we must work hard together to rebuild it, protect it and hand it over to the next generation. To live in the Guyana we dream of, we must work to eradicate COVID-19 from our midst by practicing...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, please work to conclude.

**Ms. Veerasammy:** Yes, Sir. Just a minute more, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** You had a minute signed two minutes ago.

**Ms. Veerasammy:** ...all restrictions and accept the vaccines as soon as they are made available. We must expose racism. We must work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination and build a society where we could all live in peace and harmony.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. Your time is up.

**Ms. Veerasammy** Thank you, Sir. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

**BE IT RESOLVED:**

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2021”.

[*Prime Minister*]

**Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips:** Mr. Speaker, I now move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10.00 a.m. on 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2021.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** The assembly now stands adjourned to Friday, 10.00 a.m., 26<sup>th</sup> February, 2021.

*Adjourned accordingly at 8.48 p.m.*