



# OFFICIAL REPORT

*PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2020-2021) OF THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE DOME OF THE ARTHUR CHUNG CONFERENCE CENTRE, LILIENDAAL, GREATER GEORGETOWN*

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23<sup>RD</sup> Sitting

Friday, 26<sup>TH</sup> February, 2021

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**PARLIAMENT OFFICE  
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.07 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

**MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)**

**Speaker (1)**

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

**MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)**

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

**Prime Minister (1)**

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

**Vice-President (1)**

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

[Absent]

+ Cabinet Member

\* Non-Elected Speaker

**Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)**

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

**Senior Ministers (17)**

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Minister**

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

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

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Minister**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Minister**

**Junior Ministers (4)**

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

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

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

Hon. Susan M. Rodrigues, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),*  
*Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water,*  
*Ministry of Housing and Water,*  
*Lot 41 Brickdam & United Place,*  
*Stabroek,*  
*Georgetown.*

**Other Members (14)**

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

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

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

Mr. Seepaul Narine, M.P.,  
*Lot 321 BB Seventh Street,*  
*Eccles,*  
*East Bank Demerara.*

Mrs. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.,  
*Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,*  
*Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,*  
*c/o Freedom House,*  
*41 Robb Street,*  
*Georgetown.*

Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.,  
*Lot 340 East Street,*  
*South Cummingsburg,*  
*c/o Freedom House,*  
*41 Robb Street,*  
*Georgetown.*

Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.,  
*55 AA Victoria Avenue,*  
*Eccles,*  
*East Bank Demerara.*

Mr. Faizal M. Jaffarally, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),*  
*Lot 16-30 New Street,*  
*New Amsterdam.*  
*c/o Freedom House,*  
*Robb Street,*  
*Georgetown.*

Dr. Tandika S. Smith, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),*  
*Lot 290 Area ‘J’,*  
*Tuschen, North,*  
*East Bank Essequibo.*

Mr. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.,  
*Paruima Upper Mazaruni,*  
*c/o Freedom House,*  
*Robb Street,*  
*Georgetown.*

\*Ms. Sarah Browne, M.P.,  
*Parliamentary Secretary,*  
*Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,*  
*Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,*  
*South Cummingsburg,*  
*Georgetown.*

\*Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,  
*Parliamentary Secretary,*  
*Ministry of Agriculture,*  
*Regent and Vlissengen Road,*  
*Bourda, Georgetown.*

Ms. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.,  
*Lot 32 Crown Dam,*  
*Industry,*  
*East Coast Demerara.*

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

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Joseph F. Harmon, M.S.M., M.P.,  
*Leader of the Opposition,*  
*Lot 99 Mazaruni Street,*  
*Guyhoc Park,*  
*Georgetown.*

Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.,  
*Lot 10 Delph Street,*  
*Campbelville,*  
*Georgetown.*

Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, M.P.,  
*Lot 410 Caneview Avenue,*  
*South Ruimveldt,*  
*Georgetown.* *[Absent]*

Mr. Raphael G.C. Trotman, M.P.,  
*Lot 3202 Pricese 3,*  
*Providence,*  
*East Bank Demerara.* *[Virtual Participation]*

Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P.,  
*Lot 933 Block 1,*  
*Eccles,*  
*East Bank Demerara.*

Dr. Nicolette O. Henry, M.P.,  
*Lot 2227 Ozama Street, North Ruimveldt,*  
*Georgetown.*

Dr. Karen R.V. Cummings, M.P.,  
*Lot 2 Belfield Housing Scheme,*  
*East Coast Demerara.*

Ms. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P.,  
*Lot 3382 Caneview Avenue,*  
*South Ruimveldt Park,*  
*Georgetown.*

Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.,  
*Lot 48 Atlantic Ville,*  
*Georgetown.*

Mr. Christopher A. Jones, M.P.,  
*Opposition Chief Whip,*  
*Lot 609 Conciliation Street,*  
*Tucville,*  
*Georgetown.*

Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P.,  
*Lot 842 Eccles,*  
*East Bank Demerara.*



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

[Virtual Participation]

Mr. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),  
Lot 55 Henrietta,  
Essequibo Coast.*

Mr. Ganesh A. Mahipaul, M.P.,  
*Lot 14 Plantain Walk,  
West Bank Demerara.*

Ms. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),  
Lot 88 Nelson Street,  
Mocha Village,  
East Bank Demerara.*

Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),  
Lot 17 Block 1, Section F,  
Plantation Belfield,  
East Coast Demerara.*

Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),  
Lot 40 Block 3  
Craig Milne,  
Cove & John,  
East Coast Demerara.*

Mr. Vincero H. Jordan, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),  
Lot 214 Lovely Lass Village,  
West Coast Berbice.  
C/o Christopher Jones*

Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P.,  
*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),  
Lot 80 Babu John Road,  
Haswell,  
Port Mourant, Corentyne Berbice.*

Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 8 –Potaro/Siparuni)  
Church Street Mahdia.  
Lot 4 Public Road,  
Stewartville,  
West Coast Demerara.*

Mr. Jermaine Figueira, M.P.,  
(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),  
Lot 136 2<sup>nd</sup> Street,  
Silvertown,  
Wismar, Linden.  
Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P.,  
(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),  
Lot 90, Section C,  
Wismar, Linden.

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

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

**Officers (2)**

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

**Hansard Division Officers (20)**

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*Chief Editor*  
Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,  
*Senior Editor*  
Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,  
*Senior Editor (ag)*  
Ms. Latoiah Joseph,  
*Senior Editor (ag)*  
Ms. Carol Bess,  
*Editor*  
Ms. Shevona Telford,  
*Editor (ag)*  
Ms. Christina Ramroop,  
*Editor (ag)*  
Ms. Tesia Ellis,  
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Ms. Indranie Persaud,  
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Ms. Somna Karen-Muridall,  
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Ms. Lushonn Bess,  
*Reporter*  
Ms. Bianca Cummings,  
*Reporter*  
Mr. Rohan Ramjas,  
*Reporter*  
Ms. Nadeila Allen,  
*Reporter*  
Ms. Celisa DeFlorimonte,  
*Reporter*  
Mr. Parmanand Singh,  
*Pre –Press Technician*  
Mr. Saeed Umrao,  
*Audio Technician*  
Mr. Daison Horsham,  
*Audio Technician*

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**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, just a few quick announcements.

**Meeting of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply**

The first is a reminder to Hon. Members of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply that, at 4.00 p.m. today, we will have that meeting to look at the time allocated to the estimates.

**Movement in the Dome When a Speaker is on the Floor**

Secondly, and I crave your indulgence, Hon. Members, staff and visitors to the National Assembly, I am pleading with you, when there is a speaker on the floor, especially at the podium, try to refrain from using the stairs behind them or moving in front of them or behind them. We want the live feed to look as professional as it could, and many times we see a lot of movements behind the two speakers when they are at the podium. Let us look at that.

I know in some Parliaments they call them pages, but we have two Assembly attendants here. Hon. Members are very *au fait* with how to signal them and utilise their services if they want to move messages around and do not want to be seen on their mobile devices doing that.

**Criticism of Decisions of the Speaker**

The third is what is becoming a chronic issue in the House and that is criticisms of the decisions of the Speaker. I had an opportunity to listen to the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes, yesterday criticising a decision of the Speaker. I expect the Hon. Member would do the honourable thing. I would leave it at that.

**Dress Code in the National Assembly**

I want to also say, and I have said this before, that the Chief Whips and I met on the issue of addressing the dress code in the National Assembly. That dress code is in your Handbook. I would apply the Standing Orders and what is contained in the Handbook until they are changed.

The Chief Whips, the Clerk of the National Assembly and I met and we said that addressing the issue of dress code in the National Assembly will be the first item on the agenda of the Parliamentary Management Committee (PMC) when we meet, immediately after the consideration of the estimates have been completed. I said that before. We are all

honourable people, professionals, well experienced and educated. I do not know think anyone in this House has an issue with comprehension.

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**For Written Replies**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we have five questions on the Order Paper, and they are all for written replies. These questions, numbers one to five, are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, and for the Hon Minister of Home Affairs. The answers to all of these questions have been receive and have, therefore, in accordance with our Standing Orders, been circulated.

1.        **Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Regulations**

**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:**

1. Recently citizens have observed that a number of vehicles have been fitted and are utilising flashing lights and sirens. Could the Minister state whether all Government vehicles are conforming to Section 41 of Cap 51:02, Motor Vehicles and Road Traffic Regulations?
2. Could the Minister state what action(s) he intends to take to deal with any breach of Section 41 of Cap 51:02?

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

1. This matter is currently under review since all may not be conforming largely because some vehicles taken over from the previous administration were fitted with sirens and flashing lights.
2. Following the review conformance and/or any necessary amendments will be made.

2.        **Contracted Employee**

**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:**

1. Can the Minister provide the designation of each person employed on contract in the Ministry of Home Affairs as well as its gazetted umbrella and associated Agencies since August 2, 2020?

2. Can the Minister provide the emoluments (salaries and other benefits) for each of the persons employed on contract since August 2, 2020, as stated above?
3. Can the Honourable Minister advise if financial provision for these positions were made in Budget 2020, and if so, under which Line Item are they being paid?

Mr. Benn:

Parts (1) and (2)

LIST OF CONTRACTED POSITIONS WITHIN THE  
MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS WITH EFFECT  
FROM AUGUST 2, 2020

NO	Position	Salary Scale
1	Head Customs Anti-Narcotic Unit	GS:14
2	Permanent Secretary	GS:14
3	Advisor to the Minister	GS:13
4	Registrar General	GS:13
5	Administrator Community Policing Group	GS:11
6	Administrative Assistant	GS:10
7	Senior Administrative Assistant	GS:9
8	Science Officer	GS:9
9	Systems Development Officer	GS:9
10	Intelligence Officer (5)	GS:8
11	Community Policing Liaison Officers (15)	GS:7
12	Driver/Admin Support Officer	GS:7
13	Temporary Accounts Clerk (2)	GS:2
14	Clerk 11 (G)	GS:2
15	Driver (2)	GS:2
16	Handyman	GS:1

3. A Request was made to the Ministry of Finance for funds under Line 6141 - Revision of Wages and Salaries.

3. Guyana’s Largest Drug Bust

Ms. Chandan-Edmond:

Since the start of November last year, this country infamously recorded its largest drug bust: 11.5 tons (23000 pounds) of cocaine, with a street value of 900 million Euros, GY \$ 360 billion, almost a quarter of the gross domestic product (GDP) of this country. Regrettably, two months after this dastardly development, we have seen no breakthrough of any consequence locally.

1. Could the Hon. Minister state whether this matter was brought and discussed by the Government?
2. If yes, can you state what decisions have been since taken?
3. Has there been any review by agencies involved in this issue and if so, what new measures and new policy frameworks have been implemented to avoid this reoccurrence in the future?
4. Has there been any request by regional and international agencies for information in relation to this matter?
5. If so, has that information been transmitted to the relevant agency?
6. There has been conflicting information on the scanners at the wharf where the illegal drugs left Guyana. Could the Minister state definitively what is the situation in relation to the State’s inability to identify in clear terms what occurred at the wharf?

Mr. Benn:

This matter is under confidential review and actions which will be advised on at the appropriate time.

4. Death of Prisoner, Mr. Roger Samuels

Ms. Chandan-Edmond:

The Guyana Prison Service in its press release dated the 10<sup>th</sup> January, 2021, stated that Prisoner Roger Samuels died at the Lusignan Prison on the said date after being received at the Prisons with several injuries to his body.

1. Could the Hon. Minister provide the circumstances surrounding the death of the aforementioned prisoner?
2. Can the Hon. Minister state the extent of the injuries at the time of his reception at the Lusignan Prison?
3. Having established that Mr. Samuels was injured before he was received by the prison officials, what protocols and procedures were followed?
4. Could the Hon. Minister state whether Section 27(1) of the Prison Act was followed?
5. Could the Hon. Minister state what subsequent developments contributed to the demise of this prisoner?
6. Could the Hon. Minister state what administrative reviews have been undertaken to ensure there is no repeat of this unfortunate situation?

**Mr. Benn:**

1. On January 10, 2021 at about 06:00 hours, the Duty Officer who was performing duties from 18:00 hours to 06:00 hours at the Quarantine section of the Lusignan Prison, reported that during the morning unlocking process a prisoner who is living in unit #1 reported that prisoner Roger Samuels was not moving.  
  
Immediately, the Officer-in-Charge, Director of Prisons (ag), Prison Doctor and Police were informed. Doctor Ceon Britton, Government Medical Officer examined prisoner Samuels and he was pronounced dead at 07=00 hours on the same morning.
2. Upon admission to prison, it was observed that Prisoner Roger Samuels had several lacerations to his body in various stages of healing and his right lower extremities had a Plaster of Paris cast covering same.
3. Upon admission of Prisoner Roger Samuels to prison, he was immediately seen and examine by the Nurse on duty and was given medication and referred to the Prison Doctor on Monday, January 12, 2021 for further evaluation. In addition, the escorting Police Officer did submit a statement in relation to the

injuries received by prisoner Samuels. However, the Police did not provide any medical for the prisoner.

4. Section 27(1) of the Prison Act was not followed because Prisoner Roger Samuels was not suffering from any communicable disease.
5. According to the Post-Mortem examination which was performed by Government Pathologist Doctor. Nehaul Singh where the cause of death was given as Gastrointestinal Haemorrhaging and Fractured Limb.
6. The Guyana Prison Service will make a careful assessment of prisoners who are admitted to prison regarding their health condition(s). I wish to state that upon admission to prison, persons are immediately interviewed by the medical personnel and based on their medical condition they would be referred to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation for medical observation or they would be given treatment at the prison.

Please note, that if a person is admitted to prison with visible injuries or make complain of a medical problem, the Police escorting the prisoner is required to submit a statement and or they would be required to provide a medical showing that the prisoner has received medical treatment from a hospital or from a Government Medical Officer (GMO).

**5. Sexual Assault Cases**

**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:**

From 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020 to date, what is the number of sexual assault cases, broken down by those that were:

- a. Reported to the authorities?
- b. Prosecuted? and
- c. Resulted in convictions?

**Mr. Benn:**

1. From the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2020- 25<sup>th</sup> January 2021, there were 83 sexual assault cases which were reported to the authorities; resulting in 61 of those cases being prosecuted. Please see summary of Comparative details in table 1 for the period



Table 1	Number of sexual assault cases 2nd August 2020 - 25th January 2021	Number of sexual assault cases 2nd August 2019- 25th January 2020
Reported to the Authorities	83 Cases	77 Cases
Prosecuted	61 Cases	28 Cases

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, our first presenter today is the Hon. Member, Ms. Coretta McDonald. Ms. McDonald, you may proceed.

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

It would be remiss of me, this morning, if I did not set the record straight about some things that were mentioned yesterday. The Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce was very disrespectful when the Hon. Member classified our dedicated public servants, who have kept the wheels of this economy turning, as obstructionists. When these things happen, we are in for bad days and dark nights.

I rise to respond to the Budget speech, presented to this honourable House by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh. To all Guyanese, we continue to live in one of the most bountiful countries in this world. Amidst all the economic chaos and hardship, I am confident that, with the right leadership, Guyana will reach her fullest potential. That leadership was in place for the last five and on the road to the ‘Good Life’ for the people of this nation; it was on its way to completion. Regrettably, the work of the Coalition Government, under the leadership of David Arthur Granger, was cut short by *bullyism* and high political treachery.

On the eve of the first anniversary of the closure of schools as a result of this pandemic, I would have expected the Hon. Member, Mdm. Priya Manickchand, to dish out a clear and concise plan to aid in protecting our teachers and their charges. Instead, what we got was an empty masquerade flounce and full *Lucy* behaviour about dismissals of Mr. Olato Sam, Dr. Marcel Hutson and Ms. Melcita Bovell. Let me say to us here that Ms. Melcita Bovell retired twice. She retired as a teacher. She was rehired and then she reached her year of retirement again and her contract was not renewed. We needed to give space to other persons. Mr. Olato Sam’s contract came to an end and it was not renewed. He was not dismissed. Dr. Marcel Hutson had extended annual leave and so he was sent on his leave. Unfortunately, for him, that leave ran him into retirement. Let me set the record straight.

From the onset, I am duty bound to use this opportunity to recognise the efforts of our frontline workers all across this country. For the past year, the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has questioned the resolve of Guyanese workers and they have responded excellently. They have demonstrated the exceptional values which have always made us in high demand. Today, at this moment, I salute their efforts.

As is customary, on Friday, 12<sup>th</sup> February, the Guyanese public tuned in, with much anxiety and fear, to their radios, televisions and other means of communication, to hear what goodies were contained in the Budget for them. They were anxious. This was the second budget during the period of the pandemic, which has completely wrecked their economic lives. Their sense of hope and anticipation of rescue was quickly dashed and crashed from the time this Budget’s title was announced. A Budget with the title, *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience* can only proceed from a Government and minds that are completely out of touch with the minds of the people who are struggling to make ends meet.

Instead, I thought this Budget should have read, ‘rescue, relief and recovery’ or, simply put, ‘the back to work budget’. Instead, the Hon. Member made his boast about economic dynamism and resilience, echoing the sentiments of the privileged class and *rubbing salt in the wounds* of people who are presently bruised and battered economically. Having failed to grasp the scale of the challenges being faced by the people, *Budget 2021* failed. Anyone who claims to have the interest of the working class cannot support this Budget.

It was evident, from the start, that the Hon. Member came here with a clear mission to protect the owners of wealth and the haves. There was no chance for the have nots. This assault on the Guyanese working class lasted for almost four hours with bluster and fanfare. It was a stark and sad reminder that there was no chance for the people who continue to build this country, some with their bare hands, under this sad regime.

Revisionist propaganda – on page two of the 77 pages of this Budget presentation, the Hon. Member, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, took a vulgar dive into what the *Kaieteur News* newspaper described as political drivel, but it was worse than that. For 26 minutes of this presentation, we witnessed an exercise in dangerous revisionist propaganda, the likes of which are associated with the most extreme authoritarian regimes. Perhaps, the Hon. Member was just giving us a glimpse of what is to come. This Budget sought to rewrite established

Guyanese history. In doing so, unfortunately, it labelled the period in which the People Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) ruled as the glory days and the other periods of another party as the dark periods. It is totally the opposite. It was embarrassing in every aspect and it could be easily debunked and collapsed under the most basic scrutiny.

However, suffice it to mention, the inescapable record would show us that, in 1970, on the birth of the Republic, the Guyanese working class had found a hero in the form of Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, who declared that is was official State policy to turn the small man into a real man.

10.22 a.m.

One cannot wipe away that history and make oneself a perfect example of what is described in the famous calypso, by Lord Nelson, King Liar.

On the evidence of what was said in this part of the speech, I would not dare to suggest that the Hon. Member told untruths to this Assembly. Thus, the theme runs through this Budget presentation and reinforces the need for Ministers of Finance to remain technocrats and not use budget presentations as street corner political rallies. If this principle was respected, this highly politicised document would not have been produced.

State of Labour – I take no pleasure in reporting the carnage and the destruction brought to the working-class people due to the economic fallout of COVID-19. But, I do so in anticipation of it serving as an education and encouraging the Hon. Member to change the course of this directionless Budget.

The International Labour Organization (ILO), in its *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the world of work. Seventh edition*, reports that global employment losses in 2020 was 114 million jobs.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) submitted that the prolonged session from the Coronavirus Disease could see job losses of -26% in the Bahamas, -24.8% in Jamaica, -16.7% in Guyana, -14.5% in Suriname and -10.5% in Trinidad and Tobago.

Here, the Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) reported a 30% loss of jobs. Three hundred bauxite workers have been sent home. Almost 1,500 public servants have been dismissed on mere suspicion of them voting for the Coalition. The cries of their children are on those Members on that side of the House. Hairdressers, barbershop owners, taxi drivers,

vendors, fishermen, labourers, tour operators, airline workers and more are all screaming for help.

In some households, nobody is working, and landlords could not care less. The debtors are unrelenting and are not too moved by the fallout of COVID-19. Letters of notices to quit are now a booming business in the legal fraternity.

In the case of the bauxite workers, the talk of ‘Oneness’ and ‘One Guyana’, in paragraph 1.3 of page 3 of this Budget presentation, ring hallow.

Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, about the humiliation of two Permanent Secretaries (PSs) whom I could name. Mdm. Samantha Fedee was re-designated for no reason at all. Mdm. Karen Valsluytman-Corbin was re-designated for no reason at all. These persons were employed by the Public Service Commission (PSC). We talk about oneness and yet, there is full re-designation of officers, within the Ministry of Education, who were all appointed by the PSC.

We talk about oneness and there is not one member from the Guyana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) on the Trade Union Recognition Board. As of 8<sup>th</sup> March, all officers of African descent, who are operating in Region 3, are going to be removed. We cannot talk about oneness and we are not practicing it. May I remind this House of what the late Barry White said: practice what you preach. [**Mr. Ramkissoon:** You are racist.] I cannot be racist because I have nieces and nephews who are Douglas. I cannot be racist when I have a child...I see people; I do not see colours.

This Government has zero interest in policy making for the benefit of all Guyanese. Its decisions are driven by political discrimination and political considerations. Let me show you the evidence. Guyana presently supplies 6.6% of refractory-grade bauxite to the world market. We are considered a very important supplier of this natural resource. Despite this fact, the Government refuses to rescue the bauxite workers. Instead, it has decided to put \$2 billion from this Budget into the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). Allow me to be clear; the sugar workers have been the backbone of this economy for decades. We appreciate their dedicated work. However, it is time to tell the truth. It is time to tell them that they are producing a product at 0.41 cent and selling at 0.13 cent, a loss of hard-earned taxpayers’ dollars at 0.28 cent. The transition is inevitable.

The Hon. Dr. Singh would have served this nation well, if he had demonstrated bold leadership by allowing the APNU/AFC Government by - should have encouraged that -

rightsizing the sugar industry. Instead, he came here to serve more Kool-Aid to the people of the sugar belt. Stop putting these workers’ livelihood at risk by continuing to fool them about some turn around in sugar. Where is the plan or investment to rescue the bauxite workers, I ask? It is against this backdrop of economic chaos that this anti-working Budget was presented. It is for this reason the people cannot, for a second, understand why the need for these entirely complex words in this Budget. The people do not need complicated words.

This regime has decided to give \$25,000 per household. Could \$25,000 help in any much way? Twenty-five thousand dollars, for those who are lucky to receive it, could barely pay half of the average house rent. Even though you boast of \$9 million in relief to the people, we are not sure who received this money and how it was disbursed. It is quite unfortunate that my Colleagues on the other side of the House cannot appreciate the magnitude of this crisis. I understand that it is difficult to do so from their air-conditioned (AC) ivory towers. I urge you to feel the pain of the people and change this march of madness.

The Labour Department – Mr. Speaker, if it pleases you, I now turn my attention to what is in my parliamentary remit. I am aware of the argument which suggests that the APNU/AFC Government did not have much regard for labour because we subsumed the Ministry of Labour under the Ministry of Social Protection. However, this argument has been proven baseless in the face of the track record of the past five year’s achievement for labour.

It appears that the old adage still stands true. I want to remind us that a school is only as good as its teachers. There could be numerous Ministers committed to a Government endeavour, but, if there is a lack in leadership within the building, they are wasting time.

Now that we have swatted that argument out of the way, please allow me to prove the big failure of this Budget. Hon. Kwame McCoy, cooperative societies. As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, Guyana’s economic structure was inherited from the colonial days. It is one where wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few. It passed from generation to generation. The majority of people simply feed on the crumbs.

Any fundamental and transformational reform of Guyana’s economic realities can only occur through systems as cooperative societies. Cooperative societies could bring the equity that is required to bring the small man and woman to a place of dignity. This is the reason Linden Forbes Sampson

Burnham enshrined the word ‘Cooperative’ in Guyana’s official name. It was the recognition of the important role cooperative societies play in ensuring everyone gets a piece of the economic pie. When there is talk about transformation, economic dynamism and resilience and there is no bold announcement on how the people would share the wealth, one is just talking about the wealthy becoming wealthier. In this regard, *Budget 2021* missed the big picture, just the same way the Government missed that vessel without an engine.

Dangling the fake carrot of 50,000 jobs, with no plan on how to achieve this, is not economic transformation. It is the continuation of the same old, same old. Cooperatives could serve as the engine of growth of the village economy and provide the kind of transformative economic power that cannot be easily matched. It is for this reason that the APNU/AFC Government encouraged the expansion of cooperative societies. We resuscitated the Guyana National Co-operative Union Limited (GNCUL) to provide the much-needed oversight. Under our watch, four new cooperatives were launched, with funding from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), as part of the Rural Agricultural Infrastructure Development (RAID) programme.

In 2019, thrift societies were reintroduced in schools, at both the primary and secondary levels, to rekindle the spirit of cooperativism. We worked closely with the United Nations (UN), through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to ensure the practice of cooperatives aligned with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When we were bullied out of Government, 1,268 cooperatives existed.

While it is a fact that some of these organisations need to be brought to account, arbitrary and selective integrity audits are not the solution. We welcome audits and that could shed a light on the financial situation of these entities. We are aware of what entails when the PPP/C speaks about audit. It is invariably done for narrow political motives and it is a witch hunting exercise to *fish out* their political opponents and install their cronies for election purposes.

If the Government is interested in bringing cooperatives up to the level where communities could have confidence in their operations, it would proceed on a structured approach by first reading the Government of Guyana Co-operative Policy and, Secondly, by offering a new modified document that considers the modern environment.

We understood the importance of these organisations. They allow people to live, pay their light bills, pay their taxes, pay

rent and borrow money from credit unions which served as organised box hands.

With the onset of Guyana’s eminent economic transformation, which started due to the policies of the APNU/AFC Government, cooperatives could play a vital role in ensuring that there is equity in this society. In the absence of any bold initiatives of this nature, *Budget 2021* demonstrated that there is no interest in levelling Guyana’s economic playing field. For this reason, I cannot lend support to an exercise that seems to feed crumbs to our people.

10.37 a.m.

Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) – As you must know, Mr. Speaker, with the onset of an oil and gas economy, occupational health and safety takes centre stage. Coupled with this pandemic, the task of holding oil companies and other companies operating in the oil industry to account to maintain effective occupational health and safety programmes is not an easy task. These companies have existed for decades and have operated in numerous societies across this world. They are well-versed in the art of putting their workers at risk to save a few pennies. With that in mind, one would have thought that this installed regime would have seen the big picture and introduce some schemes to ensure that there is effective enforcement of occupational health and safety standards and statutes. I guess that it is difficult to do so when one makes deals with the devil for the sake of power.

At the heart of the occupational health and safety issues, is the endemic problem of child labour. In the pre-pandemic period, Guyana had a 20.1% child labour rate. We are one year into this pandemic and our children have been away from school. Has the Government considered having a situational report on what is happening with our children in the labour market? None. Where is the bold and transformative occupational health and safety policymaking in this Budget, in light of this pandemic? Is the Government aware that Guyanese workers are being subjected to the most unconscionable workplace practices where they are being forced to work in the most unsafe circumstances? If you are not aware, take a look from the outside of your offices. Despite the Ministry of Health publishing clear occupational health and safety guidelines, due to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), this Government, this regime, continues to demand that public sector workers place their health at risk by reporting for duty, with full staff, in a clustered situation. How can we expect the Members of this Government to hold

other companies to account if they have little interest in workers who are right outside of their offices?

You speak of grand industrial growth and there is not even a whisper about a commensurate occupational health and safety policy. Again, the character of this Government is laid bare. It is all about friends, families, cronies and money. People-centred development seems to be an alien concept of this Government. Workers cannot sleep well at night with this regime in place, and this Budget brings no comfort. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change Government distinguished itself from the People’s Progressive Party/Civic on this front, by consistently displaying its ever-lasting concern for the Guyanese workers. In the interest of this, we launched the occupational health and safety policy in 2018. We engaged in nation-wide implementation of this policy. We assiduously worked with the strategic partners to improve the safety and health of all workers through a system of defined rights, responsibilities and duties. We gave the highest priority to the principle of prevention and a work atmosphere of respect at all levels. This is the reason Guyanese people voted, overwhelmingly, for the Coalition on the 2<sup>nd</sup> March, but we all know the story. This Government was installed by geopolitical and business interest so, now, it is time to repay. Sadly, workers will have to suffer at the altar of that arrangement. We are not too surprised that there was no grand announcement on the occupational health and safety policy in this Budget. It is yet another example of failure. I will not betray the working-class people of this nation by endorsing this document that presents a slap in their faces.

**Minimum wages:** This unconscionable Budget was brought to this honourable House in a time when there was a global wind of change sweeping across the world on the issue of minimum wage. In every world economy of any consequence, the debate over minimum wage is in full swing. The debate is immense. Some argue that it will place businesses under pressure and others argue that it will increase productivity and create more employment.

The Coalition Government was not too interested in all these complexities, we were clear in Government and we are now still clear. Workers at the bottom end of the pay scale must receive decent pay that affords them some human dignity. Hence, in 2017, we ordered the raising of private sector wage from an hourly rate of \$202 to \$255. Thus, workers taking home monthly wages of \$35,000 started taking home \$44,200 monthly. It is an undesirable situation to have the public sector minimum wage at \$30,000 more than the private

sector. It is a national evil. We have salesgirls, in this country, receiving \$8000 to \$9000 per week. In this day, \$32,000 monthly salaries are being cut for all kinds of flimsy reasons. It is the *Wild, Wild West* out here in the private labour market and our workers cannot speak for fear of victimisation.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, this worker will call on someone to give you an extension.

**Ms. Sarabo-Halley:** Mr. Speaker, I beg that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her presentation.

*Motion put an agreed to.*

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

**Ms. McDonald:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. They have no voice, but we will speak for them. We did not sign with the devil. Conversely, we raised the public sector minimum wage to \$70,000 and if the will of the people had prevailed, Guyanese would have seen a budget with both minimum wages of the public and private sector significantly raised. The *Guyana Chronicle* of 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2020 reported that:

“Minister of Labour, Joseph Hamilton, will soon be issuing an order to increase the private sector minimum to \$60,000.”

Almost eight months passed, and nothing has been done. It was also reported that the private sector complained about the economic fallout of COVID-19 and argued that it was difficult to raise the minimum wage at this time. Oh Please! Our Guyanese people are intelligent. COVID-19 or not, it is not going to happen. We all know that some sections of the private sector were involved in the installation of this regime and that they are basically calling the shots. We dare the Minister to make that order. We will propose and you will be instructed to stand down by your masters. This happens when there is a Government that does not reflect the will of the people.

Recently, we witnessed a sustained campaign by this installed regime to rewrite and erase the legacy and achievements of the Coalition Government. In doing so, lots of untruth, slander and blatant falsehoods have been told. Despite the mischievous attempts, the hard work completed between 2015 and 2020 continues to withstand the flurry of propaganda. This cannot be challenged.

In an effort to increase employment and opportunities at the level of the community, the Coalition Government, through

the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) Initiative, heavily invested in the people of Guyana. This investment covered community-based projects across nine administrative regions in Guyana. Projects in areas such as agriculture, livestock, added value products, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and tourism, were some of the programmes implemented. This project was designed to foster opportunities for economic development, creating opportunities to expand the economy in terms of new sources of jobs and economic activities for local communities. Due to the importance of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), and the advantages they offer to the local economies, we introduced this SLED programme. All Guyanese benefitted from this programme. More than 150 co-ops, comprising of women and youths, were among beneficiaries. Residents in Region 9 were able to start businesses in the agricultural sector and numerous women received Home Economics training. You see, Mr. Speaker, when you cannot match our leadership and commitment to the people of this country, the only option is to scandalise the programme. We will never give up on our dream to provide a ‘Good Life’ for the people of this country; not one set of people, but all.

In conclusion, I have some very valuable advice for my Friends on that side of the House. First, you need to know what you did and admit it. You need to accept why you ended up on that side of the House and all that happened. You need to know that you are installed, and you should be very conscious of your instalment. It does not matter how you spin it; you do not reflect the will of the Guyanese people. In March, you saw those rallies, you observed the overwhelming support the Coalition received from Guyanese from all walks of life and decided that you must play a trick. It was a green and yellow revolution that was blowing like a natural mystic across this land. The result was: 11,000 votes, with no statutory documents and voters’ impersonation everywhere. This is your reality and it will not go away. If you say you have done nothing wrong and that you won fair and square, I dare that side of the House to support House-to-House Registration to produce a clean list. We dare you to present yourselves against us to the people and let there be a free, credible and fair democratic process. If you claim to be the majority, then this would be easy.

This is the second budget as an installed regime. It reflects, yet again, that fraud begets fraud. It is a trick with fancy words and grand promises. The people of Guyana will never forget what you did, regardless of how much money you spend and how many promises you make. I would close with

the words of the famous Robert Nesta Marley, who said that until that day when the colour of your skin and the texture of your hair... when there is no equality, we will not have a one Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, I say to you and I say to my Colleagues on that side of the House, an electoral judgement is awaiting you. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member, for that presentation.

Hon. Members, again, another word of caution. During the Hon. Member’s presentation, I distinctly heard a number of unparliamentary words being used. I am going to circulate a list.

At the bottom of page 58 of the *Parliament of Guyana Handbook for Members of the National Assembly* it states that the Speaker can disallow words which he feels are unparliamentary. I heard words that rhymes with angle, not once but more than once. We heard words with respect to appropriation of or the illegal appropriation of assets. Please, again, let us ensure that we stick to the use of parliamentary words.

I would also ask that there be little to no movement behind the speakers when they are speaking. During the presentation of the Hon. Member, there were five distinct movements behind her.

*10.52 a.m.*

The issue is not slipping out of a chair and going around. It is walking up eight or 10 flight of stairs. The camera catches that. It looks disrespectful to the speaker. It is as if persons are walking out on the speaker.

Hon. Members, I now call on the Hon. Minister of Housing and Water, the Hon. Member, Mr. Collin Croal to make his contribution. Hon. Minister, you may proceed.

**Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Croal]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to begin by saying how proud I am to be part of a Government that gets to put Guyana back together again after the calamity in which the APNU/AFC Coalition placed us.

Since the PPP/C’s Government return to power, confidence has been restored in the economy, investors are flocking Guyana, there is a breath of fresh air that fills this land with

optimism and citizens could, once again, look forward to a bright future with the People’s Progressive Party Civic.

*Budget 2021*, quite fittingly, is themed: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. It captures President Dr. Ali’s vision for our country and makes clear the focus of this Government. We are focused on greater and better prosperity for all the people of Guyana. We are not busy acquiring gold bands and beds off the backs of public servants. We are focused on returning Guyana to glory. While the Members across the floor are busy making noise and spouting useless cometary, the Members on this side cannot wait to begin implementing the plans and policies of this PPP/C Government. These are plans and policies that would put money in the pockets of every Guyanese, rebuild the security and health sectors, provide jobs and, above all, bring hope back to our people.

The Members across the floor are not bothered by the challenges that are facing our fellow citizens. No, they want to rabble-rouse. The truth is, they cannot discuss any budget in any sensible way because they do not have the knowledge or skills to do so. More importantly, they cannot do so because they have failed. The APNU/AFC Government failed to implement the lofty plans that they gabbed about while in Government. They failed to come up with the right strategies to tackle the many challenges that faced our country, even with the goodwill they enjoyed in 2015. They have failed and they know it.

This nation cannot and must never forget the havoc that they wreaked on our fledgling democracy less than a year ago. We must never forget the war they declared on this nation when they refused to give up power. We must never forget that it is the PPP/C, along with all the other guardians of democracy, that fought desperately for five long months to ensure that the votes casted were for the party for which the majority of this country favoured, and that it was accounted for. In the face of challenges that threatened to undo us and a global pandemic at that time, the PPP/C, under the leadership of His Excellency, President Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, stayed the course because...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, a second reference... There is a Standing Order with respect to using the President’s name for influence. We circulated His Excellency’s speech and I am sure that there are ample quotes that you could quote if you want to invoke the name of His Excellency.

**Mr. Croal:** It is the PPP/C that has the knowledge, the skills and the competence to lead this country and to save it from

the hell in which the APNU/AFC had plunged it. We want to get on with development. We want to get this country back on track and *Budget 2021* sees us firmly on the path that could only lead us to success. When one listens to the previous speakers, including the last speaker and those from the Opposition, one wonders if one is living in the same country. One wonders if these are the same persons, for many whom were in Office for the last five years... Much has been said that they have been claiming that they were not consulted, but they have refused to recognise a People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government and a President, a duly elected President. If you do not recognise us, how could we recognise you as the leading Opposition?

They criticised the allocations for the school cash grants. If that is not laughable, then what is? In 2015, they removed the programme, completely, and did not even gave \$1 dollar. They are now here in this House criticising the amount of \$15,000 for every child. They have criticised the COVID-19 cash grant programme. When many of us here, for the five months, were fighting to ensure that our votes were recognised; when many of them in this Dome, from the Opposition side, who were here, daily, in the recount process, were controlling the persons, were controlling the budget and were controlling the resources of the State... While we were going through a COVID-19 pandemic, not \$1 dollar, not one resource, not one major activity was done or not one hamper was sent to communities as relief to persons who were suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic. You were in Government at that time but, yet, you come here to criticise the COVID-19 cash grant programme.

**Mr. Speaker:** Just use ‘honourable’ before ‘they’.

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

Much has been said about the public service. They probably forgot when the then Minister of State, now Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon, in a circular in 2015 indicated that candidates in elections that could not be in the public service and had to be professionalised. They terminated over 2000 public servants; from cleaners to Permanent Secretaries (PSs), including two of whom are here sitting on this side of the Government. They replaced them with candidates and activists who were embedded in every Ministry and agency.

Much has been said. They are asking about free education that we promised at the university level. The PPP/C ‘s manifesto is there for all to see and it is for all to read. If one has a comprehension deficit, then the many courses that are

being offered by the Hon. Minister of the Public Service I would ask that many of them apply and, this time, we would, legitimately, allow them to have the scholarships. We have committed that we would deliver, and we would give free university education, but we never said that it was going to happen in our first budget presentation. We said within our first term.

I am reminded by the last speaker and I am wondering if this was the same person, in addition to coming to the Opposition Office, in 2018 praised the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. The General Secretary of the Guyana Teachers’ Union (GTU) said that teachers received more in terms of salary and other benefits when the PPP/C Government was in Office during the pre-2015 era, in comparison to what was being given to them, at that time, by the APNU/AFC Coalition Government. Who said that? In addition to that, the Hon. Member forgot that the then Minister said and called the teachers, who had to strike, selfish. The Hon. Keith Scott called the teachers selfish. Did we forget this? [**Mr. Dharamlall:** And he called the Amerindian people greedy.] Avaricious, greedy, is what he called the Amerindians. Did we forget this? We have Members from the other side who are coming here and pretending that they did not just come out of Office.

There are claims by the former Minister of Education that the students only topped under the APNU/AFC. Let me repeat for you because you would not understand the years when Guyanese topped in the Caribbean: In the years 1997, 1999, 2003 – you do not want to hear it – 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2017. You could come here and pretend. [**Mr. Holder:** (*Inaudible*)] Since the Hon. Member from Region 2 wants to hear, let me give him a little.

I stand here proud, today, as the Minister of Housing and Water to share with this House and the citizens who are paying attention, not those who are making noise on the other side. Home ownership is, arguably, the main goal of every Guyanese citizen. This PPP/C has always made housing a priority. The last Government decentralised housing. We set up a Ministry of Housing and Water. What did they do? They put housing as a subset under a Ministry, just like what they did with the labour department.

11.07 a.m.

Today, home ownership is, arguably, the main goal of every Guyanese citizen, and we have made housing affordable and a priority. Today, many areas that were populated with bushes are home-thriving communities. Thanks to the foresight and the vision of the PPP/C Government. In the last

five years of the incompetent Coalition Government the housing drive, which was left by our now President and the then Minister of Housing and Water, was derailed. Their ideas for housing were weak and inadequate.

Be reminded that it was the Coalition Government that played musical chairs with the housing and water sectors. Multiple Ministers, board chairmen, and directors fired the public servants and, yet, they did not and could not clear the backlog and reduce the processing for housing applications or even meet the target that they had set. They were too busy, for example, getting their husbands into contracts and even asking for laptops. They promised to end discrimination regarding allocation of lands, yet our Learned Attorney General is now tasked with recovering hundreds of acres of lands that they doled out to their friends and families. They promised affordable housing to teachers, public servants, nurses, and the disciplined forces, among others, and they did not deliver. They promised incentives to the private sector to reduce construction costs and, again, could not deliver. They could not keep any of the promises that they made in their own manifesto.

Imagine, as has been said, between 2010 and 2015, more than 22,000 plus house lots were given out to citizens by the PPP/C Government. Astonishingly, under the APNU/AFC 7,534 house lots were given out in five years. Of that amount, more than 2,000 were allocated as part of the elections gimmick. During the post elections period, while we were fighting for democracy, they were busy allocating lots to some of their cronies. In fact, even when the Coalition had one big idea for housing, they could not get even that right. They had the big idea of introducing duplexes. They proceeded to have contractors construct duplexes, but they did not think to amend the Condominium (Regulation and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act to include this type of house. The result is that those citizens who invested their hard-earned dollars into these houses cannot get insurances or titles. Even more worrying is that the banks are not amenable to holding duplexes as collateral. How could any Minister of Housing, with an ounce of sense, allow this to happen? No wonder, even though they inherited a robust housing and water sector, it was plunged into chaos for four years. It falls to us, this PPP/C Government, to, once again, rescue the housing sector.

By midyear, the Hon. Minister of Legal Affairs will be bringing legislation to amend the Condominium (Regulation and Miscellaneous Provisions) Act to allow banks to accept titles for those houses, insurance companies to issue policies



to those homeowners and, more importantly, to allow these homeowners to access loans for expansion. Because of these and many failures of the Coalition in the housing and water sectors, and every other sector for that matter, the housing sector has received an allocation of \$8.9 billion, of which \$6 billion is for infrastructure and utility works in new and existing areas, all aiding and advancing our commitment to allocating a minimum of 50,000 house lots to citizens within our first term in Office. In 2021 alone, we intend to allocate 10,000 house lots and issue a minimum of 7,000 land titles to citizens, many of whom have been waiting for years to own their own homes. Let the House be reminded that, in just four months of being in Office, 3,600 house lots and 413 titles were handed over to citizens. This year, we will also build 1,000 homes for young people and low-income earners. Residents of Region 10 will also benefit from the construction of over 1,000 homes through a public/private partnership, with community involvement in every step and every process.

Over these five years, citizens in all ten regions will benefit from the construction of new roads, bridges, water, electricity, distribution networks, and improved drainage. New developments, including water, the construction of roads, bridges, drainage, and electrical distribution networks will be undertaken to complete infrastructural development works in Region 3, Region 4, Region 5, and Region 6. If you want to hear, these include: Anna Catherina, Cornelia Ida, Edinburgh, Stewartville and Met en Meerzorg; in Region 4, there are Cummings Lodge, La Bonne Intention, Annandale, Mon Repos, Providence, Prospect, Little Diamond, Grove, Diamond, Vigilance, Bladen Hall, and Strathspey; in Region 5, there is Experiment; and in Region 6, there is Hampshire, Williamsburg, Ordnance/Fort Lands, Number 75 Village and Number 79 Village. Twenty-five kilometres (km) of roads within Regions 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, and 10 will be upgraded. Close to 3,278 house lots, for 13,500 citizens, will be delivered this year. These include, in Region 2 – Onderneeming; in Region 3 – Tuschen, Zeelugt, La Parfait Harmonie, Westminster, Onderneeming, Lust En Rust, and Belle West; in Region 4 – Farm, Covent Garden, Providence, Prospect, Perseverance, Peters Hall, Herstelling, Good Hope, Mon Repos, Nonpareil, Hope South, Hope Estate, Hope, and Dochfour; Region 5 – Bath, Hope and Experiment; in Region 6 – Ordnance/Fort Lands and Kilcoy/Chesney; in Region 9 – Tabatinga and Culvert City; and in Region 10 – Amelias Ward, Linden.

Our 2021 national housing development programme will include the construction of 1,000 low income and young professional housing units. In Region 4, there are Cummings

Lodge, Prospect, Providence, Little Diamond, and Great Diamond; in Region 3, there are Onderneeming and Wales; in Region 6 there are Ordnance/Fort Lands, Hampshire, and Williamsburg; and in Region 10, there is Amelias Ward. In addition to that, we will distribute the home improvement subsidies as well as build core homes in La Parfait Harmonie and Sophia. You will be pleased to know, Mr. Speaker, that even recreational facilities have been included.

Outlets to foster and enhance creative aptitudes, this is the future... The future is bright with a People’s Progressive Party/ Civic Government. By the end of 2021, through the Central Housing & Planning Authority (CH&PA), Guyanese will see the commencement of new infrastructural development works in Region 1; in Region 2 – Charity; in Region 3 – Onderneeming; in Region 9 – Lethem; and in Region 10 – Amelias Ward.

The hinterland and Amerindian communities are no exception. The record of the People’s Progressive Party/ Civic with respect to development in the hinterland community speaks for itself. In the area of housing, we will commence, therefore, this year, the construction of 100 homes within hinterland communities. We will continue the road construction to complete the access road from Great Diamond to Mandela Avenue, with the construction of the four lane Highway and the heavy-duty bridge to connect at Mocha Arcadia. In addition, in excess of 20,000 residents and other users from the East Bank, the West Coast and the West Bank will directly benefit from this new access road and over 100,000 will benefit, indirectly, as part of the housing area that we have developed on the East Bank.

Persons will now, therefore, have a choice to access Georgetown onto the East Bank – they did not have such before. With this work in which our Government is engaged, we are focused on providing our citizens with the best housing interventions.

Not only are we providing affordable housing, not only are we making them sustainable in well-developed communities, we are also ensuring that private sector partners can contribute to the housing drive. To ease of the burden of high construction and material costs, we have removed the value added tax (VAT) from locally produced building and construction materials, including sand, stone, concrete blocks, plywood, logs, and lumber. This means that those persons who have house lots and who are beneficiaries can look forward to paying cheaper prices for building materials. Additionally, we will soon implement a single window

approval system for the planning and permission process, which will greatly reduce the processing time.

It is no secret that the process to obtain a planning permit is painstaking, frustrating and a headache. Potential business owners are saddled with the responsibility of running back and forth to a number of Government agencies, including the Guyana Fire Service (GFS), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and many other places to check on the status of their permits. This PPP/C Government has promised to improve the ease of doing business, and so bottlenecks like those I have just described will negatively affect this goal of ours. Therefore, we must recognise and recalibrate the planning permit process so that it can be more efficient and ultimately more effective.

That is why we will ensure that the necessary investments are made to enhance, strengthen and modernise the capacity of the staff and the technology to ensure that this is in process. I am happy to report that we have already begun the preliminary work to revamp this process. During the next few weeks, all Local Democratic Organs will be provided with a detailed list of documents that must be submitted and a revised building application form. These two measures alone will, significantly, reduce the processing time. The priority of making life easy for our citizens is not limited to house lot allottees.

11.22 a.m.

For the first time, we have made provisions for homeowners to also get extra moneys by raising the low-income mortgage ceiling to \$12 million, as well as increasing the ceiling for mortgages, issued by the New Building Society Limited, from \$12 million to \$15 million. This intervention was highly anticipated by homeowners. This means that their interest rates will be lower and, of course, other commercial banks will now have to become more competitive. This also means that citizens will now be able to access higher loans and, it follows, that they could now do more on their houses; their monthly instalments will be reduced, as a result of lower rates. Overall, the citizens will be the winners.

The key to having great communities is also to ensure that the infrastructure is in place, from the streetlights to green spaces and clean water. Clean water, therefore, means a priority for the Ministry of Housing and Water. Since in office, my team has identified several challenges to assess and distribute water, from a high iron content to a low treated water coverage. High levels of non-revenue water and a marked deficit in accessing water by the hinterland population were

compounded by the cruel imposition of value-added tax (VAT) on water, which was borne by some of our most vulnerable citizens and pensioners.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, for you to continue, you have to get an extension.

**Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

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

**Mr. Croal:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is important for me to educate this House about the state of the water sector that we inherited. The other side likes to trumpet the name Dr. Richard Van-West Charles. This is his legacy too.

The Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) was on the verge of a financial collapse. Despite the steep tariff increase by the previous Government, it had a significant loss of \$1.1 billion. So dire was the situation that it had to rely on bank overdraft facilities to finance its operations. Sadly, but predictably for the Coalition’s strategies, overdrafts totalling \$270 million did nothing to alleviate its losses. The employment cost skyrocketed since 2015, and the rental of buildings and debt plagued the entity. In August, 2020, GWI’s debt to suppliers totalled \$783 million, and even worse, over 5,000 customers were denied service connections because inventory levels of service connection materials, that were required to provide a service, had deteriorated. Also, in August, 2020, the new management inherited over 8,000 water leaks which had been ignored for the period 2015 to August, 2020. But there is good news. Since we came into Government, under the stewardship of the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Mr. Shaik Baksh, GWI has collected \$5.3 billion in revenue, an increase of over \$1 billion than in 2019. This is during the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. Its debt is reduced. It did not access an overdraft facility, and overall, the financial situation of GWI has improved. This happened in less than seven months and without burdening our Treasury. That is the legacy of Dr. Van-West Charles.

Not only have we removed VAT on water, imposed by the previous Government, we have reinstated the water subsidy that was removed. As a result of the removal of VAT on water, consumption that exceeded \$1,500 or 14 cubic metres,

over 3,000 customers will see their disposable income increase by approximately \$107 million a year. With the subsidy reinstatement, more than 26,300 pensioners will be directly impacted by an increase of approximately \$300 million in their disposable income. The Government’s national budget initiative for 2021 has, once again, demonstrated our commitment to the people of Guyana by announcing a 5% reduction in water tariffs across the board, targeting all levels of society and all levels of consumers. This initiative, when implemented, is estimated to provide a benefit of an additional \$248 million to the people of Guyana for a minimum of 173,000 customers. Overall, the Government’s initiative in the water sector, in less than a year, will provide an estimated \$655 million increase in disposable income to the people of Guyana. The GWI, therefore, now operates on a new five-year strategic plan that aligns with our national priorities of providing clean, reliable and affordable water. In this regard, we are focused on increasing access to treated water coverage to 90% to reduce our non-revenue water and modernise the infrastructure. This is a commitment the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) intends to implement.

In conclusion, under seven months, my Ministry has made significant progress in addressing the challenges within the housing and water sectors. We have chartered a course, and our minds are set on meeting our targets. I have absolutely no doubt that we will restore this sector to its former glory and even surpass it. The PPP/C Government is not about talking; it is about doing the work. We are focused on keeping the promises we made to the citizens of this great land of ours and, together, we will.

I, therefore, commend and recommend this 2021 Budget to the House as the path to recovery for our nation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister of Housing and Water, the Hon. Member, Mr. Collin Croal.

I now call on the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson to make his contribution. Hon. Member, please proceed.

**Mr. Patterson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I would like to start off by acknowledging the hard work of the staff of the Ministry of Finance in preparing this Budget. It is a thankless task. I know the staff are just responsible for the numbers but the qualities of it come from the Government.

I begin my Budget presentation with a minute to reflect on the promises made by this Government since assuming office. I will just address a few.

One of their promises, Sir, was the creation of 5,000 new jobs. What have they done? They have fired more than 2,000 persons and have not created new jobs. They promised \$40,000 per month in old age pension, but they are giving \$25,000. That is another promise made. They promised better management and renegotiations of the oil contracts for the benefit of all Guyanese. What did we get? An intimate relationship that supports flaring, a lack of inclusivity, and no renegotiations as promised.

Sir, let me tell you of a promise they did keep – and the Hon. Minister, Mr. Collin Croal, made mention of it – that is the removal of VAT on local construction materials. But the reality is that not a single price has dropped since 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2020, to now. Stone price, sand price, cement price, block price and plywood price has remained the same. I heard the Hon. Member say plywood... All those prices remain the same. Timber prices have actually gone up, even though they claim that they have reduced the VAT. Overall, from 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2020, to now, construction material cost has risen 4%. We have been tracking it. The question is, who is getting the gains of the VAT relief that they have imposed? Our Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes asked, when one removes the smoke screen or the mirrors, what is there in this Budget for the ordinary man? If one asks any home builder now, one will know that the prices have not dropped under this Government, but it has increased.

What this side of the House has been asking for and saying in all of our discussions is that the Government has to address the root cause of the income of our Members and our workers. I want to start off by asking immediately, not at the end of my speech, when the Minister gets up that he announces the 10% interim payment for our public service retroactive to January. On behalf of the workers in our country, I also want to ask for the increase in the income tax threshold to \$1.2 million annually, plus the reduction of the income tax rate of 25% for the bottom tier, and 35% for the top tier. I know that they will ask where they would get the money from, but Sir, this budget has already dug us a very dark hole with the deficit. If we approve these measures, the people will, at least, have a torchlight to see their way through this.

The main focus of my Budget presentation this morning shall be the oil and gas sector. However, I need to make a general

comment on the PPP/C’s 2021 Budget submission. When I concluded my 2020 Budget presentation last year, I concluded it with this statement, if you can recall:

“I would like to end my contribution by providing an insight into *Budget 2021*.

There a slew of interesting transformational projects, all studied, ... or final designs...

In fact, some of the projects that you will see in the PPP Budget 2021 ...”

I went on to list a few of the projects. I also listed a number of projects that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) Government left, and which, I stated, the PPP/C will shamelessly attempt to claim as their own. I listed projects such as: the Linden/Mabura Hill Road, an APNU/AFC designed and funded road; the Linden/Soesdyke Highway upgrade, an APNU/AFC designed and funded project; the East Coast bypass, all the way up to the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) and road linkages in Region 3, which the PPP/C is now calling its superhighway; new bridges over the Demerara River; plus a new bridge at Monkey Jump linking Bartica; and several other projects. Do these projects sound familiar?

11.37 p.m.

Of course, they should. If one reads section E of the 2021 Budget speech, headed Transformational Infrastructure, they are all listed there.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, every single major transformational project in this *2021 Budget*, with the exception of the Amalia Falls Hydropower Project, was conceptualized, designed and, in most cases, funding was secured by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Administration; every single one. I anticipate that the People’s Progressive Party will try to deny these facts. However, they could control the media but they cannot control the worldwide web.

Mr. Speaker, I invite you to visit my page on *Facebook*, Hon. David Patterson, MP. I know that you are on *Facebook* because I know that you follow Mr. Sherod Duncan and Ms. Catherine Hughes. That is the only way you could know what they post on such a regular basis. Sir, you know how to navigate yourself on *Facebook*. On my page you will see the APNU/AFC 2017–2025 Infrastructure Development Plan, which was prepared in 2016. It was less than a year after we took office some 5 years ago, and it was the backbone for our impressive infrastructural momentum. You will see every

single major road and bridge that the PPP/C are now claiming as their transformational projects. Every single major project in *Budget 2021* is detailed and even costed in that document.

Our developmental plan was not only limited to roads and bridges, but it also contained an energy roadmap. The Hon. Prime Minster is due to speak on Monday, and he will tell this House – and I am sure with a lot of fanfare – about the PPP/C’s plans for energy expansion and diversification. He will mention projects such as the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated’s (GPL’s) 47 megawatt new generators, that will be commissioned later this year, which will help end blackouts. What the Prime Minister will not say is that project was designed, funded, secured and constructed by the APNU/AFC Administration. In his speech, the Prime Minister would say that they will be doing solar farms in Mahdia, Leguan, Bartica and Lethem. What the Prime Minister will not say is that these projects were designed, funding and procured by the APNU/AFC Administration.

In his speech, the Prime Minister would say that there are hydro power projects in Kumu and Moco Moco. What he will not say is that these projects were designed, funded and tendered by the APNU/AFC Administration.

There will be a lot of hullabaloo and fanfare. The Kato Hydro project is schedule to be completed this year. What the Prime Minister will not say, is that this project was designed, funded, secured and constructed by the APNU/AFC Administration.

I say this to the Deputy Speaker who is not here, that they would go to Annai and our Indigenous villages and say, look at what the PPP/C has done for you. They will not tell them that the mini hydro projects that they are putting in there were designed, funded and conceptualised by the APNU/AFC Administration; every single thing. According to *Merriam-Webster’s Online Dictionary*, to plagiarize means:

“to steal and pass off (the ideas or words of another) as one's own; present as new an original idea or product derived from an existing source.”

It is crystal clear that the PPP/C has plagiarized the APNU/AFC Infrastructural Developmental Plan. I want to give the PPP/C credit for recognising the value of our plans for the betterment of the country, but at minimum, we demand that they give us the credit for the work we have done. The people of this country deserve to know the truth.

Having established that the 2021 Infrastructural Development Plan was the APNU/AFC’s, it begs the question, what are the two Ministers in the Ministry of Public Works doing on a daily basis? It is obvious that the Ministry is on auto pilot, but that is not a bad thing. Having the Ministry run on auto pilot is not necessarily a bad thing. The less these two Ministers get involved, the less damage to the Ministry they can cause.

The evidence says that the only jobs that the two Ministers do on a daily basis, is to fire hard working public servants. It is public knowledge that the Chief Works Officer was fired, so too was the Director General of the Maritime Administration Department (MARAD), the Procurement Specialist within the *[inaudible]*, the General Manager (GM) of the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation (DHBH), the Hinterland Coordinator, and they have now turned their attention to the core team. They have already terminated the entire core teams in Leguan, Wakenaam, in Regions 3, 4 and 6. More than 60 youths and single mothers are placed on the breadline. I ask whether this is the PPP/C’s fulfillment of their campaign promise to Guyana, to take care of women and include youths in national life?

I want to mention the CJIA, quickly, before I go on to oil and gas. I see that there is \$2.5 billion involved for the CJIA. On the 22<sup>nd</sup> December, last year, there was the big fanfare that the contractor agreed to put in \$1.8 billion of his own money to finish the project. Why is taxpayer’s money included in that? The question needs to be asked, who will be executing the works? Is it the same contractor? What is the procurement process that will be utilised?

What should be of the most immediate concern to the citizens of this country, is the status of the contractor’s performance and retention bonds. As of 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2020, the then Ministry of Public Infrastructure retained two bonds, collectively valued at US\$14 million. The larger of the two, the performance bond valued at US\$8 million, was a bond guaranteeing the client that the contractor will execute the project to the required standards; otherwise the bond could be cashed on demand. The other bond was a retention bond, which was \$5 million, with a guarantee to the client that the contractor will fix any defects.

These bonds, I want to make mention, are very important, because the Export Import Bank (EXIM) of China has already given the contractor all the money. In return, what we hold is a bond to ensure that they do what they are... As I speak here today, those bonds expired on the 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2020. In other words, the contractor can walk away today, and the Ministry and the country will lose US\$14 million, and our only recourse would be going to the court. It is a wholly unsatisfactory and unacceptable position.

Since the announcement of the discovery of oil in 2015, there has been much talk inside and outside of Guyana about the strength and value of the contract signed between the

Government of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and ExxonMobil. The PPP/C promised that the Government will approach the oil and gas sector in a national, non-partisan way and put a framework in place to properly manage the sector with a focus on proper management of the resource, transparency, and accountability and securing benefits for all Guyanese, that will involve better contract administration/re-negotiation, arms-length management and regulation of the industry and the involvement of civil society in oversight.

While we, in the Opposition, maintain our claim that the 2016 agreement was a vastly improved contract on the 1999 agreement signed by the PPP/C, we are willing to offer the Government the opportunity never afforded to the APNU/AFC. We are willing to offer our support on presenting a united position so that, jointly, we can address the alleged inadequacies in the contract and any other documents including the environmental permits.

While in Opposition, the PPP/C never offered the Government its support on any issue other than our border controversy with the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The lack of a unified front has allowed various parties to exploit the differences, which is not to the benefit of the country and its citizens. It is our position that, once we present a united position to our international partners, the harder it will be for them to continue ignoring our concerns. Moving forward, this issue is squarely in the hands of the Government, the time for grandstanding and blame is over; the time to act in the best interest of the citizens of our country is now.

The APNU/AFC Administration, *via* our Minister of Natural Resources, made it a requirement that ExxonMobil fully brief the PPP/C Opposition on every discovery and development. These briefings were conducted bilaterally between ExxonMobil and the PPP/C, with no involvement from our Government. This was done because it was our opinion that all political parties should be fully briefed on this important emerging industry. The Opposition has yet to be briefed by any of the operators because the Government has requested that no information be shared with us. This is in stark contrast to our handling of the sector and does not reflect the claims of inclusivity that the Government has been making speeches about.

A lot has been said over the last few months on the vexing issue of flaring of natural gas by ExxonMobil, something that is expressly prohibited by their environmental permit. While acknowledging that mistakes and breakdowns can occur, the APNU/AFC Coalition is not satisfied with the handling of this issue by the operators as well as the Government.

The response by ExxonMobil on this issue has, quite frankly, not only been disrespectful and insulting to the Guyanese public, but they also continue breaking the laws of the land with impunity. The company started off by saying that there will be no flaring from day one. They went on to day 60 and

said that they would cease flaring by day 60, which moved to day 90. Now, the promise is ongoing, over one year, without change, and with the dire consequence of severe polluting to the environment with the flaring of close to 14 billion cubic feet of gas in violation of the permit, hence, in violation of Guyana’s laws.

Further, ExxonMobil’s apparent intent, by saying that a justification for their flaring is because Guyana is a carbon sink country, must be seriously worrisome to this Parliament and the people of Guyana. In other words, because we have a pristine rainforest, we have the capacity to take in more air pollutants. What they are saying is that is if one has a lovely, well maintained garden, one’s neighbour can light a fire because his or her neighbor takes care of his or her garden. That is what they are saying. They have no responsibility to us.

The company proceeded to insult us further, by saying that it has to produce and flare above the legal limit because Guyana is a poor country, especially in this COVID-19 time. We need the money badly, so it is better to let them continue to pollute our environment than to stop flaring. In other words, they are saying to the Guyanese people that *ya’ll hungry belly*.

11.52 a.m.

They are saying that we should let them do what they have to do, because they have to help out *ya’ll hungry belly* people.

While the Coalition welcomes ExxonMobil to our shores with open arms, ExxonMobil’s only reason for being here is to make money for ExxonMobil and not because they want to help this poor country.

Sir, a motion has been introduced in this Parliament to have this matter fully debated. I have learnt that the motion has been approved, even with amendments, and I thank you. During that debate, the Opposition will further set out its position.

Allow me quickly, Sir, to turn my attention from flaring to dumping of water. Just as frightening to the protection of our health, environment, rich biodiversity and fishing industry is the dumping of wastewater produced with the oil into the ocean.

Here again, when challenged, ExxonMobil excused this unsavoury practice by callously misleading the Guyanese public that the World Bank approves of such a practice. This is a blatant misrepresentation of the World Bank’s guidance on this practice. What the World Bank actually said is that re-injection of produced water must be the first option and water dumping must only be considered if re-injection is not financially or technically feasible. There is no question, not even by ExxonMobil, that re-injection is both technically and financially feasible.

While it cannot, at this stage, be attributed to our emerging oil and gas sector, our local fisher folks have been reporting reduced catches. These are small as well as commercial companies. It is an issue which requires the input of this Parliament. I am putting the Parliament on notice, that we intend to bring a motion on water dumping to ensure that it is analysed and that the facts come to light.

Watching my time, I would like to turn my attention to the proposed gas to shore project. I would like to put on record the difference in the approach for this project by the two Administrations. In September, 2015, at a Cabinet briefing by ExxonMobil, we were informed that the company was desirous of taking Liza 1 to early production. However, this early production date may result in the flaring of associated gas. In September, 2015, Cabinet advised that gas flaring would not be permitted. ExxonMobil was requested to find alternative routes. In February, 2016, ExxonMobil informed that the reinjection of associated gas was possible. They moved from, ‘have to flare’ to ‘reinjection is possible’.

In September, 2016, the Ministry of Natural Resources officially requested ExxonMobil to consider the possibility of bringing gas to shore. At the same time, we undertook a desktop study on the proposed onshore base for the support of the fledging off shore oil and gas industry. Based on the initial study, the then Minister of Natural Resources announced that it was our desire to locate the future onshore bases in Berbice. That was in 2016.

In 2017, ExxonMobil confirmed that they could bring 30 to 50 million cubic feet on shore for the purpose of oil generation. Immediately, we contacted the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and asked for a list of its experts, and we conducted a free feasibility study. That was in March, 2017. In June, 2017, a final report was presented on the possibility of the technical feasibility of it.

In September, 2015, we organised a multi-stakeholder working group with the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, the Guyana Power and Light Inc., the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA), the Ministry of Finance, the Guyana Office for Investment (GO-INVEST), the Ministry of Business and the Ministry of Natural Resources. This working group examined 10 possible sites for the landing of oil on shore. We also did several other studies, in January, February, March, and May, 2018. We recommended and we shortlisted three in September, 2018 and November, 2019. I list all of those to contrast what the PPP/C is doing. There was no evidence of studies, no evidence of reports or analysis; absolutely nothing. Yet, they have decided that they are going locate the gas to shore project in Wales. They have even established the Wales Development Authority and is now seeking funding in 2021, to conduct the geotechnical, geophysical, environmental impact and Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR) studies. This is a classic case of *putting the cart before the horse*. What do they expect to get from studies

after they have already made their decision? These studies will just be *window dressing* to a bad project.

Mr. Speaker, we have been here before. If history teaches us anything, we will see another failed project on our hands. Remember the Skeldon Sugar Factory, the Berbice River Bridge, the Amalia Falls Hydropower Project, the Cheddi Jagan International Airport Expansion Project and the Guyana Marriott Hotel Georgetown. All these projects have something in common, other than being failures – the Hon. Vice-President, Mr. Jagdeo; the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh; the former Head of the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) and the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Wales Development Authority.

The boys are back in town and, to celebrate, they intend to embark on another failed project at the taxpayers’ expense. These three gentlemen have saddled Guyana with almost US\$0.5 billion in worthless projects already. Starting at Skeldon, it was US\$200 million; CJIA, \$150 million; the Amalia Falls Hydropower Project, thankfully, was stopped at \$45 million; the Guyana Marriott Hotel Georgetown was \$90 million; plus the money they have not paid back to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) for the Berbice River Bridge. People are saying that they should pay back to the NIS the money used for the Berbice River Bridge. They are coming to dip their fingers again into the cookie jar. They are coming again for another US\$800 million. I want you to note that all of the projects I called with the exception of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, never had a feasibility study undertaken before the decision was made to execute the project.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. I want you to note that you need an extension.

**Mr. Patterson:** I noted my time, Sir. You shortened me by two minutes.

**Mr. Speaker:** We have different times.

**Ms. Sarabo-Halley:** Mr. Speaker, I beg that you give the Hon. Member five minutes to conclude his presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

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

**Mr. Patterson:** Yes, Sir. I am timing myself because I have skipped... Let us take a closer look at the gas powerhouse at Wales, which was one of 10 sites examined by a multi stakeholder group and deemed not feasible for several reasons.

British experts sent by the United Kingdom’s Health Maintenance Organization (UK) (HMO) advised that it would

be an ‘act of lunacy’ to place a gas pipeline across the mouth of our busiest river. For the Guyanese people, he said that you *gat* to be mad.

Like the rest of South America, the Demerara River is one of the fastest flowing rivers in the world. South America is the best with that. It is so fast that when we contacted the United States Armed Forces about salvaging, the US Corps of Engineers came to Guyana and asked what they can do for us. We said to do some salvaging. This is the country and the Army with the Navy Sea, Air and Land (SEAL). They said that they do not authorise their divers to swim and dive in water that fast moving, at four miles an hour. The Navy SEALs do not go past 2.6 miles per hour. This is what they are doing. You could imagine the issue.

The power has to come over to the main load centre where we are. How will this be done? The last attempt was with the submarine cable. Every year that was another hare-brained scheme. The Prime Minister could not address that.

The timeline: in the Budget speech the Hon. Minister is claiming the project will be completed during 2023. That is hogwash. The Front End Engineering Design, which is done after the feasibility, takes nine months. The fabrication of the pipes is two years – one-inch thick pipes. The civil works for laying of the pipes is another nine months. They are just coming to hoodwink us.

Here is a big issue that we in the Opposition have a problem with: future planning. This 30 million cubic feet come from Liza I and II only. That is enough for power generation. The next two options of more associated gas are Longtail and Turbot. They are due to come online in 2030. Guess where these fields are located, in the east by Berbice. When they come online how are we going to get the gas down to Demerara? That is why, under our Administration... you could go back to Berbice and tell them we said put it in the West Coast Berbice because we have future planning.

In wrapping up, nowhere in this Budget, the term or concept for search and rescue was mentioned. Not a penny has been allocated for this necessary activity. We just lost a boat with no engine piloted by dead people. It just disappeared. That is the PPP/C for you. How could that boat be lost?

Nowhere in this Budget is there the concept of increasing the capacity of the Maritime Administration Department. This agency is wholly inadequate to handle the oil and gas sector. Under the APNU/AFC Administration we applied to the IDB for a loan for capacity building and enhancement of this agency, which has already fallen by the wayside.

To the Hon. Gentlemen with one subject in the corner, I close by repeating our demands on behalf of the workers of this country. I repeat, that the Government pays an interim payment of 10% to public servants retroactive to January, 2021 and moving the income tax threshold to \$1.2 million

and lower the tax rate. Only then, it will show the people that you care for everyone, not just your supporters and not just your friends and family.

Unless the Government can accept our humble request, I cannot support or commend this Budget. I thank you. [Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member Mr. Patterson. To keep these excellent presentations going this morning, I now call on the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources, the Hon. Vickram Bharrat. Hon. Minister you may proceed. Thank you.

**Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Bharrat]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, let me say that I am grateful for this opportunity to support Budget 2021 and the development of our country.

12.07 p.m.

From the onset, I would like to express my appreciation and thanks to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, and the dedicated and committed team at the Ministry of Finance for crafting Guyana’s largest budget of \$383.1 billion. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government must be commended for presenting two budgets in six months. Two budgets that will right the wrongs of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government.

While we speak of the APNU/AFC Government, I am wondering if there is still an AFC, because I noticed its executive members are *dropping like flies*. Even my friend the Hon. General Secretary resigned but he was cajoled into staying in the position because the Party is falling apart. I am not even sure if it has members or supporters. If we were to categorise the AFC, as of right now, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) would not fit and a trade union would not even fit because of the *pee-poor* negotiations with the APNU/AFC, which is in the Cummingsburg Accord that was signed on Valentine’s Day. It is even poor in negotiating. As accepted by the previous speaker, the Hon. David Patterson, the Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) was poorly negotiated. The Production Sharing Agreement between the Government of Guyana, ExxonMobil Corporation and Esso Exploration & Production Guyana Limited (EEPGL) was poorly negotiated and Guyana got the wrong end of it. Now, the Hon. Member is extending a hand to us to renegotiate or to review it. It is an acceptance that the negotiation was poorly done and it was done in a hasty manner.

We must say that *Budget 2021* has no new taxes, no new fines and no penalties because Guyanese was laced from *Budget 2015* right up with new taxes, increased taxes, increased penalties, more hardships and more suppression on the backs of the Guyanese people. *Budget 2021* will address

all these hardships and *Budget 2021* will show a real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth of 20.9% and, more significantly, the non-oil economy will grow by 6.1% in 2021. That is a sector that we need to place special emphasis on, the non-oil economy. We have seen, in the last five years, is that the non-oil economy was dying a slow and natural death. The non-oil economy was dying. *Budget 2021* created incentives for the traditional productive sectors – the non-oil sector.

The APNU/AFC took us down a road that so many countries went, so many countries made that mistake to go down the road of the Dutch disease. That is where we were heading.

The APNU/AFC spoke about rightsizing or downsizing the sugar industry. Today, the APNU/AFC comes to the National Assembly and speak about public servants as though it loves them. Yes, the APNU/AFC increased salaries and wages for the public servants but, what did it do on the other side of it? In every single budget it increased taxes, it increased fines, it increased penalties and the cost of living increased tremendously over the last five years. It was *like a thief in the night; you give with one hand and take away with the other*. It was the Robin Hood style of managing the economy. That is what it did.

Our aim and the aim of *Budget 2021* is to reduce the cost of living. When one reduces the cost of living, the people will have more disposable income, they will have more money to invest and they will have more money to spend. That is our aim as a Government – it is to reduce the cost of living for our people, to raise the standard of living for our people and to create investment opportunities for local and foreign investors. That is our programme, that is our policy and that is how the People’s Progressive Party/Civic manages.

We are not a Government that believes in the redistribution of wealth. Apparently, that was the policy of the APNU/AFC Government. We believe in the creation of wealth for every single Guyanese – that is what we believe in. When I say ‘every single Guyanese’, I mean the person who lives on the Corentyne Coast, persons who live in the Northwest District, persons who live in the Rupununi or persons who live in Linden or Kwakwani; we will provide incentives so that all the sectors and all Guyanese will benefit from that.

*Budget 2021* will lay the foundation for the economic transformation that our country will undergo over the next five years. *Budget 2021* signals the resurgence of a vibrant private sector in our country. Last year, we were accused, by this very Opposition, that we presented a private sector budget. We have no apologies for incentivising the private sector. We see the private sector as a partner in the development of our country. We do not see it as a competitor, nor do we see it as an enemy. We see it as a partner in the development of our country. We will continue to work with the private sector and our investors, both local and foreign, to



ensure that we build our country from strength to strength. That is our vision for Guyana; that is what we will do.

There are some fundamental questions that *Budget 2021* will seeks to address. These are matters that every Guyanese would like to see addressed. One such matter is job creation. Our people are calling on our Government to provide jobs because they were starved of employment over the last five years. People are dying for more income in their pockets, a lower cost of living, investment opportunities however, *Budget 2021* will address these.

*Budget 2021* will facilitate massive spending in public infrastructure, which will stimulate business activities, especially in the natural resources sector. My Colleague, the Hon. Minister, Mr. Collin Croal, spoke at length of our housing plan and our housing development over the next five years. The Ministry of Natural Resources is gearing itself to support the developmental plan of the Ministry of Housing and Water, the Government of Guyana. We are not sitting back and waiting as the APNU/AFC did. The demand for stone or aggregates, the demand for sand, the demand for loam and the demand for wood will increase, exponentially. Spending in public infrastructure will create thousands of jobs and develop our much-needed infrastructure that our people are crying out for.

How will *Budget 2021* right the wrongs of the APNU/AFC? From *Budget 2021*, every single Guyanese will benefit. Our customers of Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) will enjoy a 5% reduction in their water rates. Not only that but, six months after we took Government, our Government has already reduced or taken off value-added tax (VAT) from electricity and water, which was instituted by the APNU/AFC Government. We have returned the subsidies on electricity and water to our pensioners, which the APNU/AFC Government took away. Our pensioners will enjoy an increase of \$4,500. *Budget 2021* removed the VAT on building materials, basic food supplies, education and health services. Our schoolchildren in the public system will not only receive their cash grant from 2021 but they will receive an increase to \$15,000. Our Government took VAT off logging, mining and agricultural equipment. The same VAT that was imposed by the APNU/AFC Government, we have removed that in only six months in Government.

When the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, spoke about promises made by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government, these are promises that we are fulfilling every single day. These are the promises we are fulfilling. What the Hon. Member does not seem to understand is that our manifesto is a five-year programme for building Guyana and not a one-year programme or a six-month programme. Apparently, the Hon. Member does not understand that, but it is a five-year developmental programme and we will fulfil our promises in our manifesto. That is our commitment to the people of Guyana; that is our contract with the people of

Guyana; that is why the people of Guyana voted for us overwhelmingly by over 50%.

Some speakers, on the Opposition side, will come and say that they represent almost 50% of the population or 50% of the population. As I stand here, today, I am speaking on behalf of all of Guyana and not 50% but every single Guyanese. I speak on behalf of every single Guyanese.

The APNU/AFC spoke about hinterland development and incentivising the Indigenous communities but, what did it do? It put VAT on hinterland travels – we took that off. We have heard a lot over the last few days. Please, permit me the opportunity to bring some clarity to some of the mistruths and misinformation that were mentioned in this House over the last few days.

If I may look first at the word ‘democracy’. The word democracy is a word that should not be uttered by the APNU/AFC because, it is clear that, the APNU/AFC does not understand the meaning of the word democracy. How could you speak about democracy when you had illegally and unilaterally appointed a Chairman for the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM)? Today, you come here to speak about consultation. How could you speak about democracy, when you used the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) to suppress us, when we were in Opposition, including the now President and Vice-President? How could you speak about democracy when you were defeated in the no confidence motion and you refused to accept it, because you believed that 33 is not the majority of 65? How could you speak about democracy, when you could not hold elections after one year of being defeated in the no confidence motion? How could you speak about democracy when you tried to rig the elections?

Today, you spoke about fraud, but rigging is rigging. That is what you attempted to do, but you were politically manoeuvred and outsmarted. You were politically outsmarted, but you do not understand that. You say that is fraud, but that is being politically outsmarted – that is what happened to you.

We have seen all sorts of flimsy excuses, dramatics and theatrics at the recount. My Hon. Members were there every day, like myself. [**Mr. Holder:** You saw (*Inaudible*)] No. We saw a lot of dead people. We saw a lot of dead people, who you claimed were dead, that voted. That is what we saw. We did not go to the...[*Interjection*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, I did not claim that anyone was dead.

**Mr. Bharrat:** I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. If I may continue, I feel as though the Guyanese people are, more so, the supporters of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, which is more than half of our population also, the sugar workers of our country – I, myself being from that background.

12.22 p.m.

For the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, to say that the People’s Progressive Party Civic supporters are gullible or easily fooled is totally wrong and he must apologise to our people. He spoke about being mentored by Cde. Cheddi Jagan but that is something that Cde. Cheddi Jagan would never utter to call the people gullible or easily fooled because they voted for a party of their choice. That is democracy; that is not being gullible. It is being smart. It is using one’s democratic right. A lot have been said about Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and I would like to add my view on the COVID-19 situation. First, let me commend the frontline workers who have been out every single day risking their and their families lives to support every single Guyanese regardless of our differences. They have been there from the onset and they must be commended.

We have heard from 31 Members of the APNU/AFC Government that the \$25,000 is not adequate. We have heard so much about the pink slip, but the question is, what did you do for the people? Since before the elections COVID-19 was in Guyana but you were too busy trying to rig the elections. You were too busy running to the courts to decide whether 33 is the majority of 65. You were too busy. What did you do for the people? Nothing! Then, we heard another Hon. Member saying that the \$10 million the Government is giving to the Indigenous communities is nothing. How could you possibly say that when the people accepted it with open arms and welcomed it. The \$10 million would work towards small economic projects that would bring income to the Indigenous communities and create employment for those people who are more at a disadvantage than us on the coast. This is why our Government took the initiative to distribute over \$1 billion to the Indigenous communities. How could you condemn such an act of incentivising or assisting our Indigenous brothers and sisters who really need the help especially during this COVID-19 period?

If I may now turn to a few comments that were made with regard to the Ministry of Natural Resources. [**Mr. McCoy:** It is like the house they bought.] I am coming to that. If I may start with the quarry license because it seems to be the topical issue. The Hon. Member, Mr. Holder, seems to have a lot of information which, I am sad to say, is not factual. That has been the order of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change which is to bring half-truth information and it is divorced from the facts or the truths.

Our production over the last few years have been between 500,000 to 600,000 tonnes of aggregates, that is what we produced every year for the last three years. Last year, the demand for aggregates in Guyana was 850,000 tonnes. It means we are significantly underproducing and the APNU/AFC Government realised it but, instead of boasting the production, instead of giving license to the people who have the capacity and resources; what did it do? It imported

aggregates using foreign currency which it was not generating. The APNU/AFC could have boasted local production and create employment, but instead it imported aggregates and added value-added tax (VAT) to it. Our Government removed VAT on aggregates, so that it could help the construction sector.

Mr. Speaker, in five years, the APNU/AFC issued three quarry licenses. If the Hon. Member had his information correct, he would tell you that one never produced a brick or stone, the other is the smallest quarry operation we have on the Corentyne River and the next is claimed a friend of our Vice-President. These licenses were issued under the APNU/AFC Government. The Cde. or Hon. Member seems to be divorced from the fact, but he should have known that, because the very person was his employer. I would like to keep it professional and not get into personal attacks. The Hon. Member knows what the relationship between him and the operator is. I would like to clearly say that we have not issued any quarry license. Again, the Hon. Member is misleading the House. We have issued provisional permits pending environmental studies and the other requirements that are necessary. We have issued it to companies that are capable and have the resources to produce. The Member spoke about land management and he said that we are cancelling persons mining permits. In a published newspaper article, by the then APNU/AFC Government, it states that one should to pay his/her royalties and fees, and have until 15<sup>th</sup> April, 2018, which it will not be extended.

Further, there was another public notice that stated there was an extension to 31<sup>st</sup> August, 2018. I have a list here of people who have not paid their dues based on this Cancellation Order. This Cancellation Order was issued or advertised under the APNU/AFC Government. It was not the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government. Besides if a person has not paid his/her fees since 2018... The specific quarry operator who he spoke of did not pay fees since 2017. How is that not corruption? Apparently, the Hon. Member does not clearly understand what corruption means but let me remind him what is corruption. [*Interjection*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Do not remind us because it is one of the unparliamentary words.

**Mr. Bharrat:** I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. Let me remind the Hon. Member that we do not get involved in shady deals. When one speaks about shady deals, he/she would be talking about the Demerara Harbour Bridge \$200 million feasibility study, the billion dollar D’Urban Park, the \$30 billion loan to the Guyana Sugar Corporation, the drug bond rental of \$14 million per month and the signed bonus which disappeared that we are still looking for the signed bonus to this date. The APNU/AFC spoke about Block ‘C’ which was being allocated to party cronies. It is a good thing the People’s Progressive Party/Civic came into Government to salvage it.

I now turn my attention to the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC). [*Interjection*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Before you reach there, you would need an extension of time.

**Ms. Teixeira:** I would like to ask for my Colleague to have five minutes to conclude. However, I wish to say that the word ‘corruption’ is not an unparliamentary word. It is only if a Member is accusing another of corruption.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister Ms. Teixeira, we will be circulating the list that comes out of parliamentary documents just before we resume. Hon. Minister, it was a mistake from me. Your time is not up because you have until 12.37 p.m. according to my stopwatch. At that time, you would get the extension. My apologies, I will give you back the one minute and five seconds that you lost.

**Mr. Bharrat:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now turn my attention to the Guyana Forestry Commission. We have heard stories yesterday. The position of the Guyana Forestry Commission when we took Office is that the Commission was bankrupt, unable to pay staff and unable to pay basic utilities. Those are the facts and the position of the GFC on 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020. Yesterday, we heard the People’s Progressive Party/Civic used \$1.3 billion from the Guyana Forestry Commission. It means that the Commission was doing well under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, because if \$1.3 billion was used and almost a billion was inherited by the APNU/AFC Government, then it means that we left a viable Commission for the APNU/AFC and in five years it destroyed one of the best sector in this country. It is embarrassing to know that our country is covered by almost 87% forest, yet our Commission is bankrupt. Yet, we are producing a 30-35% of our allowable cuts.

Yesterday, we heard from the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramsaroop, who said that we are forcing loggers to produce. Something is definitely wrong. When someone is issued a house lot, it is because that person wants to build a house. When someone is issued a mining land, it is because that person would like to mine. When someone is issued a concession, it is because that person wants to log. If we are forcing loggers to produce, it is a good thing. I do not see how this has turned negative. The loggers, the Guyana Forestry Commission and the country will make money and employment would be created. Hon. Member, we should be commended for encouraging the loggers to produce more because we are only producing at 30% of our allowable cuts. Our exports have dried up. Thanks to the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government, because we bailed out the Commission. We changed the logging policy so that people could export logs, especially the lesser used species today.

In the interest of time I would just move quickly to a few other areas. Before I do so, I would like to say that we have been taking a number of steps to ensure we boost production

in the forestry sector. We are happy to report the forestry sector has been showing good signs of becoming viable again. Of course, with the COVID-19 situation, globally, there will be an issue but we will learn to navigate through that too. In collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works, we would be developing new roads and opening new areas for forestry and mining. One such road is the road from Kwakwani to Orealla and this is a promise fulfilled, again, and the Buckhall to 68 Road and the Puruni Road which has always been an issue. As a matter of fact, under the APNU/AFC Administration almost all the large-scale operators in the Puruni area had to withdraw, because of the condition of the road.

If I may move quickly to bauxite production. It was very heart-breaking to hear the Hon. Member, Mr. Sears, who hails from the mining town, speak about Russian Aluminium Company (RUSAL). The Hon. Coretta McDonald said that the Government sent home 300 bauxite workers because they are politically aligned. In this country, there is no bauxite company that is owned by the state. If the Hon. Member is speaking about RUSAL, it is the APNU/AFC that did that. It sent home RUSAL and 500-600 workers. It sent home RUSAL and Oldendorff Carriers and chased RUSAL and Oldendorff Carriers out of this country. It blocked the river preventing the company from going into operation. Thanks to the PPP/C Government, we have the company there providing electricity and water for those poor villages along the Berbice River.

12.37 p.m.

We are still trying to get the company to go back into operation. It is the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change that reduced bauxite to what it is today. Under the APNU/AFC, bauxite declined by over 40%. It is unfair to the workers and for the Hon. Members to come to this House to say that we are not caring. If one looks at the areas where these workers are from, he/she would see that they are from Linden, Ituni and Kwakwani and for the oil operation, they are from New Amsterdam. We know that these areas are predominantly supportive of the Coalition yet, it shows that it does not care about its own supporters.

If I may quickly go to the big issue which is oil and gas. Of course, I would love to have more time. First, I may address the flaring issues raised by the Hon. Members, Mr. Ramjattan and Mr. Patterson. It is a known fact that we inherited this issue and problem. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), under the APNU/AFC, permitted the ExxonMobil Corporation to flare 14 billion cubic feet(ft) of gas. This was the agreement signed by the APNU/AFC Government. The Hon. Attorney General will tell you that same man who is running around in every newspaper now as the [*inaudible*] for environment and gave Esso Exploration & Production Guyana Limited a 20-year permit, which is illegal. Thank God, our Government corrected that. In the

Liza Production Licence, which will expire next year, we will correct their wrong, once again.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. Now, is the correct time for you to get the correct time. Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, you have the floor.

**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.*

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

**Mr. Bharrat:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is a motion that was brought by the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, and it was approved to be debated in the National Assembly. If I may just quickly go to the last part of it where it clearly states:

“They would like to see the Liza 1 and Liza 2 Permits coming up to speed or up to date with the Payara Permit.”

The Payara Permit was signed by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government. The Liza 1 and Liza 2 Permits were signed by the APNU/AFC. There is a difference. I am happy that the Hon. Member recognised that the Payara Permit is far more superior and better negotiated than the Liza 1 and Liza Permits.

Our hymn or tune for the oil and gas sector will always be transparency and accountability. That is our promise to the Guyanese people because we will ensure that oil does not become a curse to our country and our people, but it will become a resource opportunity for our people. That is why a mere few days, after taking Office, our President put a high-level panel together to start the consultation on local content.

Local content is important to ensure that every single Guyanese benefit from this sector. Without local content, as some people say, we will get the crumbs and our Government realises that. That is why we are placing so much emphasis on local content. Only last week, in this very Dome, we had a massive consultation led by His Excellency, the President and the Vice-President, with a number of stakeholders. We have another month where we will do consultations to ensure that when we draft or craft a local content policy it reflects the true will of our people, because we realised that local content is important. At the same time, we needed to build capacity

and we needed to train our people to ensure that we develop this important sector. We will ensure that we continue to work and nurture this sector in collaboration with our investment partners and, of course, to derive the benefits from the sector. As we know it, we have eight blocks with 14 international oil companies operating in Guyana. The latest being the Qatar Petroleum Company. This, again, is evidence that investors are now flocking our shore. Investors are now coming to Guyana to invest, in our country, because they have confidence in the economy and the Government.

In the next few years, by 2024, Guyana will see its third Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSO) sailing to Guyana. We will have the Liza unity and prosperity FPSO joining the Liza Destiny. However, those two FPSOs will produce at double the capacity of the Liza Destiny right now. In other words, it simply means that, by 2024, Guyana will be producing over half of a billion barrels of oil per day. That is why we have ensured that we will invest and use the resources from the oil and gas sector to benefit every single Guyanese through world class education, health, infrastructure and security. This is what we will ensure that we do.

One of the greatest problems that we have in Guyana is power generation, the cost of power generation and the reliability of the power generation. That is why our Government is embarking on the gas-to-shore project that was spoken to at length by the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson. It is a project that the Hon. Member himself did a study as Minister of Public Infrastructure. To come to the House and criticise the project, is saying that you are being two-face. We will ensure that we pursue with that gas-to-energy project because that project will reduce our electricity generation by more than 50%, that will fulfil another campaign promise by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government.

I know that my time is running so, in conclusion, I wish to commend *Budget 2021* for passage through this National Assembly. For those who are not in support of *Budget 2021* it means that, you are not supporting job creation; it means that you are not supporting investment; it means that you are not supporting cash grant to our children; it means that you are not supporting subsidies to our pensioners; it means that you are not supporting transparency and accountability; and a better life for all Guyanese. I encourage you to get on board and move Guyana forward as one people, one nation with one common goal. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member Mr. Vickram Bharrat, Minister of Natural Resources. Hon. Members, this is a very good time to take the suspension.

*Sitting suspended at 12.45 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 2.00 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have a few quick announcements before we call the next speaker. I do have an issue with persons switching from addressing the Speaker to addressing the hecklers. When you switch from speaking to the Speaker, which is what it is called for in the Standing Orders, then you moved toward calling the other side ‘you’ and ‘them’ which breaks the parliamentary protocol and then at times when you say ‘you’, ‘they kill’, ‘you kill’, I get included. Let us see if we could change that. I think a good example yesterday was the Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, who used the name of an organisation and said ‘they’ and ‘you’ and every [*inaudible*]. Let us look at that because I do not want to keep interrupting because interruptions throw the speaker off-balance. That is why I designed these five-minute signals to indicate when the speaker has five minutes remaining from the original presentation. When I show this signal, it is two-minutes remaining and when I show this signal, it is the last minute, even when the speaker received the extension. I do not want to interrupt Members, to throw you off. Once Members continue to speak to me while occasionally looking in my direction, they will be guided by these messages without an audio interruption.

*[Mr. Speaker displayed time signs to Members.]*

With that being said, we want to also, look at the issue of the amount of other voices and noises in the National Assembly. Our Hansard Reporters who are just over the Hon. Member, Ms. Hastings-Williams’ back, record and do the transcription in 15 minutes segments, so each of them will get 15 minutes assign to them. They take the audio feed and it becomes very difficult for them to hear the presenter. We hear good in here, but they find it difficult, now, to transcribe what they are hearing because of the amount of noise.

That being said, I think, we have had a great morning, so far. To continue in that tradition, I call on the Hon. Member, former Minister, Mr. Haimraj Rajkumar to make his presentation.

**Mr. Rajkumar:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for the opportunity to share my views on *Budget 2021*. I have read the Budget speech presented by the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance to this honourable House on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2021, under the theme: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*.

The speech was filled with the People’s Progressive Party/Civic political rhetoric and half-truths. The Budget does

not have anything substantial for the ordinary citizens. It is disappointing and deceptive. As I read a few pages of the speech, I became alarmed with the words of the Hon. Member. At paragraph 1.6 of the speech I came across these words:

“Tragically, these gains were sharply reversed during the third phase, between 2015 and 2020, a period of renewed state domination and rapid economic retrogression and degeneration, made worse towards the end by the devastating effects of COVID-19, and returning the country in the short space of five years back to the brink of bankruptcy and deep economic despair.”

The Hon. Member continued at paragraph 1.10:

“...given the depletion and plunder of the public treasury over the past five years.”

This is a misrepresentation of the Coalition’s hard work in our term in Office. I said to myself that the Hon. Member must be suffering from amnesia. Then, I realised that the Hon. Member, between 2015 to 2020, was not in Guyana and probably did not take the time to familiarise himself with the developments that took place during the period of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government.

Let me remind the citizens of our country and the Hon. Member that our country has seen unprecedented infrastructural development between 2015 to 2020.

*2.05 p.m.*

Let us not forget that in 2019, the National Association of Securities Dealers Automated Quotations (NASDAQ) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) would have rated our economy as one of the fastest growing economy in the world. This was under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition Government – a record which we are proud of.

What is more confusing is, if it is true that the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government inherited an economy that was almost bankrupted as it has claimed, the Guyanese people would like to know then, how was it possible that after a few weeks in Office, for the Government to provide \$7 billion for the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cash grant, \$2 billion to the public sector employees, \$1 billion to the frontline health workers and the Disciplined Services? This meant that the rhetoric of it inheriting an empty treasury could not be true.

At paragraph 1.15 of *Budget 2021* speech, the Hon. Minister stated:

“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;...”

Someone should have informed the Hon. Minister that during his absence from Guyana, under the APNU/AFC Coalition the Guyanese workers enjoyed continued raises in their wages and salaries. Wages and salaries for public servants increased from \$39,500, in 2015, to \$70,000, in 2019. Old Age Pension was raised from \$13,100, in 2015, to \$20,500, in 2019. The income tax threshold was raised, resulting in workers having more moneys in their pockets. The APNU/AFC Coalition Government had reduced the burdensome 16% value-added tax (VAT), that was imposed by the caring PPP/C Government, to 14% and the list goes on.

These are some of the things that the APNU/AFC Coalition Government did over the last five years to provide a ‘good life’ for our citizens. The efforts by the Coalition to make our people happy cannot be swept under the carpet by these absurd fallacies. You cannot throw dust in the eyes of our people. We know, you know, and the people know of the achievements of the APNU/AFC Coalition Government.

Since 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020, our citizens have been traumatised by the actions of this Government. Over 1,000 persons lost their jobs. Persons are being marginalised and victimised, the public servants are afraid to speak out and people are fearful, and we are only just six months in with this new Government’s term in Office. This is what we call trauma.

The fallacies and deceptions continue at paragraph 4.34 of the Budget speech. The Hon. Minister, referred to the agriculture sector under the APNU/AFC Government, and said this:

“...over the past five years, the agriculture sector suffered callous neglect, being left in complete decay as if the intention was to consign it into complete non-existence.”

Again, this is another political rhetoric from the PPP/C Government, and it is quite far from the truth. It seems that truth has lost its way within the walls of this Assembly.

Let me put the record straight. During our tenure in Office, the APNU/AFC Government would have installed drainage pumps, in Essequibo and other parts of the country, to assist farmers with flooding. We had upgraded the farm-to-market roads. We did extensive work in cleaning and desilting trenches and canals all across the country, whereby providing proper and suitable environment for our farmers. We found new market for our rice exports. We removed the customs duty and VAT on pesticides used in agriculture, among other things.

According to the Hon. Minister, in 2020, the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors would have grown by 4.1% and the rice growing sector expanded by 4.8%. Bear in mind, the

Government would have changed hands in August, 2020. The increase observed by the Hon. Minister must have been the result of the hard work of the APNU/AFC Coalition Government during its term in Office.

Over the last five years, the APNU/AFC Coalition Government has done an excellent job in developing all sectors of our economy. As soon as the APNU/AFC Coalition Government took Office in 2015, we recognised that tourism played an important role in our country’s development. We implemented policies and programmes, invested in, and successfully marketed Guyana as a tourist destination. By 2018, we were able to receive over 286,000 visitors, which contributed approximately \$62.6 billion to our economy, making tourism the second largest export sector. By 2019, we received over 300,000 visitors whereby contributing significantly to our economy. In an effort to develop tourism in all our local regions, hot spots were identified for development in the various regions through our Regional Tourism Committee (RTC).

The tourism sector is mainly private-sector-driven. It has suffered tremendous loss during the time of COVID-19. The recovery of this important sector should not be solely left on the tourism stakeholders. The Government must collaborate with the current stakeholders to formulate an effective tourism recovery plan, so that the industry could recover and expand. But sadly, *Budget 2021* has no such considerations.

Mr. Speaker, I now take the opportunity to respond to the Hon. Ministers, Ms. Walrond and Ms. Rodrigues, in relation to their comments about the Small Business (Amendment) Bill 2020.

We on this side of the House recognise that the amendments are necessary. We know the benefits that a small business would receive on the passage of this Bill. The Hon. Minister did not mention, to this House, that the exact Bill was tabled in this House in 2019 and all she had to do this Bill was to change the date and put her signature on the Bill. Every word, every paragraph and every clause, represents our ideas. In short, the Small Business (Amendment) Bill 2020 is an APNU/AFC Coalition Bill.

Mr. Speaker, yes, I did go to Berbice and launched the Belvedere Business Incubator Centre (BBIC). The act of launching is distinct from the act of commissioning. There is a difference. The equipment and facility were procured and paid for, in 2019, by the Coalition Government. However, because of the pandemic, its shipment was delayed. I am happy to hear that the equipment has arrived and has been installed. I know that the small entrepreneurs in Berbice are grateful to the APNU/AFC Coalition Government for its effort in providing such a facility to help them develop their businesses. But the question is, if this facility has all the equipment and electricity and power is attached to it, why is

it not being opened to the public for their use? Are we waiting for the commissioning?

There is nothing spectacular or exciting about *Budget 2021*. It is another disappointing and deceptive budget. There is nothing new and substantial for the ordinary man. The increase for pension was promised in 2020. It is nothing new and it a far cry from the promises made during the elections campaign. The schoolchildren grant was promised in 2020 and, again, nothing new. However, the question to ask, is the cash grant adequate to keep our vulnerable students in school? We all know the answer to this question.

I had expected that in this time of COVID-19, in addition to the cash grant, the Government would have considered giving a tablet to those vulnerable children, especially those in the hinterland who are required to attend school virtually; providing free data to all students; setting up more information and communications technology (ICT) hubs around the country and ensuring that they are in working order.

I am happy that the Government would be executing reconstruction project of the Abram Zuil Secondary School – a project conceived by the APNU/AFC Government and was catered for in the 2018 Budget and tendered in 2019.

The National Quality Infrastructure System (NQIS) and the Electronic Single Window (ESW) are projects initiated by the APNU/AFC Government, with the objective of enhancing quality and ease of doing business in Guyana. There is nothing new. It is another APNU/AFC project.

Our public servants and university students are disappointed. Our public servants are disappointed because, over the past years, at budget time, an increase in salary is expected, and the Coalition Government always provided. They received retroactive pay and benefitted from the increase in income tax threshold. The combined effect was to provide more money in the hands of our workers – they were happy.

Today, no such announcement was made about any increase in the wages for the public servants; no such announcement was made about any retroactive pay; and, of course, the income tax threshold remained the same since 2019. Two consecutive budgets by the PPP/C and there is no wage increase for our public servants. Our hardworking public servants are left to wonder on percentage of salary increase will they get in 2021 and if any, at all. However, there is indeed an allocation in the Budget for the increase in wages and salaries and there is nothing preventing the Hon. Minister from making this announcement in his closing speech. There is nothing preventing him to announce a retroactive increase in wages and salaries of 10% from January, 2020 and raising the income tax threshold. Once again, this will, in no doubt, bring smiles to the faces of our hardworking teachers, policemen, soldiers, nurses, doctors and other public service workers.

Our university students are wondering too; they are wondering when will this Government make good on its campaign promise of free education. Nothing has been said in this Budget about free education. Nothing has been planned for the implemental reduction of fees. Is this another broken promise by the Government, or is it a pink slip?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you will have to get five more minutes to conclude.

**Opposition Chief Whip [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, Hon. Member Mr. Jones. Mr. Rajkumar, you may conclude.

**Mr. Rajkumar:** Thank you very much.

This morning, we have heard of the impressive 5% reduction in tariffs to [*inaudible*] whereby giving households that consume an average of \$200 per month, a saving of \$100. More money in the pockets of their parents to buy sweets for them for the month. The small-man will now be able to purchase imported stones, locally produced prestressed concrete piles and locally fabricated mild steel beams for the construction of his home, free from value-added tax (VAT). Is this measure designed to assist the small man in constructing his home? How many ordinary persons use, and could afford, prestressed concrete piles and mild steel beams for the construction of their homes? What about our local materials, such as: stones, boards, nails, plywood, windows, and doors? These are the things that, we, the small men, use to build our houses. Should these not be zero-rated as well?

Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the arguments presented in support of *Budget 2021* and I have realised that this Budget of \$383.1 billion depends heavily on borrowing to execute the plans. While I support development in our country, I do not support development at the cost of borrowing and placing a burden on our citizens for generations to come.

I am not convinced that this Budget, in its entirety, is right for our people and I will not support its passage, in this present form.

Your Honour, before I take my seat, I wish to state that we, on this side of the House, are resolute in our stand against the claim of our Essequibo by Venezuela. Our message is Essequibo is ours; Essequibo is *we own*. We repeat the words of Mr. Dave Martin:

“We ain’t giving up no mountains

We ain't giving up no tree

We ain't giving up no river that belongs to we...”

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

2.20 p.m.

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

I now have the honour to call on the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, the Hon. Member, Mr. Charles Ramson. Hon. Minister, you may proceed.

**Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports [Mr. Ramson]:** Mr. Speaker, it is a very great pleasure to stand here before you, as an elected Member, and support the largest Budget ever presented in this country’s history. I am also very pleased to stand here as the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, to also say that this is the largest budget for the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports in this country’s history. I have to say that I am also pleased, as well, to have actually heard the voice of the Hon. Member from the other side, who spoke a moment ago. In the last Parliament, not one time, did I hear his voice.

I have listened to Members from the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), who were attempting to criticise this Budget and the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government. And I ask myself, who are these people, who have proven that they cannot even run a pigpen, but now are claiming that they can be a better Government. I have said to the Hon. Member, of the other side, to not get personal with me. I have said to all of them, to not get personal with me. All now, the pigs from the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) fund cannot be found. Where is the piggy, *Figgy*? Where is the piggy?

You just came out of power. You had your chance to run this country. You have spent \$1.4 trillion of taxpayers’ money. In 2015, when you came, you found Guyana with a surplus of \$10 billion in the central bank and you left it with an overdraft of \$92 billion. You had found \$20 billion in gold reserves and it has now decreased to \$500 million. The current account deficit was US\$1.8 billion when you left Office. All those moneys spent, and your completed marquee projects were an overpass, a roundabout and a \$1.6 billion Durban Park Development Project, of which \$600 million of that money cannot be found.

The APNU/AFC promised jobs. However, over 30,000 jobs were lost. The then President of the country, when asked about his job creation plan, he told the people of Guyana to go and sell cook-up rice, pepper sauce and plantain chips. The APNU/AFC promised that young people would have occupied positions in Government, but instead ended up with a Government of geriatrics. There are persons as Mr. James Bond, Mr. Trevor Williams, and Ms. Malika Ramsey, who, up to today, cannot find their voices; they cannot recover.

The APNU/AFC promised to reduce taxes; instead, taxes were raised on everything and even the small man got pressured. Value-added tax was placed on electricity, telephone and data. Even love became more expensive – *yuh can’t even get more love in the country*. Even donkey carts were not spared the wrath of the tax whip. Brigadier (Ret’d) David Granger himself, in 2015, promised free education. Instead, in the five years they were in Government, tuition fees were raised by 35% and put VAT on electricity. The President of the country, His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali said that there will be free university education by 2024. The APNU/AFC promised transparency and accountability but hid the US\$18 million signature bonus and lied about it. The APNU/AFC promised adherence to the rule of the law and...[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, saying things like “lied about it,” I think that the word ‘lied’ is the wrong word to use. The other issue is that you should be addressing the Chair.

**Mr. Ramson:** They ‘ducked’ it. How about that?

The APNU/AFC promised the adherence for the rule of law. However, the Constitution was breached, multiple times, by the invisible President. And it is not me who said so, it was the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) that said it. I have the extract and at the end of my speech, all of these documents will be laid over to the National Assembly.

In the case of the Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) – James Patterson – in the final sentence of the first paragraph, reference: [2019] CCJ 13(AJ) it was stated that in the ‘GECOM Chairman case’, the court conclude that the process that resulted in the unilateral appointment by the President, of a Chairman of GECOM, was flawed and in breach of the Constitution. It was for the first time, in the history of this country, that a court ruled that a sitting President breached our Constitution. And they then tried to insult the intelligence of the Guyanese people by telling us that 33 is not the majority of 65. The APNU/AFC embarrassed the country, while spending hundreds of millions of dollars to take the case to the CCJ.

An extract taken from the case had a caption which read, ‘What is the Majority Necessary for the Passage of a No Confidence Motion?’ One does not have to study law to appreciate that the word ‘majority’ means the greater of two parts.

The APNU/AFC told this country that it had changed its ways. It changed its name – first, from the People’s National Congress (PNC) to the People’s National Congress Reform – 1 Guyana (PNCR–1G) and then to the People’s National Congress Reform (PNCR). Up to now...[*Interruption*]

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



Standing Order 41 (1) states:

“...a Member shall confine his or her observations to the subject under discussion.”

We are speaking on the Budget.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, when you stand on a Point of Order, you have to wait to be acknowledged. You do not go off like a runaway train.

**Ms. Sarabo-Halley:** I am sorry, Sir. My apologies.

**Mr. Speaker:** You stood on Standing Order 40 (1). What is the Point of Order?

**Ms. Sarabo-Halley:** It is Standing Order 41 (1), which states:

“...a Member shall confine his or her observations to the subject under discussion.”

I do not think that is what the Hon. Member is speaking about.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I do not uphold that as a Point of Order. We will have to do some more lessons. Hon. Minister, please continue.

**Mr. Ramson:** Apparently, she was not listening when you ruled on that, Mr. Speaker.

The APNU/AFC, told this country that it had changed its ways – changed its clothes. It said that it did not want to rig the elections, but it tried to rig the elections in front of the entire world; and it took five months to give up power.

Recorded in the *Guinness World Records*, it gave Guyana the ignoble embarrassment of being recorded in the Guinness Book of World Records after refusing to give up power for five months. Brigadier (Ret’d) David Granger, I have to say, knew that he was planning on rigging the elections with his appointment of Justice Patterson. One can read the speech he made, which is recorded in the *Demerara Waves* on 5<sup>th</sup> November, 2017, titled:

“Gaining, retaining power “big questions” for PNCR -Granger.”

In his address at the 5th Biennial Conference of the PNCR’s North American Region (NAR), in Atlanta, Georgia:

““Whatever you will choose to discuss today and the weeks and months to come, I think there are several questions that you have to ask yourself as you look to the future. You have to ask yourself ‘how did the PNC gain office in 1964?’ Ask yourself ‘how did the PNC remain in office?’ and ‘what did it do during that period? Ask yourself ‘how the PNC regained office in 2015?’ and ask yourself ‘how would the PNC retain office after 2020?’””

I will place all of this before this Parliament because there must be a record kept by this honourable House.

Imagine being a leader of a country and seeing all the shenanigans going on with all the discord and disquiet happening in this country, at the Ashmins building. I was there; I was present. I saw when they shut down the building and removed the locks from the doors. All of that happened, and Brigadier (Ret’d) David Granger did not have a care in the world. He did go to find out what occurred.

Three months later, on 14<sup>th</sup> June, when he was doing an interview – it was the day after the Report of CARICOM was concluded, submitted and presented to this public – right in the State House, where he was asked the question, if he ever saw the Statements of Poll (SOP). It was three months later that the President of the country realised that there were problems in relation to the actual tabulation and calculation of the Statements of Poll. And it was three months later that he said that he had not seen them; all he saw was a spreadsheet and he believed that that spreadsheet was the accurate one.

Let me tell the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes, because she brought an issue about our constitutionality and why we are in power. I brought the Report of CARICOM and let me advise on some of the things it says because this is in its executive ...*[Interruption]*

**Ms. Sarabo-Halley:** Mr. Speaker ...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, please go ahead.

**Ms. Sarabo-Halley:** Thank you, Sir. Just for clarity sake, if you could help me here. I remember you said that matters that are *sub judice* should not be spoken about. As far as I know, we have two petitions that are actually in the court and should not be spoken about in the National Assembly.

**Mr. Ramson:** This is a public report. The contention is not based on the Report. I am reading a public report.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Minister, remember, as you promised, to lodge all those documents you are using.

**Mr. Ramson:** All of these documents I will be lodging.

The *Report of the CARICOM Observer Team for the Recount of the Guyana March 02, 2020* states:

“From the outset, the Team wishes to acknowledge that the exercise that we observed was not in fact a recount. It was an audit of the votes cast on March 02, 2020 and from the start it was conceived as an audit, notwithstanding the statements on a national recount. A recount of votes means exactly that, a counting of the ballots cast. In this case, the so-called recount extended to issues normally reserved for an audit of ballots cast in an election.”

It further states:

“...the Team did not witness anything which would render the recount and by extension the casting of the ballot on March 02, so grievously deficient procedurally or technically, (despite some irregularities), or sufficiently deficient to have thwarted the will of the people and consequently preventing the election results and its declaration by GECOM from reflecting the will of the voters. The actual count of the vote was indeed transparent.”

I have another part to mention here because they spoke about phantom voting. It states:

“The numerous requests for information on serial numbers were so bizarre, that on one observed occasion, an APNU/AFC agent was prepared to query serial numbers on the OLE in a Work Station where no one had voted. These challenges were often made on the grounds of:

- Death, and
- Migration.

Presumably therefore, the contention is that in the March 02, 2020 polls, the phenomenon of ghost voting occurred as well as voter impersonation and other forms of voter fraud.

The Team viewed much of the exercise as a fishing expedition...”

2.35 p.m.

In their conclusion, this is what they said:

“...the Team categorically rejects the concerted public efforts to discredit the 2020 poll up to the disastrous Region 4 tabulation. Despite our concerns, nothing that we witnessed warrants a challenge to the inescapable conclusion that the recount results are acceptable and should constitute the basis of the declaration of the results of the March 02, 2020 elections.”

This is the Report.

Do not open the doors if you do not know where the room would lead – do not open the doors. This is the executive summary from the CCJ. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Do you want to talk about the constitutionality of our positions?

The ruling of the CCJ stated that the application made, by Ms. Eslyn David, challenged the credibility of the count by GECOM, under Order No. 60. Ms. Eslyn David requested an interpretation of the phrase “more votes cast” in article 177 (2) (b) of the Constitution and she asked the court to restrain

the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) from complying with the GECOM Chairman’s direction without GECOM first determining the credibility of the elections, under Order No. 60 and Section 96 of the Representation of the People Act.

Here is what they concluded; they said that:

“Unless and until an election court decides otherwise, the votes already counted by the recount process as valid votes are incapable of being declared invalid by any person or authority, ...”

“By the unnecessary insertion, into Article 177 (2) (b), of the word “valid”, the Court of Appeal impliedly invited the CEO to engage, unilaterally, in a further and unlawful validation exercise trespassed on the exclusive jurisdiction of the High Court established by Article 163. It was inconsistent with the Constitutional framework for the CEO or GECOM to disenfranchise tens of thousands of electors in a seemingly nontransparent and arbitrary manner without the due processes established in Article 163 and the National Assembly (Validity of Elections) Act,”

You have asked us about our constitutionality, there is nothing that you could say that could determine constitutionality. You are not even wise enough to understand that there is a separation of powers. There are the lawmakers and there is the judiciary to interpret what the law should be; and that is what occurred.

You also promised to end corruption and the misleading mantra of boots, boats and bicycles which turned out to be bangles, bracelets, and bedsheets. The \$400 million drug bond scandal – BK Group of Companies’ best friend, Mr. Hardat Singh – Baishanlin International Forest Development Inc. (BIFDI), the jet trip, the land scandals and \$1 billion to States Assets Recovery Agency (SARA)... There are Members in this honourable House who, between the period of January 2020 to March 2020, deposited \$90 million in their bank accounts – in three months. They also transferred the sum of US\$400,000 to an account in Texas. Everybody was on some kind of hustle. There was the fuel smuggling; there was the gun licence– everybody was on some kind of hustle. The desperation to retain power, degenerated to campaigns at funerals, and then the Hon. Members of the (APNU/AFC) have the nerve to complain and allege about ‘dead voting’.

Imagine, taking 23 years to get back power and this is what you did with it.

For the first time in my life, I find myself agreeing with the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, when he said that it is not true to say that the APNU/AFC did nothing. It did do something; it did a lot of damage to this country; it did a lot of damage to the people of this country.

As I am on the subject, of the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, I heard him say that he disagrees with the cash injection to the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). For a man who has an affinity for brown rum, one would expect that he would want to keep the sugar estates open. So, you had your five years, now let the real people run its Government. *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Jones:** Mr. Speaker, my apologies, the Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, is trying to get your attention, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, do you want to get my attention?

**Mr. Ramjattan:** *[Inaudible]* the inuendo is quite clear that ‘Ramjattan is involved with brown rum’.

**Mr. Ramson:** *[Inaudible]*. Yes.

**Mr. Ramjattan:** What is that?

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

**Mr. Ramson:** When the hat fits, *yuh does draw the string* – that is what old people say.

You just had your five years. This is a new Government, and we are in Office. Let us run our programme; let the people of the country be the judge of our records as they were the judge of your records. Go and ask. Already, there are strong signs that there is economic recovery. Go and ask the retailers in this country what Christmas was like, they would tell you that even in a pandemic, that was the best Christmas that they have had in the last five years. Money was on the road.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson – ‘Mr. Bangles’ – said in an interview that this was going to be a very dark Christmas; that is what he said. But it turned out to be untrue. Get comfortable because it will be 30 years before you smell power again and mark my words on this.

We in the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, do not *gyaff*; in politics, this is not a *gyaffing* game. Right now, let me place on record, in 2015, we told you that we were coming back for power. We did so when you controlled the public service, the Government, the Executive, the police and the army. We did all of that and took power from you. Now, I am placing on record that we are coming for three more seats, and if you continue to behave this way, we are coming for five. I am placing it on the record, now.

This is a budget debate. It is supposed to be the examination of a macroeconomic health of the country. So far, the debate proposed by the Government is for the fiscal year. What is interesting is that the APNU/AFC’s economist is still Mr. Winston Jordan – the man who lost them the elections. The man who thought that the signature bonus was a gift. The man who went into South and said that he used to see jumbie

when he was a little boy. What we have coming from the other side is incoherent and contradictory arguments. One set is saying that these are APNU/AFC projects, but in the same breath, they are saying that they do not want to support the Budget. One set is saying that we should do more for COVID-19, while another set is saying that we are borrowing too much. If it is in a time of COVID-19, then where is the money coming from to do more for people who are affected by COVID-19?

There is no financial and economic analysis. What we have had from the APNU/AFC and their obedient lackey was an attempt at Race-Baiting Rhetoric which further sealed their faith as a group of people, who would become extinct like the dodo bird which they emulate.

Despite this inevitable self-destruction, the Parliament is a place where there is a record that is kept – there is a *Hansard*. **[An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*]** We are obligated to respond. They have said that they want to place on record, as we have done many times already... The public servants will get a bonus this year. It is almost never the case that a bonus is announced during the budget speech – never. The APNU/AFC has claimed that we are attacking the public service and, by extension, the Afro-Guyanese, assuming that the vast majority of public servants are Afro-Guyanese. This, in and of itself, requires further elucidation and history has a way of providing clarity.

What I have here is a photocopy of particular sections of the 1992 Budget presented by, none other than, Mr. Carl Greenidge. Mr. Carl Greenidge presented this Budget on 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1992. In this table, on page 93, there is a section in the table which has employment and labour. In 1985, the public service had 28,686 persons. By 1991, it went down to 18,361. The People’s National Congress (PNC) fired 10,000 public servants and it did not finish there. After Demerara Bauxite Company (DEMBA) was nationalised in 1971, the PNC fired... When one goes by Speightland and sees that rustic and rusty factory which was closed down and where 2,000 workers were fired... 40% of their workforce from DEMBA. And then you want to come and lecture us about your love for public servants.

Furthermore, you destroyed and pauperised the lives of fixed income workers with the economic mismanagement during that period – you pauperised them. When the exchange rate moved from 4–1 to 124–1, in just six years, you destroyed their purchasing powers and pauperised the public servants in this country.

The fact is, your argument is self-defeating. If the People’s Progressive Party/Civic inherited a public service where Afro-Guyanese dominated the public service in 1992, and when we left in 2015, it was still dominated by Afro-Guyanese, it then means that Afro- Guyanese were not targeted in the 23 years that we were in Office. There is no

question about our position on this; no one is expected to be targeted by us, except the people who would have done financial crimes and who are holding public offices. They have to be held accountable. When you are faced with these kinds of facts, you always return to the dark period in this country, ignoring that under your watch, there were not 400 persons who were murdered, but there were 700 persons who were murdered in the last five years. That is the record. According to the ‘security experts’, 700 murders occurred in the last five years.

2.50 p.m.

As it relates to debt, because I know there are a lot of people talking about debt, the Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, had said that this is the largest level of debt we have ever had. That is not true. In our country, in 1992, the economy was US\$300 million, and our debt was 700% of that. So, if your economy was this, the size of your debt was this. For the size of the debt, it is not the aggregate that matters, it is the relative position. It is the debt relative to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). **[An Hon. Member (Opposition): (Inaudible)]** No amount of shouting can change the facts. When one examines our deficit as a percentage of GDP, it is 8.7% of our GDP. Do not come and mislead people in this country about what our debt is and what we are being concerned about. We are in a time of crises too. There were a number of issues that occurred in the last five years.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you are going to be in a time of crisis if you do not get an extension.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes more to conclude his presentation.

*Question put and agreed to.*

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

**Mr. Ramson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In relation to our Ministry, I have set a mission to develop and showcase young Guyanese talent. The Ministry is aggressively advancing that mission.

When I came to the Ministry, it was not even a Ministry. The national voice in Government for culture, youth and sport was kicked into a department within the Ministry. It lacked leadership in a major way; it had no vision, no passion, no energy and the organisational structure was weak. Imagine, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, when I got there, had 6,000 likes on Facebook. Today, it has over 22,000 likes

on Facebook and 25,000 followers. We will be launching our website in another few weeks as it is in the final stages.

I am not surprised that the Ministry was in this state because it took its cue from its absent President. He was a sailor. Five years to complete the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS), and it cost this country US\$2 million or \$400 million. Ask any of them what it means. None of them could tell you what the Green State Development Strategy was. None of them would be able to tell you that it would have cost this country over a trillion dollars to implement.

What is important to note is that, even in a pandemic, we are an events-driven Ministry. We have already done more in six months than what the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change’s (APNU/AFC’s) three Ministers have done in the last five years. We have tapped into an untapped resource we have found that the country wants to be able to build with this Government.

I have personally visited and assessed community grounds and have started doing work with those grounds in the following places: Burnham Park, New Amsterdam; the Albion Sports Complex; the Port Mourant Community Ground; the Chesney Ballfield; Canefield; the Agricola Community Centre Ground; the Golden Fleece Ground; the Reliance Ground; the Lima Centre Ground; the Anna Regina Community Ground; the Affiance Ground; the Pomona Community Ground; Aurora; Rosehall, Canje; the Jai Hind Ground; Hampshire; Crabwood Creek; Line Path; Number 70; Whim; the Buxton Community Centre Ground; the Better Hope Community Centre Ground; the La Bonne Intention (LBI) Community Centre Ground; Enterprise; Enmore; Linden; Tuschen; Met-en-Meerzorg; Zeeburg; Cornelia Ida (CI); Zeelugt; Crane; Goed Fortuin; Kara Kara; Speightland Community Ground; De Hoop; Fairfield; Mahaica, Branch Road; the Dundee School; the Bush Lot Ground; Bath Settlement; the D’Edward Ground; Blairmont; Number Three; Tiger Bay; The Georgetown Cricket Club (GCC); the Malteenoes Sports Club, the Everest Cricket Club, and the Demerara Cricket Club (DCC). And we have not even stepped on the gas as yet. The majority of these grounds were in terrible shape. There was a ground that we found in Zambia that I took the media to. Twenty million dollars was spent and, up to this day, the ground cannot be used. Many of these grounds received assistance already through our ground enhancement programme. We have already started to distribute sports gear so that we can get young people to start playing sports again. When I came into the Ministry, there was an entire section of sports gear that was dry rotted.

I heard the Hon. Member speak about the National Sports Commission (NSC). The National Sports Commission was appointed in 2017. In two years, it held three meetings. It never had audited statements and those statements were never laid in this Parliament, as they are required by the Act. They never submitted reports to the previous Minister. The entire place was in a disaster, but, immediately after here, as we get out of this Budget Debate, the Ministry will be appointing the National Sports Commission. We will be making a new appointment to the Director of Sport. An investigation will be launched too because I have seen a number of untoward things occurring there.

I have to mention The Track – the only project that was done in the last Administration. It started in 2018 and they said that it would have been completed in 2019, then they went back and said that it would have been completed in 2020. It is now 2021, and it is still not completed. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) will finish your job.

I have to show this country what had occurred during that period of time. The previous Administration requested that they needed a change of colour from The Track.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you will have to conclude.

**Mr. Ramson:** They changed the colour of The Track, and in order to change the colour of The Track it would have costed this country almost \$30 million. Do you know what colour they wanted to change the track to? Green and yellow. The APNU/AFC Government needs to apologise to this country for attempting to brainwash it by painting everything green and yellow. I will take the additional time outside of this engagement to explain our entire programme during our Budget Estimates because we have run out of time. It is very important that we respond to a number of things the Hon. Members have said. I am very pleased to support the largest Budget in Guyana’s history and the largest allocation for the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports. Hon. Member, Mr. Vincent Henry, you may proceed with your contribution. The time is running.

**Mr. Henry:** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Guyana Action Party (GAP) – a Member of the APNU/AFC Coalition – the Indigenous peoples of Guyana and the people of Region 9, I bring greetings to this honourable House. As an Indigenous representative of the people, I wish to express my dismay that I and other representatives were denied our constitutional

right of freedom of movement in and out of the Parliament on 11<sup>th</sup> February.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, again, I dealt with that. If you persist, I will have to get you to apologise.

**Mr. Henry:** Mr. Speaker, I do withdraw. I have made my point.

**Mr. Speaker:** Is that how you make your point?

**Mr. Henry:** I do apologise.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you.

**Mr. Henry:** Mr. Speaker, we listened to a rambling presentation by the Hon. Charles Ramson when he spoke about almost everything else but his Ministry’s programmes and policies. We learnt from him that his achievements were something to do with sports grounds. He may best be described as the Hon. ‘Sports Grounds Minister’.

We, the Indigenous people of Guyana, stand firmly with all Guyanese in saying to Venezuela and the world that Essequibo is ours. It is not for sale nor is it for anyone to use as a bargaining chip for personal political power. We take this opportunity to thank former President Granger for his astute leadership in using various acceptable strategies to counteract this unjust threat by Venezuela. We ask that the current PPP/C Government learn from him and the APNU/AFC and learn from him and work towards safeguarding Guyana. The people of Region 9 are listening, and they would like to know that they are safe. So, learn from the APNU/AFC.

As a recognition of the first peoples, who have settled and remained in Guyana, I ask that we remember the contributions made by the Hon. Stephen Campbell, the first Indigenous person who became a parliamentarian. We request that the day he entered Parliament, on 10<sup>th</sup> September, be declared a national holiday. Why is the Government’s side not clapping to that? The Indigenous people of Region 9 are listening and have heard that you have not clapped on their behalf. Mr. Speaker, you may guide me.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I could not have clapped.

**Mr. Henry:** My apologies again, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** If you speak to me, we can get it right.

**Mr. Henry:** Mr. Speaker, again, you may guide me. We further demand that the foreboding cloud of injustice be blown away and allow a fitting closure and justice for the

Henry and Singh boys’ murder. The PPP/C, as a political party, is well known for making promises that it has no intention of honouring. In 2011, they promised the Indigenous Toshos attending the National Toshos Council’s (NTC’s) Conference that it would institute learning channels in every Indigenous community. To date, the PPP/C has not fulfilled its promise. It also promised the Indigenous communities that they would have internet access in all communities by 2013. After squandering over \$1 billion on a fibre optic project, the much-touted dream of lightning speed internet to Region 9 disintegrated into a lightning speed *jumbie* project.

3.05 p.m.

The People’s Progressive Party/Civic promised Guyanese \$50,000 per child. They now plan to give a measly \$15,000. The PPP/C promised the pensioners of Guyana \$40,000 per month, but again never delivered. They have instead used subterfuge to fool the seniors of Guyana who were expecting \$5,000 increase in 2020, and another \$5,000 in 2021. The PPP/C promised the Toshos an increase in their stipends. They also promised to pay the village councillors monthly stipends. According to the Wapishanas of the South Rupununi, the PPP/C is a *coride* Government. They are *mashrun coride*. It is a shame to see the depths that the PPP/C would go to deceive the Indigenous peoples. According to a lady in Hiawa, Central Rupununi, the acronym PPP continues to be proven to stand for ‘punishing poor people’.

The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs continues to be an anti-Indigenous organisation. Starting with the name Amerindian, that is made up of two parts, namely, ‘Amer’ from the name Amerigo Vespucci, a conquistador who raped, killed and enslaved our ancestors and the other part ‘Indian’, which is a misnomer coined by Columbus who got lost and mistakenly took our ancestors to be Indians in India. No right-thinking Indigenous person or persons would allow themselves to be associated with the name Amerindian. Perhaps only the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs who stubbornly keeps doing this.

In an effort to minimise the massive developments that took place in the hinterland, in just a few years under the APNU/AFC, the PPP/C has made many steps backwards. Instead of building on the solid foundation instituted and known as the Hinterland Employment Youth Service (HEYs) programme, that has proven to be sustainable and of great benefits to our hinterland youths, the obtuse PPP/C has started the ill-conceived Community Support Officers (CSO) programme that has only one objective and that is to buy Indigenous votes. This CSO programme seems to be locked in stillbirth. Only yesterday a senior villager called me to express dissatisfaction with the way the CSO programme is being managed in her community. The hinterland youths are clamouring for a return of the HEYs programme that has training and a business development component. However,

we cannot expect better from an obtuse Ministry of Amerindian Affairs.

At one meeting, the current Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs was asked by an Indigenous young lady to include a training component in the CSO programme. Her answer was that, if the youth was not satisfied with the CSO programme then she should leave it. What a shame. Quite recently, a youth in Kato asked a question relating to land titling and demarcations in Indigenous communities, only to be reprimanded and told that he was too young to understand issues of development. One continues to ask the question: Where did the PPP/C find such an honourable official? One can safely conclude that the PPP/C is certainly not supportive of our hinterland youth.

I have heard misinformation from the other side related to the termination of the CSO programme in March, 2015. Please allow me to give the facts on this issue. Indeed, the cheques to pay the CSOs were cancelled in that same March, 2015. Indeed, there was a Cabinet paper directing that the CSO programme be terminated or squashed, or whatever word you want to use. However, the Cabinet that instructed the then the Permanent Secretary (PS) acting to end the CSO programme, was the PPP/C’s Cabinet. It was the PPP/C that fired the CSOs. I will repeat because I want Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 to hear that it was the PPP/C that fired the CSOs, and now they come to us as sanctimonious... I would not call the other word. However, it was the Coalition that found the moneys to pay the CSOs for March, 2015 and invited those CSOs to join the new and far better HEYs programme.

However, it is time for the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs to also target the training of qualified Indigenous youths to get training and jobs in the oil and gas industry. It is time to activate the green centre or the first technical institute in the hinterland that is based at the Bina Hill institute. Further, a committee was assigned to conduct an investigation into an alleged misconduct by the Village Council of Campbelltown, whose Toshao happened to be a female member of the National Toshos Council, and who is well-known for speaking her mind on issues. The fairness of this Committee immediately came into question because the Chairman of the Committee who was appointed by the Minister, happened to be a PPP/C activist. As expected, the events culminated with the Toshao being fired. Shame! How do you treat our Indigenous women leaders like that? I have also been informed that PPP/C activists had been bullying independent thinking contenders for Toshao-ship in many Indigenous communities. I demand that the Indigenous peoples be allowed to elect leaders of their own choice. Further, there must be non-interference in the National Toshos Council’s elections.

Since this installed PPP/C became the Government of Guyana, we have seen meritocracy thrown out the window. Many qualified and conscientious workers have been fired

because they are perceived to be supporters of the APNU/AFC. In Region 9, most of the Community Development Officers (CDO) and Welfare Officers were fired. My poor Amerindian brothers and sisters.

As human beings, we each drink and breathe to survive. It is sad to witness the level that the PPP/C has descended. They have sought to paint a picture that only they are deserving of having meals at the National Assembly. It is not only the meals in the National Assembly that the PPP/C wants for themselves, it is becoming glaring that the PPP/C feels that only they should enjoy the national patrimony, inclusive of jobs, contracts and services. The PPP/C preaches ‘one Guyana’ but what they really mean is ‘one Guyana’ only for the PPP/C.

During the APNU/AFC’s recent period in Government, there have been monumental developments benefitting all Guyanese, including the people of the hinterland. Establishment of townships in key hinterland regional capitals have jump started developments benefiting the local population. Lethem is an example. For 23 years under the PPP/C, the people of Lethem inhaled red dust in the heart of the town. It was the Coalition that brought relief to the residents by building a bitumen road that experts say would last a lifetime. Instead of the PPP/C’s wooden bridges, the Coalition constructed concrete bridges at Manari and other at strategic areas. Potable water supply systems have been established in villages in Region 9, whether or not the villages voted for APNU/AFC. Local technicians were trained and paid to ensure that the systems are functional. These technicians enjoy a salary of over \$70,000 per month, and it did not matter whom they voted for. What mattered was that they were capable and had the will to work for the development of their communities. Now, we are seeing something totally different happening in this wonderful country of Guyana. Oh dear.

General developments – please allow me to summarise some of the developments that have made positive impacts on the lives of the people of the hinterland. We have radio stations in strategic areas, including Orealla, Mabaruma, Lethem and Aishalton. Right now, I have received messages *via* Wi-Fi (Wireless Fidelity) from persons across the region, who are listening to this presentation here. I hail you the people of Region 9, and I can tell you that the Wi-Fi you have there was first conceptualised and granted under the APNU/AFC Government.

There was an increase in old age pension from \$13,000 to \$25,500; an increase in public servant’s salaries; and training of over 2,000 hinterland youths in many life skills, including leadership tourism, entrepreneurship, and facilitating our young people in their business endeavours.

The APNU/AFC also achieved massive developments in Region 9 *via* the Sustainable Livelihood and

Entrepreneurship Development (SLED) programme. These include two tourist guest houses at...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, providing the extension, you can continue.

**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, Hon. Member Mr. Jones. Hon. Member Mr. Henry, you may continue to conclude.

**Mr. Henry:** Please for the one minute when you stopped me, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** I actually did add a minute on to your original time.

**Mr. Henry:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The APNU/AFC also achieved massive developments in Region 9 *via* the SLED programme. These included two tourist guest houses in Toca; a canter, a water supply system and a coral in Kaicumbay; a modern tourist guest house in Quarrie; a training centre in Hiowa; and other projects in Shulinab, Potarinau, Sawariwau, Karaudarnau, Maruranau, Parishara, and Kotoewau amounting to nearly \$175 million. Please allow me to underline, that for these villages to get the projects, they had to apply to the Ministry of Social Protection and, after approval, an engineer visited the region and accessed the cost of the various projects, while helping to improve the plans. This was followed by the awarding of the contracts by the Regional Tender Board before implementation commenced.

We heard the Hon. Dharamlall accusing me of somehow mismanaging this project. At no time was I the Project Manager nor was I a member of the evaluation board for the granting of the project approvals. I never in charge of the implementation of the project. My interventions, as a CDO, were to assist the various beneficiaries whenever they needed assistance. Mr. Speaker, please allow me to thank the Hon. Dharamlall for making me to be \$155 million richer. I have begun to wonder why he is preoccupied in trying to make the nation see me as a person like himself. I also wonder if this is happening because villages in Region 9 are astonished at his extracurricular activities whenever he goes to Region 9. Or is it because of the Guyanese folks saying that *Thief man never like see next man walk with bag*. Mr. Speaker...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you might be imputing there, so be careful of how you proceed along that line.

**Mr. Henry:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but the Hon. Member did not impute when he accused me wrongfully before.

I have noticed a big fanfare to distribute COVID-19 grants to villages. Information coming from the region is that the grants were not allocated fairly. Two villages that voted

overwhelmingly for the APNU/AFC were granted smaller budgets than lesser populated villages that voted for the PPP/C. The one-off \$25,000 cash grants given to households cannot be a solution to counteracting the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The people of Guyana deserve better, and the people of the hinterland deserve better. Currently, there is a massive outbreak of COVID-19 in Roraima, Brazil. I want to propose that, in the future, we do like what is happening around the world, and give proper help to the communities, at least \$25,000 a month until the pandemic subsides.

Recently, there was a flurry of activities by the Ministry of Natural Resources to facilitate access to the Marudi Mountains in the South Rupununi by a Member of the PPP/C cabal who sought to monopolise the exploitation of gold in that location. It must be noted that this activity would have been done without the involvement of the small miners, and actually being beneficial to them, who are included by the Amerindians of South Rupununi.

3.20 p.m.

Luckily for the small miners, the South Rupununi District Council, the only legal district council in Guyana made possible by the APNU/AFC and the Rupununi Miners Association, stood its ground and fought tooth and nail for the small and the Indigenous miners. However, the miners are asking that we bring back the mediation agreement that was previously made, the one that they themselves are calling the Raphael Trotman’s Mediation Agreement. This is because that is one that can settle the complex Marudi Mountains mining issues, while respecting the Indigenous peoples and their social and environmental issues.

On examining a study done by Carlos Camacho Hassar, December, 2016, page 22 and titled: *Mid -term Evaluation of the Amerindian Land Titling Project in Guyana*, I saw the following figures related to our land titling in Guyana. Between 1974 and 2013, some 11,992.33 square miles of lands were titled. Of these, 4,270.63 square miles were granted by the PPP/C and 7721.7 were granted by the People’s National Congress Reform (PNCR). From these figures one can see that the PNC cared more for us, the Indigenous peoples, than the PPP/C.

Since then, APNU/AFC took the process forward and granted land titles to Kangaruma, Tasserene, Yupukari, St Monica/Mainstay, and Whyaka.

It is unfortunate that, the PPP/C who had 23 years to settle all our land issues and grant all the Indigenous communities land titles had no care in the world to give us what is rightfully ours. It must be noted...

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

**Mr. Henry:** Pardon me.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you need to conclude.

**Mr. Henry:** In conclusion, our public servants, who serve us daily, were not even mentioned in the Budget. I want to repeat that our public servants, who serve us daily, were never mentioned in in the Budget.

I want to say that the APNU/AFC is coming back. The people will bring us back. They will bring us back because what we have done for them in just a matter of three and a half years, is more than what the PPP/C did in 23 years. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

**Minister of Amerindian Affairs [Ms. Campbell-Sukhai]:** Mr. Speaker, as I stand before you today to make my contribution to the Budget debate, firstly, let me congratulate the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh and his team for the preparatory work which produced the Budget speech and the documents relating to the expenditures. The Budget theme: *A Pathway to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience* adequately reflects Guyana’s story, the legacy inherited from the APNU/AFC Government, after just five years, and the roadmap to be followed by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government to right the wrongs and to place our country and its economy on a road to progress and prosperity for all of the people of Guyana, for ‘one Guyana’.

The wrongs committed by the APNU/AFC Government will be corrected by the PPP/C Government. We will address this in the recovery targets. The PPP/C Government inherited what can best be described as a disastrous situation, laced with increased corruption, discrimination, nepotism, neglect of the entire population, failure to deliver on their manifesto promises, failure to execute their 100-day campaign plans and the so call 10-point strategic plan for hinterland development.

More unashamedly, the attempt to steal the March 2020 Elections, plunging Guyana into five months of threat to derail democracy. There were the numerous breaches of the Constitution, after the no-confidence-motion and after the elections which the PPP/C won fair and square.

The faith was demonstrated by the people of Guyana, our country, and the leadership of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, with the support from the smaller political parties, and a significant block of the international community, including a core of young Guyanese men and women who lent full support to avoid the theft of the 2<sup>nd</sup> March Elections by the APNU/AFC Coalition politicians, leaders and activists. Could this be the moral high ground they subscribed to themselves, while pretending to be the paragon of virtue and lecturing in this House about constitutionality? It took the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) to correct them, to remind them and to bring home to them that they were in full breach of their own Constitution, the *Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana*?



Many of them now occupy the Opposition seats in this honourable House, and what is funny is that they are so bold faced. They continue to be oblivious of the fact that no one takes them seriously as they are seen as destabilizers to democracy, to development, and to the people of this nation.

The majority of the electorate has rejected the APNU/AFC in the last elections. Despite this, their agents continue to peddle the outdated trick and argument. They continue to use hate and racial overtones, sowing discord, even in this honourable House and among the people of our nation, as every APNU/AFC Member of Parliament (MP) has presented hate and racially laced speeches to this House. This is shameful of those who claim to be representing, as they say, close to 50% of the electorate. I now see why the electorate and the Guyanese nation will never take this group, this bunch, this team of APNU/AFC politicians, who sits in this honourable House, seriously.

I want to go to former President Granger’s strategic plan for hinterland development. This is because, in this House, over the last four days, we have heard how much the APNU/AFC Government has done for the people of this country in the strategic plan he outlined for hinterland development, I want to bring home to them that the APNU/AFC led Granger Administration was a complete failure when it came to hinterland development.

The APNU/AFC legacy of non-performance in the sector of Amerindian development is well known across this country and not only in the hinterland. The former APNU/AFC Coalition President... Each year, since 2006-2019, the only public forum where one would sight the former President was at the NTC Conference where he regaled Amerindian leaders with a fantasy 10-point strategic plan for hinterland development and the lofty village improvement plans which have never materialised and were never funded over the last five years. Yet, in this House, today, yesterday and two days prior, I keep hearing about the Very Important Persons (VIPs). Can anyone here point us to any project or village improvement project, over the last five years, which was funded by the APNU/AFC Government? There will be none because the only funding the APNU/AFC Administration provided to the Amerindian villages was the Presidential Grant Fund which was established by the PPP/C Government, under the leadership of the now Vice-President, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo.

In that five years, they did not even take the time to increase the presidential grant. In fact, they added conditions and requirements for accessing the presidential grant so that only a mere 40% of the communities and villages across the hinterland were able to access those funds, to stimulate some level of economic activities in those villages. That is a completely shameful act.

Today, one of the first things that we have done was to encourage the village councils to collaborate with their residents and villagers, to come up with the proposals to access the Presidential Grant Fund without conditions and requirements. I can stand here today and say that, in the last three months, almost all of the villages in the hinterland, 213 Amerindian villages, have accessed the Presidential Grant Fund. In this 2021 Budget, we have \$300 million where another 220 Amerindian villages, settlements and satellites will receive those grants to stimulate their economy.

To complement the Presidential Grant Fund, in the recent period, we have provided \$1.73 billion to support Amerindian communities, villages and satellites to withstand and mitigate the harmful and negative impact from the pandemic, which this country is suffering from. I repeat, \$1.73 billion, something which the APNU/AFC Government failed to provide to stimulate the village economy, to create jobs, to provide investment funds for women, youths and the village councils, to ensure that they too benefit from resources and, also, from this country. It is such a shame.

It is a shameful act when members of this House, from the opposite side, the APNU/AFC side, could stand in this House and say to us that they have travelled the length and breadth of this country, in the hinterland. That they have travelled so much, but they have travelled and wasted \$1.6 billion in finances and they did nothing. What did you travel for? Was it for vacation, site seeing, personal family affairs or tourism? They need to answer to this House because, every single village that one goes to, one of the most complaints one gets is that, within the last five years, they have not seen any Minister coming to many communities in the villages. It was only in March or close to March, the first three months of 2020, that we have seen Ministers fanning out to the hinterland. We have had Ministers going to Kato, Ministers going to Paramakatoi, and the results of the elections were glaring.

3.35 p.m.

I do not know if they read or understood the results, but what they took to the people during the last leg of their last few months in Office were cheap watches, sandals, cheap cologne, umbrellas and jerseys. Amerindians are sensible Guyanese. Amerindians were educated for 23 years under our Government and they could judge, and they have judged you well.

That is why for those electorate who voted in Region 9...it became so hurtful to the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) that they grieved the loss in Regions 1, 9 and in many of the communities which they neglected. Therefore, the fallacy, the dream world and the fantasy world in which the Members of Parliament (MPs) of APNU/AFC, especially the Amerindian Members of Parliament, are living...They are living in a fantasy world.

They are fooling themselves. They cannot convince and influence the Amerindian population today. Therefore, they have spoken with their votes.

Anyone who attempts to heckle what I have just said...They have lost in their own villages. They have lost many of the villages in the regions they come from, including Region 9. The Member of Parliament who just spoke before me lost that region because they neglected the people. They refused to listen to the people. They refused to deliver developmental services and goods to the people and so the people voted against them.

I want to take some time to respond to the Community Support Officers (CSOs) issue. In the budget debates in 2015 and 2020, this matter was put to rest. I stood here, at that time, and read the letter, which is still filed in the Ministry, in which the Hon. Member, who is a Minister today, had a Cabinet document which said that we should go ahead and pay. The Hon. Minister, when he was a Permanent Secretary (PS), wrote that the payment would be made. What we saw was that the incoming Government refused to honour the Cabinet Decision, refused to honour the cheque and refused to renew the cycle of CSOs to the programme.

They spoke about the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) programme. They claimed that 2,500 businesses and enterprises have been created. It is documented as such, but when one goes to the communities, one cannot even find more than one or one finds zero. There is nothing. I will follow the footsteps of the Hon. Member, who said that there is nothing and he spelt the word

N-O-T-H-I-N-G. There was no programme. How many businesses and enterprises exist in Kako? How many in Waramadong? How many in Warwatta? How many at Kato? How many at Kaibarupai? How many in Tuzeneng? How many in Shulinab? They can take their time in Opposition now and go with lenses or microscopes to examine where those phantom enterprises and businesses exist. That is the legacy of HEYS.

They claimed that we have not renewed the HEYS Programme. There is also correspondence from the then Minister, Mr. Sydney Allicock, who no longer sits in this House. He wrote to the then Minister of Finance, in 2019, and stated that there was no more money to address the HEYS programme, he had to disconnect all the staff who were in the region and in the entire programme and he was going to keep four staff to ensure that they ‘tied up’ the documentation for that programme. That is exactly what occurred. They have all manner of data in the report, but it was non-existent in the field. That is the legacy.

I heard the Hon. Members talking here about \$10,000 for the children and that the PPP/C Government promised \$50,000 in 2020. I want to recall and remind this House that it was the APNU/AFC Government that removed the \$10,000 ‘because

we care’ cash grant from the children. It is the PPP/C Government, which is back in Office, that will restart the programme with \$15,000 per child. For the want of understanding of our commitment and promises to the children of this nation, before the end of our term, every child will receive \$50,000.

The school uniform programme – I am speaking about these because these are programmes and measures that directly impact the children of the hinterland. When we left Office, it was \$2,400 to provide one school uniform per child for the hinterland. The previous Government found no interest in increasing it. It was the PPP/C Government, when we came back in Office, that increased it to \$4,000 per child in the emergency budget. We have delivered already. Within the first three months of being in Office, we delivered to every hinterland student \$4,000 for school uniform assistance.

I now turn to the CSO programme. We have stood true to our word to the youths of this country. We reinstated, as soon as we came into Office, the CSO programme. Someone here articulated how grateful the communities are to have back the CSO programme.

They talked about training for the young people. I want to say that the training, in the first component, when we were in Office between 2013 to 2015, was in the concept stage. It was disbanded by the APNU/AFC Government. In this year, the training component of the CSO programme has been budgeted. Some \$820 million is going towards building capacity and empowering Amerindian youths under the CSO programme. That is what is called interest in youths. That is what is called delivering on our commitment to young people. Look around our Parliament and examine our Cabinet. Some 99% of our Members are young and youthful Guyanese.

Getting back, again, to the Granger-led Administration’s Strategic Plans for Hinterland Development, one of it was the Hinterland Energy Development Programme. This is a failure. Go around the communities and the villages. There is no Hinterland Energy Development Programme. What one would find are a few scattered incomplete installations of stand-alone solar units. If one goes to St. Monica, the battery panel is there and the solar panels are scattered in different buildings. If one goes to Kabakaburi, it is the same thing there. If one goes to Kako, it is the same thing. If one goes to Monkey Mountain, it is the same thing. One would see all of these panels piled up in buildings, incomplete and uninstalled.

They even announced in this House, in 2015, that they had established a solar farm in Maicobie. It is in the records; it is in the *Hansard*. I took the time, like the Hon. Member, Ms. Pearson-Fredericks. We went to Maicobie looking for solar farms. What did we find? Nothing. It is the same story, as

with the Smart classrooms, as we have just heard. There was nothing. N-O-T-H-I-N-G.

I recall that 6,000 panels were procured under the PPP/C Government. When we left Office, they were misdirected to State House and to the Ministry of the Presidency, instead of to the Amerindian communities, to the hinterland communities and to the remote riverain communities. That was the purpose for acquiring 6,000 additional solar panels. They were to be given to those who needed them. Instead, they took them all for themselves.

I want to announce here, today, that our Government, in this year, will be delivering 35,000 household solar units across the hinterland and to remote communities. Before the end of the year, we will deliver on this. That is what is called delivering on your commitments to the people. It is a manifesto promise that we will enhance and increase opportunities for Amerindians and hinterland residents to receive solar power in their homes.

I also want to talk about the Hinterland and Indigenous People Land Commission, another strategic plan by the APNU/AFC Granger-led Administration. It was a total failure to the extent that even the Amerindian groups and institutions, including the National Tshaos Council (NTC), objected to it. This was because the objective of that Commission was to review and to revise lands provided to Amerindians under the PPP/C Government. It was a callous attempt to take away lands from Amerindians. We have seen the results. Because they did not get their way, the moneys that were left to address land titling and demarcation, US\$10.7 million, was only spent on salaries, daily subsistence and allowances for a team that knew not how to work. They put the project on pause. I want to say to this House that, despite them having spent US\$3 million and more on salaries, allowances and subsistence, we will take the remaining US\$6 million and address the Amerindian Land Titling Project once again. We have one year to complete the targeted number of titling and demarcation, something which was not done in five years by the APNU/AFC. I would like the geographical MP for Region 9, on the APNU/AFC side, to take that back to the people. Let them listen now.

I want to talk about some other matters as they relate to Indigenous development. This year, we will be training CSOs. I want to lay this in the records. One hundred and seventy-four young CSOs will be trained in computer literacy. We have already completed training of 57 in the first three months of our Government. We will train 220 young male and female CSOs in the installation of solar panels and in maintenance of other infrastructure in their communities.

3.50 p.m.

We will train 220 drivers because our Government has been the forerunner in revolutionising transport systems in the hinterland. During the last five years, the modes of transport

– the tractors and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) – were left without maintenance. All the ATVs in Amerindian villages in Region 8 were down by 2017 and 2018. When they approached the Ministry of Indigenous Peoples’ Affairs (MoIPA) for support – they even raised it at the last three NTC conferences held under the MoIPA – and asked the then Government to help them get those vehicles back on track, do you know what the Government said? It said it was not going to do it. It saddened us to see the Toshao of Cheong Mouth walking to Regional Democratic Council (RDC) meetings under the APNU/AFC’s tenure, taking six hours to get from Cheong Mouth to Kato. I want to tell you here, today, that we are going to replenish ATVs in Region 8 and we are going to assist the region in repairing all those that are down, so they can have at least one single mode of transportation to assist them in administering their village.

The Hon. Member on the other side, in the APNU/AFC, can do well to begin to conduct herself, do the people’s job and go out there and represent the people, and not to take sweets and throw them in the air, when she visits her community, and ask them to catch. One resident had to, as they say in Creolese, *ups* the Opposition Member of Parliament and say our children are not dogs and so she should not throw the sweets in the air; she should put them in a line and give them the sweets in their hands. We have the video. What a shame. It is not a joke; it is an *eye pass* to the Indigenous children of our country.

They speak of information and communications technology (ICT) hubs and how much they have done for the hinterland in respect of the ICT programme. If the work was done successfully as they claimed, village children would have been logged into the Guyana Learning Channel Trust today. When they *lashed their chests* in 2015 and said... one Minister practically got up in the House and said when they arrived in Yupukari, they took out their phones under a mango tree and were able to connect to the internet. They downloaded *Animal Kingdom*– some fancy thing– and all the children gathered. We would like to see all the children gathered around an internet hub and logged into the Guyana Learning Channel Trust.

Let me tell you what this Government, the PPP/C Government, will do.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, before you can tell me, you have to get an extension.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

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

**Ms. Campbell-Sukhai:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic will restart the ICT programme and we will, in two years, install 200 systems for Amerindian and hinterland communities. We are going to deliver. In fact, in the last three months, we have already transported more than 10 batches of equipment for installation in Region 9. It is a sad time when a Government can waste taxpayers’ money. Some 100 ICT hub facilities were constructed and furnished, and they abandoned them.

Let us talk about health care services and entitlement. The other side had geriatric Members of Parliament and Cabinet. They spent millions, going into billions, on removing hearts, looking after kneecaps, taking out stones and going all over Ireland to do exactly what they are accusing us of doing. Let us get it straight. They had to lift an Hon. Member and bring them into the Parliament. When you yourself were being serviced...the Hon. Member was spending taxpayers’ money to correct the problem she had. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** (*Inaudible*)] It is nice to get personal with us on this side, but it is never nice to get personal when we get personal with those on the other side.

The Hon. Member spoke about the University of Guyana’s GREEN Institute. Millions were spent on the GREEN Institute. It was commissioned and boasted about in the newspaper. On investigation this year, the GREEN Institute is but a shell; there is nothing there. How can this Government start? We have to now examine that project and make provision for it for the future. Shameful! They went there bubbling with ribbons and balloons and cutting, but there is nothing there. It is a bare shell. Shame on you!

The Hinterland Poverty Reduction Programme was another Granger-led Administration promise to the hinterland. They spoke about poverty reduction. Under the APNU/AFC Government, there was no support for women and enterprise; there was none whatsoever in the hinterland. Tell me one project in the hinterland which the APNU/AFC Government did for women. What they did was list and record the PPP/Civic Government’s projects that existed there when they took Office.

Let us talk about how they treated our youths, our women and the hinterland. They put value-added tax (VAT) on airfare and freight. Then, in 2015, as an election gimmick, they said, in the Parliament, that they were going to remove it, but they never removed it. It is this Government that has made amends to the people of the hinterland and we have removed that. That is what we call our commitment to the people. We are delivering on every promise and commitment to the nation.

As we speak about support for hinterland and riverain communities, this year, we have budgeted \$42 million in outboard boats and engines – something unheard of under the APNU/AFC. We have budgeted for agricultural support. We will deliver, very shortly, 112 tractors to Amerindian

communities. In the 2021 Budget, we have made provision to procure 112 ploughs and harrows to enhance the agricultural production of hinterland and Amerindian communities. The tractors will support transportation services. It will enhance the forestry sector and, of course, the agricultural sector. That is a commitment we have made once more. Every single village one goes...

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

**Ms. Campbell-Sukhai:** ...to, the farmers are asking for chemicals to fight acoushi ants. In the last five years, they have not delivered. [**Ms. Hastings-Williams:** Do not tell lies.] Hon. Member Dawn Hastings-Williams will remember that the PPP/Civic led spraying teams to control acoushi ants in Region 7. We provided Fastac and acoushi ants bait across Regions 1, 7, 9 and 10, *et cetera*. They have done nothing in the last five years to enhance food security, livelihood options and economic activities in the hinterland.

In fact, look at their record – underperformance, rigging...

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

**Ms. Campbell-Sukhai:** Bullying, *et cetera*. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That is why we have seen that they will remain on the opposite side for a long time.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, Mr. Dineshwar Jaiprashad, you may proceed with your presentation.

**Mr. Jaiprashad:** It is an honour and a privilege for me to represent the APNU/AFC in this honourable House. Before I proceed with my presentation, I wish to rebuke some of the points that were made by the Hon. Minister, Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai.

I wish to say that, probably, the Hon. Minister was not around for the past five years and that is why she did not note and comprehend the various activities that were done in all the various Amerindian communities across the country. I wish to bring to the attention of the Hon. Minister that, in Region 6, my brothers and sisters in Orealla were able to connect with the world *via* the internet. This was a programme that was done by the APNU/AFC. I wish to say to the Hon. Minister that – she just left but the message will be relayed to her – in every Amerindian community of this country, the Five Bs initiative was implemented. The APNU/AFC Government gave boats, buses and bicycles to all Amerindian communities. This APNU/AFC Government gave water ambulances and water taxis to our hinterland communities, something that they were badly in need of for over 23 years.

I wish to also make it clear to the Hon. Minister that, in five years, the APNU/AFC provided more internet services than the PPP/C did in 23 years. The Hon. Minister mentioned that they would train CSO’s and other Amerindian youths, but

this Government closed a college that trained a lot of Amerindian youths who came from the interior.

I wish to turn my attention to the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Mr. Ramson. He was very vocal in presenting everything other than sports. The Hon. Minister pondered a lot on race, but I have here in my hand the evidence that another black young lady’s service was terminated today.

4.05 p.m.

In his presentation, the Hon. Minister said that Mr. James Bond and Ms. Malika Ramsey should have been given positions, but in my hands, I have a copy of a termination letter which was given to Malika Ramsey. Shame!

[The Hon. Member displayed a letter in the House.]

I read the Budget speech and while I was listening to the Hon. Minister, it dawned upon me the theme for this Budget is very much out of tune with what is happening in Guyana at the moment. The theme for this Budget is not making sense to the man in poverty at the moment. Since August, 2020, we have observed that the plight of the poor people is increasing and, to date, this Government has not done anything that will put more money in the hands of the poor people. *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*: this language is well-crafted but just a few percent of Guyanese would benefit from this Budget. The theme is well-crafted to show the world that we are doing things but, in reality, only a few of their supporters will benefit. Page 5 of the Budget speech states:

“(i) ensures we recover as a country both from both 2020 and from the last five years of trauma;”

This is a big untruth. How could the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance say to us that we are recovering from the trauma of the past five years? He is fully aware the APNU/AFC Government moved the salary from \$39,000 to \$70,000. Where is the trauma? The tax threshold was moved to \$65,000. A country under trauma would not have moved from being blacklisted for drugs, crime and extra judicial killings to a safe place. A safe place is not trauma. A country under trauma would not have significantly reduced the suicide rate, which was the highest in the world in 2014. The PPP/C knew who were killing themselves, but nothing was put in place to help those brothers and sisters. It was the APNU/AFC that brought down the suicide rate in this country. The PPP/C is bent on

seeing development and progress and not willing to acknowledge that things were done.

A country experiencing trauma would not have provided facilities for our school children. History will hold us accountable. There has been improvement in performance, from attendance to Grades 2,4, 6, 9 and 11, in all 10 regions because of the initiative of the APNU/AFC. A country in trauma would not have built roads for our Guyanese brothers and sisters who had never seen roads in their life. I wish to call upon the Hon. Minister, Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai, to go and check on the Amerindian communities and visit Region 1 so that she would be able to understand.

This Budget is not for the poor people of this country. It will give the ordinary people hell and some cronies would do well.

I now turn my attention to the East Berbice/Corentyne. I am happy to represent the people of East Berbice/Corentyne and I bring some of their concerns as they relate to what is happening in the country at the moment. The issue of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic in East Berbice/Corentyne is getting from bad to worse. We know that our East, West, North and South borders are very much porous, and this Government does not have a plan to tackle the movement of people in and out of Guyana. We observed what happened a few weeks ago with three Guyanese who were coming via backtrack. Two were found dead and one is still missing.

This is clearly indicating to us that the Minister of Home Affairs does not have a plan to deal with our border and territorial strengthening issues. What is the COVID-19 plan for Berbicians? When will the people receive the \$25,000 grant per month, as is happening in other countries? The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance indicated that the United States of America (USA), Europe, Canada and other countries have assisted citizens with relief, but this Government has not been doing anything much to assist the brothers and sisters of Guyana. They have given them a one-off \$25,000 and finished with it.

The curfew situation in Guyana is very much sickening. We know that we are in a pandemic. We know that alcohol abuse, domestic violence and suicide are related. Yet, this Government moved the curfew from the 6.00 p.m. to 9.00 p.m. to facilitate sporting activities.

I wish to turn my attention to the public service. It is a gross and blatant disrespect to the taxpayers of this country... This Government needs to ensure that all Guyanese pay their appropriate taxes. Do not worry about the \$10 million fraud that was mentioned by some senior PPP/C officials. There was \$6 billion in the same line item in the last budget and what did the public servants receive? They received \$25,000. Are we to assume the \$10 million will give them a \$30,000 bonus? Our nurses, policemen, firemen, soldiers and all frontline workers are on duty all day and every day and this Government did not give them a 10% or a \$100,000, which we asked for. Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, please ensure the frontline workers receive a \$100,000 for last year and \$100,000 for 2021. We have set a legacy. The Guyanese people know that we have given them 77% increase in five years.

Education – the APNU/AFC established the Bertram Collins College of The Public Service to train the young people to serve the public service. The APNU/AFC trained more than 250 young people, but as soon as this Government came into Office, it closed the College. What a shame. We are talking about development; we are talking about education; we are talking about taking our young people out of poverty and we closed a College that trained them to work and serve the public system. If there was an issue with the College, then the Government could have been rectified it. If there was a situation with the College, then stakeholders could have put systems in place and ensure that it was expanded to facilitate more of our young people.

Let me remind the Guyanese people that the PPP/C Government put fees on university education. During the campaign, prior to the 2020 elections, free education was on lamp posts everywhere. Then, we were told that it would not be free education at the University of Guyana (UG); it would be online courses. Many of us have reservations about online courses because we know what could happen there. We are asking the Government of the day to provide free education from nursery to university, so that the poor people of this country could be able to benefit and have a proper education.

Agriculture – on page 8 of the Budget speech, the Hon. Minister mentioned that the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector is estimated to have grown by 4.1 %. None of the Members of the Government indicated that this growth occurred during APNU/AFC time. Probably they were ashamed to say it directly. If agriculture was not a priority for the APNU/AFC, then how did the rice sector record the

highest growth in 2019? The Hon. Minister mentioned that six more paddy drying facilitates would be constructed in strategic locations in Regions 2, 3, 5 and 6. Let me remind the Guyanese people that, in Region 6, since this Government came into Office in August, we have some paddy drying facilities that are not utilised by the rice farmers.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. We need to get an extension for you to remind us of more.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, 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, Hon. Member Jones. Hon. Member, please proceed.

**Mr. Jaiprashad:** Thank you very much. From 2015 to 2019, rice farmers utilised the drying facilities. This reduced the road fatalities in the Corentyne. Upon the PPP/C’s being installed in 2020, we are *back to square one* where the public road is being used for paddy drying.

Based upon investigation, one drying facility was built on a private land in Corentyne and the individual (*inaudible*) the facility. Are we going to build more of these paddy drying facilities in East Berbice/Corentyne and leave them there like a white elephant? Or are we going to ensure that we observe proper procedures in terms of reducing causalities on the Corentyne highway by ensuring rice farmers use the facility at Lesbeholden and the drying facilities along the coast?

*4.20 p.m.*

Housing – I wish to draw the attention of this honourable House the issue of housing. Every Hon. Member from the PPP/C’s side made mention of the 50,000 house lots. It seems as though the house lot issue is the major thing for the PPP/C. Let me bring some light to the Guyanese people that 20 years now [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I do not have one. I applied during the PPP/C time and I never got it. The No. 77 Housing Scheme, which is more than 15 years old, is yet to be filled; the No. 76 Housing Scheme is yet to be filled; and Broomfield Village and Tain, Block Four are in a deep mess. They are more than 15 years old. Mr. Anand, you live there. You bought a house there, so you know what I am talking about.

Next to the Hon. Member’s house, there is a house lot for sale at the cost of \$10 million. We see what is happening. Friends

and associates are given lands and, after 10 or 15 years, it is being put for sale – a sum of \$10 million is for a prime roadside lot. Area R Ankerville, Babu John, Bangladesh, Hampshire South, Fort Ordinance lands, New Area – Canefield, Adelphi Scheme, Glasgow Housing Scheme – all these housing areas are yet to be filled and we are still giving the people 50,000 house lots. We are giving them 50,000 house lots in a pandemic. People are without jobs. This Government sent home 1,500 persons, what are you giving them house lots to build? Where will they get the money from and how will they build it?

I wish to turn my attention to the issue of water tariff. It is very important that I say to the honourable House that this Government will be reducing a very large sum of money for the Guyanese people – approximately, \$100 per month. On average, the Guyanese people pay \$2,000 per month for water. This Government reduced the water tariff by 5%. Basically, it is 5% of \$2,000. You are giving the people five mints/sweeties per month and you call that ‘you care’. The Hon. Member put it as a big chunk – billions of dollars – so it sounds very flowery and very good, but it is just \$100 per household. That is what you are here to talk about.

In closing, I wish to bring something of great importance about the Berbice River Bridge to the attention of the people of Berbice and the people of Guyana. When this Government constructed the Berbice River Bridge, the price was the second highest around the world – \$2,200 for a car to cross that bridge. The people pleaded with the PPP/C Government to reduce that fare, but it was in the pipeline for PPP/C to double it. Thanks to the APNU/AFC Government, the fare was reduced from \$2,200 to \$1,900. Every time we crossed that Berbice River Bridge, the Government, from 2015 to 2020, paid \$300 for every vehicle – cars and minibuses. We are in a pandemic and, according to the Ministry of Health regulations, vehicles had to operate at a reduced capacity. When the Berbice Hire Car Association and the Minibus Association ask the PPP/C Government, from August, to reduce the fare of the bridge to facilitate them, they said no and that the drivers must pay the \$1,900.

I wish to say that if the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with the Responsibility for Finance could say to the Guyanese people that he will include, at least, a 10% or a \$100,000 for public servants and frontline workers and provide more services to poor people, then we will be able to support the motion. If not, we are not supporting it.

Thank you, very much. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** I now call on the Hon. Member, Mr. Faizal Jaffarally. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

**Mr. Jaffarally:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to support *Budget 2021* as presented by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with the Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh. Allow me, on behalf of the people of Region 5, to congratulate and applaud the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh and staff of the Ministry of Finance for a well-crafted Budget.

Every single Guyanese, be it the public servants, teachers, rice farmers, sugar workers, taxi drivers, nurses, minibus operators, fisherfolks, pensioners, and even the school children, the private sector and the manufacturing sector will all benefit from *Budget 2021*. Every region and every single community, whether you live in Linden in Region 10; in Karasabai in Region 9; in Moraikobe in Region 5; or in Port Mourant in Region 6, will see some sort of infrastructural development in *Budget 2021*.

With the return to Office of the PPP/C Government led by His Excellency the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, we have seen great expansion in the business community of Region 5, which was dormant and closing during the five years of the Coalition Government. Commercial businesses in Region 5 have expanded. New businesses are going up every day since the PPP/C has returned to Office. The construction industry in Region 5 is booming. In relation to agriculture development, there is a demand for land in Region 5 because of the programmes set out by this PPP/C Government. Services are improving and is spreading across Region 5. Region 5 has suffered, significantly, at the hands of the Coalition Government. We saw political discrimination in every community that the Coalition felt that it did not receive support. I want to share a few of these communities with you. Let us look at the Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) of Blairmont/Gelderland. This NDC consists of four communities: Ithaca, Zoorg en Hoop, Blairmont and Shieldstown. For five years, under the People National Congress (PNC) rule, because the Coalition is now dead, not a single infrastructure work was done in five years in Shieldstown, in Blairmont or in Zoorg en Hoop. Yet, they are telling us that they have done work across this country.

Look what they did to Ithaca. Every single road was paved, streetlights were placed in every corner and the community ground was upgraded. The people of Ithaca deserve to have those things. Similarly, to the people of Blairmont, Zoorg en Hoop and Shieldstown deserve the same treatment.

The first week that this de facto Government came to Office in 2015, by means of fake Statements of Poll, they took away the streetlights in many communities such as Blairmont, Shieldstown, Cotton Tree, Woodley Park, Bath Settlement and Bush Lot – shame. I just want to draw a comparison. Recently, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, using subvention, bought hundreds of community streetlights for Region 5. Do you know how they were distributed? They were distributed equally across the 10 NDCs. That is how we operate. We believe that we are a Government for all the people of Guyana.

In No. 40 Village, No. 41 Village and No. 42 Village small rice farmers, afro Guyanese, who were given lease under the former President Donald Ramotar, when the APNU/AFC came into Office 2015, they took these small rice farmers to court. These farmers sought attention from the then President, Mr. David Granger. They were refused entry to the Office of the President. They sought an audience with the then Minister of State, now the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, and he said that he was too busy. These afro Guyanese small rice farmers came to us and we made representation through the Hon. Member, Mr. Anil Nandlall. We took the then Government to court and we were able to restore what was rightfully theirs, the rice lands. We were concerned about the people.

In the community of Zoorg en Hoop, 27 families, for five years, have been pleading with the Coalition Government for electricity. In this period of the pandemic, electricity is important. Instead of assisting these people and giving them electricity, they were served with evictions. These people had lease and transport to their lands and the Coalition Government served them eviction letters. I am happy to report that, with the intervention of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and the Ministry of Public Works, work has already commenced to ensure that these 27 families receive electricity. That is how we operate.

I listened to some of the Opposition Members of Parliament. They were using words like democracy, good governance, accountability and honesty. Look at your track records. They are talking about democracy. Leading up to the 2020 election, they made an attempt to disenfranchise 20,000 residents from one community, Moraikobe in Region 5 by stating that these people were not alive. Moraikobe has a total of 527 persons on the voter’s list. They said that 520 of those persons did not exist and that they had died. One could imagine how these people operate. They went to the Mahaicony Creek, places like Gordon Table, Governor Light and First Savannah and they tried to disenfranchise persons. Thanks to the PPP/C, we

stood by those people and ensured that their constitutional rights to vote were intact. They are talking about corruption.

4.35 p.m.

Their shady deals in a number of Government agencies under the Coalition... The airport, Mahaica Abary Rice Development Scheme (MARDS), transport and harbour, the sea defence, and we could go on, had shady deals. The community of Moraikobe, when our presidential candidate went there before he became the President, the people expressed, in real disgust, how they were marginalised and how they were discriminated against by the APNU/AFC Government. We made a commitment right there and then that, when we take Office, we would ensure that community receives equal benefits like any other community across the region.

When the APNU/AFC Government was in Office, electricity was limping at one hour per day. I am pleased to say that, with the short period of time that the PPP/C is in Office, Moraikobe is receiving electricity 24 hours per day. The water supply was limping. My Colleague the Hon. Susan Rodrigues and I went into that community and we made a commitment. They would now enjoy portable water in full supply. There was the expansion of the health centre and the expansion of the primary school. I also want to report that the health boat is on its way to Moraikobe.

Mahaica-Berbice is, perhaps, one of the largest agriculture area in our country with more than 96,000 acres under the rice cultivation; 13,000 acres under the sugar cultivation; 5,000 acres under cattle pasture; and 2,000 acres under cash crop cultivation, directly employing, in agriculture sector, a large per centage of the residents in Region 5.

In five years, the APNU/AFC Government has destroyed a viable and productive sector. It deliberately allowed the drainage and irrigation (D&I) network to collapse, made the farm-to- market road impassable. If that was not enough, it raised drainage and irrigation and land charges between 300% and 700% without any consultation with the farmers. The *de facto* APNU/AFC Government stayed true to its colours. They were true dictators. With the coming to Office of Dr. Irfaan Ali’s PPP/C Government, we immediately reversed the harsh and unconscionable decision. What we have achieved in five months, the APNU/AFC Administration did not achieve in five years. In five short months, what this Government has done for the people of Region 5, you have not done in five years.



The Ministry of Agriculture, through the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, visited that community in the Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA) area and he, immediately, pronounced on the reversal of those high charges. Land rental went back to \$3,500 from \$15,000. Do you know what that means Hon. Members? It means \$1.5 billion would remain in the pockets of the farmers. I must confess that is one of our manifesto promises fulfilled.

In addition to reversing the unconscionable rise in land and D&I charges, we have removed VAT on fertilisers, pesticides, weedicides, agriculture machinery and equipment, which would allow more disposable income into the pockets of our farmers.

The visionless leadership of the APNU/AFC Administration... Less than three months of coming to Office, the PPP/C Administration, the Ministry of Agriculture, through MMA/ADA, were able to break, maintain and clean 60 miles of secondary canals. We were able to grade and shape 200 miles of road and build six bridges and three sluices. These realities came about because the Hon. Minister visited the community. He was not like the old Mr. Holder, when he left to go to Region 5, he stayed at *Toots*. That is the furthest he went – *Toots*. The Minister of Agriculture went down to the *backdam*, interacted with the farmers, listened to the farmers and made on-the-spot decisions. With this intervention, it means that farmers would save significantly. It would reduce the time farmers would take to go to their farms. Farmers would normally leave, during the Coalition period, at 4 o’clock and meet to their farms at 7 o’ clock. Now, they could leave at 6 o’ clock and reach their farms at 7 o’ clock.

Recently, a contract was signed for \$327 million for the construction of a concrete road at MMA/ADA IR 3 area. This initiative would open 30,000 acres of land.

**Mr. Speaker:** To continue with that initiative, you would need some time.

**Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips]:** Mr. Speaker, with your permission, the Hon. Member would need five minutes.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Jaffarally, you may continue to conclude.

**Mr. Jaffarally:** In the area of housing, in five years, not a single house lot was developed by the APNU/AFC. The 1,000 of house lots that are in Region 5 in housing schemes like Balshack Housing Scheme, Zoorg en Hoop Housing Scheme, Block D Housing Scheme, Hope Housing Scheme, Experiment Housing Scheme, Bath Housing Scheme, Bush Lot New Area Housing Scheme and Waterloo Housing Scheme were all developed under a PPP/C Government. Go to those communities, they are all occupied. Young teachers, young public servants and young professionals are occupying those areas.

In the area of education, I am proud to say, under the PPP/C Government lead by Hon. Minister Priya Manickchand, we acquired universal education at the primary level. Very shortly, we would also achieve universal education at the secondary level. During this period of the pandemic, we ensured that all of our schools are well equipped with the [*Inaudible*] protocol as it relates to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2021, unlike our Colleagues of the APNU/AFC, in relation to our work programme, every single community, every single Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDC) across the region would benefit; whether it is Hamlet/Chance in Mahaicony Branch Road; whether it is C’ Field Tempe; Bath; Waterloo or Zuidwyk, Rosignol, all would benefit from the 2021 programme. Do you know why? The Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, the Hon. Nigel Dharamlall, has been going across these communities and he saw what was happening.

In five years, many communities had not seen a Minister of the then Government. In less than five months, Region 5 had 62 ministerial visits across every community. In the De Hoop, Big Baiabu area, no Minister ever visited there. In less than five months, we had a number of Ministers visiting: Minister Zulfikar Mustapha, Minister Priya Manickchand, Minister Juan Edghill, Minister Nigel Dharamlall, Minister Susan Rodrigues, Minister Collin Croal, Minister Gail Teixeira and Minister Sonia Parag. Our visit is not [*Inaudible*] visit; it is serious business. When the Hon. Ministers went into these communities, they discussed, they interacted, and they listened to the residents of the communities and were able to develop based on these visits. That area received electricity. From No. 10 to Big Baiabu, 90% of the infrastructure work has already been completed.

Drainage and irrigation – The Hon. Minister instructed that the machine should remain in that area.

When one wants to see commitment from an education Minister, look at the Hon. Member. Ms. Priya Manickchand. I have seen with my own eyes the Hon. Minister tracking between mud and slush, jumping in a boat to ensure that our children get their worksheets. This is how we operates.

In sports, in less than three months the Hon. Minister went to Region 5 and instructed that a number of grounds be upgraded: Fairfield, Bath Settlement, D’ Edward and Cotton Tree. He made sporting facilities available.

I am certain, with *Budget 2021*, much more would come to Region 5. I want to plead with my Colleagues on the other side of the House to join this process of development. Let us work together for the betterment of our country and our people.

It gives me great honour to commend and support *Budget 2021* as represented by the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. I just want to remind the Members of the Business Sub-committee of the Committee of Supply that we are to meet at 5.00 p.m. in the Dome.

Hon. Members, this is a good time to take the suspension.

*Sitting suspended at 4.49 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 6.25 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Members. Please be seated. I would like to call on the Hon. Deputy Speaker of the House, the Hon. Member, Mr. Lenox Shuman, to make his presentation.

**Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly [Mr. Shuman]:** Mr Speaker, as I rise to make my contribution to this rich discussion on *Budget 2021*, I ask the House’s indulgence as I do believe that some acknowledgements are in order.

I wish to first acknowledge Guyana’s 51<sup>st</sup> year as a republic and wish everyone a happy belated 51<sup>st</sup> Republic Anniversary. I would also like to commend the stellar programme put together by the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, the Hon. Mr. Charles Ramson, his staff, and the fantastic performers whose talents were on display on the night of 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 2021.

For the first time in the history of Guyana, as an Indigenous person, I felt at home in my land, something that many of my brothers and sisters still do not enjoy, and for good reason.

Guyana has never been kind to its first people. I was moved by the mosaic displayed that night. I felt quite happy. There is so much talent in Guyana that is yet to be realised.

Secondly, I wish to commend the Senior Minister in the Ministry of the Presidency with Responsibility for Finance, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, and the work of his team at the Ministry of Finance. It was no doubt a challenge to table a second budget in under six months. It was a task they, undoubtedly, proved that they are more than equal to do. I wish to thank them.

I also wish to acknowledge the bold step by the Opposition Chief Whip, the Hon. Mr. Christopher Jones, when he said that the major Opposition represents 49% of the electorate. It is an acknowledgement that, while so long overdue, shows that there is scope for political maturity in this House. It is here that I wish to enter this discussion with one word ‘people’. I have no intention of screaming like my Colleagues who absent themselves through my presentation. They, in my view, think that by raising the decibels they elevate in substance and relevance. I ask my Colleagues to listen, quietly and attentively. I do not intend to scream.

It is only fitting that we are in this august House, evaluating our progress over the last 51 years as a republic, debating on what will transpire through 2021 and on how we set the stage for the future of Guyana. I do believe that, while our approach may differ, our vision, all of us, hopefully, is to see Guyana progress. We are at a crossroads in this country’s history and recognising that is important.

I have been allotted 30 minutes and I may be, graciously, granted an additional five if my Colleagues see my contribution as valuable to the discourse. I doubt that I will need it as I dispatch with some of the falsities and fantasies of the discussions here.

I sat quietly in my seat on day one of this Budget debate and, attentively, heard the first presenter in this debate, the Hon. Ms Amanza Walton-Desir, who not only attempted to cultivate racism in this honourable House, but also sought to wipe away the growing centre of Guyana when she said, and I will quote from the *Hansard* furnished to me:

“We have to decide in this hour whether Guyana will be the land where the children of the *Chatree* or the daughters of the Dahomey will live together.”

It is a grossly reckless and irresponsible exclusionary statement which, without even a flinch or even batting an eye,

wipes away, in one fell swoop, from the rich tapestry of Guyana – all of our sisters and brothers who are Chinese; Portuguese; European; and, of course, the first people of Guyana – the Indigenous people. This is, precisely, why we see this political dispensation... and may further contribute clarity to their political disposition. It is a right offensive exclusion that I hope the Hon Member, who is absent, will take time to correct as it is an Indigenous person who is standing here in this House and educating her.

I sat and listened as the Hon. Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis referred to me in her presentation as the late Deputy Speaker, Hon. Lenox Shuman.

I wish to inform the Hon. Member that I am very much alive and well. I cannot, in good conscience, permit such recklessness in triviality to pass so quietly for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it is indicative of the way the PNC treated not only the Indigenous people of Guyana, but all Guyanese. If the Hon. Member cannot even see the Deputy Speaker standing at five feet, 11 inches with 225 pounds in front of her, how can we expect them to see the people suffering and how would they even proceed to develop policies for those they cannot see?

On 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2021, I wrote the following on *Facebook*:

“Today would have been 98 years. His stain on this nation led us to the events championed by his prodigy in 2020. A legacy we must never forget.

Deserving of no celebration. Nothing to celebrate. Just a mere acknowledgement is plenty a tribute.

We still struggle for the nation of dreams for our next generations.”

When a mind has not the competence to address a substantive issue, one recluse oneself to mediocrity. That mediocrity, unfortunately, is race. It is quite a travesty. I would challenge anyone in this honourable House to name, identify, describe or state any word synonymous with any of those that reflect an iota of racism in component, content or substance in that statement. I read it again, not for your consumption, Mr. Speaker, but for that of my Colleagues in this honourable House. I say:

“Today would have been 98 years. His stain on this nation led us to the events championed by his prodigy in 2020...

Deserving of no celebration. Nothing to celebrate. Just a mere acknowledgement is plenty a tribute.”

Here is the absence in their evaluation. It is a truism.

“We still struggle for the nation of dreams for our next generations.”

I challenge any and all of my Colleagues in this house to find the falsity or racist undertones in those few short sentences. That statement is not inaccurate. Once again, where substance and relevance are absent, racism becomes the default cover. I urge my Colleagues to change this appalling and horrendous behaviour because, when it comes to this honourable House, it creates a destructive tsunami in society.

It was in this very building that we – my Colleagues and I – attended not for one month... but we guarded ballot boxes and then struggled through a tiring and exhaustive recount process and legal proceedings – I should have a Law Degree by now – to ensure that Guyana never goes back to the Burnham-era rigging. Those are facts. There is no falsity in that statement. It is a matter of history. My Colleagues have said, on many occasions, and as is constantly perpetuated by the Hon. Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul who also absent himself from this, that we are subsets of the PPP/C.

I will say this unapologetically. If it means that I stand on the side of and fight for democracy, then I am a subset. If it means that I have vision for a progressive Guyana, free from oppression, then I am a subset. If it means that I am against a dictatorship, then I am a subset. If it means that I am against intellectually bankrupting a country, then I am a subset. If it means that I am for Indigenous rights, then I am a subset. If it means that I am on the side of an inclusive Guyana, then I am most definitely, and unapologetically, a subset. I say this because I know that, before we can heal a nation, we must first identify where it is hurting and work to fix it. That I ate sand, mud, soap, lead, wood, candle wax, eggshells, peanut shells and a list too long to call, under Mr. Burnham, is a difficult memory.

My Hon. Friends may have had the so-called ‘good life’ through those times and that is good for them. We suffered and that experience and memory cannot be downplayed nor taken away. I will fight to ensure that we never return to those days. It was Mr. Burnham, Mr. Jagan and Mr. Stephen Campbell who all fought for this country’s independence. No doubt, for their times, their contributions were much needed, but to downplay one’s suffering does not erase it. If my Colleagues were starving during the PPP/C’s tenure, if they

had eaten candle wax, eggshells, mud, sand, soap, and wood then they have my most heartfelt sympathies and I urge them to let us work to fix that.

Race is not the answer. That I advocate for the Indigenous people does not make me a racist. I simply identify the shortcomings of Administrations in this country in their 207 years-old obligation to the Indigenous people through a variety of treaties in this country’s history. When you lack substance, the default cannot be race. It is unbecoming of a nation that is 54 years old.

Yesterday, I exited the Dome of the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC) because an Hon. Member thought that screaming at the top of her voice would add substance and relevance. I struggled to find [*Inaudible*] in what she was saying. Maybe, the PNC found it.

I recall being accused of screeching by with the so-called left-over votes and fractional seat just to be here. I ask the Hon. Member, who absent herself once again, where is the Alliance For Change (AFC)? The People’s National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) is so far conjoined in AFC, or vice versa, that one cannot tell where the PNC ends and where the AFC begins. How many votes did the AFC get?

6.40 p.m.

I beg them to show me. How many votes did the AFC get? Show me a single policy or absolutely anything that the AFC did – anything. I should have prefaced that and ask for them to show me something positive and constructive that they did, but that is absent. Of course, the million-dollar questions are: Did you see the Statements of Poll (SOP) and where are your SOPs?

I understand that numeracy may be lost on the Hon. Member, that is why I try to keep numerical reference to two digits, cautiously and strenuously, I know that the majority of 65 causes them a year’s worth of challenge and too much of a headache.

We, the Liberty and Justice Party (LJP), gained 2,957 votes Mr. Speaker. If you were to ask me, the majority of that is 1,479. We did not have to try to rig an election to get those. The people simply identified that the People’s National Congress (PNC) failed and voted for us. Many others voted for our Colleagues in the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), A New and United Guyana (ANUG), The Citizenship Imitative (TCI), The New Movement (TNM), the United Republican Party (URP), the Organisation for the

Victory of the People Party (OVPP) and the People’s Republic Party (PRP). [ **Mr. Hamilton:** What about Guyana Action Party (GAP)?] A Ghost!

I did not want to get into defending the Budget presented by the Hon. Dr. Singh. It does that all by itself; the Budget defends itself.

Considering where we are, at this juncture in the country’s history and considering what we endured for the last five years, the Budget is not perfect. But I quite agree with the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security on *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism, and Resilience*. I think that some persons have difficulties understanding words so, in layman’s terms, it is to repair the damage, to stabilize the financial ground and to fortify for a better and more progressive Guyana. The answer is not to pander to race.

If one lacks substance, lacks relevance and lacks the moral and ethical fortitude to say that one has lost the elections, one does himself or herself and one’s future generations a disservice to recluse to race baiting.

The \$630 million for the revival of the Amerindian land titling programme is far superior than what was done under the PNC rule for the last five years.

The entire Annai sub-district was gazetted as a Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) in 2017, thus revoking the land title of the Indigenous people of that area. That is a clear violation of a multitude of international laws.

There is \$1.6 billion in the Budget for upgrading hinterland roads. It is not the most ideal, but it is far superior to the next-to-nothing that was previously budgeted.

The PNC voted against over \$500 million for 112 tractors; \$880 million; and over \$1.5 billion for the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) support for communities, to assist in the revival of the communities. That was, without a doubt, far superior to anything the PNC did in five years, and majority of it was done last year.

Toshaos are in need of a raise of stipend. The National Toshaos Council (NTC) is in need of funding equal to its task. These are absences that need to be corrected. We cannot only compartmentally look at the Budget. We have to be practical; 2022 is but a short 10 months away.

My community of Pakuri will benefit from a grid upgrade and expansion this year. I cannot disagree with progress, but I urge my Colleagues to let us be clear sighted in our obligation to hold the Government accountable.

I do not need to defend the Budget; the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance will do that. The Budget also defends itself.

The Amerindian Development Fund (ADF) is replenished to the tune of \$1.5 billion. How could I be against anything that stands to benefit the most marginalised population of this country?

I recognise that this is the Government’s first full-year budget. What I would say, without reservation, is that I expect the budgeted amount for the Hon. Prime Minister’s Office, to drive His Excellency’s ‘one Guyana vision’, contains the necessary and requisite funds for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It is a most needed commission in this country if we are to dispense with race politics and if we are to build a cohesive Guyana. We need it and the country needs it. I hope the Hon. Prime Minister is paying attention to that statement. I see this as a starting point to addressing equity, not only for Indigenous people but for all of Guyana.

I expect that the United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Study on Indigenous Women and Children in Guyana – a point that was lost by my Colleague who claims that he is from GAP but we know that he is from the PNC – will be more prominently articulated in the next and future budgets. Also, that article 149G of the Constitution of the *Co-operative Republic of Guyana* becomes the major consideration in future budgets when addressing indigenous issues; that the Government does not forget its commitment, not only to revise the Amerindian Act, but also the longstanding commitment to constitutional reform. It is hoped that we see these commitments articulated in the next budget.

I look forward to the budget measures that address the removal of the ‘save and except’ clause from Indigenous land titles. I will support that 100%. This will enable the fulfilment of the 1814 commitment for Indigenous or Amerindian – which ever you want to say – land titles; a desperately needed removal.

I heard my Colleagues speak of consultations for this Budget. I hear article 13 of the Constitution being thrown around, but article 13 cannot be considered in absence of article 9 which

speaks of sovereignty. When people exercise their rights under article 9 of the Constitution, article 13 is correlatingly activated.

I am happy to say that, while there is no law directing the Government to consult with the Opposition Parties on the presentation of a budget, I was happy to see some of our concerns addressed and that we were consulted on this Budget. There is no obligation for that. I remind my Colleagues, 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2021 will mark one year when the consultation was completed and the people spoke and endorsed a vision that now sees me sitting on the Opposition side. They endorsed a vision presented by the PPP/C Government and we, on this side of the House, now have an obligation to hold the Government accountable. That is our position.

To my Colleagues on this side of the House, I implore you, we have to up our game. You have to up your game. You cannot accept the bangles, bracelets and bed sheets and be expected to be taken seriously. We must conduct ourselves with integrity if we are to ensure that the people are the primary beneficiaries of the Budget.

We cannot take a hard-headed *do fuh do nah obeah* approach. That would always be a race to the bottom and the people would end up, and have always ended up, being the losers in that system.

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) now becomes the focal point of accountability and we must conduct ourselves with integrity if we are to be taken seriously. They are the Government and we are the Opposition and, as the Opposition, if we do not want our ‘slip’ to show, we cannot slip.

I ask my Colleague, who absented himself here again, the Hon. Mr. Patterson, to kindly resign and give way to a member with the kind of integrity to keep the Government accountable to ensure that the Government delivers what it has committed to and does so transparently and accountably.

I give this Budget a B-, not because of the substance of the Budget, but because of how long it took us, as a nation, to get here. It is an inditement of us as a nation; it is an inditement of all of us that it took us this long to get here. I look forward to examining the Budget measures, especially in the areas I have mentioned before, while the taxpayers continue to pay the hecklers to my right and the hecklers to my left because that is all they would be doing for the next five years. Maybe they could focus their attentions on the important thing of

holding the Government accountable and stop reflecting on their failed attempt to rig the elections when we stood to check them.

I circle back to the very one word with which I started, people. We have a responsibility to the people of Guyana, and I endorse this Budget because it does for Guyana what is needed.

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

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly. It is an honour for me to call to the microphone the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise from this side of the House on behalf of A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change in joining my Colleagues to contribute to this Budget debate 2021.

I would like to express appreciation to all the technical officers at the various ministries and agencies, including the budget staff at the Ministry of Finance, for putting together the final document for Budget 2021. We know that this is a difficult time for our public servants due to the challenges of the pandemic, but also because of the tremendous uncertainty working under the People’s Progressive Party Civic PPP/C brings. Salary increases, who knows?

6.55 p.m.

Guyana’s public servants were never in doubt that the Government was in their corner under the APNU/AFC.

To the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, kindly accept my commiseration on the passing of your father. I would like to leave these words with you, taken from the first book of the New Testament, Matthew 5:4:

“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.”

The month of February, in every calendar year, is special to many of us. To my Guyanese brothers and sisters, including Honourable Members, I publicly extend happy Black History Month greetings. Additionally, I wish to state that I am of proud African ancestry and that I will not allow anyone to define who I am.

Permit me a few minutes to address a matter that is of concern to me. The attitude of some Members on the opposite side of the House has been very vulgar. Was it necessary for a Member of Parliament (MP) to bring a female personal

pleasure device to the floor of this esteemed House? That is a piece of contraband; it is illegal to import. Would this MP not have been able to explain his point using words? Why was this vulgarity necessary? This has left a bitter taste in my mouth. I cannot believe that this is what this august House has descended to. We do have our differences, but we do not need to descend to this. We need to get on with the business of our nation. We are here to develop Guyana. We are here to improve the lives of our people. We are here to help build them the good life. That is the mantra preached by the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) since 2011, even prior to the formation of the Coalition in February, 2015.

Sir, the theme of the Budget, as indicated on the cover, is *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. There is a common saying that a book should not be judged by its cover and, clearly, in this case, we need to take heed. I have carefully examined this document and have recognised that a number of essential factors and elements are lacking, since there is no clear direction or plan outlined to realise the Budget theme. More so, there is very little included to combat the global Coronavirus disease pandemic.

What I can say, though, is that the introductory remarks, pages 1 through 5, are laced with political platitudes. The Hon. Member, at paragraph 1.13 on page 3, clearly paraphrased what the Hon. Dr. Irfaan Ali stated when he addressed the Parliament on 12<sup>th</sup> February, 2021. He said that it was a Government of oneness. The big unanswered question that I have is this: how can one speak of oneness while failing to confront racism — a charge the Hon. Members from one side dislike hearing from the other side of the population — discrimination, victimisation, disunity, and the unfair treatment of innocent Guyanese? This includes political witch hunting against renowned qualified Guyanese and so-called political activists. The PPP/C cannot speak of oneness when they are targeting Guyanese for discrimination. This is the opposite of what happened under the Coalition Government. From the very get go, an olive branch was extended to the then Opposition, which they all rejected. The abandonment of the Ministry of Social Cohesion is a perfect example of their disregard for national unity. How can you speak of oneness when Guyanese witnessed the major electoral fraud on the lower East Coast of Guyana, where 49 boxes had missing documents? And do you come in here to call us riggers on this side? Is it because we are Afro-Guyanese?

Let me remind you of what took place in 2006 with the AFC seats in Linden, where you had the former Prime Minister of

Guyana squatting. What happened in 2015 when the PPP/C used Mr. Gocool Boodhoo to insert fake statements of polls? Let the nation know that. How can you speak of oneness when Guyanese witnessed the trampling of the Constitution, all to fulfil the PPP/C’s hunger for power by any means necessary? How can you speak of oneness when the majority of the people’s representatives were forcibly locked from entering the precepts of the National Assembly without a reasonable explanation? How can you speak of oneness when the main Opposition was not consulted during the preparation of *Budget 2021*? How can you speak of oneness when the main Opposition is not afforded opportunities to serve on state and statutory boards? How can you speak of oneness when Afro-Guyanese are denied lands illegally? How can you speak of oneness?

Cde. Speaker, do you know what touched my heart today? As I was making my way into the precinct of the National Assembly, do you know what was told to me? I asked the Minister of Housing and Water for a piece of land. Do you know what Hon. Collin Croal said to two Afro-Guyanese? You *gat* money *fu*h pay *fu*h land? What are you saying to Afro-Guyanese, that we do not deserve lands? What a shame, Sir. How can you speak of oneness when Guyanese occupying lands in the Success area were shut ...?

**Mr. Croal:** Mr. Speaker, please.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister Mr. Croal?

**Mr. Croal:** Standing Order 40 (a). The Hon. Member is referring to something that does not exist, and I would like her to prove her case. She cannot come to this House and speak lies.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you are attributing words to the Hon. Minister which he says do not exist.

**Mr. Croal:** Did I have a conversation with the Hon. Member? *[Interruption]*

*[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]*

**Ms. Fergusson:** What is the Standing Order? I do not know why he is standing. Why are you standing, Sir? Why are you standing?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, regarding the attributing of a statement to anyone, especially a Member here who is denying it, the person making the allegation needs to provide the proof. In this case, Hon. Ms. Ferguson, you will have to withdraw that. Unless you have him taped, you will have to

withdraw that. We will give you back your time. *[Interruption]* Hon. Members, I am speaking, and I see Hon. Member Vinceroy Jordan shouting at the presenter. That is total disrespect. Hon. Member, please continue.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I was merely repeating what was told to me, but I will...

**Mr. Speaker:** But the issue is, that would be hearsay.

**Ms. Ferguson:** I am so guided, Sir. How can you speak of oneness when Guyanese occupying lands in the Success area were shot with rubber pellets and their lands were flooded? How can you speak of oneness when the families of young Joel and Isaiah Henry, and Haresh Singh are still to get justice? How can you speak of oneness when approximately 1,500 public servants were unlawfully displaced from their jobs by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic? As we are now debating *Budget 2021*, earlier today, *via* social media, it has been reported that forty-five nurses from Region 4 have been terminated. How can you speak of oneness when affording food is an issue? How can you speak of oneness when the distribution of the COVID-19 cash grant relief is being done in a discriminatory manner? How can you speak of oneness when public servants were wilfully denied salary increases for the year 2020 and when *Budget 2021* has failed to make mention of an increase? Sir, I wish to admonish the installed Hon. Members with what is written in the *Good Book*, the *Old Testament*, Deuteronomy 32:25, and I quote ... *[Interruption]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Hon. Member needs to get your ear. You cannot provide a running commentary. Thank you.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Pardon?

**Mr. Speaker:** I was speaking to the Honourable Members who were, what I consider, being very noisy.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you very much, for your protection, Cde. Speaker. I wish to admonish the installed Hon. Members of what is written in the *Good Book*. Taken from the *Old Testament*, Deuteronomy 32:35:

“Vengeance is Mine, and recompense, their foot shall slip in due time; For the day of their calamity is at hand, And the things to come hasten upon them.”

Today, what is evident before our eyes, since post 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2020, I can only describe as political vengeance. This is

injurious to our people, systems of governance, and by extension, our nation.

Sir, I now turn my attention to address issues highlighted in *Budget 2021*. It is my desire, before departing this good life, to see every Guyanese provided a house lot to construct his or her dream house. My Colleague, Hon. Sherod Duncan, earlier in the week addressed matters under the housing sector. After careful examination of the Budget speech and the Estimates for subsequent considerations, I do believe that I can refute the misinformation that continues to be parroted in the media by the installed Regime. Firstly, I make no apologies in cautioning the Hon. Members on the other side that the truth always prevails when fact tells a different narrative. Growing up as a child, my parents always reminded me and siblings of the famous proverb, *“speak the truth and speak it ever, cost it what it will.”*

7.10 p.m.

When one examines Budgets 2020 and 2021 respectively, one will stumble on the catchy promise: 50,000 house lots within five years. This is meant to give Guyanese false hope. Sir, the PPP/C’s track record is there and it reveals that at no time in their 23 years in Office did they ever provide 50 house lots to the Guyanese people within any five-year period. Even half of that was never produced. How is the PPP/C to do now what they never did throughout their 23 years in Government?

The Hon. Member, Mr. Colin Croal during his submission on *Budget 2020*, provided a miscalculated and comparative analysis on house lot distributions. He claimed that, in 2014, the PPP/C allocated 2,440 house lots as against 776, in 2018, by the APNU/AFC. Sir, what the Hon. Member failed to tell us then, which I will now reveal to this House and the people of Guyana, is that between 2012 and 2014, the PPP/C distributed a total of 11,342 house lots, of which 149 of 570 house lots were turn-key houses in Plantation Perseverance in Region 4. In reading the actual Budget speech, I discovered that the Hon. Members on the opposite side have a major problem with numbers. I invite you to turn to page 49 of the Budget, paragraph 4.132, lines one to three. This is what the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh said:

“In the housing sector, works are progressing apace to restore the lost vibrancy and vitality that once exemplified the sector. Before the PPP/C government demitted office in 2015...”

He also said that the PPP/C distributed a total of 22,964 house lots in five years. Sir, I wish to debunk this misinformation and to remind this House that, as I said before, the total number of house lots distributed by the PPP/C between 2012 to 2014 was 11,342. Perhaps the Hon. Minister and his two Colleagues in the housing sector could provide clarity and state from where the number 22,964 arises. Sir, I recall reading the PPP/C Manifesto 2020 and on page 8, this is what they sold to Guyanese:

“The PPP/C developed and distributed 112,761 house lots to Guyanese families, 80% of which went to low income families.”

Cde. Speaker, this is far from the truth. My research revealed that approximately 60,000 house lots were distributed in the 23 years of the PPP/C’s rule in Government. I have the evidence here, Sir.

Additionally, the Hon. Member, in his 2020 Budget presentation, on page 20 stated:

“In 2014, under the PPP/C, 4,079 transports were processed. At best the Coalition did 2,556; and at worse 1,207 during the period 2015-2019.”

Again, I repeat for emphasis, the Hon. Members do have difficulties with numbers and also facts and fictions. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** Ms. Ferguson (*inaudible*)] You know what your father did with your niece in West Coast Berbice. Let me assist the Hon. Members in distinguishing fiction from facts. Sir, my former Colleague and the Minister of Communities, the Hon. Member, Ronald Bulkan, on 5<sup>th</sup> December, 2019, is on record providing an assessment on the Ministry’s performance for the year 2019. He reported:

“Over the last four years, the Coalition Government, through the Central Housing and Planning Authority (CH&PA) has delivered some 14,000 land titles; a representation of close to 4,000 titles per annum.”

Again, I challenge the Hon. Members to refute the facts.

The installed Members continue to promulgate that the Coalition Government has done nothing for the housing sector. Sir, if one is to measure the period 2012 to 2014 of the PPP/C’s track record, as against the period 2015 and 2020 of the Coalition’s track record, one will indeed notice the vast amount of work and efforts put in to address the demand for housing for our people.



Permit me, Sir, to share a few of our achievements. The Hon. Member, Mr. Jaffarally mentioned that the Coalition did nothing, and that we did not create one house lot in Region 5. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you this, there were available lands for housing in 2019. They are as follows: Annandale on the East Coast of Demerara – 329 house lots completed; Plantation Mon Repos – 203 house lots completed; Parcel 1145, Providence – 190 house lots completed; Parcel 1768 Cummings Lodge – 370 house lots completed; Plantation Prospect, the remaining area – 500 house lots completed; and Tracks N, X and NY in La Bonne Intention (LBI) – 447 house lots completed. My goodly Friend, Mr. Jaffarally, said that we never did a design at Experiment, West Coast Berbice, but this is our design and from this design, 673 house lots were completed. [Hon. Member displayed documents.] Do not let the Hon. Members come here fooling and *palazing* themselves that the APNU/AFC did not do anything. [**Mr. Hamilton:** What are you doing with the Government’s documents?] These are my documents.

Since the installation of the Hon. Members in Office it seems, from all angles, that there is no structured approach or a plan for the housing sector. In fact, there was none when we went into Office in May, 2015 – not one housing policy. The Coalition did a comprehensive analysis on the housing sector to address the challenges facing the Government’s housing programme in Guyana. This is the document with the facts. [The Hon. Member held up a document.] What is now evident in the housing sector is the wild west approach.

I challenge the two Hon. Members in the housing sector to provide this House with their installed Government’s housing policy. What I do know is that there is none since we keep hearing their copycat approaches at interviews, which only serve to flatter the Coalition. They could take a cue from the first Executive President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, the late Mr. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, who had a thorough housing policy for Guyana. The Coalition’s policy on the housing sector was also a comprehensive one. We did not just hand out house lots with only the most basic infrastructure in place, and then shout out that we issued 50,000 house lots. Sir, you should take a walk through East Ruimveldt, West Ruimveldt, North Ruimveldt, South Ruimveldt, Tucville, Festival City, Roxanne Burnham Gardens, Shirley Field Ridley Square and Perseverance, to name a few places that were created under the APNU/AFC Coalition Government. There you will see what wholesome communities should look like. That is what you call a visionary Government.

I will now clarify another item of misinformation, and that is, the hinterland housing programme. The Opposition said that we abandoned the hinterland housing programme. But, as I stand here this afternoon, I will say that this is something we inherited from the previous Administration. We did not abandon it. We recognised that housing is important to our people, so we did a lot of projects in Region 1, Region 9, and Region 7, where many communities benefited from an entire change of roof amongst other things.

They are saying that the APNU/AFC did not have a policy or a vision for the housing sector. I will invite my Hon. Members to arm themselves with a copy of Guyana’s *Decade of Development: 2020-2029*. This is a document that was compiled by the former President of Guyana, Brig. (Ret’d) David Arthur Granger where he outlined, in detail, his ten-year plan to address the housing situation here in our country. This is the evidence, and this is facts.

Sir, I am delighted to see that in *Budget 2021* we will be proceeding with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) funded programme for adequate housing development for our people. I wish to say to the Hon. Members on that side: do not claim the project. This project was conceived by the APNU/AFC Government, and I will be keeping a very close eye on the project because we did extensive work through the Central Housing and Planning Authority. We interviewed persons and identified those who will be benefiting from the project.

In the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2021, I observed that the Ministry of Housing and Water, through the CH&PA, is requesting a whopping \$6 billion. Sir, I intend to ask some searching questions in this particular area. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the shouting and the continuous commentary... Please, allow the Hon. Member to continue.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Sir, do I have two minutes remaining from my thirty minutes?

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, Hon. Member.

7.25 *p.m.*

**Ms. Ferguson:** Sir, in the interest of time, I wish to turn my attention to public works. I wish to remind this House of the pathway set out by the Coalition Government to move and improve public infrastructure in Guyana. The Government’s strategic plan for the transport sector is premised on its belief

that the transport infrastructure and services are central to the growth and development of the Guyanese economy and society. I know my Colleague, the Hon. Mr. David Patterson, earlier today, addressed some successes that our Government has done. I wish to reemphasise and highlight, because we keep hearing that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) did nothing. Look at what is happening on the East Bank Demerara, there are five overhead pedestrian paths. You had 23 years and not a vision of that nature was conceptualised.

The first round-about at Kitty was the vision of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change. If one looks at all the reinforced concrete roads in Region 8, 1 and 9, that is what is called visionary leadership.

I know my Colleague, the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, shared earlier what we were doing and referred to the 2017–2025 plan that the Ministry of Public Infrastructure had to move Guyana Forward. If the Government follow this document, Guyana will move in a positive direction.

**Mr. Speaker:** For you to move on with your continuation, you will need some more time.

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

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

**Ms. Ferguson:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and thank you very much, Hon. Opposition Chief Whip.

I will now examine a few of the not so impressive measures which will or are likely to have an impact on the sectors or areas that were addressed earlier.

Firstly: reducing water tariff, by my calculations, if a metered customer consumption rate is \$3,000 per month, then 5% of \$3,000 will be \$150. Does the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) really intend to provide an improvement of \$150 per month to Guyanese? That cannot even buy a Coca-Cola; it can barely purchase a cheese roll. If the Government wants to provide relief to Guyanese, it should make water free. Which Guyanese is excited to get \$150 benefit per month? That is a joke.

Secondly: reducing the cost of construction and home ownership. While this may be welcomed, the reality here is that many Guyanese would not benefit. The question that

jumps to one’s mind is whether the low-income earners would benefit. Would a single mother who is struggling to ensure that a meal is placed on the table for her five children benefit? How would a public servant whose last salary increase was in 2019 and receives the minimum salary of \$70,000 benefit? How would the vendor at the different markets, Water Street, Regent Street and the roadsides benefit? How would the young man that everyone of us passes in the centre of our main access roads, plying his trade by selling water benefit? Boldly, I say that they will not benefit. What I do know is that once the installed regime embarks on mass production of houses, it would enter into agreements with huge manufacturing companies where there will be given a percentage off on certain items and the final cost will be borne by the ordinary man.

Thirdly: reducing the duty on industrial grade cement. Here I would say that the ordinary and average Guyanese will not benefit. Rather, they will be the bug bearer for the importers and businesses. Let us face the facts and not just narrate fictions. The reality here is that an individual allocation is the standard 40x100 plot of land. When one is ready to commence construction of his/her private house, he/she would not use industrial grade cement. This is more applicable to the bigger boys who will be awarded contracts for the building of schools, roads, bridges and other major construction. That is the fact.

Sir, how much time do I have?

Under increase in the low-income mortgage low ceiling, while this may be a laudable initiative, I will summarise by repeating, would a single mother who is struggling to ensure that a meal is placed on the table for her five children benefit? How would a public servant whose last salary increase was in 2019 and receives the minimum salary of \$70,000 benefit? **[An Hon. Member: (inaudible)]** Well, it is for the sake of emphasis. The reality is that I had the opportunity of serving at the Central Housing & Planning Authority (CH&PA) for a short stint and, many days, I gave my ears to those who visited and expressed their dissatisfaction and disappointment with the financial institutions. Rather than, the installed regime, working with institutions to increase the mortgage lending, it should find an alternate mechanism to help our people who are desperate and in vulnerable situations. I would now conclude, Sir.

In conclusion, as my Colleagues on this side of the House I cannot, with good conscience, give my blessing to the passage of *Budget 2021*. It lacks substance. It is without

guidance on what to expect in the regime’s fight to combat Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). It is not a budget for the ordinary man. It is not a budget for the youths or the single mothers. It is a budget created for economic genocide for the poor. A budget with promises and fictions...*[Interjection]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you need to conclude.

**Ms. Ferguson:** All right, I am now wrapping up, Sir.

... that will not be realised. A budget crafted without the input from the major and key parliamentary stakeholder.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, Point of Order. We cannot allow in this House phrases like ‘economic genocide’. If we do not allow the word ‘nonsense’, we cannot allow the phrase ‘economic genocide’ in this House.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, please. I do not recognise that as a Point of Order. You can continue to conclude immediately, Hon. Member.

**Ms. Ferguson:** Yes, Sir. I am doing just that.

If I am to support this document, I will be doing the public servants, nurses, teachers, police officers and ranks, military officers and ranks, single mothers and youths a disservice.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member, your time is up.

**Ms. Ferguson:** I do not wish to be labelled as a judas or traitor by the people I represent.

Finally, I, like my Colleagues, call on the Government to ensure that public servants are given a 10% wage increase retroactive from January to...*[inaudible]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon Member and Minister of Home Affairs Mr. Robeson Horatio Benn, you may proceed with your contribution.

Hon. Members, please allow the Minister to make his presentation.

**Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh for the wonderful Budget presentation. The fact that the document was presented in this House is contextualised where we are and what we need to do to move forward and make our country and society better.

The last time I spoke in this House, I deplored presentations which were made. I have to say that I cannot match the wonderful presentations of Mr. Shuman nor the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh. We had before us, in this House, a delusional, deplorable, regrettable, and infamous display and presentation from an Hon. Member. The Member is only honourable, perhaps by convention in this House.

If Guyana is to become better, to be at peace and to have harmony, it has to begin here in this House with us and it has to arise from reasonable, responsible debates that are based on facts. Unfortunately, it now seems, as if we have a situation where the Opposition, with the exception of Mr. Shuman, is on a path of continuing to shape the situation per insurrection, first edition for pivoting to the public servants, the police, the army and all sorts of persons who they want to create an image, a sense of victimhood in respect of what we need to do and how we need to move forward in our country.

I think most of us are aware of how we landed where we are. When His Excellency Irfaan Ali came here to make his Inaugural Address to the Parliament, he spoke on a singular and particular theme which is unity. I do not know how we can achieve this unity or this great hope of the Guyanese people, if we continue to have engagements of this type in this House.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Shuman, reminded us of the experience we had here during the recount. The Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, who wrote this Budget speech along with his staff, had experiences, when the Government changed in 2015, which resulted in him along with others being shackled. He had to run out of the country. He had to leave his family. He was prosecuted. Dr. Singh, thank you my friend for coming back to Guyana to work for the development of this country and for delivering a Budget speech free of ranker, free of hatred and free of incitement. There was much of that we saw, again, in this House.

I do not want to dwell so much on other experiences in this House but, the point is that the Hon. Members on that side except Hon. Member Mr. Shuman, keep throwing up irresponsible statements in the... **[An Hon. Member: (inaudible)]** No. I have to say it. ... face of the highest Courts of the region, in the face of the observations and information of the Organization of American States (OAS), the European Union (EU), the South American countries of Argentina, Brazil and Chile (ABC), the British, CARICOM, the CARICOM recount team who did a wonderfully professional work here with identifying who won the Elections.

7.40 p.m.

All the issues about the 49 phantom or whatever ballot boxes which was just said are utter nonsense. They kept repeating it because now I believe they are on a path where...*[interjection]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister the words ‘nonsense’ and ‘utter nonsense’, you will have to withdraw.

**Mr. Benn:** I withdraw, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, please withdraw.

**Mr. Benn:** I withdraw those words. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand, do you have a problem with my rulings?

**Mr. Benn:** I have withdrawn the words and I apologise for using those words. Just to say that the presentations are deplorable. I think we are on a path where trouble is being stirred up. Having failed at winning the Elections they are extremely bitter. They are sourpusses. Their only intention now is to create trouble in this House and in this country. This is why they would walk out because they do not want to debate or have a reasonable debate.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, I want to interrupt you again. That recommendation in the Handbook, the Speaker could disallow certain words too. So, be careful how you construct the new words that you want to present.

**Mr. Benn:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When I spoke to the question of the recount, I heard the Hon. Member, just now, criticising the COVID-19 cash grant. I understood that she received first. I heard the Hon. Member say that somebody was not allocated a house lot, but I also heard that she was allocated more than one. **[Ms. Manickchand:** Four.] Maybe four. I wish she was here to deny or confirm what I am saying here now that I am on the floor. I heard the Hon. Member say that the first round-about in the city of Georgetown was made under the APNU/AFC. There are several round-about in the city of Georgetown. In creating the round-about it destroyed a signalised intersection to create a round-about, which was totally unnecessary and a waste.

I heard the Hon. Member say that five overpasses were built. I know with the Work Services Group (WSG) we discussed and designed these overpasses. We, of course, never designed elevators. We decided that it would have been better to put a button with a light for people to press to stop the traffic and

walk across, because we feared that people would not use them. That is the experience in Trinidad and Tobago. That is what is happening now. They are not being used.

I have heard the Hon. Member talking about transport, infrastructure and all those things. When they took over in the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, we already had the money as a loan from the Government of India to build the Ogle Bypass road – US\$50 million. The Agreement was signed by President Ramotar. Part of that money was to build a new boat to move from the Georgetown port to the North West port in 12 or 14 hours rather than 24 or 26 hours. We had the money. They did nothing with it and the people are still suffering, as a result of that. I could go on and on.

They talked about imported cement and what not. The significant missing term in our development equation is cheap power. Only now that is being addressed, in the discussions, in the Budget, and in the work of the Hon. Prime Minister.

They stopped the 165 megawatts Amaila Falls Hydropower Project which would have given cheap power, not only to Linden but, for the time being, it would have given us cheap renewable power. They talked about the airport and all sorts of other things which they did wonderful things somehow. **[Mr. Nandlall:** I advise you to ignore them]. Thank you, Attorney General (AG). It is distressing to come again and again to try to debunk. They think that maybe if they say it often enough, people will believe these things. That is why I am fearful and that is why we have to answer them. Somewhere there is a quotation, and I am being careful, that the ready resort to charges of racism is the resort of scoundrels. That is what we are seeing in this House. The ready resort to charges of racism is the resort of scoundrels.

**Mr. Speaker:** That is another unparliamentary word.

**Mr. Benn:** I withdraw it, having said it sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you.

**Mr. Benn:** I want to congratulate the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh and his team for doing a wonderful Budget, for putting in the energy, for having the discussions and for having even the skirmishes in relation to developing this Budget. We even had our own opinions and little arguments, but we are extremely satisfied with the results.

Again, I have to say that in accordance with the Constitution, electoral laws of Guyana and the scrutiny of the highest Courts of the land with the dogged persistence of the

Electoral Observers’ Mission, the ABC’s, the Organization of American States (OAS), and the CARICOM Return team, the will of the people of Guyana prevailed and it shall prosper Guyana over all the weapons formed against it in 2020.

Mr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, Mr. Mark Phillips and Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo were sworn in as President, Prime Minister and Vice-President, respectively. That is the will of the Guyanese people. Yet, when President Ali was taking the salute and inspecting the Presidential Honour Guard on the occasion of his Inaugural Address to this Parliament, a would be insurrectionist in dungarees, video staged for prosperity by climbing over of the gates of the Parliament while kicking a Policeman in the head in the process. He was restrained from his feigned heroics, unfortunately, with an inadvertent display of his *buckta*. The charges are still pending. Still, again, when President Ali and First Lady, Arya Ali took to the red carpet, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Members of this House took the position to bellow ‘fraud is fraud’ in a grossly display of hysterical delusional self-confidence.

Could we imagine that the fraudsters and riggers shouting, ‘fraud is fraud’ and also come to this House to debate and speak of a regime that is now in Government as if merely saying so makes that true against the simplest of sensibilities. Eternal shame, though has already accorded them their place in history.

I am not a religious person, but we have the second ‘coming’ of the PPP/C in Government – the second ‘coming’. We have to work hard now so that our people can expect and experience the rapture of Guyana’s development.

The development class conceptualised in the manifesto of the PPP/C and uncontextualised in the first of many budgets to be presented by Dr. Singh as Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance again. President Irfaan Ali has spoken in ways of enhancing national unity irrespective of race, class, ethnic, religious, cultural and political perspectives. He has repeatedly struck the necessary notes emphasising fairness, justice, opportunity, equity, reward for diligent work, property and crime reduction, and improved healthcare.

Unfortunately, again, in spite of the traumatic events of 2<sup>nd</sup> March to 8<sup>th</sup> August, 2020, the necessary taking of the available opportunities for retrospection and introspection have not been grasped by those whom we can best describe as the usual suspects, who in the usual manner continue to recklessly and luridly race-bait, conjure up fictions and

alternative facts on the intent purpose and results of the past PPP/C programmes and projects. Worse yet, they have purloined those projects which they inherited and have advertised them decidedly as their own.

I am amongst the first to concede that the APNU/AFC built a round-about in Georgetown, replacing a signalised intersection and naming it the first round-about in Guyana. At the macro-employment level, they studiously avoided speaking about the 7,000 sugar workers who they dumped into the dams and streets without a care for the consequences on the 28,000 direct dependence of those workers and the negative withdrawal of the synergistic economic impacts on another 70,000 persons of all races in the sugar industry.

I am not sure of those who are here to represent them who are perhaps competent, but I really would have liked to ask their leading lives, what is the problem they have with sugar and what is the problem they have with rice? We all came through sugar and rice. The country developed though sugar and rice. Rice is a staple product and both sugar and rice earned as foreign exchange and that is the significance in it beyond all the support Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) gives in the communities in drainage and irrigation, in the maintenance of dams, in the maintenance of sport grounds and health facilities, and all those other things.

They see rice and its difficulties which they have accentuated in a very narrow way. Today, someone said angrily that people were drying rice on the road. I, as the Minister of Public Works, and Bishop Edghill, want to [*inaudible*]. In the rice growing season, if there are not enough places to dry the rice, the road has to be used. If the rice crop fails or if it goes with the wrong moisture or we get red rice, Guyana loses; we lose; I lose. I have been in other countries where I saw onions and potatoes thrown on the road to be dried. You have to go in the corner. In Canada and Switzerland when the cows go with their bells, everybody has to slow down and stop. Here, we are complaining about the poor farmers drying rice on the road to get the best grade and quality for export. This is the fantasies which they create and speak about without thinking.

7.55 p.m.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, as you regroup your thoughts, I will ask someone to move the suspension of the Standing Order, so that we can go beyond 8.00 p.m.

**Suspension of Standing Order No. 11**

BE IT RESOLVED:

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

[Prime Minister]

**Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips:** I ask that we move the suspension of the Standing Order to continue the debate.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Standing Order suspended.*

**Mr. Benn:** The actions taken by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change in Government suggests that forestry and fishing, quarry and construction, transportation and mining and bauxite – where the Government allowed the blocking of the Berbice River – eventually put in paid to the RUSAL/Oldendorff Carriers (Guyana) Incorporated combined operations. This activity also put paid to the jobs of 700 direct employment for Linden, Kwakwani, Maple Town and Hururu residents, another 400 jobs downriver at New Amsterdam and its satellite communities. They will tell those people today and tomorrow that they love them and they must vote for them, but they are destroying their livelihood and the opportunities for the development of those people and the communities.

I accuse the APNU/AFC of undertaking those measures as a matter of policy. It has long lost its plot for national development and saw a new omnipotent – the God of Oil. The oil which was not simply added as a new long-awaited asset to the development matrix but one to be worshipped, idolised and suckled up. While I condemn the economic and resulting social policy of the APNU/AFC in Government, I hasten to condemn those now, patented presentations, which only sees development through the vision of race and who seek to have us inflict on each other, the hurt and pain meted out to all of us in circumstance over which we had no control.

The Opposition Leader, Hon. Member Lt. Col (Ret’d) Harmon, who appears to be eyeing a career in stand-up comedy, likened the Budget to a plane that has somehow crashed before take-off. Laughter aside, I am glad that he raised the imagery of flight in relation to the Budget and what it portends for Guyana’s future economic development. I had the opportunity recently to visit the Western Frontier and the Wapishana savannahs to the south. In every instance, despite the pressing anxieties imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the migrant and sovereignty issues posed by Venezuela and the now dissipating tremors almost everywhere, almost

everyone who were engaged were ambulant at the change in Government and getting themselves for *The Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*.

Significantly, the aircraft were flown by Guyanese pilots of different races, ethnicities and backgrounds paired in the same cockpits who did their jobs professionally and had our teams delivered and returned safely. I want to call on the APNU/AFC Opposition to let us emulate the professional skills, confidence and engagement that have us in this honourable House, prepare, take-off, fly and land this Guyana aircraft safely and without distress, because we are all on board and will all perish if we lose unified control necessary for the safe operation and handling of a complex but enduring comity that Guyana represents.

Now more than ever, the call for unity has to be answered, so that we should not repeat the failures of the past. An example of which is the defeat in 1763, when tribalism clashed over social and economic roles and jealousy led to the guns going one way, the shots going the other way and the powder going another way. We cannot fail again. The Budget speaks to the clearest path to take to recovery. We on this side of the House, are determined to act responsibly, so as to deliver what we must. It is a far better life than what we have had to future generations of Guyanese.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, keeps carping and touting about the projects and activities at the Ministry of Home Affairs, which he says were new initiatives under his Ministry of Public Security. The raw facts of the matter are that almost every activity he or his booster points to have their genesis under previous People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Governments with Minister Clement Rohee. What we have been advised is that the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, as he is here, continues to sit with Colleagues in an abusive relationship – that of the APNU/AFC oblivious to the disgrace full spectacle he presents.

I want to assure the Hon. Member that we are not tapping his phones. The question now is, how does he do it? How does he endure it? The action may lie in the use of self-medication as I have heard, the Hon. Member, Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, used a wonderful little word the other day when she said *poof*. I had a feeling that I was told, if one is to scratch a match near to the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, he would go *poof*.

The Budget speaks about a *Path to Recovery Economic, Dynamism and Resilience*. For the Ministry of Home Affairs and its agency this path is joined by emphasising continuous

improvement, diversity, professionalism, eliminating corruption and optimising resource use for the safety and security sector. The goal is to increase the peace. That is the watch word I want the Ministry to adapt as we go forward. Our responsibility is to increase the peace in service to Guyana and in response to the critique of issues of the lack of public trust, poor response times and inefficient resource allocation.

The 2021 Budget proposed billions of dollars for the sector and its significantly improvements over 2020. The safety and security of citizens, enterprises and assets are vital to ensuring the development we must now have and to fulfil the long pent-up expectations of all with respect to the sector. These have to be met by diligent effort over the medium-term. The implementation of rational policy, judicious programmes and practical projects bolstered by continuous iterated review, monitoring, evaluation optimising will see the Ministry of Home Affairs shake off the effects of malaise, misdirection and corruption, which has plagued it over the last five years during the APNU/AFC’s time in Government.

The first adjustment toward the institution of a new culture is focused on commitment towards working on the development to improve the sector and to gradually improve public confidence in real terms. This is not expected to be easy, so we have already seen signs where the challenges to public order and security have raised their ugly heads. Not satisfied with their failed efforts to rig on the national and international stage— the national elections— significant elements to the political Opposition have moved on seamlessly to promote racial divisiveness, violence, sedition and politically inspired crime. A case in point is the gruesome murder event, on the West Bank Berbice, when Guyanese could not share their collective grief over the incident of the death of the Henry boys but had to battle feelings of hatred, recrimination and retaliation. The hurt was expanded by racial and criminal attacks on undeserving citizens, as a result of incitement by the maximum leaders of the APNU/AFC – Mr. Granger and Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon – Excellent and Honourable as they are by conventions.

Failure on that front has now slid over as continuous cries of racial victimisation and a renewed resort to openly build the public service into a collision course with the Administration, on – as has been tried and repeated often before – false grounds, alternative truths and plain, naked untruths. The Budget debate is being used by the Opposition not for an opportunity to seriously debate critical national issues but as a platform to create and promote disunity and insurrection,

which, misguidedly, they think they have the backings of even their own supporters. Were they not ridiculous, shameful and dangerous, it would have been roiling entertainment to sit through the Opposition’s presentations that was pressed on by many seemingly disillusioned, advocates both in the print, visual and social media. Sure, it does hurt to lose an election but to claim victory and feign genuine disappointment against all facts, repeated with the benefits of the recount and against all the world, only suggests that certain Members have completely lost their senses or that mischief is afoot.

Therefore, I am forced to start with some considerations of the Guyana Police Force (GPF) which has the responsibility for the service and protection in relation to policing. The sum is allocated from making up for the declaration in mobile, fixed and capital assets for the needed effort to stem rising crime which has taken advantage of the lapses due to the pandemic and the malaise, real or induced, particularly during elections in the past. A review of the 2020 crime statistics indicates an overall reduction in serious crime by 6.9%. This reduction is predicated on the effects of the ‘stay at home’ imperative retired by protection from the pandemic as robbery, robbery under arms with guns, robbery with violence, breaking and entering, and larceny and burglary showed declines, but murders increased by 13%. Year-to-date, 2021, figures show a decline in serious crime by 40.3%. This is viewed as a response to an increase in vehicle, motorcycle, feet patrols and also improving keenness of police ranks to engage in the rising crime check.

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

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

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

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

The reduction due to the provision by the Government of resources in the form of 45 motorcycles and the support of vehicles alone from Government agencies, along with better use of surveillance cameras and intelligence showed the efficacy of this support.

In wrapping up, I want to go beyond the mere statistics and speak to particular issues which plague the Guyana Police Force and the Guyana Prison Service and to identify plainly

that there is need for better professionalism in the prison system and there is need for more empathy. I have repeatedly told the agencies that I do not want prisoners beaten and I do not want their food taken away. I have requested that the prison system plant 4,000 fruit trees to help improve the diet of the prisoners. I have asked the Minister of Agriculture for four shade houses to act as nurseries. I have said that prisoners should be able to get a banana and an egg regularly. Our responsibility is to rehabilitate prisoners and to return them to useful work in society.

There had been an outcry about the release of prisoners, some time ago. I am aware that the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, had sent a text which was widely shared. I will read the first part, Mr. Ramjattan responded to say that: Imran, just to correct a misperception surrounding early release for good behaviour and upon the condition of serving a minimum of one-third late post sentence, there is such a provision in our prison laws. I used it on several occasions as previous Ministers, on the recommendation of the Director.

8.10 p.m.

On one occasion, I released more than 100 prisoners. I just wanted to clarify that, in relation to the whipped-up outcry of the statutory release of prisoners to which I did (*inaudible*) 65 persons.

Mr. Speaker, I understand that, today, the Members of the Opposition, including, the Hon. Member, Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, visited the Commissioner of Police. I have such no difficulty with such a visit, but I have to take issue to a couple of things, which I saw or heard of, in relation to the visit. First, there was a suggestion and apology about the searching of Hon. Members coming to this House. I am of the view that every Member should be searched – should make themselves available for search. At the last Parliament we came through ...[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, that was the Speaker’s decision. If you have a problem with it, there is a mechanism to address it.

**Mr. Benn:** Sir, I am the speaker on the floor.

**Mr. Speaker:** That is not the mechanism. You have to bring a motion.

**Mr. Benn:** We could bring a motion. But I am just saying that we are in circumstances where strange things could happen, and we could continue to do as we did at the Parliament.

Simply, in closing, I would like to – and I am sorry the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, is not here – just read some of the issues that occurred which occupied the efforts of the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU). I will quickly call them out: the investigations to the procurement of consultancy service for the feasibility study that was designed for the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation; the conspiracy to defraud the country (*inaudible*) on 25<sup>th</sup> January, 2021 – Mr. David Patterson, former Minister of Public Infrastructure, and Mr. Rawlston Adams, former General Manager (GM) of the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation; both pleaded not guilty and were placed on \$200,000 bail.

I wanted to ask Mr. Patterson, here, to return to the people of Guyana, the *jingles*, which he took, that were purchased with public moneys – he and all the others. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Bangles or *jingles*, whatever they are.

Money laundering investigation – Aubrey Norton, Martinez Seepersaud, money laundering investigation with regards to Yuri Garcia Dominguez; SOCU versus Michael Bagot, Civil Recovery Case; investigation with Shervington Lovell for drug-related offences; investigation with respect to the alleged illegal sale and lease of National Industrial & Commercial Investments Ltd. (NICIL) land; SOCU versus Jacqueline Caines, civil forfeiture application; and an investigation with respect to the Immigration and Support Services department. Maybe, I spent too much time on other things, so I could not get into this one, but it is interesting.

A forensic audit of the Guyana Police Force (GPF) Finance Department. An investigation is underway with respect to the GPF Finance Department because there seems to be a revolving door between police finances and the police welfare fund. For the last year, or part of the last year, an amount of \$300 million went missing.

An investigation has been launched into the issuance of firearm licences issued by the Guyana Police Force within the period January, 2018 and present. The former Minister of Public Security is not here, so I could not pose a direct question to him on this matter.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you will have to conclude.

**Mr. Benn:** Perhaps, this is my unfortunate meandering because my presentation changed because of what was said before I came. I could only encourage Hon. Members, not only on our side of the House. I have no difficulty with their responses in respect to what we have to do to create and ensure peace in Guyana, so that we could have the



development which we all want and that we could hand-on, as I like to say, a better life than what we had, to our children. That is our responsibility; nothing else matters.

Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members, with those few words, thank you. [Applause]

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

The Hon. Member and Minister of Public Works, Bishop Juan Edghill.

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

On this late Friday evening, I stand here to make my contribution and to lend support to *Budget 2021* titled: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*; a budget that was carefully crafted and presented by my Colleague and the team at the Ministry of Finance, also recognising our technical staff throughout all the various sectors that will do Guyana good. This Budget must be supported by all right-thinking Guyanese.

I stand here to make my presentation, and I would like to declare for the benefit of all Members of this House and for all Guyanese that I am manumitted Guyanese. I am mentally liberated. I have African ancestry. I am a spiritually conscience human being, but I am a politically informed citizen. I am a leader that is committed to the unity and national reconciliation of this nation and I believe in the oneness of our people. I am working towards pursuing our nation’s motto: *One people, One Nation, One Destiny*. I say this to indicate that I am extremely zealous, and I am very passionate about Guyana’s future and Guyana’s development. So, as I speak here tonight, I speak from that background. Also, I must indicate that the last time I checked, there was no transport lodged anywhere or in any part of this country, or in any part of the world, where any human being, system, group or tribe owns me. I am a free person.

In congratulating my Colleague, of many years, whom I enjoy working with, a man of class, skill and patience, Dr. Ashni Singh, I would like to indicate that a budget projects: plans, projects, programmes, and policies.

*Budget 2021* is largely informed by the world-renowned Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), the National Development Strategy (NDS), the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) and the National Competitiveness Strategy (NCS). What we are doing in Guyana is not pulling things out of thin air, but it is informed by well-documented

strategies that benefitted from wide consultations and had the input from the widest cross-section of Guyanese. So, this plan, *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience* was crafted with the Guyanese people in mind; and that is why every right-thinking Guyanese should support *Budget 2021*.

Listening, observing, and making my own assessment – from listening to my Colleague reading the Budget speech, researching the numbers and looking at all the various sectors – I have concluded that this Budget provides for eight things, which I would like to indicate. Firstly, it provides for building of the physical infrastructure to ensure the transformational development and modernising of Guyana. When I speak about this, I speak about what we could all look forward to, cheap and reliable energy. Starting the process to ensure that 400 megawatts of electricity to bring down the cost for manufacturing for household use, and to ensure industrialisation and light manufacturing.

I speak of the possibility of having – what the President described in this House as – the corridor of development. I am referring to a new bridge across the Corentyne River linking the island, Long Island, as a freeport/free zone area. Linking two countries and making it possible for Guyanese and other international travellers to move through South America, Brazil, and French Guiana and back into Suriname and Guyana: down the Linden/Lethem road, over the Takutu and back into Brazil; opening new possibilities for markets in South America.

We are not talking about bangles and bed sheets. We are talking about major – corridors of development. We are talking about a new four-lane high span concrete bridge, across the Demerara River. For the record, when we went out for expressions of interest (EOIs), 21 companies showed interest. Just the other day when we went out for expressions of interest for certain studies for the Corentyne River bridge, 30 companies showed interest. Do you know what that means? The world is looking at Guyana and the world is seeing opportunities in Guyana and only those who are politically strangled by anger and bitterness are unable to see the future of Guyana.

When we talk about the corridors of development, we are talking about the development of our hinterland, not just merely with access to roads, but access with ferries and access with our coastal and hinterland airstrips. Since presiding as the team leader in this Ministry, we have had the opportunity to grant permission for new airstrips and new

aircrafts because Guyana is taking off. One Member said that the Budget crashed before take-off, but it depends on where he is living. This Budget does not only provide for the building of physical infrastructure, but it creates a framework that allows for social inclusion and oneness.

I have heard Members of the Opposition saying that this Budget is discriminatory. Let me tell you how this Budget discriminates.

8.25 *p.m.*

It discriminates in favour of more than 180,000 schoolchildren, who will benefit by way of a \$15,000 cash grant. It discriminates in the favour of the 61,000 pensioners, who will get an increase in their pensions, that the Hon. Minister, Dr. Vidhya Persaud, spoke about. It discriminates in favour of our young and small businesses, which has been provided with \$250 million, to ensure that there is capacity building and the opportunity to take them to the next level. That is how this Budget discriminates.

It discriminates in favour of the Amerindians of our country; our Indigenous people – our brothers and sisters of the 215 villages scattered across our country – to ensure that they get electricity, even though they are not on the grid. The Hon. Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai, today – not so long ago – spoke to that, where 35,000 household units will be moving from 65 watts to 150 watts and that will be going to every household in the interior and our riverine areas. This is how this Budget discriminates. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes, the Opposition says it discriminates.

It discriminates in favour of our young people, that the Hon. Mr. Charles Ramson would have the opportunity to go into their communities and to develop capacity and provide sporting equipment in their community centres, whereby giving them safe spaces: to hangout, to have recreation, to play, to have education and to socialise in safe areas which will mean less work for Minister Benn in the crime and security sector. That is how this Budget discriminates.

I really think that we have Colleagues who are not in their right minds.

Thirdly, this Budget promotes and encourages the entrepreneurial spirit of our people. It encourages innovation. It creates opportunities and, certainly, it is ensuring a pathway to prosperity. I believe in charity. However, I have a greater belief and a greater hope that what people believe, it is not just merely charity, but opportunities. That is why when one

looks at the measures in the Budget, there are opportunities for home ownerships; opportunities for the expansion of businesses; opportunities for small businesses to grow and opportunities for young people to get online scholarships.

I was pleased when I learnt from my Colleague, the Minister of Education, that a teacher could be in a remote area, teach all day, still study and be able graduate without having to leave his or her children there because of online learning. That is what this Budget is doing, it is creating opportunities.

This Budget is also correcting the wrongs of the past. Tonight, if we are to spend time speaking about the wrongs of the last five years, we would be here for a very long time. A lot of my Colleagues have already eloquently placed on the record, the wrongs of hardships and difficulties. And, while I am at this, let me just say something, it would appear that there is a grave misunderstanding as it relates to the PPP/C’s model of development. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, accused us of borrowing. Mr. Speaker when you hear the word, ‘borrowing’... Every Guyanese, who is listening to me on this Friday night, would love to get themselves qualified where they could go to the bank and borrow. Why would they want to borrow? It is because one wants to accelerate his or her development; one wants to improve on his or her possibilities for prosperity.

When the PPP/C borrows, we do not borrow for a parade. The APNU/AFC borrowed to build a stadium to have a parade. When we borrow, we borrow to invest, so that in the years to come, that investment will pay for itself. Based upon our track record of having been able to bring down our difficulties, as it relates to our debt worthiness, we could now go out to the international market and borrow at concessional rates of 20 or 30 years at 1% or 2%. Do you know what that is doing for us? It is helping us to accelerate our development. Listen to the APNU/AFC’s model of development, it is taxation. And even when they borrow, it is to spend on: cheese straw, Grey Goose, meals at the Guyana Marriott Hotel Georgetown and the consumption of items that makes no sense.

Mr. Speaker, I understand the bitterness of the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, when she spoke earlier tonight. Do you know what she misses? I have the documents and I could produce it to the world, so let me be challenged. The Maritime Administration Department (MARAD) account was her personal petty cash. Every time she went to the Essequibo, it was \$600,000; every time she went to the Rupununi, it was \$900,000; and when she went to Wakenaam... We all know

that under every Ministry, moneys are given for travel and subsistence that allows Ministers to be financed to do their governmental work. Why were you dipping into an agency and writing letters? Mr. Speaker, it was also her personal donation club. For a gospel concert – I would not call the name – it was \$2 million of MARAD’s money. So, I could understand the bitterness and frustration. The benefit of the brooches, gifts, bed sheets, laptops and the unending list of items that were brought from agencies for the Hon. Ms. Ferguson and the Hon. Mr. Patterson, while they served as the Minister, and the Minister within, the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, is well documented and it is a shameful act. People’s moneys must not be used for your personal gain. You were put there to serve. You are already salaried and taken care of with allowances and benefits. Why are you using the funds from agencies?

The facts will show that the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) had in excess of \$1 billion in its reserves, when we left Office. Minister Robeson Benn was the Minister at that time. The MARAD had billions of dollars available to it. Thanks to the Chairmanship of one, the famous Mr. Larry London, last year, we had to give GCAA the sum of \$460 million; and this year, we have to give them money, again. Do you see the difference between the models of development? That is the model – the money is gone, but there is nothing to show.

We are here tonight debating a \$383.1 billion Budget, but in the last five years – 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 – the APNU/AFC spent \$1.3 trillion. Let me break this down for the ordinary Guyanese. One trillion is equal to one thousand billion. What do they have to show? Tonight, we have heard that there is a roundabout, five overpasses and the D’ Urban Park. [**An Hon. Member:** And the arches.] The arches were donated by Banks D’Aguiar’s Industries & Holdings (DIH) Limited and ANSA McAL Limited. Why would you want to put that as an expenditure when it was donated?

We, on this side of the House, would not be intimidated, condemned, or manipulated by the Opposition, who is coming here with their sanctimonious gangsterism and saying how they would like to have this and that. When they were here, the only things they wanted to have were the things they took for themselves. We, in the PPP/C, bring to this nation a culture of servant leadership. Yes, we lead, but we lead by serving our people. That is why we are rooted in the base. That is why you could see us on the ground. That is why we visit the villages. That is why we are in the boats going up to every creek. That is why we are in every community. That is

why we reach out to Africans, Indians, Chinese, Portuguese, Brazilians, Santoro, and Douglas – anybody or race. [*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, the Hon. Deputy Speaker is on the floor.

**Mr. Shuman:** Mr. Speaker, I stand on a Point of Order. The Hon. Member is imputing my character.

**Bishop Edghill:** I beg your pardon, Mr. Shuman. I respectfully bow to you, Sir. All except, Mr. Shuman. So, we have some wrongs to get right.

We had an emergency budget, and I could say this without fear of contradiction because it is happening around the country, everybody wants their roads fixed. Mr. Speaker, I am sure you will tell me about your road, as well. Do you know what we did when we went into the Ministry? We sent out our engineers to consult with every Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) and Regional Democratic Council (RDC). Every NDC was to name its two top priority roads to be fixed. We did not discriminate areas where Indians live and where Africans live. We fixed the roads. As I stand here to speak tonight, 168 roads are under construction throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. Let me just say this, while I am on this point, do you know what our implementation rate, at the Ministry of Public Works, was for 2020? It was 97.9%, moving from 57% and 61%, over the last five years. We have to right the wrongs.

The children were denied over \$8 billion. We are righting that wrong; we are giving them back their money. The senior citizens of this country were denied their water subsidy. We are righting that wrong; we are giving it to them. Our young people had to line up at the Ministry of Housing and Water for house lots, nothing was happening, and only selected people were getting. One had to do all sorts of gymnastics on the table and under the table to get through; we are righting that wrong. Our farmers had to face difficulties with drainage and irrigation charges; we are righting that wrong. This Budget is righting wrongs.

This Budget is ensuring the health and well-being of our citizens. It is advancing our intellectual development; it is retooling our workforce with the skills needed to service the traditional as well as new and emerging sectors. I speak of oil and gas. I speak of ecotourism and our hospitality industry. I speak of agro-processing, light manufacturing, plantation agriculture and our biodiversity services. I am not just speaking about rice, sugar, bauxite and forestry, we are

expanding and, we have to add to that, information and communications technology (ICT). So, when you hear from our Colleagues on this side of the House, the infrastructure has been set – the physical infrastructure, legislative infrastructure and the economic framework, to ensure that all of our sectors are moving together – and the regression that we had over the last five years that we will experience a turnaround. Hence, the title of our budget, A Pathway to Prosperity. We are cutting new grounds to make that happen.

This Budget also provides for the safeguarding of the vulnerable amongst us. A country is not just judged by the great things it does, but by how it treats its vulnerable in society – the helpless, the downtrodden, the poor, the underprivileged, the differently abled and our single mothers, for whom I wish that our men would be more responsible with, so that we do not have so many of them.

8.40 p.m.

This Budget speaks to those issues. We believe in human development. Dr. Cheddi Jagan articulated a new global human order; economic development, but with a human face, ensuring benefits to real people.

This Budget caters for the defending of our sovereignty, ensuring the safety and the security of our people and, eventually, ensuring that there is adequate investment in our future, safeguarding our future.

When I read and went through this Budget, when I looked at the numbers and the allocations that are made, it will stabilise communities and it will keep families together. I believe that it will expand the middle class and that it will promote the development of our small businesses; more than anything else, it will ensure that everyone has a seat at the table because there is equal opportunity and equal access.

I have observed a trend that is developing in Guyana, especially by those who have lost political power and believe that if they say something, often enough, people will believe it to be true. The Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, stood in this House and said that all the projects the PPP/C is pursuing were conceptualised, designed and funded by the APNU/AFC. Then I heard the Hon. Minister Ferguson, not so long ago – the former Minister – saying that the Sheriff/Mandela expansion project and the adequate housing project were their concepts and they funded it. Dr. Ashni Singh and I had to look at each other and smile. That was a US\$66 million Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) loan and I am sure that the person whose signature is there –

the person who signed – would be that of Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. The APNU/AFC refashioned that money and did what it wanted to do. And, up until now, the Sheriff/Mandela expansion project is not completed. As a matter of fact, when I assumed Office, there was nothing going on with the Sheriff/Mandela expansion project – it was stopped.

Today, I am happy to report to the House that Mr. Patterson accused myself, and my Colleague, Minister Indar, of only firing people – he said that is the only thing we do; I am coming to that. You said that we do not do anything. As a result of my intervention, the Sheriff Street/Mandela expansion project has nine sub-contractors and 19 sites that are being worked on simultaneously. I do not do anything, Sir. I do not do it; I make it happen.

When we got into Office, we left US\$50 million. Minister Robeson Benn was the Minister at that time and Mr. Donald Ramotar was the President. India had allowed for us to fund US\$50 million to build a road link between the East Coast of Demerara and the East Bank of Demerara. Five years after we left Office, we went back and there was nothing. As a matter of fact, it moved from US\$50 million to \$208 million. They were busy doing their things to see how they could get the best deals along the alignment, to give lands to their friends, cronies, and families.

The Government of India’s representative in Guyana, worked on India’s Independence Day to facilitate the PPP/C’s Administration to reformat and to get that project going again. In *Budget 2021*, moneys have been allocated because the work will begin in the latter part of this year. We are going to the procurement process. We left the money; we left the road; and they did nothing. Yet, the Hon. Member stood up here and said that he conceptualised it. He was on Mr. Donald Ramotar’s mind – the President of Guyana, at that time – when he went to India. Mr. Patterson was on the mind of Mr. Donald Ramotar, while that project was being conceptualised and funded. It is unbelievable how people would come here and pontificate. Mr. Speaker, there must be some penalty, somewhere in this world for *kavakamitism*.

According to the Hon. Member, the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA) modernisation project was conceptualised by Mr. David Patterson. Again, this was an agreement under Minister Robeson Benn. In 2011, Mr. Patterson was in Mr. Benn’s psyche conceptualising and funding this project. The moneys came from the Export–Import Bank of China (China Exim Bank), and not the APNU/AFC’s bank account. When the APNU/AFC got into

Office, do you know what it did, Mr. Speaker? It shrunk the footprint of the airport; it was made smaller. All of the other works that should have been done to facilitate commercial offices and food courts, were cut out; the number of boarding bridges were reduced and US\$23 million disappeared from the contract.

The Minister that does nothing, as he claimed, did something. When I assumed Office, I went to the airport. The President himself went to the airport and, after a while, President Irfaan Ali led the team. We said to the Chinese that we are not accepting this – it was clear language. The same people who Mr. Patterson sat with, smiled, and got US\$23 million, when they realised the no- nonsense, and pro-people approach of the Irfaan Ali Administration, where we believe in value for money and where we believe that the people of Guyana must get what they are paying for ...We now have an amicable settlement. The same people will now provide corridors for two additional boarding bridges...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you will need an extension of time to tell us about these bridges.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to seek a five-minute extension for the Hon. Member to conclude. As there is no one here, I do not see why we cannot give him 10 minutes.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, it is because I was presented with a list amending the Standing Orders.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Bishop Edghill:** Mr. Speaker, may I proceed?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, please proceed.

**Bishop Edghill:** With that airport, we will now have a new curtain wall; we will modernise the airport. A superstructure will have to be put up so as to allow for shops. We have to get work done to ensure that airlines have offices and that there are other commercial spaces. The Hon. Member was so bold, in his presentation, to stand and say that he does not know what the money in the Budget is for. The Estimates are coming, Sir and we will deal with that.

This Budget allows us to be able to move things in its proper perspectives.

The other thing I want to address is the statement made by Hon. Member about ‘we fire people’. He said that we fired the General Manager for the Demerara Harbour Bridge

Corporation – I have his resignation in my office. He said that we fired the General Manager MARAD. The General Manager of MARAD is a man by the name of Mr. Steven Thomas. The person who was the General Manger was promoted and brought to my office as the Ministerial Advisor on Maritime Affairs but has since been asked to go because of several issues.

Minister Robeson Benn sat right here and sent me a *WhatsApp* message showing me of what was happening at 14 Miles Issano, the hinterland coordinator, the man, who the Member said I fired, was dispatched to the area to correct what was going on there. Do you know what he was worried about? It is the gentleman who accompanied him when he visited the Macau in China. He said that a procurement specialist was fired. Mr. Speaker, I do not have a procurement specialist at my Ministry. He said the Coordinator of the Work Services Group was fired. Mr. Vaughn is, on public record, telling everyone in Guyana to please not drag him into politics – *and the man guh come here and say how I fired the man*. Do you see what we are talking about? It is the same man who told the nation, when I broke the news that he had taken a bangle from the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation, that he does not even wear jewellery and that he does not like jewellery. When he was caught with the jewellery on this hand and photographs appeared across the country, he then started to dance, and he said something different. Mr. Speaker, do you know why I went there? I could have let this pass, but the people of Guyana should know that when the APNU/AFC speaks, not to believe anything that it says.

The Hon. Member, Annette Ferguson, stood there and said that she would speak the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The truth is not a person. The truth cannot be decorated with hairstyles, jewellery, and brooches. The truth cannot sleep on a comfortable king-sized bed with bed sheets.

The truth is the truth, it needs no clutches; if it does, it is a lie. It stands by itself. It is the same people who stood and told the people of Guyana that they won the elections that Brigadier (Ret’d) Granger would be sworn in. They were mobilising people to come, several times, to a swearing in. It is the same people who deceived their own supporters and told them that they won the elections and that they are coming here to rewrite history and to make all sorts of things.

For the consideration of the Estimates, I will deal with the numbers and the allocations that are in the Budget, but I want to indicate to you, that *Budget 2021* provides hope for

Guyanese – a modern Guyana, superhighways, and modernisation. What one sees when one enters New York City, one will see when driving his or her car, here in Guyana. What we have been dreaming about, is about to happen. The leadership of President Ali and the PPP/C will take Guyana safely to that destination. I invite all Guyanese to come to the table and let us sit together and join in this path of working together for a prosperous Guyana.

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

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

I now call on the Hon. Member, Dr. Tandika Smith, to make her presentation.

**Dr. Smith:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am truly humbled to stand on the Government side of this House to give my contribution to *Budget 2021 – A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. A budget that truly reflects the epitome of visionary policies, plans and programmes of our Government. It is one that will certainly see the resuscitation of our economy, the improvement of livelihood for all Guyanese and most of all, one that will create a solid foundation for sustainable economic development that will help secure the future for many generations to come.

Before I proceed further in this debate, permit me to register my sincere gratitude to the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh and his hardworking team for their unwavering dedication and commitment in preparing a people’s budget.

8.55 p.m.

After occupying my seat in this honourable House for the past three days, it is difficult to not notice the many delusional and misleading statements coming from the Hon. Members of the Coalition Opposition, as they lauded the hard work and development undertaken by their Government. Like every other Guyanese, I am convinced that the only hard work they have done is to work on destroying the economy of this country. They worked hard to empty the pockets of the working class and the poor and ordinary man by adding so many taxes to basic food items and many other items.

They worked hard on creating unemployment by firing 7000 sugar workers and 2000 CSOs. That is why, today, they can only boast of works that are mere figments of their imaginations. It is evident that they are competing with the fictional characters of the famous fairy-tale books, *Alice in Wonderland* and *Pinocchio*. The distortions of their

perceptions of change, a ‘good life’ and progress are insanely unbelievable and a blatant insult to the intelligence of every Guyanese and, more so, their own supporters.

The untruths fuelled by the Coalition Opposition is venomous and shameful. It is sickening to see that the very Members of the political party that plundered the public’s purse and did nothing for our country, stand there without remorse knowing fully well that it was under their Government, many families went to bed without a meal. Persons lost their place of abode. Our school children dropped out of schools. The dreams of many young people to attend a university, to achieve higher learning, were shattered simply because the children of cronies and party members, became a high priority.

To my fellow young people and all right-thinking Guyanese, I implore you to remain cautious and conscious of what the APNU/AFC stands for; it is anti-progress, anti-cohesion, anti-youth development, anti-poor people and, most of all, anti-democracy. I wish to tell you, always be reminded that it was under the very Coalition Government you did not enjoy a ‘good life’ as promised.

Opportunities and employment became foreign to them. Healthcare, education, agriculture and major sectors collapsed under their watch. Most of all, democracy was under siege for five long months. The basic right to freedom of choice was held hostage simply because of an uncaring and kleptocratic Government. Be watchful, our future generation must never endure what we did under the APNU/AFC Coalition and, certainly, should never have their right to freedom of choice violated or held hostage.

I now turn my attention to the health sector. It is no secret that under the previous Administration, like many other sectors, the health sector suffered immensely due to mass corruption and the mismanagement of public funds. We saw the crippling of basic healthcare services such as ultra-sonography X-rays and basic laboratory tests, such as Biochemistry and Serology, among others. There was the lack of basic medication countrywide. Today, under this Government, we have the pleasure to revamp this sector under the stewardship of the Hon. Minister Dr Frank Anthony, who understands and knows the importance of the delivery of quality healthcare to a nation.

Our health sector will receive a whopping \$53.5 billion, one of the largest in many years. This simply means that every programme within the Ministry of Health, such as maternal, child healthcare, mental health, chronic disease and reproductive health, just to name a few, will benefit

extensively from this allocation. A total of \$70 billion will be allocated to replenish the shortage of medications for psychiatric patients. Additionally, programmes will be implemented to address mental health and suicide prevention, with an extension to hinterland communities. Our high-risk expecting mothers in areas such as Moruca, Kato and Enmore will be able to benefit from maternal waiting homes provided for them at the cost of over \$140 million.

We recognise the importance of safe and modernised infrastructure that will aid in the delivery of reliable and high standards of healthcare services. That is why \$2.8 billion has been allocated to ensure same. Of this, the Smart Hospital Projects at Lenora, Lethem, Paramakatoi, Mabaruma and Diamond, will see upgraded services. Clearly this is the visionary path that our Government will embark on to ensure no community, big or small, is left behind, as was done under the previous Government. Our health sector has been plagued with a large number of non-functional and faulty medical equipment in various health facilities. This will be resolved because \$1.8 billion has been allocated to purchase critical medical equipment to furnish this void.

As we continue to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, our Government remains committed in protecting the well-being of our healthcare workers, our population at large and will be rolling out vaccination with the goal of achieving herd immunity by the end of 2021. To show our appreciation, already our healthcare workers have received a two-weeks bonus, plus a \$25,000 one-off cash grant. This was also extended to all public servants. The accessibility to personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitising agents, COVID-19 test kits and other medical supplies, will improve significantly, as compared to what was provided by the previous Government at the discovery of patient zero in mid-March of 2020.

Our Administration has also acted responsibly and ramped up testing – from conducting 21 tests daily to over 200 tests, with the capacity to do over 2000. A total of \$750 million has been allocated to support the rolling out of the COVID-19 vaccines which will see healthcare workers, the elderly and persons with comorbidities being the first recipients. Already our healthcare workers have benefitted from the first batch of the COVID-19 AstraZeneca vaccine. These are only some of the developments to be expected within our health sector for 2021. I am sure that the Hon. Minister Dr. Frank Anthony, will elaborate more on this.

As one of the geographical MPs representing Region 3, I must say, to mention that this region was neglected by the previous Administration is an understatement. Immediately after they got into Office in 2015, Region 3 became completely invisible to them. The evidence shows that there was not one new housing scheme in the entire Region 3; there is the deplorable state of roads and the inadequate or no water supply in places such as Wakenaam Island, Leguan Island, Tuschen, Zeelugt and Parika, just to name a few and; there are the many cries for house lots from the residents – single mothers, fishermen, teachers, nurses, doctors and others. The unfinished stelling is another example that, under the APNU/AFC Government, there was never a plan or delivery of anything tangible to this nation.

As we have discovered in our fact finding, two X-ray machines were placed at the Parika Health Centre and the Leguan Cottage Hospital in rooms with no electricity, no darkrooms or even proper paper trail of how they got there. The only information available was that they were placed there three years ago – non-functional and gathering dust – while residents suffered and reached into their pockets to travel long hours to either private institutions or to the regional hospitals to get an X-ray done. This is truly shameful.

This will no longer be the state of affairs under the PPP/C Government. Already, road works have begun in Tuschen, Zeelugt, Wakenaam Island and in many other areas in Region 3. This is only the beginning of the good things to come under our Government.

On the 24<sup>th</sup> December, 2020, at a historical event of the Dream Realised Housing Drive, held at the Lenora Track and Field Facility, our Hon. Minister of Housing and Water and Hon. Minister in the Ministry of Housing and Water, distributed 700 land titles. Over 1000 persons received allocations for a plot of land. This speaks volume of what our Government stands for. Our regional cottage hospitals will receive medical equipment such as new anaesthetic, ultrasounds and digital X-tray machines, improved ambulance services and many other medical supplies.

This is what a visionary Government does. It looks after the wellbeing of its people. As always, a PPP/C Government will ensure that every single Guyanese gets a piece of the pie. We will ensure that no one is left behind, and this includes the Hon. Members of the Opposition, who of course are not here at the moment.

In conclusion, ...

**Mr. Speaker:** I think you may have to ...

**Dr. Smith:** I apologise, Mr. Shuman, I do recognise your presence. In conclusion, I wish to commend *Budget 2021* because it is one that will give relief to every Guyanese and restore all of the loss that we had under the previous Government. Thank you. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member Dr. Tandika Smith. Hon. Prime Minister, you have the floor.

**ADJOURNMENT**

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2021.”

[*Prime Minister*]

**Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips:** Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10.00 am. on Monday, 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2021.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, the Assembly now stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m. Monday, 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2021.

*Adjourned accordingly at 9.08 p.m.*