



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

24TH Sitting

Monday, 1ST March, 2021

**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,
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+ 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,
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Georgetown.

+ *Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P.,
Minister of Home Affairs,
Ministry of Home Affairs,
Brickdam,
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+ Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P.,
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Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
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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.,
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+*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,
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Minister of Local Government and Regional Development,
Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
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+ Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P.,
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+ Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,
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Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports,
Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports,
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+ Hon. Sonia Savitri Parag, M.P.,
Minister of the Public Service,
Ministry of the Public Service,
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+ **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,
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Georgetown.

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

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

Hon. Susan M. Rodrigues, M.P.,
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Other Members (14)

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East Bank Demerara.
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Georgetown.

Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P.,
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Georgetown.
Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.,
Lot 340 East Street,
South Cummingsburg,
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41 Robb Street,
Georgetown.
Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.,
55 AA Victoria Avenue,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.
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East Bank Essequibo.
Mr. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.,
Paruima Upper Mazaruni,
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Georgetown.
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Parliamentary Secretary,
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South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.
*Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture,
Regent and Vlissengen Road,
Bourda, Georgetown.
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Industry,
East Coast Demerara.

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

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

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

Mr. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P.,
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Cove & John,
East Coast Demerara.*

Mr. Vincero H. Jordan, M.P.,
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Lot 214 Lovely Lass Village,
West Coast Berbice.
C/o Christopher Jones*

Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P.,
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Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,
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Stewartville,
West Coast Demerara.*

Mr. Jermaine Figueira, M.P.,
(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),
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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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Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,
Senior Editor
Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
Senior Editor (ag)
Ms. Latoiah Joseph,
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Ms. Roseina Singh,
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Mr. Rohan Ramjas,
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Ms. Nadeila Allen,
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Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician
Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician
Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Unparliamentary Expressions

Mr. Speaker: I just want to remind Hon. Members about the list of words that are deemed unparliamentary. Along with that, there is the notice that the Speaker may also disallow words that he finds unparliamentary.

Media Coverage

Mr. Speaker: The other issue that we have this morning is to commend the Press for the extensive and comprehensive coverage they have been giving to the Sittings of the National Assembly thus far.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

For Written Replies

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there are two questions on today’s Order Paper, and they are for written replies. These questions, numbered one and two, are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Chandan-Edmond, and are for the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs. The answers to these questions have been received and have, therefore, been circulated in accordance with our Standing Orders.

1. **REPORTS REQUESTED BY DR. LUIS FONDEBRIER**

Ms. Chandan-Edmond:

1. Could the Hon. Minister state what reports were requested by Dr. Luis Fondebrier, the Argentine Forensic Specialist?
2. Could the Hon. Minister state why from the inception was Dr. Luis Fondebrier request not honoured by the Guyana Police Force?

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]:

1. A number of forensic type reports were requested by Fondebrier.
2. Dr Fondebrier's requests could not be entertained in entirety because of the view that he was being introduced and facilitated by some who had an interest in confusing, delaying and thwarting the investigations which have, in the main, been successfully concluded.

2. **POLICE ESCORT**

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: What are the conditions and protocols in relation to the provision of a police escort to private citizens?

Mr. Benn: “Conditions and Protocols Police Escorts to private citizens Request or the service of Police Escort” can be made by:

- Private Organization(s)/ Private Individual (s).

• Police Escorts shall only be "eligible" if it fits no less than one (1) of the following categories:

• To provide escort for cash, payroll/ disbursement of cash such as Old Age Pensions and cash grants. In accordance to the Force Training Manual under this escort, the responsibility shall be protecting the cash, and will be familiar with various precautions and for seeing that they are carried out by all concern including the driver of the vehicle and the person responsible for handling or paying cash.

• To provide mineral escorts which includes gold and diamond.

To provide explosive, arms and ammunition escorts.

• To provide body escorts which includes VIP, Dignitaries, Government Officials, Diplomats among others.

Protocols

Ranks on Escort Duties shall perform the following tasks:

Before Escorts

- Obtain a copy of all permits.

• Review the route plan and ensure copies are distributed to all participants.

• Determine the number of Police Escorts needed based on the permit and jurisdictional requirements.
- Ensure a list of telephone contacts has been compiled (i.e., power companies, utility companies, railroad companies, tow truck companies etc.) to accompany the escort and is distributed to all participants.
- Ensure a reliable means of communication is available.

- Ensure a contingency plan is developed that includes safe stopping places.
- Identify a lead contact for the entire escort.
- Coordinate and test all communications equipment.
- Identify who will make notifications when necessary.
- Discuss where vehicles will be located and when they will be there (including drop-ins, etc).

During Escorts

- Undertake risk assessments of person(s) item (s) to be escorted to determine the most appropriate method of transport, the number of escorts and the level of restraint required to ensure the safety of those involved.
- Perform an inspection of the transport vehicle (s) before placing person (s) items inside and in their presence to ensure vehicles are safe.
- Monitor communications with all other vehicles in the convoy.
- Ensure the movement is proceeding lawfully at all times.
- Ensure all procedures and special conditions mandated by permit (s) are followed.
- Maintain and facilitate traffic control.
- Activate contingency plan if necessary, including safe stopping point.
- Supervise and monitor progress of the movement, paying attention to all time constraints.
- Operate vehicles safely and in accordance with Motor vehicles and Road Traffic Act Chapter 51:02 to ensure the safety of the person(s) or item(s) being escorted and other road users.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Motion

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

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

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

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

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

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

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before I call the first speaker today, I just want to inform Members that the Business Sub-Committee met on Friday and have decided on the schedule for the Estimates. We will move that resolution around lunch time.

Our first speaker today is the Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde, Senior Counsel. Hon. Member, please, you may proceed.

Mr. Forde: Good Morning, Mr. Speaker. Good Morning, Members of the National Assembly.

I rise to strongly reject, oppose and denounce the 2021 Estimates of Expenditure. The Budget presentation delivered by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance titled: “*A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*”, apart from being historic for the length of time it took to read, approximately five hours, it is also historic because it is the Budget with the largest deficit in the history of Guyana. A Budget in the excess of \$106.651 billion.

The Senior Minister has stated that the economy grew a whopping 43.5% in 2020. This is a testimony to the management of the economy of this country and the policies introduced by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC). This economic growth delivered to the people of this country by the APNU/AFC offers to them the hope and expectation of an equitable economic and social transformation of Guyana.

This is the greatest failure of the Budget. It fails to offer any genuine prospects of any equitable economic and social transformation of Guyana which is so needed and desired by the people of Guyana. This failure renders *Budget 2021* irrational, insipid and insensitive.

In this sense, *Budget 2021* is ordinary, flat and unimaginative. It is, therefore, the classic orthodox budget that the people of this country would expect from a People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration.

I would position *Budget 2021* by setting as its context *Budget 2011*. *Budget 2011* was a Budget of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic and delivered by the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh. In 2021, this country is again saddled by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic and the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh.

In a column on the 2011 Budget, *Kaieteur News*, after reviewing the Budget, stated:

“The 2011 Budget is said to be the highest in our country’s history. But if you break the numbers down, if you add what it will cost the treasury to increase pensions and social assistance and place this alongside what is being spent on public expenditure, the distinction becomes more glaring and reveals the anti-working class nature of this year’s budget.”

It also stated:

“So where is the benefit for the working class in this Budget? The answer, we will be told during the debate, will be in the billions that are going to be spent on education and health. But the rich will also benefit from this, will they not?”

It stated further:

“The philosophy of the PPP government is that by helping the rich we help the poor. The rich create jobs and keep industry and commerce going. Thus helping them helps the poor.”

This Budget, *Budget 2021*, is a mere continuation of the same trickle-down approach to the economic management of Guyana by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. A budget is a monetary reflection of all Government policies. It is a document that relates, not only to the Minister of Finance, but, ultimately, to those in the Government who would implement and prioritise the policies it encapsulates.

The agenda laid out in *Budget 2021* is quite instructive and revealing of what are the People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s priorities for the next year. When one looks at what were the priorities of the private sector and the Guyana Trades Union Congress (GTUC) for *Budget 2021* and what eventually found its way into the Budget, the trickle-down approach is confirmed.

The Guyana Trades Union Congress stated that its priorities were: One – A reduction in national borrowing. Was it granted? No; Two: A reduction in concessions given to the private sector. Was it granted? No; Three: The erasure of the deficit of the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). Was it granted? No; Four: The immediate restoration of the constitutional right to free education at the tertiary level. Was it granted? No.

On the other hand, all the requests made by the private sector were granted.

The Senior Minister speaks at paragraph 1.15 of *Budget 2021*. He spoke about the Budget being one to ensure that the country recovers from the trauma of the last five years. You see, when I said that the Budget is irrational and insipid, I was not being harsh. For the benefit of the Senior Minister, who we know from the debate to increase the debt ceilings a few weeks ago and engage in imaginary conversations with himself, let me bring him up to speed with a dose of reality. Whilst he was sojourning for the past five years, the economy has grown and flourished. In relation to the productive

industries, only the sugar industry contracted in the past four years due to the mismanagement of the sugar industry by the PPP/C. A crisis which was inherited by the A Partnership for National Unity /Alliance For Change. The other productive industries expanded on an average in the past 5 years. There was notable growth in other crops; gold; other mining and quarrying; petroleum and gas and support services; rice manufacturing; electricity supply; accommodation and food services; financial and insurance activities; professional, scientific and technical services; and human health and social work. These expanded on average, in the past 5 years, by 5.5%, 12.7%, 14.9%, 119.4%, 6%, 4.2%, 4.5%, 4%, 4.1% and 4.9%, respectively.

Further, the respective real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for each industry, from 2014 to 2019 increased, except for the sugar, forestry, and rice industries, which contracted by a mere 0.1% and sugar manufacturing. Noteworthy are the industries which recorded significant growth over the period 2014 to 2019. These include other crops; livestock; gold; other mining and quarrying; petroleum and gas and support services; rice manufacturing; electricity supply; water supply and sewerage; transport and storage; accommodation and food services; financial and insurance activities; professional, scientific and technical services; administrative and support services; public administration; and human health and social work. These increased by 28.6%, 15.4%, 63.8%, 72.7%, 3,679%, 19.8%, 22.8%, 17.4%, 17.9%, 24.5%, 21.6% ,22.4%; 18.9%, 17.7%, and 26.8%, respectively. This could hardly be called a case for recovery from trauma. I know that the phenomenal growth and transformation of the economy would have been traumatic for the Senior Minister who has been coming to this Parliament for many years with all sorts of brews, devices and contraptions, but just could not get the economy to perform.

The APNU/AFC believes in empowering economics and the people of economics. The rate of positive growth of the economy that has the Senior Minster and his Government traumatised was achieved by empowering economics and the people of economics. It was not the PPP/C’s trickle-down economics that led to increases in wages and salaries, old-age pensions and social assistance. It was also not the same old PPP/C’s trickle-down economics which resulted in significant growth in the public sector minimum wage. These increases led to higher household income, particularly among those earning within the lowest income brackets, thereby reducing poverty. The public sector minimum wage increased by over 70% between 2015 and 2019, to reach \$70,000.

In addition, expenditure on old-age pensions and social assistance increased by 26.4% in 2019, when compared with 2016, reaching \$14.8 billion. Between 2015 and 2019 old-age pensions increased by 56.2% to reach \$20,500.

The former Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan’s prudent and sound management have to be acknowledged, especially now, as we stand to lose all the gains the economy made over the last five years at the hands of this illegitimate Government with a blast from the past, with the return of the failed...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Mr. Forde, did you say, ‘illegitimate Government’?

Mr. Forde: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Do you have proof of that?

Mr. Forde: Yes, Mr. Speaker, I have proof. If you wish for me to withdraw it, I will withdraw it for the purposes of being able to speak.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, please.

Mr. Forde: With a blast from the past, with the return of the failed policies, whereby the rich get richer, and the poor stay poor.

Let us examine the management of the economy under the last five years of the Jagdeo’s Presidency. Let us examine the poor handling of the economy in his first five years as elected President and compare that to the performance of the economy under the five years of the APNU/AFC. Mr. Speaker, you will recall that the Hon. Member Jagdeo was appointed in 1999, had two years to practice as President before he was elected in 2001. Despite having two years to practice as President before being elected and having served as Minister of Finance before that, he could not deliver credible economic performance.

10.22 a.m.

Then came the flood in 2005, a complete mismanagement of the drainage and irrigation infrastructure. The Hon. Member Jagdeo’s first five years was a complete disaster in contrast to the Granger Administration, which grew the economy three times faster than the Jagdeo Administration ever did.

In the year 2001, the economy grew by 1.9%; in 2002, it grew by 1.1%; in 2003, by -0.6%; in 2004, by 1.6%. In relation to the Granger Administration, in 2015 it grew by 3.2%; in 2016, by 3.3%; in 2017, by 2.1%; and in 2018, by 4.1%. The

Coalition’s spending produced results. When the Hon. Member, Mr. Jagdeo, inherited the economy from the Jagans, 31% of the GDP was in productive capacity, according to World Bank data. By the time the Granger Administration came to power, Guyana’s productive capacity was below 25%. In other words, the people of Guyana could have only used 25% of the GDP to invest instead of 31%.

During those very hard times, the Hon. Member, Mr. Jagdeo, and the PPP/C introduced value-added tax (VAT). Now, they are pretending that they are protesting against VAT and taxes – hypocrites of the highest order. The Coalition came to power in 2015 and reduced the VAT from Jagdeo’s 16% to 14% and stabilised the economy. By reducing the rate of the VAT, the Coalition was able to raise the productive capacity of the country to over 31% again by 2018. This is what the World Bank said.

The Coalition has increased the opportunity for interested persons to position themselves to take advantage of the opportunities that have emerged from the oil and gas economy. In other words, it was laying the foundation for all Guyanese, not some, as the PPP/C is now doing. All Guyanese would have benefitted from the oil and gas economy.

The PPP/C seeks to claim that the Coalition did not see agriculture as a priority. Rice output in 2018 was no worse than anytime between 2009 and 2014, during the reign of the PPP/C. In fact, it was better during that time than any other period. Let us examine the agricultural output of the commodities over the last few years. Again, and again, it was established that there was greater economic growth under the Coalition. Cassava output was down by 67% under the PPP/C, but it was up by 156% under the Coalition. Citrus production was down by 57% under the PPP/C, but it was up by 193% under the Coalition. Banana was down by 22% under the PPP/C, but it was up by 144% under the Coalition. Even where the PPP/C was able to increase output, the Coalition had outperformed it. Under the Coalition, egg production increased by 494%; bora production increased by over 600%; and hot pepper cultivation increased by nearly 700%. Under the Granger Administration, tomato production increased by 857%. The PPP/C is about distorting the facts, misleading the people of this country about agriculture and the economy. Pineapple production went up under the Coalition by over 1000%. Plantain production under the Coalition increased over 3000%. In other words, the performance of the economy, with respect to pineapples and plantains alone, was over 10 times more than under the

PPP/C. Bora production and citrus production went up over seven times more than under the PPP/C. These agricultural commodities together, contribute more than rice and sugar as agricultural crops to our economy. This is what the ordinary man and woman were able to achieve under our Government.

The PPP/C can talk all it wants, because it cannot dispute the fact that the Granger Government cared more about the hardworking Guyanese people and their economic future. The PPP/C cannot discourage the Guyanese people from believing in themselves and from us believing in them. The Coalition Government has been a Government that was sensitive to the concerns and business interests. It is on the return to Government, and on its return, it will continue to be sensitive to the concerns of the people and businesses.

In 2015, if you were a worker and earned \$50,000 per month, you were able to keep \$600,000 a year in your pocket. Because of our Government’s concern for workers and the importance of families, workers were able to keep all the money they earned, up to \$780,000 per year, in their pockets for those four years. That is \$180,000 extra that the workers were able to keep in their pockets. When one divides that by four, it means that who earned \$780,000 or more would have gotten an extra \$45,000 in their pockets every year. Under the Coalition, it paid to work, and we encouraged work. In fact, Guyanese workers were able to keep an additional \$46 billion in their pockets under our Government.

The Government intends to go borrowing to fund the deficit, but up to now the Senior Minister has not told us how much of the Budget will be financed by loans. For the five years that the APNU/AFC was in Government, the total deficit for those years was about \$92 billion. Last year, the Budget deficit for the PPP/C was \$92 billion. This year, it is over \$106 billion. The programme is to borrow and spend.

The Senior Minister repeatedly came to the country, speaking of the largest budget ever. I refer to 2011. In 2012, the Senior Minister was back at it again with the largest budget ever. Under his stewardship, as the Minister of Finance, between 2009 and 2012, Guyana’s interest payment to bankers who held our domestic and external debts increased from US\$30 million to US\$40 million per year. This represented a decision by the Senior Minister to transfer wealth and income from the workers of this country. It was only under the APNU/AFC that workers began to receive any real and genuine benefits from the Government. With the increases in the debt ceiling for both external and domestic borrowing, the same approach is being employed again. The heavy debt

burden that is being placed on the workers and the people of this country will snuff out fiscal space with benefits to the workers of the country. The PPP/C has no concerns about the workers.

The late President, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, in his 1980 Budget presentation, stated:

“deficit financing will continue to plague the working people. And the country will sink deeper and deeper in the mire of despondency and despair.”

They will not even listen to their own founding leader. The state of despondency and despair which existed under the PPP/C is already fermenting and is on its rise.

When one listens to the Budget speech of the Senior Minister on sugar, one wonders if he is still jetlagged. It was under the tenure of the Senior Minister, as the then Minister of Finance, under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, that sugar suffered its worst and was left to die. The Senior Minister, in 2009, stated that sugar declined, by 24.1% in 2005 and 15.8% in 2008, when compared to 2007. After the PPP/C allowed the sugar industry to go into a free fall, after closing estates, their response was the Skeldon Sugar Factory. This was supposed to be the silver bullet that was to boost sugar production, but it turned out to be the bane of its existence. The Skeldon Sugar Factory was brought to this country by the Senior Minister. The Senior Minister entered into loans for the Skeldon Sugar Factory, saddling the workers of this country with over US\$3,800,000 per year in debt with a repayment period ending in 2033. They spent billions of dollars to erect a factory that was faulty, poorly designed and constructed. This is the legacy of the Senior Minister and the PPP/C in relation to sugar. Mr. Speaker, you will notice that, in the Budget’s pages, the 77 pages of this work of fiction, which is this year’s Budget, the Senior Minister has not mentioned one word on the Skeldon Sugar Factory. I know, Mr. Speaker, that you have exercised, and you have the prerogative to exercise a fact-checking role on the Budget speech, but I also know that you cannot contradict me. There is nothing in the Budget about the Skeldon Sugar Factory and the over US\$200 million wasted by the PPP/C on pages 26 to 28. Is this the second phase from the 1992 to 2015 period which the Senior Minister refers to at paragraph 1.6 in the Budget speech? He stated:

“an era of economic restoration and reconstruction, with widespread renewal and expansion, returned our country to solvency and credit-worthiness, and put us firmly on a path to prosperity.”

That is a joke. The reality is that the Senior Minister and the PPP/C have been bad for Guyana. The truth is that the Senior Minister is orbiting in his own universe. The facts are that, between 1998 and 2008, under the PPP/C, the economy grew by 1.8% and in the years 1998 to 2003, the economy contracted.

This Budget has not only abandoned the public servants, the teachers, the policemen and soldiers and nurses, but also the employees of the private sector. The PPP/C’s philosophy is that workers must work and preferably be seen and not heard. That is why the voice of workers and labour cannot and did not adorn the pages of this Budget. The Minister of Labour, the Hon. Member, cannot be taken seriously. The Minister of Labour, the Senior Minister and the Government have failed the employees in the private sector. In August 2020, the Minister of Labour announced that he would be reinitiating negotiations for the private sector minimum wages to be increased to \$60,000. It was the APNU/AFC that increased private sector wages in 2017 from \$202 to \$255, which took their monthly salaries from \$35,000 to \$44,000. [Mr. Hamilton: *(Inaudible)*] Let him laugh, he is a joker. The increases in salary for workers ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, who is “him”?

Mr. Forde: Pardon me?

Mr. Speaker: Who is “him”?

Mr. Forde: The Hon. Member.

Mr. Speaker: Right. There were about two other times. It is “the Minister of Labour.” Please, either use “Comrade” or “Honourable”.

Mr. Forde: Right. The Hon. Member has a joke on him.

The increases in salaries for workers, whether in the private or public sector, is not a priority for this Government. The Government simply does not care about the workers; they are totally insensitive. There are no increases in salaries for the soldiers, no increases in salaries for the police, no increases in salaries for the public servants, none for the nurses, and none for the teachers. The Minister of Labour has not said a word about this, and we cannot expect more from him about this because he has no point to make.

The Budget speech is also silent on the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). This is not surprising, but it is definitely alarming. The National Insurance Scheme is an important institution for the ordinary Guyanese worker. As I have

pointed out earlier, the GTUC specifically requested that careful attention be paid to the Scheme. The Senior Minister was the Chairman of the Cooperative Finance Administration, which had to approve investments made by the NIS and did approve the investment of \$6 billion in the Colonial Life Insurance Company (CLICO). The National Insurance Scheme is now of little importance; it is now of low priority and of little use to the PPP/C. While the Senior Minister was the Minister of Finance and had the responsibility for the National Insurance Scheme, he permitted and allowed the plunder of the Scheme. The investment failed, leaving the beneficiaries of the NIS suffering terribly. It was the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change, in September 2016, that signed the debenture agreement of over \$5.6 billion to repay the NIS for the losses suffered when the moneys were given to CLICO, when it collapsed in 2009, under the Senior Minister. The further work that was undertaken by the APNU/AFC to fix the Scheme has not been considered a priority by the Senior Minister and by his Party. The workers are simply not a priority, but the use of the savings to invest in the Berbice Bridge Company Incorporated (BBC Inc.), where the Scheme did not even have a Director, was a priority for the PPP/C. The Senior Minister has paid no attention to the National Insurance Scheme. He never had an interest, apart from using the moneys as a gift for associates to invest.

Completely overlooked in the Budget speech is the need for a comprehensive citizenship, immigration and border policy. We heard the Minister of Labour again wailing about labour officers learning foreign languages. The same gaff from last year, nothing of substance. The Budget speech has no substance on the issues of constitutional reform and governance. It is clear that there is no commitment to constitutional reform.

10.37 a.m.

With respect to the criminal justice system, no meaningful progress has been undertaken by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). Despite the grand talk of an active and rigorous parliamentary agenda, there has been no progress, signs of any activity or rigour.

Under the criminal justice sector reform, guidelines, rules and programmes for the implementation of a restorative justice programme had already been developed. Further, the Restorative Justice Bill of 2019 had already been laid in this House. There is not a single piece of legislation, identified in

the Budget speech, that would advance or improve the justice sector.

All the Bills brought to this House, except the unconstitutional Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Act 2004, were Bills drafted and conceived under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC).

The Budget and the Attorney General, once again, fail to appreciate that there is need for the establishment of a governing structure that recognises the reality of our ethnic composition, the devolution of powers to the regions and a review and strengthening of the checks and balances in the constitutional framework.

I would not have known last year, when I spoke of the PPP/C’s decision to dissolve the State Assets Recovery Agency (SARA) and replace it with a watch poodle, that the poodle would have been the Hon. Attorney General. The Hon. Attorney General, seeking to recover lands, has launched a vicious attack on supporters of the APNU/AFC. This is despite them speaking of ‘oneness’. This is hypocrisy.

Since the attention of the Hon. Attorney General has been directed to the assets of Guyana and he has a keen interest in the assets of Guyana, I wish to draw his attention to certain facts. On 12th January, 2010, the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) entered into an amendment to an agreement of sale and purchase with National Hardware (Guyana) Limited, which was signed on 28th December, 2009, to sell a property measuring 103.3 acres for the consideration of \$598 million.

The price per acre sold to National Hardware (Guyana) Limited was \$5.8 million. This was substantially less than what National Hardware (Guyana) Limited had bid for a similar property, which was approximately 40 acres, in January, 2009 in the same Liliendaal/Pattensen area, where the highest bid received in January, 2009 was \$16.24 million per acre. That price had appeared inadequate to NICIL at that time and was rejected. Also, NICIL had received an offer to purchase approximately \$15.1 million per acre for the said land when the property was advertised for expressions of interest in mid-2008.

On 12th March, 2010, Vesting Order No. 4 of 2010 was signed by the now Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, vesting the ownership from the Government of Guyana, *via* the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission (GLSC), to NICIL. On 20th

March, 2010, that very Order was published in the *Official Gazette*.

On 16th March, 2010, NICIL wrote Mr. Edward Boyer and informed him of the 103 acres of land which were vested to National Hardware (Guyana) Limited and asked him to pay the balance of \$540-odd million. On 1st June, 2010, NICIL wrote Mr. Edward Boyer and stated that the outstanding balance of \$540-odd million, due since 16th March, 2010, was still outstanding and that the interest was accruing until paid. He did pay the balance between 29th October, 2010 and 1st December, 2010. On 9th May, 2011, the transport for the property was issued to National Hardware (Guyana) Limited. This is the kicker, Mr. Speaker: In 2012, National Hardware (Guyana) Limited sold 16.615 acres out of the 103 acres of land to Edward B. Beharry and Company Limited for \$495,085,000. Imagine, 16.615 acres of land being sold for \$495-odd million, that same 16.6 acres forming part of a 100-acre plot that was sold for \$598 million.

While officials of and appointed by the APNU/AFC are being treated unfairly and harassed, the country awaits the investigation of this matter and the institution of legal proceedings.

I take this opportunity to remind this House that my party, during its time in Government, governed Guyana differently from the way it was governed for 23 years prior to our assumption of Office. Everyone is well aware that, even though we knew who were on the PPP/C’s nomination list in 2015 and who were avowed supporters of the PPP/C, our Government engaged in political neutrality. We did so by refusing to politicise the human resources of this country, unlike what is taking place, once again, under the PPP/C Administration. Under the Coalition Government, Guyanese were able to disclose their party affiliation without fear of dismissal. Guyanese were able to exercise their freedom of speech and association without fear of reprisal during the Administration of the Coalition. Even as the legitimacy of this Government remains under a cloud, we have already seen the vindictiveness and vengeful conduct of the PPP/C re-emerge, as it has gone about satisfying political patronage.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we have seen the expiration of your first segment. You would need an extension to continue.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Comrade Speaker, I do move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his whipping.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not know about whipping, but you have five minutes to continue to conclude your presentation. Thank you.

Mr. Forde: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was saying, the PPP/C has already returned to window dressing, which is the standard version of PPP/C inclusion.

Our philosophy on governing was different. It was one of tolerance and compromise, in contrast to the spitefulness currently on full display in public. I wish to recall the efforts of my party to align the practice of good governance with the freedoms that Guyanese expect their government to permit them to have. We believe that the Guyanese people have a right to be free of excessive government domination and control, unjustified imprisonment and wanton police misconduct. Perhaps, Guyanese were surprised by the amount of freedom they were able to enjoy, without political reprisal, under our Administration and a police force that was becoming better at providing service, instead of demanding bribes. Regrettably, in the early days of the PPP/C taking Office, we saw the return of the ugly head of police brutality and misconduct; it is what I guess can now be called the signature profile of the PPP/C.

Further, during our term in Office, we sought to leave the people of this country with a greater amount of income that they had earned and to exercise their choice over how to spend it. In doing so, we took the route of reducing the income tax burden on the people of this country. A few in the private sector probably felt that we had not done enough. In quite a misleading fashion, *Budget 2021* can be interpreted to mean State domination and economic degeneration.

Our mandate, though, was to rebuild and restore the trust in the institutions of government. Equally important was the task of giving people a minimum wage. Towards that end, we increased the minimum wage by over 26%, and the salaries of public servants who earned \$100,000 and less, by an average of 17.1%. That significant salary increase was accompanied by the inclusion of the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) as a tax deduction. Through that process alone, every eligible taxpayer automatically had an increase in their salaries of about 2%. Added to that, in 2016, we increased the exemption threshold to \$660,000, bringing further relief to Guyanese and giving them control over their additional income. With putting Guyanese in control of their lives as our mission, we further increased it to \$720,000 in 2017, and reduced the income tax rate from 30% to 28%.

All of these steps were taken on a commitment to leave the Guyanese people in control of their destiny and for them to use their own money as creatively as they wished. How Guyanese spend their money must always be their choice, even as they join in contributing to the common services of the government. The disposition of my party is unlike that of the PPP/C’s, whose theme and principle undergirding this 2021 Budget continue to veer away from the charge given to us by the Constitution of Guyana, which is that we must complement our economic independence with political sovereignty. This Budget wants Guyanese to continue believing that the PPP/C knows best and must tell them how to live their lives. They must retain for themselves, in this Budget, the right to give and the right to take.

By the illegal installation of this Government, the Coalition did not get a chance to continue the process of reducing the direct tax burden on Guyanese. This Budget does not do it either. But our commitment to free the people of this country from excessive dependence on the Government is firm and resolute. I, therefore, want to inform this House and the people of Guyana that it is the intention of our party, along with the Coalition partners, to remove the income tax from the tax structure of Guyana. Guyana has the capacity to do so and Guyanese have the right to expect it to happen.

This step to free the people from the clutches of the Guyana Government and to give Guyanese control over their income will happen. It will also give them the opportunity to enjoy a quality of life consistent with their work and the possibilities of the country’s resources, as called for in the Constitution. The people of this country will stop paying income tax and will not be afraid of political bullying, administrative unfairness and arrogance, as they seek to build wealth and make a positive contribution to our dear land. That is our commitment to Guyana.

Budget 2021 is a colossal failure. The PPP/C, once again, has failed to grapple with the socio- economic inequalities that exist, and which will be exacerbated by the substantial projected growths for this year and other years. They have, once again, chosen to abandon the people of Guyana, including the poor people. The APNU/AFC will forever stand in the defence of the vulnerable, poor and underprivileged people of Guyana.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. It is my honour now to call on the Hon. Member and Minister of Health, Dr. Frank Anthony.

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Mr. Speaker and Hon. Colleagues, allow me, first of all, to join my Colleagues on this side of the House in congratulating Dr. Ashni Singh and the Ministry of Finance’s team for putting together a balanced Budget.

This Budget takes into consideration the need to repair the damage done by the APNU/AFC, by unshackling the poor from the unconscionable taxes, by restoring and expanding jobs and by laying the blueprint for prosperity in this country. The people are relieved that the economy is back in safe hands, that the Budget represents their interests, that they were consulted and that their views were incorporated. Because of this, they have more moneys in their pockets, for themselves and their families.

We just heard an excursion into fiction. We heard from the Hon. Member, who came before just now, that cassava, banana, bora, plantain and pineapple were increased by 1,000% and that, somehow, these increases, while laudable as these are, would replace our export earning in sugar and rice. How much cassava did we export? How money did we earn? How much pineapple did we export and how much did we earn? You come here and try to tell us about agriculture; your record in agriculture is disgraceful. Every single farmer in this country knows that. Do not come here and lecture us.

Let us talk about agriculture a little bit. What have they done with the infrastructure in agriculture and what have they done with the drainage and irrigation (D&I) of this country? They increased the charges on farmers. They took the charges up to \$15,000 per acre when, under the PPP/C, the charge was \$3,500. Because of that, farmers were leaving the lands in droves. What about value-added tax (VAT) on agriculture? [**Mr. Duncan:** Do you really want to talk about VAT?] Let us talk about it. There was 14% VAT on agricultural inputs. That is what they imposed.

10.52 a.m.

Do you know what that caused? It caused simple farmers not to be able to have inputs to do proper agriculture. Imagine, they put VAT on spray cans. Farmers did not have or had to pay more for spray cans. Where are the markets for these agricultural produces? Under the APNU/AFC, they had no markets for the farmers, causing whatever they produced, in many cases, to spoil.

I had the opportunity of going into Region 9. When I visited some of those villages, the peanut farmers did not have access

to markets. Now, under this Government, the farmers in Region 9 could have access to markets.

What about agro-processing? We left a beautiful, state-of-the-art, functioning agro-processing facility at Parika. What did they do with it over the last couple of years? They abandoned that facility. We are not only going to restore it but, we are going to be build more agro-processing facilities for our farmers in Regions 3, 9, 10 and 6.

In every sector, we can look at what they have done. They have destroyed almost every sector of our country, and they come here...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I just want to understand who ‘they’ are.

Dr. Anthony: ‘They’ are the Hon. Members on that side, the APNU/AFC. They have destroyed almost all sectors of our economy and they come here today to lecture us. Gone are the years when, with every passing APNU/AFC budget, anxiety turned into nightmares, as working families were buried deeper under taxes and thousands of jobs were destroyed. Let them say that they did not destroy jobs. Look at what happened in sugar. More than 7,000 families they retrenched. That had an indirect impact on many communities across this country.

Let us look at the other sectors. Under their watch, they lost more than 33,000 jobs, and that is according to a report from their own Department of Labour. We can count. Thousands of jobs were destroyed and there was a sense of hopelessness that pervaded this land.

What this Budget is trying to do is right the wrongs against the poor in our country, by creating job opportunities, by removing VAT on essential food items, by restoring dignity and by giving everyone a fair shot at prosperity.

This is not empty rhetoric; ask the sugar workers; ask the construction workers; ask the small business owners; ask the mining workers; ask the public servants; ask the police and the army; ask the elderly; and ask the working families of this country. Every family in this country, today, is happy with the restoration and increase of the cash grant of \$15,000 per child. Every household is satisfied with coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cash grant of \$25,000. What did they do for the people? They were there. Why is it that they could not have given them a cash grant for COVID-19?

In this country, today, there is a feeling of optimism and there is a renewed sense of confidence. Everyone is talking that Guyana is ‘back on track’.

Despite the Hon. Members on the other side’s toxic bombast, they know that this is an excellent Budget, with the right balance of social expenditures and fiscal measures. This mix is going to make a bigger pie for all of Guyana. Perhaps, that is why there were no arguments on macro or even microeconomic measures. There were no views on the economic fundamentals of this Budget and there were no ideas on the Budget measures. Instead, the Hon. Members were very comfortable taking refuge in dishonourable, distasteful racist rants. I heard one Hon. Member refer to another Hon. Member as an Uncle Tom, and there were many others that littered this debate. This speaks volume about the persons making the attacks and speaks even more about the racist nature of the organisation they represent.

I hope that when the Hon. Leader of the Opposition rises to make his contribution, he rebukes his offending Comrades; condemns, in the strongest terms, the racist tirade; and offers an apology to the Members of this House and the Guyanese people as a whole.

This type of backward thinking has no place in a forward-looking Guyana.

Ms. Michelle Obama once said:

“When someone is cruel or acts like a bully, you don’t stoop to their level. No, our motto is when they go low, we go high.”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. McDonald, there are certain words that you are using... Mr. Mahipaul and Colleague, the Hon. Member, when you shout, you are right in my ear.

You may continue, Hon. Member.

Dr. Anthony: Throughout this debate, we have taken the high ground, highlighting policies, plans and pathways to prosperity. In contrast, our opponents have valiantly tried to distract attention from the pro-people, pro-business measures in this Budget. This ostrich-like behaviour of burying your heads in the sand so that you are blinded to the obvious is the hallmark of sore losers.

Look up and look around you. The country has moved on. The people are moving on. Many of them feel betrayed by their leaders’ false narratives, the ugly attempts to subvert the

Constitution and the bizarre attempt to ‘Mingo’ the elections. The Hon. Member, Mr. Roysdale Forde, was part of the star-studded cast of lawyers who desperately tried every trick in the book to thwart the will of the Guyanese people.

The people of this country will never forget the Hon. Member and his colleagues’ handiwork to stop a legitimately passed no confidence motion. They knew that the no confidence motion was passed with a legal majority. They said so in Parliament. Yet, he joined in arguing all the way to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) to stop the effect of the no confidence motion, using convoluted mathematics.

The people of this country will never forget the Hon. Member’s defence of one Mr. Clairmont Mingo who sought to alter the Statements of Poll (SOPs).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, there is a Standing Order with respect to naming people who cannot defend themselves in the House, so, please.

Dr. Anthony: The Hon. Member defended the prince of Ashmins building who sought to alter the Statements of Poll.

The people of this country will never forget the Hon. Member and his colleagues’ support for – I do not know if to call his name now – the one who arbitrarily threw out tens of thousands of votes so that he could change the winner of 2nd March elections. We all know who he is because he submitted many reports [**Mr. Nandlall:** It is Mr. Lowenfield. Call his name.] Well, you call it. [**Mr. Nandlall:** Keith Lowenfield.] Exactly.

The people of this country will never forget the Hon. Member’s strident call for a total forensic count to determine the elections’ final results. Yet, he then turned around, after the recount results showed that the PPP/C won the elections, and he challenged the results in court.

How can the people of this country forget the Hon. Member and his Colleagues who were instrumental in delaying the legitimate Government from taking Office for more than five months? These are the same Hon. Members who came to this Parliament...and I heard in his opening statement, he said that he rejected, opposed and renounced this Budget. How could this Hon. Member come to this Parliament, after all that he has done with elections petitions and all sorts of things, to challenge the legitimacy of *Budget 2021*?

The Guyanese people are smart, resilient and strong. Even those who voted for the APNU/AFC realised that they were taken for a ride. Many of your supporters listened, with

amazement, to your flip-flopping and inconsistencies. Many of them concluded that you lost the elections when you refused to produce your SOPs. Not only have you lost the elections, but you have lost credibility. People do not believe you. People do not trust you. People are ashamed of you. That is why people are keeping their social distance from you.

The trick that you once pulled of using ethnic mobilisation to sustain support is changing. Guyanese no longer want to live in ethnic enclaves. They are tired of hearing you single out one group over another. I know many of you are gifted with words. You can dress up your racism in nice, flowery language, but when we strip the fanciness away, it is pure ethnic hustle. This must stop.

11.07 a.m.

On the eve of the elections’ anniversary, I want to say that the Guyanese people have moved on. They want the APNU/AFC to accept the results of the elections and move on. They want us to erase the lines of division. They want us to have more unity and co-operation. We must work to make that wish a reality. We must actively work and continuously promote the many things that can help make Guyana into that diverse tapestry.

Our people would always be at their best when we rise above division and ethnic cleavages and when our brothers and sisters can come together for a common purpose to proclaim the creed in our motto of *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*.

Our President, His Excellency Mohamed Irfaan Ali, understands the value of unity and the cost of division. That is why he created the One Guyana Commission to bring our people together. Whether we are big or small, whether we are black or brown or Government or Opposition, there is an opportunity for everyone. This is a vision of hope, of oneness and of a new Guyana that we are building.

We need all Guyanese talents and efforts in rebuilding and creating new levels of prosperity. We need them in every sector of our country. In health, we are still battling with many challenges in the sector. These include drug shortages, lack of adequate infrastructure and lack of ambulances. These problems are systemic and, while some progress has been made, it would require a lot more work to permanently correct the deficiencies and the damages done by the APNU/AFC.

In terms of drug shortages, we have inherited a messy situation where drugs and medical supplies were not purchased since 2018, and more than \$1 billion worth of drugs in the bond had expired. We had to dump them. We had to start to address the shortage by doing emergency procurement to fill the immediate needs. We are hopeful that, with this year’s allocation of more than \$7 billion, we will stabilise this situation.

The APNU/AFC left us with many incomplete infrastructural projects. The most famous is the infectious disease hospital on which they spent \$1 billion. Yet, it was inoperable. Our Government had to fix all of the deficiencies, buy all the equipment and find the staff to run the facility. We had to make it operable.

Despite all of those challenges, we were able to start the services at that facility on 1st September, 2020. To date, we have treated close to 700 patients in that facility. There were many other incomplete projects, including the Ruimveldt poly clinic and the Ministry of Health’s head office. The Hon. Dr. Cummings said, in her speech earlier in this debate, that she would be monitoring. It begs the question: why did she not monitor before? This is because the projects are substantially delayed and above budget.

Let us look at the Ministry of Health headquarters. This is a clear case of mismanagement and, if possible, corruption. This project, which was started in 2017, at the cost of \$365 million and was to be completed in 365 days, is still not finished. The contractor was paid \$304 million, which represented 85% of the contract sum. Of that sum that was paid, \$233 million was paid without any valuation certificates. To complete this project now, we will have to plaster the walls, fix the ceilings, do internal and external painting, install a lift, build stairs, tile and do plumbing and electrical works. Yet, 85% of the money has already been expended.

The contractor has since been terminated and a new tender for a contractor, to finish the job, will shortly...

Mr. Speaker: Has the contractor been terminated?

Dr. Anthony: The contract has been terminated. Sorry. We have advertised. The APNU/AFC was also in the habit of announcing infrastructural projects and not following through, budget after budget. Here is a clear example. Since 2016, the APNU/AFC spoke about the primary healthcare project. Every year since then, they have made a token allocation in the budget, but the project never materialised.

In 2017, there was nothing. In 2018, there was nothing. In 2019, there was nothing. In 2020, when we returned to Office, we realised that no work had been done on this project for all these years. Within months, we were able to restart the negotiations with the Exim Bank of India. Tenders were advertised; firms were allowed to bid; they were evaluated; and the recommendation was made for a company to do the designs of the West Demerara Regional Hospital, the Suddie Regional Hospital and the Bartica Hospital. Those design works would start in a few months.

When the APNU/AFC was in Office, many governments did not trust them with money. The SMART Hospital Project was a United Kingdom (UK) Government initiative. Instead of the traditional practice to give the Government of the day the money so that it could administer the project, the UK Government passed those moneys to the Pan-American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) for implementation of the project. It shows the confidence that they had in that Government. Under the SMART Hospital Project, we have already completed the Diamond Diagnostic Centre, which we will reopen sometime later this month. We are also going to work and try to finish the other hospitals which include the Leonora Cottage Hospital, Mabaruma Regional Hospital and Lethem Regional Hospital. We are also going to complete the health centre at Paramakatoi. This is what progress looks like.

In improving the well-being of mothers, we expect to strengthen the maternity infrastructure across this country. A new maternity home will be opened, within months, at Lethem. We are also going to improve and open a new maternity ward at the New Amsterdam Hospital later in this year. We are also going to build maternity waiting homes at Kato and Moruka.

Yes, we had a very unfortunate death at the New Amsterdam Hospital. Already, we have sent an investigation team. They went there yesterday, and they have completed the investigation. When I get those recommendations, we will take action against the nurses, doctors and whoever is at fault in that unfortunate death.

In the past, we had a very successful paediatric cardiac programme at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) and we were able to do more than 100 cases at the hospital. This programme, which would normally help the children of this country, was dismantled by that Government. Over the past two years, Guyana was only able to send about five children for cardiac care abroad. For each child sent to

Canada or the United States of America (USA) to get their operations, it cost about US\$30,000 to US\$50,000. They sent, in the last two years, five children. One went to the USA and three went to Cuba. There is a backlog of cases and a preliminary analysis shows that we have nearly 130 children waiting for surgery.

That is why, in this year’s Budget, we have allocated moneys to buy all the necessary equipment and to pay the surgeons to come to Guyana so that we could restart the paediatric cardiology programme.

Mr. Speaker: For you to restart your presentation, you will need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Dr. Anthony: There are many other things that I can talk about. We can talk about the successes that we are getting in terms of reducing the burden of infectious diseases. We could talk about the work that we have started in chronic non-communicable diseases, which also includes developing a new oncology programme so that we could treat those patients.

Within these couple of months, we have been able to work with a team in the Ministry and with our external stakeholders to put together a new vision and a new strategy for health in Guyana that goes from 2021 to 2030. Not only that, we have completed a new Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) plan. In that plan, we are going to roll out comprehensive preparations and we are also going to do some testing. I could go on and on with the many things that we have done and that we will be doing.

Since there has been a clamour for me to talk about COVID-19, I will now turn my attention to COVID-19. We heard many of the speakers here. The Hon. Members on the other side came here and said that we, on this side, did not have a plan for COVID-19. If one examines what they did after our first case on 11th March, 2020, if they were so effective and if they had such a good plan, then after we had the first case and the first death, they would have been able to do the contact

tracing and we would have liquidated the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) from Guyana.

11.22 a.m.

The truth was that they were in shambles. They did not know what to do and so they were scrambling for a response. They were not able to conduct the polymerase chain reaction (PCR) testing so we had to build capacity in almost every area for the response. Now that we have completed that, we are moving to the next stage of this response. The next stage has to be the rolling out of COVID-19 vaccines. We are very grateful to the Prime Minister and the people of Barbados for sending 3,000 doses of the AstraZeneca vaccine to Guyana. As soon as we got it, the next day we were able to start rolling that out to our frontline health workers. We have immunised workers in Regions 4, 3, 2, 6, 5, 8, 9, 1 and 7. We spread it out all over. Guess what? Tomorrow morning, we will be getting 20,000 more vaccines and we will be using that to immunise our workers.

On the 8th March, International Women’s Day, we will be getting 80,000 more vaccines for the people of this country. Later in the month, we will be getting another 100,000 through the COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX) mechanism. This will enable us to immunise our population. If this is not a plan, then what else is a plan? This is what is going to get us out of COVID-19.

I want to thank the Government of India, the Government of the People's Republic of China, the Government of Barbados and COVAX for providing us with vaccines so that we can protect the people of this country.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister of Health. It is my honour, now, to introduce the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes, and ask her to make her contribution.

Hon. Member, before you start, I just want Members to know that the Hon. Member Mr. Forde had an average of 85 decibels (dB) in the House. The Hon. Member Dr. Anthony was enthusiastically welcomed, and he averaged about 90 decibels.

Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What could I say about the last presenter? Let me say that he was like a pencil, with absolutely no point, and I will deal with his points later on.

I wish to start by thanking the officers in the public service who have worked tirelessly to make this Budget a reality. I wish to single out the staff of the Ministry of Finance, our teachers, our frontline workers, our healthcare workers and the other Guyanese who have held this country together at this most difficult time. You are *the salt of the earth* and we say to you, thank you.

It is with great sadness that I stand here, today, as a Member of the National Assembly of this honourable House. Sadness because, in all honesty, I cannot say that we have truly served the people of Guyana with all that has taken place in the last seven days. I was thankful that, in the early stages of this Twelfth Parliament, I was forced to be out of the jurisdiction and could attend virtually. It has been difficult to sit here and face the vitriol, the attacks on my sensibility and the abuse that I have never received from any Member of my family or close friends. We have been forced to drown in this madness in this very House. Mr. Speaker, you see, we come here to serve with the best of intentions. Each morning I come here, I tell myself to just ignore, just shut your mouth and, after the incessant bloodletting, I am ashamed to say, I too find myself responding and becoming all that I despise about the way we are doing things in this Parliament. A wise Martin Carter, who wrote 40 years ago, said that we are all consumed.

The situation was made worse when some sections of our media refused to provide a balanced report, that is, one that can be deemed fair and objective – the tenets of any good journalist. Instead, what we got, in this case from the *Kaieteur News*, was a singling out of a series of comments with no response or no coverage of the words that facilitated... that initially brought the retort and invoked the reaction. I do not need to tell the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) community of Guyana about my unwavering support to their right to choose and enjoy all the basic rights. Lest we forget, in 2006 when the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination (SASOD) tried to host their very first *Painting the Spectrum* Film Festival, they came to me at Sidewalk Café saying that no one was willing to offer them a venue. Time does and reveals some interesting things.

When the Minister of Education could stand here in a rant and say that we have a friend in them, I want her to remember that it was her own Colleague, the current Minister with responsibility for public infrastructure, a man of the cloth, who had very different words to say, which was reported in *Stabroek News* of the 29th June, 2010:

“The Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO), yesterday, accused the Society Against Sexual Orientation Discrimination (SASOD) of attempting to corrupt young minds in society by using its gay and lesbian film festival to promote homosexuality.”

He said the fact that gays and lesbian are internationally accepted and are allowed certain rights, even marriage, does not mean that Guyana has to ‘subscribe to the western culture.’”

Do not come to us in this House and think that you could speak, when you have a big blob in your eye. I suggest you look in the mirror. *Wikipedia* states and I quote...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I hear some words which I will not allow. Hon. Member Mr. McCoy, please.

Ms. Hughes: As *Wikipedia* quotes, and I would like to quote:

“The President of Guyana, Bharrat Jagdeo of the People's Progressive Party, refused to sign the amendment bill.”

I know one may be asking what amendment Bill it is. I would like to remind you that in 2010, during the constitutional reform process, this Parliament voted to outlaw discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. I just gave you the quote of who refused to sign off on it. Now, tell me, who could we trust? Who could trust what is said by this other side, which continuously tries to repeat and to change history? What comes to mind is the lion in Jesus Christ Superstar, when Jesus Christ gets angry and he says:

“But what is truth? Is truth unchanging law? We both have truths – are mine the same as yours?”

Regrettably, the absence of truth is displayed in the first line of the Budget presentation, when we are asked to accept a theme: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. Recovery; Recovery from what? In September 2019, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) declared Guyana the fastest growing economy in the world. On 2nd November, 2019, in *Bloomberg*, it is reported that:

“Guyana GDP to grow fourteen times as fast as China’s next year.”

This was last year. In the same month, *Consumer News and Business Channel* (CNBC) said that Guyana’s economy is projected to grow by 86% in 2020.

I would like to reference the press release of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), dated 11th September, 2019:

“Guyana’s economic growth strengthened in 2018...”

Since 2018.

“...with broad-based expansion across all major sectors. Real GDP grew by 4.1 percent, led by construction and services sectors...”

“Economic growth is projected at 4.4 percent in 2019”

All at the same time when this A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government was in place. Guess what? it went on to say that:

“Directors welcomed Guyana’s broad-based economic expansion in recent years underpinned by prudent macroeconomic policies. Directors noted that the medium-term outlook is favorable...”

Guess what the IMF says about the National Resource Fund?

“Directors welcomed the authorities’ Natural Resource Fund (NRF) legislation for managing Guyana’s oil wealth and emphasized the need to complement it with a fiscal responsibility framework to avoid fiscal deficits. They commended that the NRF’s framework aims to save some of the resource income for future generations and contain the pickup in public spending. They commended the NFS framework and explained that it aims to save some of the resource income for future generations, so that future generations can manage public spending.”

That is the legislation that we brought.

So, Mr. Speaker, let us come closer to home. Let us see what the APNU/AFC actually did for public servants in Guyana, when we continue to ponder what public servants got. In 2014, the minimum wage was \$20,000; in 2015, it was increased to \$39,500; and later in 2015, it was increased from \$39,500 to \$50,000, which is a 26% increase at one time. It was not the usual 5% that the Members on the other side of this House have a tradition of giving. From 2016, it went from \$50,000 to \$55,000; and in 2017, it went from \$55,000 to \$60,000, which is a 20% increase. In 2018, from...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am just a little confused. There is the national minimum wage and there is the

minimum wage in the public service. I think there may be some synonymy.

Ms. Hughes: I am giving you the increases in minimum wage for the public service.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Ms. Hughes: Which I mentioned before. In 2018, it went from \$60,000 to \$64,200; and in 2019, it went from \$64,200 to \$70,000. We had a commitment and every single year, we made sure that the ordinary people of this country got an increase. When the Hon. Minister of Health speaks about unshackling the poor; we unshackled the poor. This was no pre-election gimmick. Every year we ensured Guyanese had a little more.

I think this is a good time to really look at some of the comments the previous speaker made. He spoke about the sugar industry. The most disgraceful thing that he did this morning is not to mention the US\$300 million lost and squandered between 2008 and 2014. He refuses to accept that, because of that, we had to start a process of diversification. When he spoke about the hopelessness that pervades this land, let us say that this is what is happening now... Then he spoke about the reduction in value-added tax (VAT).

11.37 a.m.

I want to remind him that it was the People’s Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) that first introduced into the economy of Guyana – 16% VAT. We started a process of slowly reducing it. Guess what? I ask him to show any items of food that is reduced any time VAT is reduced. That is a fallacy. He spoke about incomplete projects. I have too much to say to waste time on responding to that, but I do want to mention a few. We fixed the East Coast of Demerara road; we fixed the East Bank of Demerara road; we fixed the Kato Secondary School, which went over \$1 billion dollars – thanks to the current Minister of Education; and we fixed the Cheddi Jagan International Airport (CJIA), which should have been done long ago.

Let us talk about the building in High Street – a testimony to the reign of the PPP/C – which stands there unable to be used by any entity. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will give you back your time. Hon. Member Mr. Mc Coy, the list in front of you has guidance with respect to the kinds of words you could use in this House. Hon. Member, please continue.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is the specialty hospital and the road to nowhere that was supposed to lead to the Amaila Hydropower Project. What is sad is that the PPP/C Government speaks about corruption, but the Minister before me, who ranted about it, ceased to mention his daughter’s scholarship and the printing of her poetry book, which was paid for by taxpayers of Guyana. Folks, *do not throw stones if you live in a glass house*.

Having not being invited to consult prior on this Budget, I do wish to take this opportunity, nonetheless, to add my plea to an increase in the private sector minimum wage. This is long overdue. Under the APNU/AFC Administration pensions and public assistance were increased, VAT was reduced, schools and hospitals were built, we had first oil and there were improvements on the transparency index. At this point, for what it is worth, I would like to thank Mr. Jordan for his stewardship of the economy. The success of his performance is in the testimony of the international organisations I quoted and are forever written in history and in the sands of times. Their attempts to jail Former Minister Jordan and destroy his good reputation will fail. For what it is worth, I thank him on the behalf of all Guyanese. I also apologise to his family and many other families, who have come to realise, as I was told recently, that public service in Guyana is a burden and not the task that we all as Guyanese should be encouraged to bear. The constant assassination and verbal assassination of individuals and families are totally unacceptable.

Today, governments all over the world are fighting to keep their economies intact and their citizens safe. It is unbelievable that it was in the last five minutes of the Hon Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance’s presentation that he mentioned Covid-19 and people’s concerns. Maybe, he has not seen the most recent post that was released today, which states that the Australian Government has made a direct connection with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in some of the vaccines. They have now cancelled over 50,000 orders from a particular company that is making the vaccines. The Minister would have been better placed to come and explain to the people of Guyana how we are going to ensure that the vaccines we take are safe, given information like that in the public domain.

The current Minister of Health went on a rampage about having to use the specialty hospital. Whether we like it or not, that facility was rebuilt in record time, and in haste, to provide a safe space for these highly contagious Covid-19

patients to be isolated and treated away from other patients in other hospitals. This facility is still the only one of its kind. Instead of badmouthing it, which he did, and cussing it up, the Minister of Health had to put his... behind and use the same location. I want the nation to know that, when the APNU/AFC setup the National COVID-19 Task Force (NCTF), we deliberately invited the PPP/C to be part of the Task force. It was because we knew that, in an area of health and a pandemic of this nature, all Guyanese had to be onboard working together. They chose not to participate in the taskforce. If we could be better and bigger persons, the PPP/C would have sat on the Task Force so that contributions of all sides could be received, and decisions be made in the interest of all Guyanese.

The first months after August, 2020, the numbers showed that we had a massive increase in the number of cases and deaths, especially. More and more it continued and, now, we have many countries not wanting citizens of Guyana to travel to their countries. We are on another list.

I would like to turn my attention to information and communications technology (ICT) development because I am extremely proud of the success the then Government had in those areas. We connected over 158 primary schools and 105 secondary schools and 30 technical and vocational institutes; we opened a 173 ICT community hubs in all regions; we provided free internet to the Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs) and Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs); we provided internet to over 72 hinterland communities; we provided ‘smart’ classrooms; and we worked with agencies, like PAHO, with regard to the specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timely (SMART) Hospitals. Yes. Do a search of *Google*, SMART Hospitals existed in Guyana prior to August, 2020. Why am I saying all of this? I am not tooting my own horn, but I am raising these facts to the Government because I am showing them that we left an excellent infrastructure in place that gave us an edge in these Covid-19 times.

Instead, the current Government was totally laxed and did not utilised the foundation and the infrastructure that existed to be able to ensure that more of our children could learn online. It is an undisputed fact that far more approved and educational learning opportunities are available on the web. We should all be ashamed, including me, when we realised that online learning in Guyana could and is only the purview of the folks that have. Yes, Mr. Speaker, it is only the parents and guardians who could give their child/children a device, a computer, laptop and who could, probably, afford Blaze or an

internet or data plan of some sort, food to nourish the brains of their children and a quiet corner at home to learn... The have nots, still a large percentage of our population, have nothing to get, have nothing learn and have lost a year of formal education. These are the forgotten ones whose parents Guyana failed more than two decades ago, between 1992 and 20015. These were the children who went to school that had a mere zinc sheet. I travelled around enough in this country to be horrified at schools that have zinc sheets as the only roof, and there is no installation, yet we expect them to learn in the midday sun. Many of those parents cannot even help their children today.

I am disappointed with this Budget because there is no definitive statement or allocation for the have nots of our society. How does a mother who could barely scrape together cash to purchase one device decide which of her three children she is going to give the gift of education – a gift that is guaranteed in our Constitution? What is even more worrying is that the current Minister of Education came to this House and spoke about the 26% increase in spending for janitorial supplies and the 41% increase for cleaning and extermination of schools. Cleaning the schools is what the Ministry of Education is supposed to do. We would have been encouraged if the Hon. Minister came and explained an exciting project like the ones we see in Trinidad and Jamaica, where children are being given their own device. We changed the One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) programme to One Laptop Per Teacher (OLPT) programme so that teachers could prepare better for our school children. As I said, more than two years ago our intention was to ensure that every child gets a device. In a COVID-19 ridden world, that is the minimum that we could do. The vision was to provide this and if it does exist in any part of the Budget, we are hoping we will hear it in the wrap up.

The current programme of asking mommy and daddy or a guardian to collect a workbook, at their own expense, especially if they had been fired or have no job or little money, and carry it back to school after competition... all this means is that the workbooks do not work. Many of us received complaints about the errors in the workbooks and, as I far as know, spell check is still just a click away on a computer. In a specific comprehension assignment, the animal ‘deer’ was spelt as ‘dear’, consistently. How dare an official come to this House and say it is acceptable to put those kinds of errors in books from which she wants our children to work when her children have the luxury of private education?

Mr. Speaker, I would like you to know that technology allows us to block any sites persons might be worried about, in terms of children accessing and using the facilities at the ICT hubs, at the schools or wherever. What I expected was a programme, between the Ministry of Education and the citizens in a community, to ensure that free internet would be available and safe distancing protocols in place for our children to continue to learn. In many rural parts of the United States of America (USA) children are also be given a portable Wi-Fi device. It is available on the *Amazon* website. Funding to expand our E-Government Network, which was established in 2015, although the technology and the project to launch was signed since 2012... We were the ones to put it into being. The facility exists to expand that same E-Government Network to ensure that children, especially in vulnerable groups, at specific time, get free internet from the same network.

These are some of the things that we know could have been new projects in this same Budget. The National Data Management Authority (NDMA), as you know, is the agency that runs, manages and maintains the E-Government Network.

11.52 a.m.

Guess what? We cannot comprehend how, a few weeks ago, the Government of Guyana, this current Government, chose to close all the Community Development and Social Management Divisions. All the representatives from communities – 72 locations – specifically, in the hinterland areas that we, carefully, chose to manage, were all sent home and the units were closed. The Hon. Member, Ms. Campbell-Sukhai seems to have forgotten that these locations existed. Those same locations where we found persons had the skills to manage the technology, they were all sent home. When everybody else in the world is building their capacity, we are breaking it down, not using it and closing it down.

There were major projects: The Information and Communications Technology Access and E-Service for Hinterland, Poor and Remote Communities Project – \$17 million from the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF) and also, as you know, the \$37.5 million fund from the Guyana National Broadband Project. It was under these two projects that we were able to do and implement the massive expansion I mentioned earlier, which was never done before in the history of Guyana.

What did we have before? We had what we can define as the largest corruption scandal in the history of Guyana. We had a

defunct fibre optic cable; moneys used; no idea where the moneys went and not one service anywhere between Linden and Lethem, which the cable was supposed to provide. Here is the audit done by Ram and McRae in whom I know the current Government has the utmost confidence:

“...the Project was executed without appropriate project management documentation, including a Project Initiation Document setting out the purpose, objectives, scope, deliverables...”

The total ICT project amounted to \$13 billion, not millions, in one side of the project and then a further \$2.9 billion. The budget was to be financed by central government, while \$10 billion was budgeted to be financed from a loan. You know that the ordinary people of Guyana are still paying for that. Who was the project manager, Mr. Alexei Ramotar – Project Manager, in the document...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, remember I just cautioned the Hon. Members on the Government side about naming people who cannot defend...

Ms. Hughes: I withdraw that. The prominent son of a very prominent former President. What did they say? No inventories. The listing provided by the project manager did not include cost, which is the most significant element, and there was no inventory listing.

Listen to the information on banking. The honourable project manager, they put the name, so I have to take out the name. The project manager:

“...advised that he was never in possession of any bank statements and no bank reconciliations were performed even though the bank account was used on a regular basis to pay contractors. This appears to indicate that the control of funds was not considered a priority.”

Once again, who is this Peoples Progressive Party Civic Government to talk to us about corruption?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will have to withdraw that one too, ‘corruption’.

Ms. Hughes: Apologies, Mr. Speaker, I withdraw.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, in order for you to continue, you will need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Ms. Hughes: I know that you are a fair person. I am hoping that you did include the extra time that I lost.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, you got an extra minute because you were supposed to get that notice at 11.56 a.m., but you got it at 11.57 a.m. You are now starting at 11.57.41 a.m.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, Hon. Members of this honourable House and people of Guyana, I have spoken about the ‘smart’ classrooms. What I will say is: do a *Goggle* search. I want to remind the Hon. Member Minister of Education that all the equipment for the ‘smart’ classrooms I listed arrived in Guyana prior to August, 2020. If the Minister of Education is telling me and this honourable House that, for the last six months, they did not have the capacity to implement and set up the equipment [**An Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*] I am guilty.

I want to talk about telecommunications. I stand proud of the foundation that we laid in liberalisation. I compliment the Hon. Prime Minister for completing the process for the benefit of all Guyanese. But, there are some questions to which I need answers. Hon. Prime Minister, liberalisation could never be, simply, the signing and assenting to parts of legislations that we did not bring to the House.

Firstly, did the current Government concluded a settlement agreement with the Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company Limited (GTT) and its parent company the Atlantic Tele Network International Incorporation (ATNI)? It was a well-known fact that they were pending taxes and Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) assessments which suggested that the company owed \$48 million in taxes. Transparency and accountability are important. The people of Guyana want to know if those moneys were recovered. It is not seen in any part of the Budget. If it was, we know that it should have been announced, publicly, as the law dictates.

Then again, there were rights according to GTT and ATNI; they assumed that the residual value is in excess of \$100 million. Therefore, ending the monopoly, they assumed, that there would be a payment for the loss of their time. I would like the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Hon. Prime Minister to explain whether an agreement was found on the value of that settlement. Of course, we want to know what the agreements were in terms of the spectrum. At the end of the day, we want to see the settlement agreement.

The people of Guyana will also remember that the APNU/AFC Government went to court to get the \$5 million that was owed on the sale of shares to GTT, which the previous Government never collected. Again, we perused the estimates and I did not see it included there.

Hon. Prime Minister, I am happy that you are continuing with our two telecommunications projects, which now falls under you remit. I am happy to see that that VAT was removed from data services.

I want to mention in closing that a lot has been said in this House about rigging. We have a particular other Member of the cloth who uses the word riggers all the time. I want to remind the public and the people of this House that we had an individual, a previous Chief Elections Officer, a Sheikh of the Elections Commission (GECOM), who, in 2011, manipulated the count. We seemed to have forgotten that. I sat at the Pegasus Hotel waiting for the results. At the very last minute, we realised that an extra seat was not to go to the PPP/C, but to the Alliance For Change (AFC). Thanks to the honourable, Mr. Vincent Alexander. Since then, we know that time is history. It did not stop there.

In 2015, we had fake Statements of Poll. Is that possible? We remember that the security marks on those fake Statements of Poll finally came to the understanding of the people of Guyana. Again, do not talk to us about rigging.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I stand on a Point of Order, Standing Order 40. The matter to which the Hon. Member referring to is *sub judice*. It is in the courts since 2015. This was an issue that was brought to the court in 2015. The election petition by the PPP/C has not been heard up to now.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, thank you very much. Hon. Member, that matter is still *sub judice*. You will need to withdraw those remarks, or we will have to strike them out.

Ms. Hughes: I am speaking on the fact that we have individuals in this room that used the word ‘rig’. If the people of Guyana remember anything, they must remember...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are almost at the end of your presentation, so if you want to use the few more seconds to do that ...

Ms. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, the constant severing of jobs by persons in this Administration, continues to create and support the perception that a particular race in this country is

being targeted. I want to say that like John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK) said:

“...both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belabouring those problems which divide us.”

This country is my country too. My grandfather was part of the team that went to London to speak on our independence.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up.

Ms. Hughes: My great aunt’s music is in the tapestry of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up. Could we cut the microphone, please?

Ms. Hughes: Guyana being... [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up. Hon. Members, I think this is a good time for us to take the suspension.

Sitting suspended at 12.05 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.13 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: I now call on the Hon. Member, the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, Ms. Gail Teixeira, to make her contribution. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Today is 1st March, 2021. One year ago, this day, all parties were preparing for the 2nd of March elections. Little did we know that it was going to take us five months to have the genuine results of those elections declared. Tomorrow will mark one year since those elections were held.

We have been regaled by the APNU/AFC with all sort of small stuff. The issue is, what the APNU/AFC has to live with for the rest of its existence is a legacy that it has left our country. It is a legacy of a party that was willing to do anything and everything to stay in power regardless of the will of the people of our country.

1.15 p.m.

They could talk about all sorts of small stuff, some may have merits in terms of mistakes we made in the past or weaknesses we had. No Government, even Mr. Burnham’s Governments, went to the extent to which the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) went in 2020.

In fact, the legacy that they left us is not just in Guyana. The legacy they have left us, as the people of Guyana, is a legacy that is now known across the world. We are the only country, in the democratic world, that had to wait five months and struggle day by day to have the will of the people respected and declared. I would just go back, a bit, because some people are, a bit, younger than I am.

I lived through the 70s when we, as a people, had to live with the fact – Mr. Speaker, you were in my generation, I believe – that, in Jonestown, 900 people were massacred on our soil. It was the highest civilian massacre in the world, in a non-war situation, until 11th September with the plane going into the twin towers. That was our legacy. Is it always that when the People’s National Congress (PNC) is in power we will have to live with these global legacies that stain us as a people? How often when we go abroad and say, Guyana, people have asked: Is it the Jonestown? Now people would say, Guyana, the country in which they had to wait for five months.

The APNU/AFC come to us with crocodile tears in this National Assembly about their righteousness. They are just galling. Whatever they did right or wrong, good or bad, it has been overtaken and stained forever. What they did from the No Confidence Motion of the 21st December, 2018, right through to 2nd August 2020 is not only the five months. We were dragged before the courts to be told, arithmetically, what we all knew, that 33 is the majority of 65. How disgraceful? Yet they do not hang their heads in shame; they come here and pretend to be righteous. They have come here with jaundiced eyes because everything they are seeing is race. They cannot look at the kaleidoscope of our nation and how beautiful we are in our distinct differences, culturally, ethnically, religiously and geographically. They come here with jaundiced eyes and deduced everything - common denominator is race. How could you have a country being run by a party like that? That is why they failed. That is why they are on the other side. They did not comprehend that as Guyanese we are many different colours and combinations, we have our differences and we have our ethnic insecurities, but we still love our country. We still want to be here. We still want to make this our home. They did not understand that Afro-Guyanese, Indo-Guyanese, Mixed-Guyanese, Portuguese-Guyanese, Chinese-Guyanese and Amerindian-Guyanese want this as their home. They did not want to live in this situation where they were discriminated against as a people based on colour and sometimes religious and political affiliation. Yet, they come here and talk a whole set of nonsense.

Mr. Speaker, remember, you and I have been in Parliament for a while, and we know the old bat and ball trick. Whether it was 1992–1997, 1997–2001, 2001–2006, 2006–2011, 2012-2015 the PNC were bad players. Every time they were losing a discussion, they would throw down their bats and ball and walk – poor losers. That is in your deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). You tried to hijack an election, thwart the will of the people of this country who voted on election day, in a peaceful election, and gave their mandate to the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). The gall of it all is that despite the results, you did everything, every day, from the 5th March right through to 2nd August, to make sure that you remained in power regardless of the will of the people. The point is that democracy prevails. This new nascent democracy of ours that started in 1992, with the first free and fair elections, is a baby democracy. We do not have 300 years of democracy like the Americans. We do not have hundreds of years of democracy like the British. What we do have is our guts to recognise how we have to fight for this free democracy, and we have had to fight for it again to protect and to preserve it in that period between December, 2018 and August, 2020. Democracy is now enshrined, and it is something that every citizen of this country recognises has a duty to protect and defend.

In all the presentations we have been listening too for the last four days, there is no *mea culpa*. There is no responsibility for anything they did. They blamed everything on somebody else. As a Government and a former Government, they take responsibility for nothing. That is sad. It does not bother me, because I know that it would not help them to win elections again. We in the PPP/C said that we recognised some of our weaknesses and that we would correct them. We did. We came back stronger and more united than before and the people recognised that.

I want to deal with an illusion that exists in this Parliament. There is an illusion that there is something called the APNU/AFC Coalition. The problem is that it no longer exists. The Working People's Alliance (WPA) is gone. The shell of The Unity Force (TUF) is gone. That never was in the first place. The Guyana Action Party never was, but it was part of the 2011 group. The Coalition for Transformation, which Ms. Annette Ferguson headed, is gone. It was a PNC front in the first place. Justice For All – gone. Mr. Scott’s party, made up of three people, the name of which I could never remember – please forgive me – gone. What are we left with? The bare bones. The bare bones go back to the DNA of the PNC and the AFC. Both are shells of their former days. So, there is no APNU/AFC Coalition in this House. What there is, is a

PNC/AFC marriage. A marriage of convenience. Who knows? It is a marriage. This PNC/AFC Coalition crossed the Rubicon. When Caesar crossed the Rubicon he never returned; he was defeated. It is a passage to no return. When the PNC crossed the Rubicon, when they refused to comply with the Constitution and the No Confidence Motion and call elections by 21st March, 2019, they were on the path to destruction and defeat. So said, so done.

The oppression of the PNC/AFC in Government, the 200 taxes... The promises were not delivered in the five years. The promises they made in the first 100 days and the 20% increase in salary that the public servants were to get never happened. They fooled the Guyana Public Service Union and the Guyana Teachers Union that backed them in the 2015 elections that “manna was going to fall from heaven”. They were promised that they were going to get 20%, but they never did. The teachers had to strike in November, 2017 to try to get what little they received from the Government. Then, it was broken promises to all, including to the poor and vulnerable, whom they promised would have all these increases in the allowances, old age pension, *et cetera*. What did they deliver? An increase in tax collection of \$225 billion as a result of their new taxes, fees and licenses going up. As my Colleague Hugh Todd said, *the policies of the Coalition were politically, socially and economically extractive*. That is a perfect description. In my interpretation of my Colleague’s words, they took all that they could, they sucked the country of its oxygen and people were suffocating under their leadership, but they never recognised it. They never saw it; they refused to believe it.

Fundamentally, there is a philosophical difference between the PPP/C and the PNC/AFC. Fundamentally it is a governance issue. What is the governance issue? How is power acquired and on whose behalf is it used? Who are the beneficiaries? That is what governance is about. On whose behalf is one ruling? Who are the beneficiaries? One is judged by one’s governance structures and one’s philosophy. Or, as the APNU/AFC was doing, it was governing for the few at the top, the elite, the friends, cronies and many of the long-time supporters of the PNC who felt it was *ah wee dees time*; it was time to get back. Do you remember those things?

The issue of the people and the Government is a contract that is sacred. It is fundamental and it is based on our Constitution.

There are other philosophical differences between us. We have a pro-grow, pro-poor approach to development. That is

what we started with in 1992 and we have continued it up to now. When one looks at the PPP/C budgets, there is always a large section to do with pro-poor and a large section to do with pro-growth in order to expand the economy to allow for the growth of businesses and for the betterment of all of our people.

What is the PNC/AFC philosophy? Its philosophy to development is tax driven – tax the people and let them pay more – rather than investment, expansion and diversification. Fundamentally, its philosophy is anti-people and anti-growth. The economic model is one that uses taxation as a means to create revenue. In fact, in 2018, Ram and McRae in its annual budget focus stated that *governments, philosophically, are not in the business of profit. Governments are enablers and facilitators*. That is what the PPP/C is now. We are the enablers and the facilitators to make sure that our people are able to reach the heights that they are supposed to, to get the opportunities to do that, to get the support of the Government and whatever goods and services we offer, in order to be able to reach that.

The Opposition talked about inclusion and social cohesion until everybody wanted to barf when they heard those words because it was so disconnected to reality. Inclusion, where was that? They talked about firing people. They fired thousands of people. So, welcome back to that. They fired thousands of people. In the public service they fired over 2,000 people. They fired 1,972 Amerindian Community Support Officers (CSOs) – the ethnic group that had the largest persons who were dismissed within the first month of the PNC coming to power. Why was there vengeance for the Amerindians? It is inexplicable. Was it because they chose to vote a particular way that they did not agree with?

There are other crimes and there are other philosophies. The Opposition was invisible, inaccessible, divorced from the people, relying on expensive spin doctors, both in Guyana and beyond to churn out race and division, to churn out fake news and to weave a narrative that fooled themselves. They actually fooled themselves, but no one else was fooled. They claimed the achievements which no one could find. They claimed gifts that were not existing. They made people, who were not politically and ethnically correct, feel like second class citizens in their own country of birth. They made us feel as if we were second class citizens in the nation of our birth, where our navel string is buried. They come here to preach righteousness and that they are so “holier than thou”. We were all made to feel that we were not worthy of being in Guyana. They treated us as second-class citizens. They took

away from the people hope in the future, and undermined trust and confidence. People did not know how they were going to make it. Not only the 7,000 sugar workers lost their jobs, the 1,972 Amerindian CSOs and the 2,000-odd public servants, but there were also 30,000 jobs that were lost because of the wrong policies and priorities of your Government.

1.30 p.m.

Yet, the Hon. Members remain oblivious and insensitive to this all. This is their shame and legacy. We do not have to defend the Hon. Members; they have to apologise to the people for what they did to them.

Our cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversities were some things that were used and are still being used by the APNU/AFC to divide instead of to reconcile and to build. The Hon. Members were vindictive and heartless and are still being that vindictive and heartless.

Let us do some Mathematics. I know the APNU/AFC/PNC are not good at Mathematics. They do not seem to like Mathematics very much. Let us do some translation. Let me confess, I am not very good at Mathematics either, but I do know Arithmetic. Let us go back. The 1,927 Community Support Officers who were terminated had 10,000 dependents. This meant that by their salaries being withdrawn from August, 2015, \$700 million was removed from the village economies in the interior. This increased the poverty exponentially in these areas. What did the APNU/AFC give back in return? Did it bother the Hon. Members? The APNU/AFC gave back boats, buses, bicycles and expandable sandals. The buses broke down after a few mornings and the boats did not work. A very small percentage of the people the APNU/AFC gave those tokens. It was as when the white people came to our country as colonisers and gave tokens to the natives. The APNU/AFC gave tokens to the natives, the Amerindian people of our country – here is a couple of buses; here is a couple of boats; be grateful; it is the APNU/AFC in Government. Shockingly, \$700 million was removed from the economy. That is why the Amerindian villages were having trouble. This included the APNU/AFC not dealing with the Community Development Plans with the money that had been applied for before 2015 and which was approved in the Guyana/ Norway Agreement. The APNU/AFC did not release that money. The money was released in little tranches when they wanted photographs in the newspapers and notoriety. The APNU/AFC did not get it; people were suffering as a result of one decision it took.

The Opposition terminated and treated 7,000 sugar workers as “collateral damage”. In this House, more recently, the whole sugar industry was called, ‘bloodsuckers of the nation’. Those 7,000 workers had families. If there was an average of five persons who lived in a sugar worker’s home, 35,000 persons were immediately impacted by this.

The impact on the wider community was calculated. It shows that one quarter of the Guyanese population was affected, and yet, the APNU/AFC did nothing. The APNU/AFC was asked to give relief to the sugar workers who lost their jobs, and it did nothing. The APNU/AFC just did not get it. Why did 30,000 people lose their jobs? It was because of the taxation and all the other wrong priorities the APNU/AFC had. Businesses were closed and this was before the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). The APNU/AFC comes to this House and talks about bauxite when what happened to the bauxite industry was its fault. The APNU/AFC did it and, yet, the Hon. Members are so delusional that they did not even recognise this when they were in Government.

They knew that \$30,000 people lost their jobs and gave no help, assistance or relief. They just did not get it. Every week the *Official Gazette* was full of bank sales on motorcycles, minibuses, houses, farming equipment and combines because the people could not pay their loans. Still, the APNU/AFC did not get it; instead it continued to accumulate land. Land grabbing and all sorts of other nefarious arrangements were going on, which are now under investigation.

In 2018, the boast was that the Ministry of Public Health had the biggest budget. In fact, for the five years, the Ministry of Public Health had over \$105 billion. Yet, severe and constant shortages of essential drugs and medical supplies were across the country. Immunisation levels fell because of the lack of vaccine. Drugs for patients with Human Immunodeficiency Virus/ Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS) were unavailable. People had to buy if they had the money. In many parts of the country, there were no places like pharmacies to go to buy anything. Yet, the moneys were spent; \$100 billion was spent. All the legacy the Hon. Members seem to talk about is the Centre for Disease Prevention and Control in Liliendaal. How disgraceful is that? It was not even the Government’s property that the APNU/AFC spent over \$1 billion of taxpayers’ moneys on. The APNU/AFC did not get it. The Hon. Members were living so far in the clouds and thought that they were entitled and had a transport to Government and did not have to worry about, nor, pay attention to the minions below – the working people and the farmers.

It was calculated that approximately over \$200,000 per annum was removed from every household in Guyana by the taxes the APNU/AFC introduced. The APNU/AFC did not get it. There was a 60% increase in the taxes between 2015 and 2019. There was \$225 billion taken from our people, and Hon. Members wonder why the people were having a hard time. I do not think that they wondered why; I do not think that they cared to wonder or to do anything. The APNU/AFC did not recognise that by the taxation it brought in there would be consequences. If farming implements are taxed there would then be an increase in the cost of production and products reaching the markets. When the APNU/AFC did not remove the fuel cost until the cost had dropped so far, it was exposed. This caused the increase in cost for food. In the 2018 Mid-Year Report, the Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, had to admit that the inflation had gone up because of the cost of living and the cost of production.

If that were all... there is more. It is like opening a Pandora’s box – out jumps all these issues, and the more one digs, the more one finds. The levels of corruption and the issues of transparency and accountability were levels never seen before in this country.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, we will have to withdraw, “corruption”.

Ms. Teixeira: Scandals and scandal mania were in their heights in the five years. I am not talking anecdotally. Go to the Reports of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of Guyana for 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 and you will barf when you read. On almost every page, there is a scandal or the inexplicable use of money. While I am not allowed to use the word, corruption, we will have to find another for it. It begins with a capital ‘C’ and is spelt C-o-r-r-u-p-t-i-o-n.

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, the levels of scandals were so high that people... [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I am just asking how to spell it. ...denied. The issue was not only of people filling their pockets and using taxpayers’ moneys wrongly, it was the impact on the people. By these scandals, people were denied better healthcare. There was \$100 billion for health, of which the majority on the drug budget went through non-public tendered arrangements. Yet, the drugs were not there and people suffered. These scandals cost the ordinary people every single day of their lives. The APNU/AFC took money out of their pockets and did not give them back what they needed.

Let us go to housing. The APNU/AFC did not like our housing programme. It threw the programme out the window and created duplexes after quite a while. There were, again, questions and scandals in relation to that, but the laws were never changed so that the people could borrow money from the bank in order to buy a duplex. The APNU/AFC had short horizons, but it did not recognise that.

Infrastructure: every time the APNU/AFC did not do a road and bridge, it cost the taxi and bus owners because their vehicles had to be repaired more often. Then used tyres were prevented from coming in the country. Therefore, taxi owners had to pay an increase from \$6,000 per tyre to \$18,000. Where did you think that money was coming from for the ordinary people? It all came out as a result of making decisions.

Some of the men in this House over there – not all; I try to be careful – never go into a market or a supermarket. They have other people do that for them. However, it was sad to see, as we went through the five years, that people started buying less things such as chicken and fish and bought more rice and chowmein. They made decisions with what money they had available. The APNU/AFC must have known this and, yet, it was oblivious.

The APNU/AFC’s misuse of funds relating to infrastructure cost everybody who was transporting, money. One had to pay more to get where one wanted to go. The APNU/AFC cost the country jobs by having the housing program whittle down to almost 2,000 a year; if it was that much. It meant that 5,000 construction workers in the housing sector lost their jobs.

Manufacturers who were producing goods for the construction industry, were losing markets as well. The APNU/AFC also decided that the tendering process was something that it could dispense with. What did the APNU/AFC do? Contractors of this country were unable to get work for five years. If the contractors were of a particular composition or how they looked or how the APNU/AFC thought they looked, for five years thousands of them could not get work in this country. Now that there is open public tender – it is in the newspapers and all over the place – there is an upsurge in the tendering process and small, medium and large companies are coming forward to bid for Government works. Do you know what that will do? It will create jobs because as more work is created, more people are hired. The APNU/AFC was so myopic and short-sighted that it did not recognise these ripples effects.

There is the other area, the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) project. The report that came out stated that it is good programme; one that means well. What did the APNU/AFC use it for? The Hon. Members used it to give rewards to the boys, their activists, and left out meaningfully deserving people who needed that support from SLED. Of course, that is another issue under investigation. Even for the COVID-19 relief that the Hon. Members claimed they were involved in, the \$50,000 voucher for the people to get groceries, why was it that the centre to apply for it was in Georgetown at the green mansion opposite the National Cultural Centre (NCC)? Why was it that Guyanese had to go to the Chetwynd Learning Centre in the green house to apply for the food vouchers? The Hon. Members know what I am talking about; it is opposite the National Cultural Centre. Why is it that only a few people received it?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, to continue you need to apply for an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you.

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, I request an extension of five minutes for the Hon. Member to continue.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, you may continue to conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: These scandals denied our people what was rightfully theirs – access to goods, services and a better life. Then there is the non-inclusion of people in job appointments, access to housing, water and safety nets, and the denial of inclusion of the civil society and the Parliamentary Opposition. In fact, exclusionary was what you were and what the PNC was.

1.45 p.m.

There was a level of *control freakism* that we observed in the five years – if you were not on their side, you were of no worth and, therefore, to be ignored. I will leave my Colleague, Mr. Nandlall, to talk about the violations to the Constitution, except to say one thing: another one of your legacies is that no other Government in this country, from Independence to now, has committed so many violations of the Constitution found by the judiciary of Guyana and the

Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). No other Government; no other Government!

When my Colleague, Mr. Croal, spoke about having delivered 10,000 house lots in the last three months of 2020, do we realise how many jobs we have created with that and what hope we have created with that? The issue of people owning their house lots is priceless in terms of the whole future – how they look at life, how they invest in this country and how they believe this is the place to be. But, no, you dwindled it down to 2,000 and did not even bother to do anything proper with it.

As I try to wind down, there are many things. I have heard the unions being quoted, but I have the quote from 2018 where both the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the Federation of Independence Trade Unions of Guyana (FITUG) condemned the *2018 Budget* as being anti-people and anti-union.

Since we have got into Office, we have had the 2020 emergency Budget. That has set the stage, as we said then, to do emergency works with the COVID-19 and with regard to our economy. In 2021, we now commence the implementing stage of expanding and diversifying the economy and repairing the damage caused by the APNU/AFC’s time in office. We have to do hard work to rebuild our nation. We have to restore hope, trust and confidence in the future.

When one looks at the programmes that we have in our Budget, which I hope some of you have read... because some of the things that have been said in the National Assembly shows clearly that no one read it. In the few months since we have been in Office, \$5.5 billion and more have been given out in COVID-19 relief. I just want to make a quick comment. Between March and August, during COVID-19, not one mask was given out to the public. As the Parliamentary Opposition, I noticed that Ms. Hughes had said that we did not join the Taskforce. We were not joining their taskforce that was a talk shop. We were doing; 200,000 masks were made in the midst of COVID-19 by volunteers across every region of this country. Food hampers were delivered to thousands and thousands of persons with no political strings attached and, yet, did you want us to be part of the Taskforce? I do not think that you really wanted us.

When one looks at the Budget, the document here, the Volumes, and if they have been going through it, what is the focus? It is health, education, public works, housing and water, and human services? This is where we are talking about public works, creating the infrastructure for the expansion and the diversification of the economy.

Agriculture: in terms of removing what the APNU/AFC did by moving us in a mono-culture direction with oil and gas only, we are reversing that. The investment in agriculture is not to do with pineapple and bora, as someone was speaking about today. It is about really moving us in an agro-processing way to be more value-added and, also, more expanded. When one looks at health, education, human services, housing and water, those are all in relation to improving the quality of life of our people regardless of where they live, regardless of what class they are, regardless of what ethnic group they are, regardless of what religion and regardless of what gender.

The APNU/AFC were the “gods of small things” and worried about arches and the painting of buildings. The PPP/C, from 2nd August, 2020, is focusing on the big issues and the priorities to transform the economy by expanding and diversifying the economic base and, as I said, improving the quality of life and reducing the geographic disparities that exist in our country. We have geographic disparities between the rural, coastal and the interior and we have to grapple with that.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have to conclude now.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to say that 2021 is a plan for *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. Did someone give me five minutes? All right, I was not paying attention. Comrades and Members of Parliament, I would suggest that when you have your time and you get over all of your hype, why not read pages 43-57 in the Budget book on investing in our people and pages 54- 64?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you are going to have to stop now.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Before I call on the next speaker, I noticed that someone just came into the House and handed something to someone on the Government side. I did not recognise that person as a Parliament staff. Again, I want to say that the sanctity of this House needs to be maintained. If you have your staff bringing things to you, please, pass it to the persons who are entitled to walk around the House. The next time I see that I would embarrass the person who is doing it.

The Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Nandlall. Hon. Minister, you may proceed with your contribution to this debate.

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: Mr. Speaker, the privilege is now mine to offer some remarks on the 2021 national estimates and expenditure and the Budget speech of my brother, the distinguished Senior Minister in the Office of the President with the Responsibility for Finance. I wish to offer to him and his staff my deepest felicitations on producing the largest Budget ever in the history of our country.

I have also had the opportunity to listen to my distinguished Colleagues on the other side of the House and they have a problem. They have a problem which is theirs; it was created by them which they have to shoulder. It is one of credibility. The truth of the matter is, no matter what they say, how they say it, no one in this country who knows them takes them seriously. We heard the distinguished Member Ms. Hughes lecture to us this morning, and guess what the front page of yesterday newspaper stated:

“Former APNU/AFC Minister signed off millions in contracts to own company – record reveals.”

Catherine Hughes’ photograph adorns the front page of the newspaper.

Mr. Speaker: It is the Hon. Member Catherine Hughes.

Mr. Nandlall: Of course, Hon. Member; deeply honourable. We heard from my learned Friend, the Hon. Mr. Forde. How could one divorce Mr. Forde from his role during that five months period? Thy Guyanese people are an intelligent people. They say Mr. Forde lead that team that sought, relentlessly, to trample upon our Constitution, defeat the will of our people and steal a government. The whole world saw that, and he lost repeatedly at the courts. We also saw him promise the PNC supporters that he will throw this Government out of power by the election petition, but within three months of the filing of the petition, the petition was dismissed. How could anyone take him seriously?

I suppose it is for that reason he came here this morning and pretended to be an economist and regaled us with some statistics that no one in this House has ever heard. I never knew that we produced so much bora, squash and pineapple. He told us that our pineapple and bora production was greater than rice. Two saijan and saime farmers called me and said that they felt left out because he did not mention them. This

Hon. Member is highly inexperienced, and he must know that we are intelligent people in this House. He came here with a string of statistics, did not cite a source from where he collected them and regaled us about sectors that we do not even know existed at that level in this country. He told us that we are planting more cassava and yam than rice and sugar, but shame.

The Member spent a lot of time speaking on a particular transaction on the East Coast of Demerara, in relation to a National and Industrial Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) sale of land to Mr. Eddie Boyer. What he did not say is that land in question was advertised by public tender and the National Hardware Ltd. applied, pursuant to that process, and won based upon a public tendering process. He omitted that part of the equation. I have here all of the transactions done by NICIL from 1993 to 2011 and, if he wishes, he could read them. They are all documented in this document. [*The Hon. Member held up a document.*] It is a publicly available document. It outlines every sale of public lands by NICIL – the process involved, where it was advertised, who bought, at what price they bought and even the competitive bids are recorded in this document. Mr. Forde has no credibility, whatsoever, to question anyone on this side.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General, if you do not want to say Hon. Mr. Forde, you could say, Cde. Forde.

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Speaker, the lands that are now under review by this Administration are lands that were gifted away without any known public process whatsoever. That is the difference. And the lands that were given were not given to the ordinary Guyanese, but to *cronies* on that side. That is why he said that we are witch-hunting PNC supporters. It is not the PNC supporters; it is the friends and *cronies* of the PNC who benefited from public lands by virtue of private transactions never made public. We would continue to review those transactions and where possible we would take the requisite steps to restore those lands to the ownership of the people of this country.

Mr. Speaker, 55 years after Independence and 51 years after attaining Republican status, our country is now fortuitously poised for an unprecedented economic take-off, which holds a certain potentiality of, not only transforming our country itself but, transforming the lives of our people and, indeed, future generations, in a manner never consulted before.

At this fundamental juncture, Guyanese of every race and class must now make a choice. Would they come on board with our Government, or would they continue to allow

themselves to be manipulated, misused, misled and abused by an incompetent, irrelevant APNU/AFC?

They come here to lecture to us on democracy and constitutionality, but they think that the Guyanese people have forgotten that in 1968 they stole their rights to choose a government of their choice. In 1973 they rigged the elections, in 1977 they rigged the referendum, in 1980 they rigged the elections, in 1985 they rigged the elections.

2.00 p.m.

How could Guyanese forget that? Yet, you are coming now to tell us about democracy. The Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, my distinguished Friend and learned Colleague, spoke about debt and debt management and he told us that we were borrowing too much. It is the People’s National Congress (PNC), whose umbrella he shelters under now, that made Guyana and Guyanese the most indebted people per capita on planet earth after 1992. This same gentleman is lecturing to us about debt management. We borrow, but we borrow in a sustainable manner and with a proper assessment of our revenue streams to repay. How do you want us to build the country, Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan? Do you want us to throw box-hands? We will borrow, but we will borrow in a manner that is prudent, manageable and we will pay it back – as we have always done.

How could the Members of this House and members of the public not recall that, after 21 years or more in the political wilderness, they got a one seat majority after the 2011 elections? Rather than use that one seat majority, after so many years in the political wilderness, to exact and extract more for the people of this country, they used that one seat majority to slash constitutional agencies’ budgets, to strike down national transformational projects and to vote down legislation that sabotaged us internationally which caused us to be blacklisted as a money laundering state. That is what they used their power for.

In 2015, they assumed Government. After five short years, they emptied the treasury; sky rocketed the national debt; imposed over 200 new taxes on the backs of the people; crippled the productive sectors; drove fear into the business community with the use of the State Asset Recovery Agency (SARA) and the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU); destroyed the reputation of highly qualified Guyanese who worked with the previous Government by instituting trumped up charges; caused 30,000 Guyanese to lose their jobs, including 7,000 sugar workers and 2,000 Amerindian Community Support Officers (CSOs); ceased lands from rice

farmers; repeatedly violated the Constitution; led us to being the first country in the world to refuse to hold elections in the prescribed time after being defeated by a no-confidence motion; plundered the treasury and extra-budgetary agencies with unauthorised spending; signed the most lopsided oil contract in history; swindled \$15 million of an \$18 million signing bonus; and in the end, shamelessly tried to steal another term in Government by attempting to pervert the elections results. That has been your track record over the last five years and the people of Guyana are very familiar with it.

Now, in Opposition, the Hon. Members are demonstrating with crystalline clarity to the people of this country that they are too incompetent, too divisive and too boorish to represent them. The Hon. Members’ behaviour in this House have descended to the lowest ebb in our parliamentary history and they have done it for the world to see. The people have expressed their disgust at the way in which you have behaved. I walked with a copy of the *Kaieteur News*. It is a newspaper that I picked up randomly. In the Letters column on Friday, 26th February, 2021:

“The Speaker failed to do his job”

By Kit Nascemento.

“Dishonourable members in the House”

By Dr. Vishnu Bisram.

“Disappointed with Tabitha Sarabo-Halley’s presentation”

By Attiya Baksh.

“Parliament shames Guyanese”

By E.B. John.

Every single letter in the Letters column last Friday denounced behaviour in this House, mostly by your side. The Parliament is the highest discussion forum in our constitutional democracy. Members come here not on their own volition to prosecute their own agendas, but to represent the interest of our people. Each of us individually represent the interest of at least 5,000 Guyanese. In the discharge of those responsibilities, we are mandated to carry ourselves with decency and decorum, both in this House as well as in the precincts of this House. The entire compound of this building falls within the precincts of this House. Mr. Speaker, look at this, the Hon. Member, Mr. Sherod Duncan, in the precincts of the National Assembly posted this on his

Facebook page for everyone to see. This is what he did; he laid on the floor with his pants open. This is what he published for the world to see in the precincts of this House. That sort of degenerate vulgarity must be condemned in the strongest possible manner.

[*Hon. Member displayed picture.*]

Not having a track record of performance to which Hon. Members could point and because of their disgraceful attempt to steal Government from March to August – an attempt that has been deprecated by the judiciary and condemned locally and internationally – the Hon. Members are unable to make a constructive contribution in this National Assembly. They come here and they hurl personal attacks and invectives, manufactured accomplishments and, worse yet, ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General (AG), I will have to get you to withdraw the word “steal”, because I see here that “thief” is an unparliamentary word too.

Mr. Nandlall: Sorry, Sir. What is it?

Mr. Speaker: You said “steal”. I have to get you to withdraw that.

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Speaker, I withdraw, no problem. I hope that I will get back my time, Mr. Speaker.

The Hon. Members come here and pretend to be representatives of Afro-Guyanese. All they have done, in Government, whichever epoch one wishes to examine, is pauperised Guyanese, the working people, including Afro-Guyanese. At this juncture, we have to speak candidly because that is why we are here and that is why we are given immunities.

Let me make it abundantly clear, none of the Hon. Members on that side of the House is more qualified to represent Afro-Guyanese or any grouping of people more than anybody on this side of the House. I want to make that very clear. This afro-centric charade by Members on that side must be dismantled. I have heard them. Look at our Hon. Prime Minister, Brigadier (Ret’d) Mark Phillips, with substantive responsibilities and they label him as a mere token. How disrespectful! Where do they get that authority from, to look at the Hon. Member, Mr. Hugh Todd, who is responsible for the foreign relations of our country, and label him a mere token? How could you look at the Hon. Member, Ms. Oneidge Walrond, responsible for tourism, industry and commerce in this country, and label her a mere token? How could you look at Hon. Member Mr. Joseph Hamilton, who is

responsible for the labour relations in our country, and label him a mere token? How could you look at the Hon. Member, Mr. Benn, who is responsible for national security and label him a mere token? Look at Mr. Kwame McCoy, who is responsible for the entire state media, and you label him a token. This sort of discrimination must stop. There is also Bishop Edghill who is responsible for public infrastructure, perhaps the most important portfolio, and you label him a token. How dare you? This confounded nonsense must stop. It must stop.

Let me examine a few instances in their Government to show the duplicity. One of the first things that they did when they got into Government was to accept a letter written by a lawyer on behalf of BK Group of Companies. Rather than suing that company for breaching a contract at the Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill Facility, they paid the company US\$5.7 million. Let them point to me which Afro-community they spent US\$5.7 million in on one project. A wharf, rather than repossess that wharf for breach of contract, they have gifted it \$20 million to BK Marine and that wharf is valued at \$8 billion. Show me an African community that you spent \$8 billion on. Do not come here to pretend to represent Afro-Guyanese.

I see they are pretending to represent teachers and public servants. When the teachers and the public servants strike under their Government, this is what their Minister had to say, Minister Keith Scott:

“Striking teachers are selfish and uncaring.”

This is what Mr. Keith Scott said. When the Amerindians asked for more land, this is what is written about Mr. Keith Scott:

“Dismisses Amerindian land concerns as greed.”

This is your record and you come here to represent people. The story of the Afro-Guyanese rice farmers of West Coast Berbice tells it all. The Donald Ramotar Administration distributed 50-year leases for 10 acres of rice lands to the people of West Coast Berbice. The first thing that they did when they got into Government was to instruct the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary–Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA) to revoke all those leases and to give it to their cronies. The MMA/ADA did that and I took the matter to the court on behalf of the PPP/C. All of those people, I have no doubt, are from Seafield village and from Number 40 Village. They may have voted for the APNU/AFC at the 2015 Elections, but their lands were being

taken away. I won the first battle in the court because I was able to establish that the MMA/ADA cannot take lands that have been issued by the President under a lease. Rather than accept the Ruling of the court and leave the farmers in peace, do you know what they did? Those farmers took seed paddy; gas; diesel; fertiliser, in advance from the millers; and some of them borrowed money. When those lands were being taken away from them, 51 Afro-Guyanese families were put on the breadline. They went to court, received a court order and the judge said that only the President can revoke that. Do you know that the President did? I have it here. In the *Kaieteur News* all of the names of the farmers were published. They said in the notice:

“It is hereby given that his Excellency, the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, has cancelled all State land leases as described in the Schedules...”

There were 45 Afro-Guyanese farmers and, today, you come here to pretend to represent Afro-Guyanese.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, as you make all of those quotes from those documents you will have to lay them. Do not throw them in the garbage.

Mr. Nandlall: No. They are here, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Member, Mr. Forde, spoke about the lands and surveys issue and about the lands that we are going after. I want to ask him and I also want to ask those on that side, could they point to any Afro-Guyanese village that they have given lands to? Could you point to the people of Den Amstel; point to the people of Buxton; point to the people of Golden Grove, Nabacリス, Victoria, Lichfield and Belladrum? What lands have you given to them? Your cronies in Georgetown have received thousands of acres of riverside properties and prime commercial properties in Georgetown because they financed your campaign. Do not come here and pretend to represent the ordinary people. [**Ms. Manickchand:** And financed their personal lives too.] Yes. They financed their personal lives too. I have the evidence.

They come here and they speak about the public servants. Their own, Ms. Simona Broomes, instructed the Public Service Commission to not promote public servants. The Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley – I have another one of these beautiful pictures where she dismissed the Hon. Member – felt that she had a power to dismiss public servants. She dismissed public servants and the President had to reinstate them by a commission.

[Hon. Member displayed a picture.]

They speak about bauxite workers and they are quoting liberally from Mr. Lincoln Lewis.

2.15 p.m.

This is what Mr. Lincoln Lewis, the President of the Guyana Bauxite and General Workers Union (GBGWU), said about them and the bauxite workers:

“Bauxite workers feel abandoned by Government...”

I have it all here. All of this information is in the records, because they come here pretending to represent public officers. The best one I have kept for last. The Hon. Member, Ms. Coretta McDonald came here and spoke glowingly for teachers. She looks beautiful in her photograph and I love her hairstyle, but on 4th September, 2018, in the *Guyana Times*, she said:

“Teachers got more under the PPP Government-GTU”

[Hon. Member displayed a picture.]

Let me quote again what she said. The Hon. Member is quite articulate:

““If we look at what transpired under the PPP Government when they were in power and what is transpiring now...remember we did not want the five percent. We made noise about it. But with the five percent we got a whole lot of non-salary benefits,” she said, to loud applause from the large gathering of teachers.

She continued, “For the first time in the history of this country, our teachers were able to get clothing allowance, duty free concessions, and allowances for additional qualifications...””

We still have space for her on this side of the House. At least, I think her mind is in the right direction.

I believe that I have given sufficient examples to dismantle their mantra about representing poor people and working people of this country. In fact, because of their performance, if they are to go into an election tomorrow, they will lose a minimum of ten seats.

As I have been repeatedly stating, this Budget represents one-fifth of our developmental plan to transform Guyana. As we

have said, repeatedly, this Budget lays the foundation upon which the edifice of modern Guyana will be constructed. My Colleagues have done an exemplary job in their presentations by outlining the various projects contained in the Budget. There is no need for me to repeat them. Of equal importance to what is in the Budget is what is not in the Budget. The Budget creates an environment that is conducive. For example, the Budget provides for the construction of a hospitality training institute that will train 2,000 Guyanese per year and this would create a regimen of staff who would serve in the hotel industry. A Sheraton Hotel, a Delta Hotel by Marriott, a Sure Stay Hotel by Best Western, a Best Western Hotel, a Hyatt Hotel Tower, a Radisson Hotel, a Hilton Hotel and a mammoth 1,000 room hotel with elevated car park, are just some of the major hotels that are coming here. These projects will bring millions of US dollars in direct foreign investment to Guyana and create jobs for thousands. None of these hotels are within the Budget.

Similarly, the gas-to-shore project will result in a reduction in the cost of electricity by 50%, which will awake Guyana’s sleeping giant – the agro-manufacturing sector. The construction of a deep water harbour at the mouth of the Berbice River; the construction of the Del Conte Highway from Parika to Bartica; the construction of a new high way from Parika to the Demerara Harbour Bridge; the construction of the Lethem to Linden road; the construction of the Ogle to Diamond road link; and the construction of the Mandela Avenue to Eccles bypass will accumulatively make available tens of thousands of acres of prime land for development opportunities while stimulating commerce and trade in a manner never seen before. These projects will be financed by loans but now backed by an economy that will be in receipt of an unprecedented revenue flow from oil production. No doubt, over the next five years, Guyana will be chartering its course to becoming the leading investment destination in the western hemisphere.

It is within this environment developmental equation that the Ministry of Legal Affairs will have to play a crucial role. Our major focus will be the creation of a modern legal infrastructure that will regulate these new and emerging sectors while, at the same time, we will revamp our archaic laws to complete a new and modern legal framework for Guyana. So, every conceivable area of economic activity will be targeted for legal reforms. An international consultant will be retained to draft a continuum of legislations for the oil and gas sector.

In the housing and hospitality sector, we will have a whole new regime of legislation dealing with zoning, urban planning, condominiums and townhouses.

In the health sector, we have identified approximately 25 pieces of legislation that we will work on, including a new public health act, a new mental health act, an organ transplant legislation, a new Food and Drug Act and many more.

In the agriculture sector, we will be enacting a food safety bill and a food security act, and other pieces of legislation that will prepare Guyana to export agricultural products. In addition to the Hire-Purchase Bill, which is in a Select Committee; we have an anti-dumping bill; the Moveable Property Security Bill; and an electronic (e)-transaction bill that are currently in draft. This latter bill is to prepare the public sector to engage in e-transactions for payments to be made for Government services by means other than cash and cheque.

At the level of the local government, the Solid Waste Management Bill will soon be completed and public consultations will be held in relation there too. From a defence point of view, in order to strengthen our ability to protect our borders, a bill is being drafted for the establishment of a border patrol unit which will supplement the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) to secure and protect our borders.

Similarly, in the legal sector, a draft of legislation will be promulgated, including a new Arbitration Act, a new Juvenile Justice Bill, a bail bill sentencing guidelines, and a slew of amendments will be done to our Election Laws to make the electoral process more credible and transparent and to hold the staff of the Elections Commission (GECOM) to a higher standard of care.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee for Constitutional Reform of the National Assembly will begin its work and that Committee will remain the main vehicle by which these reforms will be driven. This year will also see the beginning of a programme that will install holders of a Bachelor of Laws Degree into the state prosecutorial programme. These persons will work with Police Prosecutors in our magistrates' court right across the length and breadth of Guyana. Significantly, the Ministry of Legal Affairs will be reviewing the Procurement Act not only to strengthen the public procurement process, but to create a more levelled playing field in order to accommodate small contractors. Within a few months, the Judicial Service Commission will be up and

running. The Committee on Appointments has already provided its nominees.

We are also working on new and modern *Public Service Rules* which will further protect the interest of public servants. As we continue to modernise the public sector architecture, massive reforms are taking place at the Deeds and Commercial Registries Authority and the Land Registry. Documents are being digitised and the requisite platforms are being built to facilitate e-transactions including e-payments. This year will also see the appointment of the Law Reform Commission, and its first task will be to revise the current Laws of Guyana and to produce a new consolidated volume of those laws. We are also working with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP), the Guyana Police Force, the Guyana Prison Service and the Judiciary to create a joint management information system to manage criminal litigations more effectively. The Office of the DPP is earmarked for physical expansion and hopefully, we will get a budget for a new building for the Office of the DPP because it requires serious physical as well as human resource expansion. A new magistrate's court building with living quarters and supporting facilities will be constructed at Port Kaituma, Mabaruma, Vigilance and the lower East Bank Demerara.

A total of \$4.6 billion has been allocated for the legal and justice sector. We have already expended over US\$1 million in the construction, installation and function of 32 containerised virtual courtrooms located at Lusignan, Mazaruni, Timehri and New Amsterdam whereby prisoners in custody at these prison centres could have their cases heard in these courts obviating the need to transport them across the country to various locations. Not only...

Mr. Speaker: You will need more time, Hon. Attorney General.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, with your permission, I would like five minutes for the Hon. Member to complete his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Attorney General, you may continue to conclude.

Mr. Nandlall: This will not only protect the prisoners, magistrates and court personnel from unnecessary exposure in this Coronavirus disease (COVID- 19) pandemic but, at the same time, it will save millions of taxpayers' dollars, which

would have had to be spent in transporting these prisoners to various courtrooms, including the far-flung areas.

This year we will also see the completion of a massive physical expansion to the main building of the Ministry of Legal Affairs. It will create much-needed space to accommodate more personnel who are required to meet the expanding role of the Attorney General Chambers in the coming years. The Attorney General’s Chambers will continue its review of state land giveaways under the previous Administration and will take the requisite steps to restore these lands to the ownership of the state. The Attorney General’s Chambers will continue to vigilantly monitor the performance of contractors who are executing Government contracts to ensure that these contracts are satisfactorily performed and completed within the scheduled time.

This Budget represents one’s instalment of a five-year programme we took to the people during the elections campaign on 20th March, 2020. By their ballots, the people have endorsed our plan and by extension, they have endorsed this Budget.

Significantly, this Budget has also received the endorsement of important stakeholder organisations in the developmental agenda of this country, including the Private Sector Commission, the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association Limited, the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Berbice Chamber of Commerce and Development Association, the Central Corentyne Chamber of Commerce, the largest trade union movement in Guyana the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Guyana (FITUG), the American Chamber of Commerce of Guyana (AMCHAM), and all the political parties in Guyana. If the 31 harbingers of doom in this House do not support the Budget, the people and of the country will lose nothing. The ship of Guyana will sail without them and they will continue to be an irrelevant and incompetent bunch.

With those few remarks, I commend this Budget to this honourable House.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I have been informed that the next speaker, His Excellency, the Hon. Member, Dr Bharrat Jagdeo, will not be making a presentation. Now, I would like to call on the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Joseph Harmon to make his presentation. The Hon. Member will be making his contribution virtually.

Hon. Members, could we take a five-minute suspension. I need to make an urgent call.

Sitting suspended at 2.28 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 2.37 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon Members. Please, be seated. I have the honour now to call on the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to make his presentation. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you may proceed.

2.37 p.m.

Let us have a few minutes to sort out some technical issues. We have been having connection issues.

Hon. Members, bear with us, there seems to be some connectivity issues as I have said. We should have it sorted out in a few moments.

Hon. Members, I have been insisting, for the last few weeks, that we have redundancy independent of the current provider of bandwidth and connectivity. I have been assured that everything is all right and I will insist now that the Clerk provides redundancy that is independent of our current producer in the system. We have all been experiencing problems, especially during the morning sessions and, today, it is at its worst. I actually had to ride my hotspot on my phone when we started.

Hon. Chief Whip, any updates for us?

Mr. Jones: Yes, Sir. Based on what we saw in the technician’s room, the Opposition Leader just signed in.

Mr. Speaker: We would still have to bring him online to get the feed in the House. Is he on now?

Mr. Jones: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: That is Great.

Hon. Members, it is an honour to call on the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Joseph Harmon to make his contribution.

Leader of the Opposition [Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon]: I rise to speak on...[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, we do not have the audio as yet in the Dome. Let me just hold you for a second, so that we could get the feed to come through the speakers in the Dome. Could you give us a test?

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Yes, Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Please, go ahead.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: I rise to speak on behalf of the Opposition and more than half of the population of Guyana who we represent, according to the published results of the 2020 elections.

In this debate, I am defending not only those, but the many thousands of poor people and the many children who are not going to benefit in any meaningful way from this Budget. I speak for all Guyanese, regardless of ethnicity, party affiliation, party loyalty or how the vote was casted.

I also rise to criticise our own conduct during the exchanges that took place during the Budget debate. There could be no acceptable explanation for us descending to the levels of the Hon. Members on the Government side of this House, whose unsolicited abuse began this gross loss of civility.

As is known, *a mistake repeated more than once is a decision*. When the Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Anil Nandlall, who just spoke, whispered loudly as he was leaving the Chamber on Wednesday, 25th February, so that we all could have heard his invective directed at the Member of Parliament (MP), Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley, we have to assume it was intended in its full vulgarity. Mr. Speaker, I urge you to take the appropriate action to usher in decorum in the Honorable House.

I stand on the shoulders of my Colleagues who dealt exceptionally well and dispatched attempts by the Hon. Members of the Government’s side of the House to submit distortions about the stellar and transformative tenure of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Coalition between 2015 and 2020. It is not my desire to be repetitive on these matters, however, it would be remiss of me to ignore some key issues which the Hon. Members on the Government’s side of the House chose to lament. Those issues had nothing to do with policies, programmes and budgetary affairs that would serve to make a difference in the lives of the people of this country.

To my Colleagues of the APNU/AFC, Members of Parliament, you have done an excellent job. From our first Speaker, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir to, our penultimate speaker, Ms. Catherine Hughes. They have disassembled this Budget and explained its content so that the ordinary man and woman in Guyana could understand it. I say to you, *quod erat demonstrandum*; what was to be proved has been proven.

That is to say that the Budget is vacuous; it is vapid; and it is visionless.

To the public servants who worked very hard to try to put this Humpty Dumpty Budget together, again, I congratulate you for your hard work. Unfortunately, how the Budget itself is so mixed up; it is difficult to make the several parts cohere to make a whole.

It would be ungracious of me not to welcome Dr. Ashni Singh back, but I also empathise with you Dr. Singh, this is not your Budget; this is a three-card trick; I am sure he understands it better than most of us.

As it has become the norm in recent times, the Hon. Member, Mr. Joseph Hamilton, was the first speaker and in his unresearched and unintelligent manner sought to attack the educational qualification of the Leader of the Opposition by comparing those of the Prime Minister with that of the Leader of the Opposition. I am sure that the Hon. Prime Minister would have been embarrassed by such crassness.

Mr. Hamilton would know that I am not fazed by these political barbs. However, he must also be aware that on the Government Ministers credentials posted on the internet by the Government, under the Hon. Member’s Education, it is stated in bold red, not listed. That means that there is nothing there. At least, they could have put a certificate of qualification issued by the institution at Sixth and Light Streets, Georgetown. There may be something for you there. I do not want to dwell on that because a number of persons on the Government’s side have stooped to certain levels.

It seems to me that they are unable to debate us because they are unable to match our research; they are unable to match our delivery; and they have to resort to tools and obstacles in order to help them in their presentations. We are not going to go that way. The Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, who had a lot of photographs just now... I am sure if one is to examine the pieces of evidence that he sought to produce, one would find that they contradict quite a lot of what he said. Mr. Speaker, I am happy that you asked the Hon. Member to ensure that the ‘bits and pieces’ that he sought to rely on are made apart of the records of the House.

The last speaker spoke, at length, about the question of representing the African Guyanese and several other speakers spoke on that issue. The question of ethnicity has to be dealt with. We have to deal with it. The question has arisen over and over in the debates. I wish to start by taking a passage from Mr. Hugh Desmond Hoyte, in his contribution to the

budget debate in 1993. His words in 1993 are as relevant as if they occurred today. He stated:

“Undoubtedly this is an important matter and we would be doing ourselves and our country a disservice, if we were to pretend that an ethnic question did not exist in our country.”

Hear me, Mr. Nandlall, this is Mr. Desmond Hoyte in 1993, just after the October, 1992, elections. This is what...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I do not think we use ‘Mr.’. We use Comrade (Cde.) or Honourable (Hon.).

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: I am sure Mr. Nandlall might not like the terminology Comrade, so I would say honourable.

Mr. Speaker: No. This is the Standing Order. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall.

Lt. Col. Ret’d Harmon: The Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall.

2.52 p.m.

“In fact, in every plural society there are tensions. In every plural society there are people who seek to take advantage of differences of race, culture, religions and social background, but the important thing for political leaders, the important thing for people who would like to see their country make progress in a context of peace and tranquillity is to decide how best we can manage tensions within our country. As political leaders, we sought not to dis-acknowledge the fact of ethnic discrimination because it exists, but we ought to confront it and deal with it in an intelligent and constructive manner. We need to understand today that there is much anger outside on the streets on this issue, that there are many people who perceive that ethnic discrimination is rampant. The point is not whether their perception is right or wrong. The reality is their perception and it is our duty as political leaders to minimise that perception and to try to get people to understand that the better way is to find *modus vivendi* in which all of us could live in peace and harmony.”

What is important is how leaders are treating this national problem. As we approach this question, I do not think that it is time for cosmetology. I do believe that labels such as

‘oneness’ and ‘we are one’, without more, are not going to help. Those are outward and visible signs; those are visible things. They might give a certain political kudos but, in the end, they are not truly beneficial. The whole issue has to be confronted by way of a national debate and national understanding. The political will to resolve this issue in the best interest of the country has to be demonstrated, now.

Mr. Speaker, I posit, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) is ready to act. We are ready to act. However, I must say that the attitude displayed by the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, who just spoke, will only exacerbate this situation. The APNU/AFC is crystal clear when it comes to this matter, not just in rhetoric, but in action in everything that we do. The very idea of a coalition, invites and gives comfort to ethnicity, diversity and enthuse the spirit of ethnic polarisation. To break all of this, one of the first act of the David Granger-led Administration, in 2015, was to establish a Department of Social Cohesion which functioned at the highest level of Government. That concept formed part of all the programmes and focus of every Ministry. That record is inescapable and cannot be erased.

Ethnic tensions will exist. There will always be irresponsible citizens and leaders, but the question is, what do you do when it manifests itself? Under our watch, the Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) remained a robust political and independent institution, with full powers under the law to pursue anyone who sought to sow the seeds of division amongst our people. Never, for one second, did we consider interfering with the independence of the Ethnic Relations Commission. Once it is allowed to do its work, and with robust leadership, the Commission can play a pivotal role in the resolution of this national problem.

However, the daily revelations in the media of the ERC, appears to be, in my view, an attempt to dismantle this very important Commission and to damage its impartiality. We must guard against this insidious attempt by persons who are uncomfortable with the composition of the Ethnic Relations Commission.

As I said, mere labels would not solve the ethnicity issue. I would be satisfied if there was to be a genuine effort to give effect to our oneness. Unfortunately, while this seem to be an aspiration, of President Ali, we see no financial allocation in the Budget to give effect to this oneness as a programme. In fact, the regime dismantled the Department of Social Cohesion and replaced it with nothing. President Ali do not just *talk the talk, walk the walk*. When the Granger

Administration established the Department of Social Cohesion, financial allocations to that Department to do its work. In 2017, we allocated \$111,767,000. In 2018, we allocated \$395,544,000. In 2019, we allocated \$836 million. We walked the walk, and we talked the talk. On the subject of ethnicity, it is not what you say, rather it is what you do and that is important.

The second issue I wish to address is this question of consultation which is another issue that arose in the formulation of the Budget. Many persons said there were extensive consultations. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance spoke about how many persons were consulted. The President, in his inaugural address to the House, stressed on cooperation and working together. This, of course, is consistent with article 13 our Constitution which speaks of an inclusionary democracy by providing increasing opportunities for the participation of citizens with particular emphasis on those areas of decision-making that directly affects their well-being. Working together must involve a process of consultation for openness and participation in decision-making. This, in our view, would be a necessary condition for reinforcing resilience within the population as a whole.

To quote from an excellent Member of Parliament, the late Winston Murray, in his budget debate of 2009, he said:

“I would like to say to the Hon Minister that working together cannot and must not be a tool of convenience invoked in times of difficulty or crisis, as a rallying call to cope with the situation. Rather it must be a practice that is embedded in our way of life to get things done and to move our country forward.”

He further said:

“...the evidence is that the Government’s approach to this idea of working together is, at best, ambivalent.”

These words by Mr. Murray are just as appropriate, today, as they were in 2009. There was no consultation with the Opposition in the formulation of this Budget. And so, it is deficient, it is defective, and it is disastrous in many areas.

It is time that President Ali climbs down from his horse and recognise that the only way forward for this country is by meaningful consultation. The Hon. Member, Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo, has had his time and more, and should remove his heavy hands off your Administration. The Constitution, President Ali, sets no precondition for consultation between

the President and the Leader of the Opposition. In articles 127, 161, 191, 198, 200, 207, 210 and 212, none of them sets any precondition for consultation.

Mr. Speaker, in my own public statement, after we were sworn in as Members of Parliament (MPs) on 2nd September, 2020, I made it very clear that the Opposition was prepared to cooperate on issues of territorial integrity, public security, public health, national sovereignty and other areas which we deemed to be in the public interest. This is quite unlike the PPP/C, who in 2015, after our elections victory, which was not challenged, refused to cooperate. In fact, they refused to take up their seats in this House for several months. On the contrary, we have reached out even in an environment where the elections results that installed the Irfaan Ali Regime are the subject of two petitions before the courts. This intransigence is weighing the patience thin of citizens and can only lead to self-destruction if allowed to continue.

Now, to some specific issues in the Budget. The vision outlined by the Irfaan Ali Administration and described as achieving six...*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I do not know if you were here or tuned in, but with regard to His Excellency the President, I said that I would only accept Hon. Members quoting from the address which His Excellency made here. If you are going to refer to that and you want to name His Excellency, please, use the right salutation.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Mr. Speaker, I am quoting from the document, the Budget speech, by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, in which he quoted the President. And this is why I am saying that it is outlined as their vision, but I will make note of your exhortation.

Mr. Speaker: In that case, please, use the proper salutation for His Excellency.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Thank you.

When closely examined, this is sort of a hodgepodge of ideas put together that do not connect to each other by any common trend. The PPP/C Regime inherited a well-thought-out and articulated 20-year vision for Guyana titled: The Green State Development Strategy: Vision 2040. Mr. Speaker, permit me to, briefly, speak to this strategy because it appears that the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramson, all decked out in his Queen’s College tie, sought to criticise the strategy and in so doing, displayed a thrilling ignorance of the document itself, except

for one paragraph in the executive summary which deals with investment assured in the model.

For the Hon. Member, and his Colleagues, let me elucidate. The Green State Development Strategy: Vision 2040 is Guyana’s 20-year national development policy that reflects the guiding vision and principles of the green agenda. It is an inclusive and prosperous Guyana that provides a good quantity of life for all its citizens, based on sound education, social protection, low carbon, and resilient development, providing new economic opportunities, justice, and political empowerment. The central objective is development that provides a better quality of life for all Guyanese derived from the country’s natural wealth.

This strategy took two years to develop. In 2017, there was a first level document which was produced and that was called Framework 1.

3.07 p.m.

That was completed in 2017. That prioritised Guyana’s long-term development. In the following year multi-stakeholder thematic expert groups with 116 participating professionals from the Government, public service, private sector and civil society groups were formed to deliberate on this development theme. The policy trajectory was established under the theme. A third layer of consultation ensured inputs from Guyanese citizens throughout the country. It was held in 33 clusters on the coast, as well as in the hinterland, drawing participation from more than 1,600 citizens in surrounding communities and villages, in what were called ‘green conversations’.

The strategy, therefore, promotes three key messages. Firstly, it speaks to managing the natural resources wealth. Secondly, it speaks to supporting economic resilience; and thirdly, it speaks to building capital and institutional capacity. Those are the three key messages. There are eight thematic areas in this strategy. They are the economic restructuring and diversification; the sustainable management of our natural resources; the transition to renewable and clean energy; resilient infrastructure and green towns; healthy, educated and socially cohesive population; internationally competitive trade and investment; good governance and strong institutions; and finally, sound fiscal policies. This strategy was done with the help and cooperation of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

As I said, it was well-articulated and came it from the bottom up. It is a vision that is for all of Guyana. It is not a vision that you put together in two months; this is two years of

consultations at various levels. When we speak to the strategy and to the vision, this what we are talking about – a well-thought-out and well-articulated. And so, this vision of oneness that we are hearing about, or the this, ‘we are one’, it has to be articulated. It cannot just come from the top and then to be installed at the bottom. It has to come from the people. This is what the PPP/C inherited– hard, methodical work – and what they want to do is to throw it away because Mr. Jagdeo does not like it. He wants to go back to the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), which is in fact one of the elements of this larger strategy that was developed by all of these consultations. So, this question of vision is important for us as Guyanese, and we do not just buy into something called a vision because it is stated by His Excellency the President. This vision has to represent what it is the people say they want. What are their inputs into it? So, that is it about vision.

A budget, as we are discussing or debating here now, has to be set within a political framework, which seeks to deliver a quality of life, in cycles, to the citizens. It is either in a one-year, three-year or five-year cycle but the budget is, of course, for a one-year period. That political framework has to be a true framework. If not, it could skew the manner in which resources are allocated in the budget. If you have a bad political narrative, the resources will go in a bad way.

Here, we have noted that speakers from the Government side attempting to implant a false narrative of the events which occurred after 2nd March, 2020, and are accusing the APNU/AFC of stalling democracy for five months. I heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, speak about ‘rigging’ and ‘rigging’ and ‘rigging’, and all of that. We will, therefore, see, in these petitions, where the proof is. All these issues about ‘rigging’ are allegations. I can say to the Hon. Member, that the only proof that there was ever any ‘rigging’ or fraud, in the courts, was the PPP/C and that was way back when Mr. Hamilton Greene was challenging for – I believe – a seat, on the East Bank of Demerara. No time after that was there ever any talk about ‘rigging’, or any proof of it in the court. So, I challenge the Hon. Member to bring the proof of what he is saying and to bring me a court document that states so. The petitions, here, will state what happened. I do not want to go into the full details because I understand the *sub judice* rule.

But Mr. Speaker, I do believe that you allowed a liberal interpretation to that rule when the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramson, spoke and sought to lay documents in the parliamentary records, on matters which are actually before the court and that are live issues before the court. So, I will

not go down that road, Mr. Speaker. However, I want to say that this talk about stalling democracy is a big joke, but if the situation was not as it is, I would have called it a joke. But this environment where the PPP/C Regime has almost total control of the print and electronic media and the repetition of this false narrative could become a reality for some of our people in this country. The PPP/C, they all know that it is a false narrative. It is a notorious fact that there are two petitions before the courts which challenge the legality of the elections results and a very liberal interpretation which was given to the Hon. Mr. Ramson. I will not go into the details of it. However, I believe that I should avert to at least a summary of the true narrative because all of these speakers on the Government side have been harping at this. They feel that by continuous repetition, a lie can become the truth. I am not saying that they are lying but, basically, that is what is written – that by constant repetition, a lie becomes truth. This is what they believe.

So, as to not offend that rule, I just want to chronicle some of the events without actually going into what the court is dealing within the petitions themselves.

On 2nd March, we went to elections. On 4th March, during the tabulation of the results at the Region 4 office – of the Elections Commission (GECOM) – it was a fact... In fact, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramson, himself spoke about being in that building when he said he saw people coming out with boxes. So, he placed himself at the scene. The PPP/C’s hierarchy stormed the building to stop the tabulation from taking place. Subsequent to that ... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you said that you are stating that as a statement of fact, and I think that was...

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Yes. It was published in the *Kaieteur News* on 5th March.

Mr. Speaker: Yes. But there are other articles I read and those were ‘allegations’; so, I cannot accept that if you are saying it is statement of fact. That fact has not been established.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Mr. Speaker, I will say that it is reported in the media, that on 5th March, this is what occurred.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much.

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: And subsequent to that, three actions were filed by a gentleman by the name of Mr.

Holladar, who was represented by the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall. Three separate actions were filed; the final one had the impact of causing the Chairman of the Elections Commission to not act because of fear of being in contempt of an undertaking which he gave to the court. That situation was an action, that when it was filed, the Hon. Attorney General was told by the Chief Justice – and it is recorded– that this has nowhere to go and where was he going with it. However, it was allowed to remain for three months as a halo over the heads of everyone.

After that period of time, there was, of course, some backward and forward taking place. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat got involved. A CARICOM team of Prime Ministers came here and met with the President and the Hon. Member, Mr. Jagdeo, and decided on a course of action. That course of action saw the two principals signing a document that stated that they agree that there was going to be a recount and that recount took place. It took 33 days, and several issues arose out of that recount which are chronicled in the petitions themselves. And so, I do not want to go through them, but they are chronicled in the petition. It is not for the Hon. Member, Mr. Jagdeo, or anyone else, to say that the APNU/AFC stalled democracy for five months. Matters were taking place. There was an agreement signed by the parties. So, how, in the face of all of that, could anyone say or accuse us of stalling democracy? That is indeed a matter which should not continue because it is not true and to the extent of which they keep repeating that falsehood, it sets an impression on the minds of the Guyanese people that it is true when it is not so.

It is important to understand that in this country, the PPP/C was awarded 233,000 votes, or thereabout, and the APNU/AFC 217,926 votes. It is not as if this was a landslide and that the APNU/AFC just got one seat – even though, I heard from the Government side, one Hon. Member saying that we will lose three seats, another Hon. Member saying five seats and now, this afternoon, the Hon Mr. Nandlall said 10 seats. I do not know where you going with that, you all are living in a fool’s paradise.

Many of us watched American television on 6th January, 2021, when persons stormed the United States Capitol Building in Washington, District of Columbia (D.C.) in the United States of America (USA), while lawmakers were certifying the results of the American elections. Their intent was to stop what they perceived to be fraud. The reports are that persons were seeking out the then US Vice-President, Mr. Michael Pence, and the Speaker of the House, Ms. Nancy

Pelosi. I hope that we do not have a situation like that here Mr. Speaker because I do not know where you will hide. They had to be taken to a safe place. Subsequent actions by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and other law enforcement agencies, have seen many of these persons charged and placed before the courts. Investigations are still ongoing. These persons were, variously, described as hooligans, *et cetera*.

Here in Guyana, in March, 2020, persons who reportedly stormed the office of the Guyana Elections Commission building in Region 4, destroying records and preventing the Commissioner from making electoral declarations, are no different from the persons, who stormed the United States Capitol Building, and were described as hooligans. Some who sit in this honourable House and seek to cast off their shame and disgrace by revisiting the electoral narrative are hooligans as Hon. Members.

In my last Budget speech, I called for a sum of money to be allocated for the purpose of house-to-house registration to cleanse the voters’ list.

3.22 p.m.

Even though there is a sum of \$4.1 billion stated for GECOM, because there was no consultation with us in this Budget, we shall have to await the interrogation of these sums allocated to the Elections Commission to determine what sum, if any, was allocated for this purpose. But from our own calculations, when we took away the current expenses from the sum allocated, we saw from what was left that it could hardly run a Local Government Elections, much less, a house-to-house registration exercise meant to cleanse the whole the voters’ list. So, this will have to be a matter that is dealt with in a very important way. The world has said that in all the observation reports on the 2020 elections that the voters’ list has to be cleansed.

Guyana is at the cusp of economic take-off and we are beginning to receive oil revenues. Guyanese have been hopeful that they would have benefitted from a Budget that imbues them with hope and confidence in a prosperous future. The Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, was given a sound platform for take-off which the Granger Administration worked tirelessly to create.

On page 8, paragraph 3.2 of his Budget speech, Dr. Singh, grudgingly, acknowledges that in 2020, the real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 43.5%. So, instead of the

empty treasury that the PPP/C was feeding this nation with in its first six months, this is what is emerging from this Budget.

Firstly, the real GDP growth of 43.5% took place in 2020.

Secondly, there is US\$206 million from the National Resources Fund in the bank – remember, the PPP/C said we spent it all out, but it is in the bank and it is now in their records to show.

Thirdly, they inherited a solid tax base which increased the number of persons contributing to the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA). Many persons who are outside there and are earning huge sums of money have now been brought into the tax base. This has eased the burden on some of us, who are employed and were made poorer, while some who are outside of that tax base, earning billions, were not taxed in the way they should; and so, this helped in some way.

Fourthly, we introduced an amnesty which provided tax delinquents to come in and settle their obligations. This of course, I believe, raised somewhere in the vicinity of \$9 billion.

Fifthly, we introduced a Natural Resources Fund law which was heralded by the World Bank as being progressive and transparent and which laid the groundwork for withdrawals from the fund for purposes which have to be cleared by the National Assembly. So, Mr. Speaker, you see the safeguards there, it has to be cleared by the you and the Members of this House.

Sixthly, we left an improved agriculture sector. And seventhly, a buoyant public service with a clear plan for the future, being the engine of Government’s work in a modern economy. These, among more, the PPP/C inherited. But, more importantly, they inherited a proud Guyana that the world had taken notice of in the five short years.

What we saw in *Budget 2021* was an attempt to reverse the economic, social and other gains that the country made and a dismantling of anything connected to the APNU/AFC Administration; to return us to a state of that tattered legacy left by the Hon. Member, Mr. Bharat Jagdeo, in 2011 – that legacy of extrajudicial killings; that legacy of drug trafficking; and that legacy of a shattered economy is what we inherited.

Budget 2021, ought to have been focused on lifting people out of poverty and providing them with the ‘good life’. Instead, what we have gotten is the opposite. Budgets in the past have been criticised for lacking vision, but this Budget

takes the cake in that regard. It is wholly visionless. At a time when Guyana is beginning to realise these revenues and is in a position to embark on transformative projects for the benefit of the Guyanese people, we are saddled with a Budget that is basically a hodgepodge of the PPP/C’s self-interests hurriedly put together. *Budget 2021*, as we said, is vacuous, it is vapid, and it is visionless.

Mr. Speaker, Guyanese have been betrayed by this Budget. First and foremost, it has to be recognised that the PPP/C have abandoned the hardworking public servants and have treated them with contempt and disregard. There is absolutely nothing in this Budget for the public servants. They will benefit from zero increase in salaries. We have called for a minimum of 10% increase across the board for public servants. Dr. Ashni Singh, we expect that you will make the announcement of the increase before the end of this process.

Our frontline workers in the health sector have been left empty-handed with nothing to show; no reward or recognition for their hard work, over the past year, during the devastating pandemic. They have worked beyond the call of duty and this *Budget 2021* does not offer them anything. It is an insult, and it is disrespectful to them. Shame on you, PPP/C, for ignoring our frontline workers.

While the PPP/C have found billions of dollars to pour into the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), which continues to produce sugar way above the price of sugar on the World Market, our frontline workers in the public service must feel an emptiness in their hearts and must be wondering if they should stay in their profession.

The Hon. Minister of Agriculture is being very critical about our scrutiny on the allocations to GuySuCo. You see Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member makes a point of equating GuySuCo with sugar workers because it is in his party’s political interest to do so. However, let me quote from the former President Mr. Donald Ramotar to bring greater light and to bring this matter into greater relief. He said that while we are on the subject about the mismanagement of public resources, let us again address the issue of \$2 billion more for GuySuCo. This money, without the proper plan to restructure the industry, will go up in smoke just the same as the \$7 billion we spent on GuySuCo in the last budget. But I do not want to ask you to take my word for it, I want you to listen to the words of the former President, Mr. Ramotar.

He said:

“The industry needs to be restructured, reorganized as much as it needs financial inputs at this stage. Not to reorganize this could end up just throwing money at the problem without tangible results, ...”

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that we should not keep financing GuySuCo without the appropriate reform plans. And the gentleman, who now heads GuySuCo, is supposed to be a turnaround expert; at least, that is what he holds himself out as being. We are now awaiting this reform plan, but even before a plan, we are pumping billions of dollars into GuySuCo.

The Minister wants us to believe that this money is going straight to the sugar workers – it is not so. The bulk of this money is going to the mismanagement and to nepotism in this industry. It is going to businesses that are connected to the PPP/C Administration. But that is not all, the former President, Mr. Ramotar, thinks that in addition to this waste that the PPP/C, even now, has at the back of its mind the privatisation of the sugar industry.

Here is another handy quote about the necessity for reform.

He said:

“If this is not done then the point would be reached where the government would look for the easy way out and accept privatization of the industry. They would say we tried, we have put in a lot of money but it has not work therefore we have no other option but to sell out the industry. That would be a huge collective slap in our faces and a great let down to our ancestors who invested their life’s blood in sugar, ...”

Mr. Speaker, what a statement. There is a familiar expression which says, *mouth open, story jump out*. The former President does not have that confidence that the current expenditure is genuine. Rather, that without a plan, it is just money thrown on the fire to make it seem as if the PPP/C is trying; when in reality, at every chance they intend to offload the burden and privatise GuySuCo.

I do not even have to highlight such audacity through my own arguments. Here is another Member of the PPP/C, who is laying out their playbook for sugar. When Guyanese ask why sugar has failed, perhaps a better question [*inaudible*] did the PPP/C ever intended for sugar to succeed? The next time I see former President Ramotar, I will have to give him a congratulatory, I cannot shake his hand now, a fist bump,

something like that, for his candour. We are grateful that he has had the fortitude to express what is known to be true.

Mr. Speaker, when you hear something like this coming from a former President, does it make you question the true purpose of everything that is in this Budget? Since, there is no cohesive plan, we have to ask ourselves what exactly is the reason for each and every line item in this Budget? There is no plan for GuySuCo, but we are pumping money into it. There is no vision for this country that has budgetary allocations going to it, so why are we spending all this money? It is just about playing politics with people’s money; that is all it is. Whether these initiatives are designed to succeed is a matter which we will have to look at.

Like *Budget 2020*, this Budget that wreaks havoc on the economy and the pockets of poor people, who will find that their dollar would be unable to buy less, in fact, it would be able to buy less, and they will sink deeper into hardship. Dr. Singh go into the markets and find out what is happening with the prices for basic commodities, and you would get a better sense of the way ordinary Guyanese people feel.

I do not want to say that you have only been back very shortly because you were in a wealthy country, but I believe that in your heart of hearts that you would not have done a budget like this. This is why I am saying that this is not your Budget because this is a Budget that is disconnected from the ordinary man and woman of this country. It is devoid of a medium-term strategy of development for Guyana. It is revisionist and is resurrecting failed policies and programmes. Instead of a budget that provides economic empowerment to Guyanese, we have a budget which ignores large sections of the population and offers a few handouts to a few. It is a budget designed to keep people poor rather than a budget which is packed with programmes to economically empower people through access to financing to start. Young people have been ignored and cast aside in this Budget, despite the fact that the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport boasts about having the largest budget ever. We still need to see what is inside there.

3.37 p.m.

Where is your youth policy in which it was determined that these moneys were spent? There is no provision for them in the Budget. There are no mechanism or programme which allows young people to realise business ideas and initiatives to expand small businesses.

Most importantly, however, *Budget 2021* fails to provide a pathway for us to emerge from the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. What we have seen is the placing of a large sum to procure vaccines, but we know what that is design to do. Even though, Dr. Anthony tried his best to explain, it is not working.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you could use ‘Comrade’ or ‘Hon. Member’. You have referred to the Hon. Member ...

Lt. Col (Ret’d) Harmon: All right, I am sorry. The Hon. Member, Dr. Anthony. It is difficult for me to sell this. There is no plan.

The objective in this Budget for COVID speaks to navigating the COVID-19 as long as it is there. One would have expected some greater clarity on how this objective could be achieved and the sum of money stated to achieve this purpose. However, what is it that we were is given a lump sum. There is no clear policy direction to deal with COVID.

In *Budget 2020*, a sum was placed there for disease control on communicable diseases for a three-month period in 2020. The Government spent \$7 billion on that. In 2021, for a 12-month period, the sum of \$8 billion for drugs and medical supply is there. There is a heavy increase of \$6 billion over the 2019 allocation. So, this is an area we will have to place special emphasis on with respect to the availability of the vaccines to achieve what is called herd immunity.

Herd immunity is a term which needs to be explained to the ordinary man and woman because, sometimes, when one hears about herd, he or she is thinking about a pack of animals behaving in a certain way. When we speak about herd immunity, we have to explain to people what it means. In our view, this herd immunity cannot be achieved. In fact, there is no serious plan where the vaccines have been identified. So far, they cannot even immunise half of the population. I do not know what percentage they used to determine what is herd immunity, but the Hon. Minister of Health would be able to explain that even better, but I cannot understand it that, herd immunity can be achieved by a percentage that is less than half of the population.

The vaccines itself, the bulk of which I now understand is coming from India, seems not to have taken into account the peculiar circumstances of our Indigenous people. That might become a challenge itself to administer two dosages to one individual. That might be a challenge in some Indigenous communities. I think the Hon. Minister will have to place specific attention. I understand that the vaccine from *Johnson*

and Johnson, which is now coming on the market, just requires one dose and that is it. So, the question of our citizens who live in remotes areas and move from one place to the next might be a challenge in administering two doses.

The reality calls for a more well-articulated plan with wider stakeholders’ participation and at a meaningful level. Reliance on these vaccines alone, as a cure for all in this pandemic, seems to diminish the enthusiasm for the testing, tracing and treatment of our citizens. We seem to be in a holding pattern, and we are waiting on this vaccine. This, of course, can have negative consequences of spreading rather than containing the virus.

There are several other areas of national concern and there are two of them which I wish to address. One, of course, has to do with public safety and security. The budgetary allocations in this area seem to heavily focus on community policing groups. Since August, 2020, we have seen a gradual return to a state of lawlessness in our society as occurred before 2015. Many of our citizens recall the death squads; cross-border gun running; extrajudicial killings; drug trafficking; and the high levels of crimes and interpersonal violence that were the hallmark of the previous PPP/C Administrations.

From 2015 to August, 2020, citizens were able to go about their daily lives in relative peace and security. That was because the APNU/AFC paid careful attention to the security situation and increased, in an exponential way, budgetary allocations for the Guyana Police Force (GPF), which allowed them to be reequipped with the tools necessary to do their jobs.

With assistance from the United Kingdom (UK), we undertook a careful study of the Guyana Police force. Under Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Combe, a British security expert, certain reforms were proposed which we started to take actions on. The Guyana Police Force was redeployed and reorganised in keeping with the administrative regions and the shift in the demography of our country. This meant that police division commanders, at a senior level, were deployed to each of the 10 administrative regions, allowing for faster response to criminal activities, and, in some cases, proactive patrolling that was confidence building in nature. The deployment of horses in some hinterland areas assisted in patrols along our borders. There was an intensification of training of our police ranks at all levels of the Force. Our coastal patrols were responsible for a reduction in the level of crime among our fishing folks at sea.

The combined effect of these measures meant that the crime rates in this country, over the period of 2015 to 2020, were of the lowest in decades. We have to thank the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, who headed that Ministry for this stellar performance. The five-year reports which were left, the Hon. Member, who is now the Minister of Home Affairs, could read them, they are there.

Drug trafficking was slowed up to a trickle at our air, seaports and border locations.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have two minutes to conclude.

Lt. Col (Ret’d) Harmon: ...citizen networks from community districts and regions in the centre to share intelligence.

Our effort to remove Guyana from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism blacklist was admired by many in the international community. Some of our operators became trainers for other countries in their effort to climb out of such a state.

This is the architecture that the PPP/C inherited. Since then, what has happened? In November, 2020, there was one of the largest drugs bust of 11.5 tons of cocaine. Early in August, 2020, a shipment of 1.5 tons had been discovered in Hamburg, Germany which came from Guyana. An aircraft was found in the hinterland with cocaine, foreign currencies and weapons.

Of course, the frequent breakouts from the prisons have left our citizens in a state of fear. In this regard, that is why, this week, I met with the Commissioner of Police and his senior officers. We made those points very clear to them and we trust that we will have a better understanding going forward. We have related our concerns to the police about community policing, the arbitrary arrest of persons and so on. We also talked about the Attorney General’s use of the police ranks in large numbers to terrorise citizens in his avaricious pursuit of land. This is now making people feel that we have a police state.

The other quality of life is (*inaudible*) to deal with water, but since I am not allowed much more time, let me say that our performance has been recognised on page 10 of the report that there has been a significant improvement in water and sanitation.

In closing, let me leave eight critical points with us, which, in my view, will move our country forward. One: our Government or any government cannot function by just seeing red or green communities. Our communities are made up of people. Two: let us agree that constructive engagement, based on clear principles and broaden stakeholders at the national, regional and community levels, is a *sine qua non* for our development. Three: let us immediately shift from this ethnic marginalisation and vindictiveness. Four: let us agree to meet to cause a redress on what has occurred in this country. Five: let us agree to collectively focus on poverty and the plight of our poor citizens. Six: let us agree that there is a need for immediate and urgent protection of our sovereignty and our national patrimony. Mr. David Patterson spoke at length about that in his presentation. Seven: that the COVID-19 Task Force could be expanded with representation at a meaningful level. If I wrap up now to say ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Leader of the Opposition, you know you have to pay some respect, you call on that earlier. The Speaker was speaking.

Lt. Col (Ret’d) Harmon: Yes, Sir. I thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: No, I was not shutting you down. I was going to allow you to conclude because I actually...

Lt Col (Ret’d) Harmon: I do not want to be disrespectful at all.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Sir.

Lt Col (Ret’d) Harmon: I am not a person like that. As you know, I grew up in the military.

Eight: These are important steps and that is why I kept them for the last part of my presentation. Let us agree that there is an urgent need to update our electoral laws to ensure that there is a List of Electors which reflect the reality of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker and Colleagues, I leave you with the words of the former President of Guyana, Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham:

“the destiny of the Cooperative Republic is in our hands; let these be safe hands.”

Mr. Speaker, for reasons which, by now, have become very clear in our presentations, I cannot support this Budget. I thank you, very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Leader of the Opposition. I just want to inform you, first, when you said that ‘you are not allow’, there was an agreement between both sides that you get one hour. That hour expired at 2.46 p.m.

Lt Col (Ret’d) Harmon: I will not challenge that at all. I thank you for your ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Leader of the Opposition, you had an opportunity to speak. It is very disrespectful to speak when the Speaker is speaking. I did allow the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to make his points which I thought the nation needed to hear. So, he got an additional five minutes.

Hon. Prime Minister, it is my honour to also now welcome you to make your contribution to this Budget debate. My time says 3.55.44 p.m., sorry 3.51.49 p.m.

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: I rise to express my support for *Budget 2021* presented by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, under the theme: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*.

3.52 p.m.

Our Government stands proud of this Budget, not only because it is the first full-year Budget presented by our PPP/C Administration or the fact that it is the largest Budget presented in Guyana’s history, we are proud because the preparation and presentation of the \$381.1 billion Budget showcase the immense passion and concern that our Government holds for the wellbeing and upliftment of the people of our country, proven by the ample, strategic and deliberate allocations across all sectors.

More so, we stand proud to have been able to successfully achieve this just on the heels of the 2020 emergency Budget, which was mandatorily prepared by your PPP/C Government to begin the revitalisation of our country’s economy. The economy faced a dire economic downturn, originating from the previous five years of gross incompetence and poor leadership which created nothing but hardship and poverty for all the people across this country. Except the few and their families and friends, some of whom currently sit on the other side of this honourable House now pretending to care about the people of our country, after they were voted out of Office by both a motion of no-confidence in 2018 and then at the 2020 General and Regional Elections.

They come here with their dedicated theatrics at every single sitting of this National Assembly, but still have absolutely

nothing of substance to contribute or bring to the table for the benefit of the people they claimed to represent. How witless they are; nothing but a self-serving bunch. The people of this country are seeing your true colours and no amount of theatrical performance would convince them otherwise.

Our Government inherited a stagnant economy, all credits due to the failed and visionless APNU/AFC Administration. The collapse of which culminated after the passage of the no-confidence motion, as mentioned earlier in December, 2018, where we saw with our very own eyes the flagrant violations of our Constitution and rule of law right through the catastrophic five months that followed the 2nd March 2020 General and Regional Elections. This struggle was only heightened by the deadly Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), which we had to a still continue to battle. *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience* speaks volumes and breathes hope and life into the hearts of our citizens. It speaks of rebirth; it speaks of renewal; but most of all, it speaks of a new era of prosperity of all Guyanese. An era that our people have for too long hoped for without fruition.

The work done by the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, and his team in preparing this 2021 Budget is quite admirable. Thus, they deserve the highest commendation for producing a budget that is sure to touch the lives of every single Guyanese in many ways with plans for rapid development and economic growth. I wish to humbly note that this Budget would initiate investments in catalytic and transformative infrastructure, including energy infrastructure to ensure adequate energy supply at a competitive cost and transport infrastructure to improve international connectivity. Thereby, unleashing domestic production and productivity.

Permit me to remind you, Mr. Speaker, that this Budget is in keeping with our Governments’ vision of making Guyana a truly prosperous country and providing benefits to all our citizens, while laying the foundation that projects sustainable long-term growth. Along this thrust, I will wish to highlight the plans for the agencies under the Office of the Prime Minister that would aid us in contributing to the realisation of our Governments’ vision for the prosperity and improvement of the lives of all Guyanese throughout the length and breadth of Guyana.

However, I have been listening to the debate over the last five days and I came to the conclusion that the Hon. Members on the other side of the House have a problem with reading. In order for them to understand the Budget, I have a pull-out

from the newspaper, *Guyana Chronicle*, Sunday 14th February, *Budget at a Glance*. I urge all the Members on the other side of the House to have this pull-out. It is just four pages of reading, in fact three pages reading. That would help you to understand the Budget. It is a pity that I did not speak before and offer this to you before you made your speeches in this House.

Mr. Speaker, your Prime Minister has many portfolios unlike his predecessor – power generation, telecommunications and innovation, Government information and communications services, disaster preparedness response and management. In our *Budget 2021*, an estimated \$8.4 billion has been allocated to the power generation programme. Our Government foresees the massive potential that energy holds for an economic boom in Guyana and will remain true to our intentions to achieve the provision of affordable, stable and reliable electricity throughout our country.

More so, the world remains under attack by the Coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic. Utilities and power generators worldwide have been forced to alter their practices and develop strategies to deal with the rapid developments and change in patterns with regard to energy consumption as a result. Now, more than ever, the world requires a reliable supply of electricity to prevent further disruption and Guyana is no exception. With allocations of \$240 million for the sustainable energy programme; \$628.8 million for the renewable energy improvement power system project; \$750 million for the energy matrix diversification programme; \$500 million for the solar system project; and \$125 million for the small hydro projects, our Government would work assiduously to implement the necessary measures that will result in improved standard of living for our people through the generation and provision of sufficient, stable and reliable electricity.

Allow me to speak on the specific works of the agencies that have a direct bearing on our plans in the power generation sector. An estimated total of \$1 billion has been allocated to the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA). At present, Guyana is supplied with energy from a variety of energy sources. At the same time, our country is predominantly reliant on imported fossil-based fuels. Price volatility in international oil markets and the threat of rising temperatures from greenhouse gases, necessitate that we move to cleaner sources of energy and climate resilient infrastructure. The most significant step taken to address climate change in Guyana is the development and implementation of, listen to me carefully, the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), which was

launched in June, 2019 and revised in 2010 and 2013. We have returned to the Low Caron Development Strategy. Your strategy is a bunch of slogans. We need a real strategy that denotes the ways, means and ends and is approved by the people of Guyana.

The strategic vision for the energy sector encompasses the provision of affordable, stable and reliable energy for households and businesses with an energy mix that includes hydropower, natural gas, solar and wind, leading to more than 400 megawatts of newly installed capacity over the next five years. That is a strategy. A reduction in the cost of energy by at least 50%. Among the measures that our PPP/C Government is aiming to implement to transform the power sector, includes the production of 250 megawatts of natural gas in the interim.

There would be urgent actions to improve and upgrade the national grid and the completion of the Amalia’s Falls Hydropower project, cognisant of the declining cost of some renewable energy technologies, the level of maturity of existing energy efficient technologies, as well as national and international obligations. The Guyana Energy Agency’s five-year strategic plan provides key strategic actions to guide the activities of the agency, including the advancement of solar and wind systems for off-grid areas; support for the expansion of the Hinterland Electrification Programme; replacement and upgrade of solar photovoltaic (PV) systems in the hinterland; and the advancement of micro grids for large hinterland areas.

The GEA intends to continue its collaboration with sister agencies, Ministries, the private sector, academia and communities in advancing in its vision and mandate towards a sustainable energy future, ensuring energy access to all Guyanese.

Power generation entails the development and implementation of energy policies and oversight of the management of power generation establishments to improve the effective and efficient provision of energy services across the country. An estimated total of \$3.1 billion has been allocated to power companies across Guyana: \$172.5 million for Lethem Power Company; \$490 million for Kwakwani Utilities Incorporated; \$2.3 billion for Limine – the APNU/AFC stronghold; \$30 million for Mabaruma Power Company; \$50 million for Mahdia Power and Light; \$10 million for Moruka Power and Light; \$15 million Matthews Ridge Power and Light; and \$50 million for Port Kaituma Power and Light.

In Guyana, where power generation is concerned, we also acknowledge the increasing demands for power in the advent of our growing oil and gas sector. The Guyana and Power and Light (GPL) Incorporated, our country’s primary power generation agency, requires massive support and investments so that it could strengthen its capacity to serve the increasing demands and, by extension, our people. This is one of the essential cornerstones for economic and socio-economic developments.

4.07 p.m.

The Guyana Power and Light Incorporated is also rolling ahead with its transmission and distribution plan, which essentially targets redundancy, reliability, capacity upgrades, bulk delivery systems to new load centres, and technical loss reduction *via* larger conductors and power factor correction.

The transmission and distribution system would be subjected to continuous expansion, modernisation and the introduction of automation, to ultimately realise a Smart Grid. The ultimate aim is the integration of a fully automated transmission and distribution metering and generation system. This would realise accurate frequency on voltage controls within operating standards and the ability to undertake corrective action automatically, thus reducing outages in the event of permanent network faults.

The GPL is currently working with a list of known areas and will continue to ensure that access to electricity is improved to 100% by 2024. The company plans to stockpile all metering materials in advance of the customer-based expected growth, while acquiring additional meters to address non-technical losses and defects. Above all this, customer service remains high on the GPL’s list as well. While the reliability and the quality of the supply of electricity delivered to customers are of significant importance to the Company, it remains cognisant of the nature of electricity and the importance of leveraging information and communications technological (ICT) initiatives to improve the efficiencies within its operations.

There are also plans for a phased transition from the Automated Meter Reading (AMR) technology to the Automated Metering Infrastructure (AMI) technology, in order to facilitate the on demand and scheduled remote retrieval of meter readings; the reduction in estimated bills resulting from meter access challenges; the voltage level monitoring at customers’ premises; the detection of unauthorised interference of electric service at the point of the meter and the remote disconnection or reconnection of

electric services. Besides the benefits of replacing the regular meters with AMI meters, which will help improve the quality of service and accounting efficiency, the AMI technology will also help identify voltage levels within the distribution network and inform a critical operational standard and performance measure.

Voltage regulation. – with the list of planned projects to improve the power systems in generation and transmission and distribution, the metering plan and the efficiency and customer service improvements initiatives, the GPL plans to meet and exceed the technical and non-technical Operational Standard & Performance Targets outlined in the 2021-2025 Development and Expansion Programme.

The Power Utility Upgrade Programme (PUUP) is designed to support the GPL in executing fundamental infrastructure investment of a corporate development programme which will allow for a cultural change that contributes to an organisation that can supply energy within minimum international standard. A total estimate of \$1.8 billion has been allocated to this project.

The main outcomes of this project are expected to be the reductions of the technical and non-technical losses. The project will also improve the performances of the power distribution network in terms of reliability. In alignment with the LCDS, the PUUP will reinforce the electricity infrastructure by upgrading part of the transmission and distribution network which contributes to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure. This project will also contribute towards improving Guyana’s doing business conditions by making it easier to obtain electricity through better power network performance and impact the achievement of SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, which will be characterised by the country’s growth in electricity consumption.

The work of the PUUP will also include identifiable climate mitigation and the co-benefit of the reduction of technical losses in the distribution network, which is an estimated energy saving of 80 Gigawatt hours, (GWh) by 2022. Furthermore, this project will contribute to the achievement of the SDG 13 – Climate Action – which requires urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Specifically, this project addresses the following aspects of GPL’s operations: infrastructural upgrade to decrease technical and commercial losses; reinforcement of infrastructure to improve reliability; institutional

strengthening through training and the reinforcement of techniques required for efficient management at the executive and senior management levels; the operational efficiency through consultancies in system planning; energy demand forecasting; and Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) – operation and maintenance.

The work of the Power Producers and Distributors Incorporated (PPDI) agency will also contribute to overall power generation capacity in Guyana. These works include increasing its generating capacity by 44% with the inclusion of the new installation of a 46.5-megawatt (MW) Power Plant at Garden of Eden. The plant’s gensets came into the country in November, but unfortunately, the people of Guyana have to wait until the second quarter of 2021 for this project to come onstream. This is simply due to poor planning by the previous Administration. Instead of simultaneous planning, we have to live with the sequential planning approach of the previous Administration.

There will be the creating of additional employment through expansion; supporting Government’s strategies towards alternative sources of energy, including solar power, wind power, Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) and gas-to-shore projects; providing technical and other support to other energy-generating providers; and developing and implementing effective risk management systems and policies to manage current and emerging risks.

For the Hinterland Electrification Company Incorporated (HECI), an estimated \$202.5 million has been allocated. In 2004, our PPP/C Government implemented the Unserved Areas Electrification Programme (UAEP). The purpose of which was to provide electricity to unserved areas along the coast. Another component under this programme also aimed to examine ways in which hinterland areas could have increased access to electricity in the most cost effective and sustainable manner.

At the community level, many of the Government institutions were powered by individual solar systems or diesel generators, while about 10% of the communities had a mini grid supply in electricity to mainly community buildings in a central area and residential buildings within feasible distances.

After assuming Office, I wish to report that, by the end of 2020, the HECI had installed a 1100 kilovolt-ampere (kVA) generator at Kwakwani, a new engine 4750 kVA at Mabaruma, a 150 kVA at Matthews Ridge, 12 kilowatt (kW) Solar Micro-Grids in Yarikita and Hotaquai in Region 1, a 10

kW Solar Micro-Grid system in Chinowieng, Region 7 and a 15kW Solar Micro-Grid in Phillippi-Region 7. That was in 2020.

The plans for 2021 include: the completion of the installation of Solar Micro-Grids in Monkey Mountain, Akawini, Bethany, Kabakaburi and Achiwuib. There will be the complete installation of a 150kW hydro-power system at Kato, along with the construction of a distribution system. There will be the installation of new engines for generators at Lethem, Mahdia, Port Kaituma and Matthews Ridge and the upgrading of the distribution network in Lethem. There will be the installation of Solar Home Systems (SHS) for households in approximately 200 hinterland communities. This is between 25,000 to 30,000 systems and the project will start in 2021. Each system will provide the average household with dusk-to-dawn lighting, power for the charging of cell phones and laptops, and operating audio equipment for information and entertainment.

Further, the HECI plans to install solar PV powered micro-grid systems in 50 communities by 2025. This has already started with such systems being completed in four communities, as mentioned earlier.

The plan is to upgrade and expand the generation and distribution capacities in communities with existing grids to serve an additional 450 households and businesses, improve generation reliability and reduce electricity costs throughout our interior – Lethem, Mahdia, Port Kaituma and Matthew’s Ridge – by introducing solar farms to reduce reliance on diesel generation. This has already started with solar farm projects being installed in Lethem and Mahdia under an International Development Bank (ID) funded programme which is managed by the Guyana Energy Agency.

Across all villages, the maintenance of the energy systems is essential to ensure optimum performance and to prolong their useful life. Preventive and emergency maintenance activities on the energy systems will be best provided by local residents. In this regard, through the HECI, we plan to provide appropriate training for residents, including females in all of the nearly 200 hinterland communities during the period 2021 to 2025. All these plans will be able to commence soon for the HECI.

The importance of information and communications technology, particularly as it relates to its use as a tool of economic and social empowerment, cannot be overemphasised. Investments in ICT have continually increased globally, causing a massive shift in the global

economy. Guyana has made many strides in the innovation of ICTs but there is some way to go. This creates room for our country to learn and follow the pattern of larger countries’ successes in this regard.

There is tremendous potential for ICTs to be used for development in all sectors of our country including health, education, security, infrastructure, agriculture and social development. Against this backdrop, I wish to remind you, Mr. Speaker, that our Government is aware of the need for improved ICT access across the country with an aim to bridging the digital divide currently experienced by our people and enhancing their quality of living by giving them more access to information and communications.

4.22 *p.m.*

With an estimated \$2 billion allocation for the National Data Management Authority (NDMA) over the next five years, the NDMA would continue to work to transform the delivery of Government services and improve citizen’s quality of life, through appropriate use of technology that fosters digital inclusion and public trust.

In 2021, the NDMA would continue to focus on improving the quality of public services to citizens, expanding the reach of Government services and facilitating specialised information and communications technology (ICT) training to fulfil Government needs. This is all geared towards providing increased access to internet and Government services, irrespective of geographic location or monetary status, and an increase in ICT literacy.

In 2021, the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector and concomitant reduction in the rates offered by service providers will allow NDMA to increase the internet bandwidth provided to Government intuitions and agencies. The NDMA would drastically improve its internet availability through the utilisation of two independent providers. This now provides the redundant path for NDMA internet services. The NDMA would aggressively be pursuing the fiberoptic cable installation project across the coast to facilitate the expansion and reach of Government services and replace the limited capacity of the current wireless option.

Interconnecting communication towers would allow more capacity and reliability at locations along the coast. These towers would be used to provide improved access to internet services throughout community hotspots and hubs. The NDMA currently provides internet access at over 80 sites in the streets of Georgetown which are free and openly available

to all. The NDMA is further expanding its internet access to hinterland and remote locations, with plans for more expansion beyond the current installation. Leveraging the existing and new fibre infrastructure in Georgetown, the NDMA would proceed to interconnect secondary schools with fibre, thereby significantly increasing bandwidth availability to improve the delivery of schools’ virtual curriculum.

Safe City, the major deliverable for the Guyana National Broadband Project, would be launched in 2021. It would provide a unified emergency call centre service, *via* the command centre, to the public through one number, 911. Citizens would have a single point of access to the Guyana Police Force (GPF), Guyana Fire Service (GFS) and emergency ambulance services *via* this number. Response times are expected to improve along with the coordination of responding resources.

Energy responders would be equipped with modern communication devices that could provide real time video, voice and data feedback to the command centre which is built specifically for this purpose. The security and regulation of Government information systems are important to encourage confidence in Government services by citizens, businesses and international partners. It is therefore necessary to ensure that these systems and services are protected from cyber threats.

One major deliverable for 2021 is the development of the national cybersecurity strategy for Guyana. Additionally, in 2021, the NDMA would be conducting an assessment to ascertain Guyana’s capability to respond to cybersecurity incidents of national significance.

Further, the NDMA is in the process of developing Government wide cybersecurity policies. The NDMA would continue to focus on monitoring and securing Government’s networks and services as well as responding to cyber incidents of national importance. [An. Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*]

Mr: Speaker: We cannot use “Shut *yuh* mouth” either.

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: One of the Government of Guyana’s most significant achievement to date has been its ability to bring to a close the long-awaited liberalisation of the telecommunications sector, a feat completed within two months of taking Office. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) completed this campaign promise in record time. This single move, which was long overdue and

delayed by the previous Administration, would create a quantum leap in communications and the way we connect. It would also fast track the development of the associated technologies, stimulating tremendous social and economic benefits in traditionally dependent sectors by leveraging technology.

Within weeks of liberalisation and its introduction of a new competitive landscape, Guyana experienced new speeds and services offered by major service providers. Today, Guyana could easily access gigabit internet speeds on par with services offered in the region and the first world. This is a clear example of liberalisation enabling rapid development in the country, such as access to the latest technologies and robust fibreoptic and fixed services across the most densely populated parts of Guyana.

Liberalisation has also resulted in a decrease in wholesale prices for bandwidth capacity towards some 80%. This has enabled the NDMA to access quadruple bandwidth capacity, which has strengthened our ability to improve the delivery of services tasked to this agency. Mr. Speaker, only recently, in this very House, we experienced the work of the NDMA. We were able to increase the bandwidth to facilitate your work.

The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) has also given our support to the construction of two new Subminiature-C (Sub-C) cables, which would strengthen the resilience of our international connectivity and ensure our sector’s preparedness for a rapidly developing economy.

The Office of the Prime Minister would also widen its focus from macro services to the empowerment of smaller rural providers to extend connectivity across the country. We have already tasked the Guyana Telecommunications Agency with equipping these small providers to join us in the mammoth task of providing universal services for all of our brothers and sisters country wide, especially in the hinterland.

This also ties into our recent order that allows for the registration of small internet service providers. This move would contribute to our promise of universal services and stimulate increased economic activities in ICT in these communities. This is a crucial strategy to boost connectivity and ensure there is space for the small ICT businesses.

We would also implement robust policies that advocate for providing services based on modern protocols, including number portability and interconnection standards, and those that support the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to conduct its mandate effectively. We believe these initiatives

would contribute towards driving the sector’s progression in favour of increased benefits to the Guyanese people. As an example, number portability, which gives ownership of one’s telephone number to the consumer rather than the provider, is a measure that enables the consumer to choose the best service provider for his or her needs without the cost of switching to new numbers. This forces the provider to ensure the best quality and affordability, rather than locking in clients who do not wish to change their current number.

Currently, the Office of the Prime Minister is also reviewing its spectrum policy by engaging stakeholders, telecommunications professionals and external expertise. We believe this collaboration would ensure that we are prepared for the 5G revolution that would boost internet connectivity and support the internet of things, artificial intelligence and so much more that have been associated with advanced 5G services. We are also working to equip the Telecommunications Agency with the resources, exposure and skillset necessary to prepare us for a modern future in telecommunications.

In my 2020 Budget presentation, I had highlighted the increased access to technology resulting in the growing demand by the public for accountability and transparency from their Government. All across the world, people are now more empowered and continue to call on those in power to remain transparent and keep them informed. Our PPP/C Government remains committed to this cause and provisions under the Government Information and Communication Services Programme speak volume with regard to this commitment. A total of \$961.3 million had been allocated for this year’s budget towards this area.

An estimated \$375 million has been allocated to the National Communications Network (NCN) to carry out its work programmes and plans. NCN is aiming to become the first network in Guyana to be fully digital, while educating, entertaining, inspiring and using all technological and compatible advancements available.

Linden has begun the process with Berbice on the list. Radio stations, coastal and regional, have been equipped with the latest broadcast equipment and are almost fully digital. Through the regional radio stations and television (TV) relays, the interior regions of Guyana, particularly Regions 1,7,8 and 9 and interior communities of Regions 2,6 and 10, are no longer deprived of the opportunity of information sharing and communication with Government and economic centres of the post. The NCN enables the provision of access

to information, an increasingly important constitutional and human right.

Over the next four years, NCN will embark on reaching those communities in sub-regions already receiving service but, due to mountainous terrain and lack of electricity, are unable to receive power signal. NCN will partner with other State agencies such as the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA), to ensure that there is provision of reliable power for these additional facilities. This effort will realise the growth and development of indigenous broadcasters and create employment. Through a satellite link with NCN in Georgetown, these stations will be able to access daily programmes, from the main national broadcaster in Georgetown, covering news, current affairs and national, cultural and social events, including sports and entertainment, live broadcast from Parliament and key national events as well as special educational and health programmes produced by NCN.

NCN intends to remain complaint with the time frame set out in The Persons with Disabilities Act 2012 that makes provisions for the inclusion of sign language or subtitles. Chapter 36:05, Section 26 (1), (2) of the Act stipulates:

“...every national television station shall provide a sign language inset or subtitles in at least one newscast programme daily and special programmes covering events of national significance”.

NCN will explore forthwith the use of closed captioning and the use of sign language interpreters as part of its social responsibilities and will endeavour to be compliant by 2022. It is estimated that 50,000 persons comprise Guyana’s person with disabilities population.

4.37 *p.m.*

Of this population, 9.1% or 4,406 persons suffer from hearing impediments and 30% or 14,525 persons suffer from visual impairment. The NCN will start with sign language or closed captioning during the major newscasts, presidential addresses and other important public information. In the coming years, it will also strive to present major programmes in indigenous and creole languages.

As the NCN strives to expand and diversify both programming and human resource capacity, the agency, under the direction of the Minister in the Office of the Prime Minister and the Board of Directors, anticipates that it will

receive technical and programmatic capacity building, as outlined by the Department of Public Affairs.

Further, the agency will be part of a universal exchange programme, established through key external international and bilateral partners, and benefit from training of new communication recruits for the State media. The NCN already has several noteworthy broadcasters and television presenters who can be emulated by those now joining the profession. They can listen to archived recordings from the early days of Radio Demerara in 1951 to the Guyana Broadcasting Service (GBS) in 1958 and the Guyana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) in 1979 to modern-day NCN in 2021.

The Hon. Minister of Public Affairs, a few days ago in his address to this House, envisaged the development of a National Broadcast Academy in collaboration with the Guyana Press Association, the Guyana National Broadcasting Authority (GNBA), and the University of Guyana (UG). This initiative will provide the opportunity for young broadcasters to be adequately trained and mentored in all areas of broadcasting. The NCN sees itself as being a major contributor and beneficiary in this endeavour over the next four years.

From 2021 to 2025, the NCN will continue to establish itself as the only network in this country that reaches across all regions, *via* television, radio, and social media. It also intends to be the first network fully digital and to use all technological and compatible advancements available in order to efficiently execute its mandate of promoting social and human development of the people of Guyana.

A total estimate of \$310 million, which was allocated to the Department of Public Information (DPI), will allow for continued access to public information for all our citizens, which is a right enshrined in the Constitution of Guyana. Therefore, as mentioned before, our Government, in respect of this constitutional right, is obligated to provide information to the people of Guyana on all matters relating to policy decisions and national plans, programmes and events. Such information is essential to promoting an understanding of all public issues and encouraging meaningful engagement with and the involvement of Guyanese people.

In keeping with this obligation, the Department of Public Information is mandated to serve as the public relations arm of the Government. It is tasked with ensuring that citizens are informed and kept abreast with the work programmes, policies, plans, events and activities of the Government. It is

also responsible for special productions, coverage and promotion of national events and initiatives. As such, it is anticipated that the DPI will become the Government’s information agency, overseeing the coordination, dissemination, and promulgation of the work of the Government through various channels. It will serve as the central coordinative hub of public information and Government activities. In this regard, it is envisioned that, from 2021 to 2025, the department will be transformed into a rationalised, equipped and efficient Government information agency with optimised national reach. Through staged interventions, it is envisioned that the department will become a leader in the production, creation, and promotion of the Government’s work.

Our Government has recognised that there must be greater focus on making Government messaging clear, understandable and easy to obtain. It has been noted that official Government information need to be distinctly and consistently identifiable to minimise instances of confusion on the part of the public and to ensure that the message is received the way it was intended.

A total of \$563 million has been allocated to the Civil Defence Commission (CDC) for it to carry out its work. As our country continues to develop and expand, the CDC will be focusing, heavily, on institutional strengthening within the organisation to better position the agency to lead and coordinate disaster risk management across Guyana in a fast paced and efficient way.

I wish to report that from 2nd August to December, 2020, the Civil Defence Commission distributed 42,615 food and sanitation hampers throughout Guyana at a cost of \$434.3 million. Of note is that the CDC wants to legitimise its role and authority in coordinating disaster risk management at all levels, through the passage and implementation of the requisite legislation for Guyana. This crucial milestone will necessitate various degrees of capacity and awareness building across the country in order to educate the population on the new regulations and to establish and implement the governance system and roles contained therein.

The CDC intends to vastly ramp up its efforts towards education and awareness, therefore, in the areas of disaster risk management, recognising that awareness is a critical catalyst to drive positive action in reducing risks and building resilience. More importantly, the CDC intends to establish a mechanism for extensive and continuous data gathering on risk and risk reduction impacts in the long and short term and

the accurate analyses and reporting of these against various regional and international targets.

The CDC’s strategic vision for 2021 to 2025 is to see the enhancement of capacities for preparedness and response at all levels. National oil spill readiness has been prioritised by the agency as one of its focus areas within the coming five years, given the new and emerging threats associated with this developing industry. Health, agriculture, natural resources, finance, education, and infrastructure have been identified as the priority sectors for disaster risk management and institutional strengthening during 2021 to 2025. The CDC, therefore, will support these sectors in the development of sector-specific plans.

While much has been said about what our Government plans to do, we must also consider all that has already been done by our Administration, particularly within such a short timeframe and under political and economic constraints. Within the first 100 days of our Government taking Office, our country and our people saw a massive shift, as we aimed to urgently deliver and bring immediate relief to the people. Our Government took charge of the health crisis in this country, procuring medical supplies and delivering much-needed relief to our citizens amid the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. When we took over, we only had four ventilators in this country. Today, we have 25 ventilators. We had a lockdown and 21 tests being done per day. Today, we have no lockdown, over 2,000 tests being done and protection of the lives and economic livelihood of the people. **[Mr. Mahipaul: (inaudible) 197 deaths.]** Let me repeat for you: our Government took charge of the health crisis in this country, procuring medical supplies and delivering much-needed relief to our citizens amid the Coronavirus pandemic.

Our Government strived to reduce the strains that weighed on our economy and rebuild significant interests in investment in our country. Our People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government has been working arduously to restore hope in the lives of our people, our citizens, to rebuild trust and confidence and to uplift our people in a manner that they can realise true prosperity in all aspects of life.

This is important and I wish to submit, electronically, what I am going to read now. After forming the Government on 2nd August, 2020, it was quite revealing, and many of what I am going to reveal now is captured in our daily papers. The *Guyana Times*, 6th August:

“Infectious Diseases Hospital a ‘total disaster’”.

The *Guyana Times*, 9th August, 2020:

“APNU/AFC left GFC bankrupted – Teixeira”

That is the Guyana Forestry Commission.

“...unable to pay staff, millions in debt”.

The *Stabroek News*, 10th August, 2020:

““Director of Parks’ Larry London was getting huge salary, benefits

-hardly lived in country”.

He hardly lived in Guyana.

Kaieteur News, 16th August, 2020:

“Woman who filed recount challenge given \$7.5M contract in June by APNU+AFC”.

[Mr. Ramson: Tell us about the Petroleum Advisor.] I am coming to that one. The *Guyana Times*, 7th August, 2020:

“Carol Joseph was paid as petroleum advisor, other posts under APNU/AFC Govt”.

The *Guyana Times*, 21st August, 2020:

“APNU/AFC owes NCN \$16M for campaign ads”.

Until this date, it has not been paid. The *Stabroek News*, 21st August:

I need to be guided here, Mr. Speaker. I should say:

“Update: “Christopher ... arrested as cops remove barbershop equipment”.

Publication, the *Guyana Times*, 23rd August, 2020. **[Mr. Mahipaul:** You were going good all the time.] You said it was boring.

“APNU/AFC Govt spent over \$68M from taxpayers to retain private lawyers”.

The *Stabroek News*, 16th September, 2020:

“...Region Six health sector was plagued by mismanagement under APNU+AFC

-says veterinary anesthetic machine was bought for hospital”.

Something for animals was bought for humans. On 18th September, 2020:

“APNU+AFC left broken health care system to address pandemic”.

On 22nd September, 2020, the *Stabroek News* stated:

“Larry London contract for birth certificates raises eyebrows”.

The *Kaieteur News*, 22nd September, 2020:

“Asphalt plant racket uncovered”.

The *Kaieteur News*, 23rd September, 2020:

“Gov’t launched investigations into asphalt plant racket

-DHB management distances itself from allegations”

The *Kaieteur News*, 24th September, 2020:

“Lands and Survey boss, Trevor Benn, bought \$25M Prado for \$2.5M from his own workplace”.

The *Kaieteur News*, 30th September, 2020:

“Christopher Jones gifted state lands twice; Trevor Benn waived land fees...”

Mr. Speaker: It is Hon. Member Christopher Jones.

4.52 p.m.

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: The Hon. Member:

“Christopher Jones gifted state lands twice; Trevor Benn waived land fees

...Barber shop scandal.”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, you will have to wind down.

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: The *Guyana Times* newspaper on 8th October, 2020:

“\$170B spent by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) in capital funds cannot be fully accounted for...”

This was from the Accountant General.

The *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper, 14th October, 2020:

“SARA dismantled

- Director, Deputy and staff fired.”

Apparently, they appointed themselves.

iNews Guyana, 25th October, 2020:

“Massive land conspiracy connected to Ogle/Diamond bypass project unearthed

...prime land leased to shell companies under APNU/AFC flipped for profit.”

The *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper, 28th October, 2020:

“APNU lawyer implicated in land scandal.

-police, SOCU to investigate transactions.”

The *Stabroek News* newspaper, 1st November, 2020:

“Land corruption.”

The *Guyana Times* newspaper, 7th November, 2020:

“Ganesh Mahipaul absent from work for 33 days, divulged confidential info.”

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. We need to conclude.

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: The *Guyana Times* newspaper, 10th November, 2020:

“Bombshell revelations: A chronicle of nepotism, corrupt practices, wanton spending by APNU/AFC.

- 100 days of discoveries.”

The *Stabroek News* newspaper, 29th November, 2020:

“Millions unaccounted for from SLED initiative – Hamilton”

The *Stabroek News* newspaper, 30th November, 2020:

“US\$1M bank deposit...

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

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: I am concluding, Mr. Speaker.

“...for Bond was not red-flagged

-Nandlall sees negligence”

The *Stabroek News* newspaper:

“Mustapha puts hold on \$100 million in D&I contracts, asks AG to probe

- after massive unapproved variations.”

This list goes on and on. It is important that I mention these in order to mention that what is certain is our people across this country now have a Government that is serving in their best interest, and we will continue to do so.

As our President, my Colleague Ministers and I travel to communities in all 10 regions, we see, feel, and hear about the relief that people now enjoy as a result of all the measures our PPP/C Government has put in place so far. The changes in people’s lives in the past six months of a change of Government have restored hope, and our people now look forward, with great confidence, to enjoying a bright future for themselves and their loved ones.

Our PPP/C Government is a working Government. We do not work only in the office behind closed doors, flipping papers all day long, but we get up and get out in the fields to meet the people. We serve them so that when we come to this House, we truly represent what they want. The decisions we make here do not take away, but add and improve the lives of our people, because their voices are finally being heard by our PPP/C Government.

Many communities that I visited since I became Prime Minister...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, I do not want to cut your microphone.

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, could I just have two minutes more?

Mr. Speaker: Two minutes will be two minutes too long.

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: Many communities that I visited have told me that it was the first time, in five years, they have seen a Prime Minister and a Minister of Government.

Our Government, President Ali, all our Ministers and I are accessible to all our people. Our doors remain open, and we will continue our work in that manner. For those who do not come to us, we will come to you because we are for all Guyanese. Development is for all Guyana in keeping with our motto ‘one Guyana’.

The presentations made by myself and my Colleagues, in our defence of the allocations in *Budget 2021*, have all flawlessly illustrated how our Government’s programmes and plans for every area and sector will, undoubtedly, contribute to restoration. The new day for Guyana and all Guyanese has finally come.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Members, we are going to take the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, and then we will take the resolution from the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply. That will conclude our business for today.

Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, it is my honour to call on you to conclude the debate. Hon. Minister, you may proceed, and I am starting the clock at 4.59.25 p.m.

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance [Dr. Singh] (replying): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, my mother, like so many other Guyanese mothers, is an incredibly strong woman, and throughout my entire life I have never seen her daunted or flinched by any circumstance. Even in the face of the greatest adversity, she would reassure me and my siblings and, in more recent years, her grandchildren that no challenge is unsurmountable and that everything happens for a reason.

You might ask, Mr. Speaker, why I begin my presentation with this reference. I do so, Sir, because the lesson that everything happens for a reason is one that I have held close and dear throughout my adult consciousness. I make this particular reference at this time because I have seen a lot of questions asked about the quality of the debate over the last five days and criticisms expressed about things said on both sides. I believe, very strongly, that the past five days were a very important five days for this country. Those five days happened for a very good reason. Indeed, in equal measure, we have all seen a lot of questions asked about the last five years. I do believe, equally, that the last five years also happened for a very important reason. In exactly the same measure, there has been a lot of debate about why our country had to experience the trauma that we experienced from 2nd March to 2nd August. I believe that history and the passage of time will demonstrate to us, with abundance, that those months between March and August, 2020 also happened for

an extremely good reason. The bottom line is that the last five years, the period from 2nd March to 2nd August and, furthermore, the last five days, long and arduous though they might have seemed at times, provided the Guyanese people and the world at large with how morally bankrupt, technically inept and insincere the APNU/AFC is. Most importantly, those three periods successively – the last five years, March to August and the last five days – demonstrated to the Guyanese people how much the APNU/AFC is disrespectful of the intelligence of the people they profess to represent.

I listened, very keenly, to the presentation made by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition earlier today. I must, first of all, thank him for the graciousness of the welcome that he extended to me on my return to Guyana and to this honourable House. It would not have escaped his notice that his graciousness in that regard was not necessarily reflected across the contributions by those whom he leads in this House. The Leader of the Opposition made a number of important points and I believe, very deliberately, adopted a stance intended to convey an impression of magnanimity in some instances and statesman likeness in some instances. But it would be remiss of me if I were not to identify a few of the issues that he raised just to illustrate the point I am making that, notwithstanding the pronouncements made by the distinguished Leader of the Opposition, the actions of the APNU/AFC, in this House and outside of this House, are, in fact, starkly in contrast with the stance he attempted to adopt today.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke of the fact that the APNU/AFC is ready to work together for national development. He said that the APNU/AFC is ready to act and ready to engage.

5.07 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I contrast that statement with the invitation which was extended by His Excellency the President to former President Granger to meet at a forum for former Presidents which, despite the public pronouncements of how willing they are to engage and how eager they are to be consulted, was spurned by former President Granger.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke, again, in a faint tone of magnanimity about willingness to engage, trying to convey an impression of civility but, yet, when His Excellency the President came on the 11th February to address this very House, in his inaugural Address, not only did the A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) absent themselves from that sitting but it

engaged in raucous and vulgar behaviour outside of this Dome and outside of this compound.

It is very easy to stand and say all sorts of things to try and convey an impression of what you are, but the reality indicates a very different truth. In fact, what it discloses is that the APNU/AFC has no respect for the intelligence of the Guyanese people. It believes, and some of them said it... The Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan spoke of someone speaking to the gullible supporters. The Guyanese people are not gullible, Sir. We do not believe that any Guyanese is gullible. In fact, the Guyanese people are far more sophisticated and intelligent than you might believe. Stop saying that, and it was said. The record will reflect it. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible*) bloodsucker]. Of course, on the bloodsucker comment. Instead of standing here and saying all sorts of things that are intended to insult the intelligence of the Guyanese people, when people were watching with their very eyes... Do you not think that the Guyanese people were watching over the last five years? Do you not think that the Guyanese people were watching from May to August?

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition took great umbrage and devoted a significant part of his presentation to this question of democracy, the events of 2020 and the question of rigging of the elections. He devoted a significant part of his presentation to this question. He said that the accusation that the APNU/AFC attempted to stall democracy in 2020 is a big joke and that it did not happen. Sir, the world was watching, and the world saw not only the events of March to August, but the world had an opportunity to cast its collective mind back to the entire journey that led to March, 2020. I am going to go back to that journey in a minute.

On the specific question of the role of the APNU/AFC in the stalling of democracy, if the APNU/AFC were to be believed, we would all doubt our eyes. Did we actually see that, in one moment, the APNU/AFC agreed to a recount, but in another moment one of their candidates went to court to stop the recount? Was this something that I was imagining from Dubai or wherever it was that I was supposed to have been? Did the world imagine that the APNU/AFC agreed to a recount, invited Caribbean Community (CARICOM) observers to come back and then deployed one of its own candidates to go to court to try and stop the recount, as the CARICOM observers were arriving at the Airport? The Leader of the Opposition and our Friends on that side of the House would have us believe that they never made any attempt to stall democracy and that it never happened. The APNU/AFC would have us believe that the court action that

was filed is a figment of our imagination and that it never happened. That is not counting the fact that some of these people were, apparently, on the payroll of the Government.

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition would have us believe that we are all imagining when the Carter Center was told that it could not come back to Guyana. Could you imagine, Sir, saying to the Carter Center that you are not permitting them to come back to observe the recount in Guyana? The barring of international observers from coming back to observe the recount, did we imagine that? [**Mr. Ramjattan:** Charrandass is a judas; a snake.] Oh, my goodness, look who is speaking about judas, Mr. Neemakaram himself. Is he the junior Neemakaram? Is the rubberstamp the senior Neemakaram?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, remember that you speak to me.

Dr. Singh: My apologies.

Mr. Speaker: Secondly, the language of the Parliament is English.

Dr. Singh: Did we imagine these things? Do you remember that the CARICOM observers were brought in by a special flight and were waiting to observe the recount as were the representatives of all the parties, only to be told that the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC) suddenly had to be fumigated? Did we imagine that? Did the people of Guyana imagine that?

I say to the Leader of the Opposition that it is *okay* to come and adapt this nice magnanimous statesman like tone but stop insulting the intelligence of the Guyanese people. They did not imagine all of those things. The fact of the matter is that the APNU/AFC was involved in an elaborate scheme to subvert democracy in 2020. That scheme did not start in 2020. When we look back at the events of the last five years, a lot of things that did not make sense at that time, with hindsight, makes a lot of sense now. Let us look back.

As I have said on a previous occasion in this House, three lists of six upstanding Guyanese citizens were proposed by the then Leader of the Opposition, following a standard formula that has been in place since 1992. It was three lists of six persons each – 18 fine upstanding Guyanese Citizens. All 18 of them were rejected as being... [**Mr. Holder:** Rightfully so.] I am glad to hear the APNU/AFC Member of Parliament (M.P.) maintained the position, rightfully so. They are still citizens of Guyana and they are watching and listening to you too. Eighteen upstanding Guyanese citizens were cast aside as

being not fit and proper and, therefore, unsuitable to be appointed as Chairman of the Elections Commission (GECOM). At the time, perhaps, the reason was not completely obvious to everyone. We thought that, maybe, it was just momentary madness and momentary disrespect for these 18 people. Then, in violation of the Constitution, a unilateral appointment was made. That unilateral appointment, as we all know, was subsequently struck down by the highest court of our land, the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), as unconstitutional, and rightfully so.

At that time, a lot of people did not understand the significance of that move, but the pieces were being put in place. Then we saw the manner in which the APNU/AFC... They stand here now and talk about public service. The Hon. Member Ms. Catherine Hughes stood and spoke eloquently about what has happened to public service in Guyana. The APNU/AFC, from the first day it assumed Office, set about on a rampage of political prosecution against their opponents, including people who had given a lifetime of public service. I am not going to speak about my own example. I will put myself aside for the moment. I will offer an even more compelling example [**An Hon. Member (Government):** Roger Luncheon]. That is correct. I do not believe that there is anybody in this country who would dare to think of Dr. Roger Forbes Luncheon with anything but the highest of respect. It has been captured on video for posterity, police being deployed on political instructions, turning up at the Office of the Leader of the Opposition to say to Dr. Roger Luncheon, Sir, that they had been instructed to place him under arrest. Dr Roger Luncheon, a man who has devoted his entire life to public service in this country, a man who has always served the people of this country [**Mr. Ramson:** With impeccable integrity.] With impeccable integrity, more than any of you could ever dream of mustering.

Mr. Speaker: I agree where I am concerned, but for the Hon. Members, it is something else. So please, ‘you’ should be Hon.

Dr. Singh: The Hon. Members, of course.

5.22 *p.m.*

The entire world watched with horror and pain, and many people watched with tears in their eyes, as Dr. Roger Luncheon was manhandled in that manner. And then the Hon. Members dare to come here and speak about what has happened to the public service?

The APNU/AFC lowered the tone of political engagement in this country to its lowest level ever, during the period 2015 to 2020. I served in two Parliaments and never before did I hear such personal insults hurled at us on this side from those on that side – never. To come now and stand and say what has happened to the public service when, in fact, such lasting damage was done to the political climate in this country by the behaviour of the dictatorial APNU/AFC Government of 2015... Shame on you! [**Mr. Holder:** *(Inaudible)*] I have not given my examples as yet. That would be spoken of at the appropriate time. I have given an even more compelling example. My example will be given on another occasion. [**An. Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*] Do you want to talk about my example?

The Hon. Member wants me to speak about my example. It is a well-known fact that the APNU/AFC Government spent hundreds of millions of dollars doing audits, high, low, left, right and centre, searching everywhere and found not a scintilla of wrongdoing on my part, and then trumped up charges [*Interruption*] I want to finish this story.

I came back to Guyana to face those charges, voluntarily. I attended court as any law-abiding and respectful citizen would do. I am not going to get into the legal merits of the case. The fact of the matter is, let them say to the people what my wrongdoing was. Unlike some of you over there, who were busy...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if you want to call their party, that is a different story.

Dr. Singh: Very well, Sir. Unlike, the Hon. Members over there who were busy...

Mr. Speaker: Is the Deputy Speaker included?

Dr. Singh: The Deputy Speaker is excluded. Unlike, Hon. Members over there who were busy enriching themselves at the expense of the public’s purse, whether it is using public moneys to buy bangles and bracelets or whether it was contracting your own company to do business – I heard someone talk about Videomega Productions with all of the sanctimonious standing up and pretending to be decent. I did not sell any land to myself. I did not sell any land without public tender or without going to Cabinet and getting its approval.

Having gone through a fully transparent process and acting upon the instruction of Cabinet, the APNU/AFC Government, knowing fully well that my integrity was unchallengeable,

trumped up charges and brought me back to this country. I will tell you this: the story is going somewhere. [**An Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*]. Sir, I attended Court. After the Court proceedings were finished... I am saying this because I want to put it in the public records. I bought a plane ticket. I paid thousands of dollars to buy a ticket to come back to Guyana to attend court. I got onto a plane and I voluntarily walked into the court. After the court proceedings were finished, I was then conveyed down the prisoners’ chute. As I went down the prisoners’ chute, there was a long line of policemen. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** *(Inaudible)*] I am not exaggerating, Sir. Every single policeman that stood there, without exception, apologised to me. Several of them said that they were very sorry for putting me through this but that I should understand that they were instructed politically to do it.

I will tell you this: In that moment my faith in the inherent decency of the Guyanese people was restored. I did not give Guyana nearly as much service as Dr. Roger Luncheon, but I think that I have given Guyana a fair bit of service. That dictatorial APNU/AFC Government, after I came back voluntarily to appear in Court, then instructed the policemen to put me in handcuffs and parade me there so that they could take a picture and put it on the front page of a newspaper, and you dare to come and talk about decency. The Hon. Members dare talk about public service. They believe that I would have been, somehow, humiliated or cowed by that. I wore those handcuffs as a badge of honour, and I said silently to myself that I will devote the rest of my life to keep these hoodlums out of Government forever.

Mr. Speaker: You would have to withdraw that one.

Dr. Singh: I do withdraw it, Sir, and reformulate it with your permission. I will repeat it for emphasis – I wore the handcuffs placed on my wrists by the APNU/AFC dictatorship with pride and, in that instance, I swore to myself that I will devote the rest of my life to ensuring that the APNU/AFC is removed from Government and never returns to Government ever again.

They thought that they would have cowed me or humiliated me. There is nothing that the APNU/AFC could do to challenge my integrity, unlike some of the Members on that side of the House – some people say ‘honourable’ by parliamentary convention.

I will tell you that I was not the only one, Sir. Just as I said to myself that I will spend the rest of my life to make sure these people are removed from Government; thousands of

Guyanese made the same decision. Thousands said, maybe, that they were fooled in 2015, but we *aint mekin* the same mistake again in 2020.

They like to jump up and talk about decency and they talk about integrity. What did the green banners read? There were banners everywhere. [**Mr. Nandlall:** Integrity.] Yes. [**Hon. Members (Government):** Honesty, Decency]. Honesty, decency and integrity. How ironic? They come here and they want to pretend to be such decent people. [**Ms. Manickchand:** (*Inaudible*) and dress (*Inaudible*)] I did not want to mention; I will leave that to others.

The Hon. Members on that side of the House, the Deputy Speaker excepted of course, would come here and speak of how decent they are. I sat in horror. One of the self-appointed paragons of decency over there [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*).] Yes, self-appointed paragons of decency. Would that be an appropriate expression? One of the self-appointed paragons of decency, the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes, stood there... The Hon Member likes to project herself as some kind of moral compass, a moral kind of... The word fails me now. I listened with horror as this paragon of decency worked through the entire Cabinet. She started with Frank Anthony’s children. Sir, this is the paragon of...

Mr. Speaker: Cde. Frank.

Dr. Singh: The Hon. Member, Dr. Frank Anthony. The Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes, self-appointed paragon of decency on the APNU/AFC benches, started firstly with the Hon. Minister, Dr. Frank Anthony’s children. The Hon. Member, Dr. Anthony’s children need no defence from me or from anybody else. They are Guyana’s scholars – two of Guyana’s most brilliant daughters of the current generation. Moreover, they are two young Guyanese girls, brilliant young Guyanese young ladies. If you listened to the Hon. Member, she is the defender of women and the defender of all things that are decent, but she has no shame trying to impugn the integrity of two Guyana’s brightest young women.

Not satisfied with that, she then moved on to the Hon. Minister, Ms. Manickchand’s children. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] You missed that. She then moved on and brought into the debate, Ms. Manickchand’s children. Minister Manickchand’s children are babies. Not satisfied with that, she went on to Former President Ramotar’s son, making an almost clean sweep. Mind you, the Hon. Member presents herself as the defender of family values and family virtues, decency and speaks nicely and so on, but has no shame in bringing people’s innocent children into the debate.

I made this point really to say that the Guyanese people have been watching and paying attention for the last five years, for the five months of last year and for the last five days. Do not panic.

Mr. Speaker, when I read these articles and hear the commentary about people... As a matter of fact, the last five days, long and arduous as they might have seemed were, in fact, extremely informative, instructive and enlightening. They displayed to the Guyana people and reminded them of the true and deceptive nature of this APNU/AFC assortment. I say assortment because they are a disjointed assortment. They could not make up their minds over the five days.

5.37 p.m.

Some of them said the Budget was a copy of their policies. Others said that the Budget is rubbish. When you put the two together, I do not know what they really mean. But we heard all sorts of random noises, disjointed, like I said, and inconsistent with each other. Perhaps, it may be a leadership problem. I am going to say this, I think that there are a few main points that I would like to make as I conclude this Budget debate.

First of all, I would like to say, definitively, that the people of Guyana are well aware that the APNU/AFC Coalition does not have the moral authority to serve as credible representatives of anybody in this House. It is unfortunate because 47% of the Guyanese people... Is it 47? [**An Hon. Member (Government):** Thereabout.] Thereabouts. It is really unfortunate, Sir, because the truth is [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Certainly not after the last five days. Not to mention, the five months in last year. The truth is that the 47% of the Guyanese people that they profess to represent really do deserve better. The moral bankruptcy of the APNU/AFC is illustrated not only by their failure to implement their own manifesto promises, but also by the consistent acts of policy deception. They were repeatedly saying that they were cutting taxes when, in fact, they were collecting and imposing more taxes. They were saying in one breath that they are reducing taxes but, in fact, slapping taxes on electricity, on water, on medical supplies, on education services, on construction materials [**Ms. Manickchand:** Health services] On health services. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** On machinery] On heavy equipment and machinery. The people of Guyana were getting their electricity bills and they could have seen the value-added tax (VAT) on the electricity bill, but the Government said that it did not put on any new tax. Stop insulting the intelligence of the people. Come on. They

keep professing their own integrity, but the people of Guyana can see. This morning or yesterday morning, we woke up to stories of the Hon. Catherine Hughes contracting her own company. I will tell you that those documents that have been disclosed relate to the Ministry of Public Telecommunications. If one looks more widely across Government, one would be shocked to see how much business that company was getting. They think that people do not know. They think that people are stupid. They land grabbed. They believe that people do not know but, at the appropriate time, these things will be disclosed. They like to talk about Pradoville 1 and Pradoville 2. Sir, if you count how many of them were busy grabbing... Do you know why they were holding on to power between March and August? Do you know how many of them got lands between March and August? When the facts are disclosed; it will be discovered.

Mr. Speaker: You have lost me. I do not know who they and them are.

Dr. Singh: Sir, when the facts are disclosed at the appropriate time and the charges are laid, you will see, in fact... They speak about Pradoville 1 or 2, when they were busy establishing – I do not know what to call it – perhaps *riggsville* because the riggers were there. They were busy establishing a *riggersville*. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** *Riggsville*.] A *Riggersville*, populated by themselves and their families. They think that people do not know. They were busy creating a *Riggersville* where they... I do not want to speak about anybody’s children, so I am not going to do that. But they were busy establishing a *Riggersville*, giving themselves... and they believe that people do not know. They come here... what was the phrase used? [**Mr. Hamilton:** *Sanctimonious gangster*.] Sanctimonious...

Mr. Speaker: You cannot use the word ‘gangster’.

Dr. Singh: My apologies, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: You cannot use the ‘g’ word.

Dr. Singh: No, no, no. It was not my... I was...

Mr. Speaker: Please, it is the Hon. Member or Comrade. Those are in the Standing Orders.

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Sir. [**Mr. Nandlall:** Start with the (*Inaudible*)] Well, I would not. I would not start with the firearm licences as admonished by the Attorney General. This pattern of deception that was set out over the last five years... They think that people do not know these things. Guyana is a small place. This pattern of deception that was set out over

the last five years, actually, manifested itself, again, over the last five days. I do not want to descend into the puerile. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*Inaudible*)] Do you think that I should not? The litany of untruths and misrepresentations is in full view of the world at large. Mr. Speaker, I think their first speaker placed her trump card... Do you know what her trump card was? [**Mr. Dharamlall:** It was race.] Yes, of course, that one. There was one that I took a little bit more personally. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** It was race.] Putting aside the race-based rant, her trump card, her *pièce de résistance* was that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance did not thank his staff. That was like the trump card. She said it like she was delivering a knockout punch. It was the Hon. Member, Mr. Anand Persaud, who spoke about floating like a butterfly and stinging like a bee – which we all know is a boxing reference; a reference to the man Cassius Clay – Muhammad Ali. The Hon. Member Amanza Walton-Desir stood up and delivered what she felt, clearly, was her knockout punch, that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance did not thank his staff. Not only was it on video and captured in the *Hansard* for permanent record – the *Hansard* is the official record of the proceedings of this House... Knowing fully well that this was not true, after you, Sir, caused the official record to be circulated, they are still repeating it. What is the motive? They want to somehow say to my staff that I did not thank them. They are so simpleminded.

I was almost born and grew in the Ministry of Finance. Some of them were still running around in their short pants when I was already working at the Ministry of Finance. These people, who comprise my family... The staff of the Ministry of Finance are my family. I have been in the Ministry of Finance for 20 years – 2001 to now. When I was around and, in the country, I do not believe that there was anyone who got married to whose wedding I did not go. I do not believe that there is anyone working in the Ministry whose child would visit the Ministry and they would not bring their child upstairs to see me or I would not go downstairs to meet their child and *gaff* with their child. If their parents *ain’t* feeling well, they will come and tell me that their father *ain’t* feeling well and I *gon* stay in touch *wit dem*, and *dey gon* keep me posted. These people are my family. To be so simpleminded to come here and parrot this thing like, somehow Ashni Singh... the staff of the Ministry of Finance will think, *oh* my goodness! The APNU/AFC is so good to us. [**Mr. Nandlall:** It was a written speech.] *oh*, yes. She was reading. She was reading faithfully. Most of them read very faithfully. It was comical, but there were other things. I am making this point,

really, just to say how simpleminded... I suppose, if one is simpleminded, one assumes that the whole world is simpleminded too. They assumed that everyone is stupid and that everyone will believe any stupidity told to them.

I repeat again, do not insult the intelligence of the Guyanese people. You thought that you could have done it from 2015 to 2020 and you were put in your place. There are all sorts of misrepresentations. They said that the Budget had no provisions for the COVID-19 vaccines, the Budget is projecting a...

I would like to relate a true story. [**Mr. Nandlall:** What about eyeballs and ironies?] It was ironies and eye water. One of the more defining and depressing moments over the past week, for me, took place last Friday evening. I am not like Members on that side of the House and I take great pride in it. I really do believe that young MP’s, irrespective of what side they are sitting on, should be encouraged and should be given an opportunity to grow and develop. I will not name the Member of Parliament concerned but there is a certain Member of Parliament, a young Member of Parliament on that side of the House, who spoke very well. Stood at the podium and spoke very eloquently, with a very credible face, on matters relating to the economy. The MP pronounced, and I am going to quote as I requested the verbatim transcript. She said that the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) comes with some illogical source of confidence to proudly proclaim that it is their hope and ambition to deliver non-oil Gross Domestic Product (GDP) - this is the part that caught my attention - to deliver non-oil GDP in 2021, that will be smaller than that of non-oil GDP that was under the Coalition in 2019. She went on to say that was what was presented in the Budget which was presented in this House. This is GDP facts, Mr. Speaker. She further stated that the PPP/C... I just disclosed her gender, although I said I would not expose the identity of the person. The Member of Parliament went on to say that the PPP/C has the audacity to beat their chests and boast about the ambition to deliver three years of economic stagnation.

When I heard this, it worried me. I thought, perhaps, that the printer’s devil had gotten the better of my staff’s excellent work; the same staff that they claim that they like so much and are thanking so much, and who I know worked very hard and very diligently on this speech. I thought, for a moment, because I do not sit down and make up these numbers... There are experts. When one speaks about national accounts and GDP, it is not something where one puts one’s finger in the air, feel where the wind is blowing and pluck a number

out of thin air. There are people who actually understand the compilation of national accounts, who understand how to calculate value-added in the economy and who understand how to measure real growth in the economy – those very public servants whom I call my family and regard as my family, and to whom the APNU/AFC profess so much to be grateful. This thing bothered me. I thought, perhaps, that the printer’s devil had gotten the better of the excellent work that my staff had done. I summoned a meeting of my staff and I said to them that I heard this thing and I wanted to know if an incorrect number, somehow, got printed in the tables or in the text. I asked them to check it for me. They checked and they came back. I do not want to use the language. They are professional public servants. I do not want to use the language that they used. Like I said, they are my family, so they speak freely. Suffice to say, they were unable to establish the basis of the statement, but the thing was still on my mind.

5.52 *p.m.*

Last Friday evening, I happened to be on the corridor outside and I asked one staff of the Parliament office to please pass a message to the Member of Parliament (MP) that, if she would be kind enough, I would be happy to have a brief word with her. She very graciously consented, and so, on the corridor as she was walking by, she stopped and she spoke with me. I said to her that I had heard she made a statement and I was trying to understand what was the basis for the statement. She responded, ‘which statement’? I said you made the statement that we are projecting a lower GDP.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I had to caution another speaker with reference to a conversation with Minister Croal. I would want to say let us leave that to a little hearsay.

Dr. Singh: Sir, one would prefer...

Mr. Speaker: She is not here to defend nor deny.

Dr. Singh: Sir, she should be here. She is a Member of the House.

Mr. Speaker: This is why there is a Speaker to help to protect everyone. Remember, I had circulated your verbatim conclusion.

Dr. Singh: Very well, Sir. I wrestled with this matter and I will be guided by you. I am not going to go further with the conversation, but suffice it to say, she herself was incapable of explaining to me what she had said. I would leave it at that. I would not go further to say what else she said to me. She

had no clue of what she was talking about and had no difficulty in standing to say it, knowing *full well* that it had no basis in fact. I would be guided by your better judgement on this matter.

Mr. Speaker: My better judgement says that you have about seven minutes to conclude.

Dr. Singh: Very good. On that note, I would like to move on to yet another example. The APNU/AFC, amongst several things, kept going on about salary increases for public servants. Some were trying to convey the impression that *Budget 2021* had nothing for the public servants. Sir, I would like to make the following points. I invite any Member of the public to examine the Budget speeches for 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 which were presented by the APNU/AFC. On every instance, and I am choosing my words very carefully... The Budget speech for 2016 reported, historically, what salary increase had been awarded but gave no indication of what salary increase would be awarded in 2016. The same was the case in 2017, 2018 and 2019. All of the Budget speeches indicated what increase had been awarded for the previous year or the proceeding or ensuing year but none of them indicated what the budgeted increase for the next year was. I invite anybody to examine the Budget speeches for 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 and prove otherwise. They come here and tried to create an impression, but they and their surrogates speaking out there know *full well* that it is a well-established convention that the Budget speech does not announce what salary increase would be awarded in the coming year.

I also would like to speak about this business of public servants. They come and profess how much they did for the public servants and the people of Guyana. Sir, I would like to give the House a small illustration of what the APNU/AFC Government did to the public servants, and they believe that the people are naïve or stupid. For this purpose, let us imagine a hypothetical family comprising of, perhaps, a husband and a wife. Let us say a policeman and a teacher and their three children are living on the lower flat of the family house; let us say the wife’s father lives upstairs and he is a retired public officer and a pensioner; and his son is a doctor in the public healthcare system. This is a family like our family and many of us could relate to it or it is a relative or neighbour of ours. All of us either belong to a family like this or we know a family or families like this. Sir, first of all in their manifesto they promised all of the public officers in this house – the doctor, the teacher and the policeman – a 20% increase, and never delivered it.

Secondly, they then decided that they were going to compel the public servants they professed to have championed, including the doctor who was a contracted employee, by issuing a circular to contracted employees to state that as long as the person was under the age of 45 he or she was compelled to move from the contracted status to the fixed establishment. Sir, do you know what that immediately did to the doctor who was a contracted employee? Immediately his earnings went down by 22½% because he used to get that as gratuity every six months. He wanted to be on the contracted gratuity terms because he is a young man who just graduated as a doctor and does not know if he is going to be in the public service until the age of 55 to get a pension. He wanted to be a contracted employee to get his gratuity now so that he could save and apply for a low income or middle-income house lot, so that he could build a house and start a family of his own.

The APNU/AFC Government that is now here and want to beat their chests and profess to have championed the cause of public officers said to nearly 8,000 such employees that they are taking 22½% of their earnings and compelled them to go onto the fixed establishment. If someone leaves the public service before the age of 55, then, tough luck. Sir, that was a 22½% reduction in immediate earnings, and that was not all.

They issued another circular that stated persons were compelled to take their leave, and if they do not take their leave, it will be forfeited because they were no longer paying salary *in lieu* of leave. Historically, we tended to encourage people to take their leave because they needed to rest, renew, rejuvenate and come back. Often times, many of our public servants, as we all know, are working in environments that are perhaps understaffed, and there is a lot of work to be done and they themselves feel that they do not need the full 28 days of leave, but that they could take two weeks of leave and do not mind working. Historically, many public servants would accumulate leave and then, at some point in time, would be paid salary *in lieu* of leave.

Sir, if you speak with any staff of the Ministry of Finance, he or she could tell you for every occasion he or she received a salary payment *in lieu* of leave what he or she bought with it. Some of them said to me that they bought laptops to give to their daughters. These are real cases. I asked them if the salary *in lieu* of leave that was taken away was something that they looked forward to. Sir, I was given a long list of items. A member of my staff, with his voice trembling with emotion, said to me that he could remember every item he bought with his salary *in lieu* of leave.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I could remember I gave you notice about two minutes ago. You would have to wind down.

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Sir. This particular officer of mine said he bought a laptop, helped his sister to pay her tuition fees, bought a television and a four-burner gas stove for his house at various times and accumulated cash. Another staff said that she accumulated a couple of years salary *in lieu* of leave and then used it as the equity to apply for her loan to build her house on the plot of land she was given by the Ministry of Housing and Water under the previous PPP/C Government. Sir, this salary *in lieu* of leave was taken away. Public servants were told to take their leave or it would be forfeited because the Government was not going to be paying salaries *in lieu* of leave. When one accumulates the impact of these developments, not to mention the mother downstairs with her three school-aged children who lost, in an instant, a \$10,000 cash grant for each of her children – this was \$30,000 that was taken away from her. Then the father upstairs, who is a pensioner, the water meter was in his name, he lost the subsidy on water then had to start to pay value-added tax (VAT) on water and electricity. Sir, when one annualizes and accumulates the impact of all these measures, the calculation is very easy to do. The impact on the family over a five-year period, which I just described to the House, one could check the numbers. The impact of APNU/AFC’s oppressive policies on that five-year period would be a staggering \$4.7 million. Imagine taking away from the modest family...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, if you do not conclude the impact would be the shutting off of your microphone.

Dr. Singh: I beg to simply say that the people of Guyana are not as naïve or gullible as the APNU/AFC would have us think. The people of Guyana are far more sophisticated than that and they spoke in March, 2020, and rejected the oppressive policies of the APNU/AFC. The people of Guyana watched on in astonishment from March to August, 2020, and even more of them were hardened in their minds that the APNU/AFC neither has the moral authority nor, indeed, the technical competence to be in Government.

Sir, my final words would be that the last five days happened for a reason. It once again demonstrated to the people of Guyana that the APNU/AFC has nothing constructive to offer Guyana. That is why the people put them where they are and put the People’s Progressive Party/Civic where we are.

Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to commend *Budget 2021* to this honourable House. I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, the general debate on the Budget has just concluded. Before we adjourn, we would consider and dispose of the Report of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply (COS) on the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2021 Estimates of Expenditure. We would have to go into the Committee of Supply for this purpose. The Assembly will now resolve itself into the Committee of Supply.

6.07 p.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I wish to report that the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply met on Friday, 26th February, 2021 and it considered the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2021 Estimates of Expenditure in the Committee of Supply. The Sub-Committee passed the Resolution on this matter. Copies of the Sub-Committee’s Minutes, Resolution and Schedule have been circulated. Will the Hon. Member, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, kindly move the necessary motion?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I now move:

“That this Committee doth agree with the Business Sub-Committee in the said Resolution.”

Question put and agreed to.

RESOLUTION OF THE BUSINESS SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY, 26th FEBRUARY, 2021, ON THE CONSIDERATION OF ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2021

RESOLVED, That the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply recommend to the Committee of Supply that –

- (i) the number of Sittings to be allocated to the consideration of the 2021 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure in the Committee of Supply, should be a maximum of five;
- (ii) the allocation of time for the consideration of the Programmes and Agencies of the Estimates in the

Committee of Supply should be as shown in the Schedule attached:

- Provided that any time save on the consideration of any Programme or Agency on that allocated, may be added to any other Programme or Agency, as may be decided on by the Chairman of the Committee.
- (iii) approval for Minsters to answer questions and vote away from their seats would be sought from the Speaker (Chairman of the Committee).
- (iv) the proceedings at the Sittings of the Committee of Supply during consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure should, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be concluded at the time recommended in the Schedule attached.

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

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the Committer of Supply has allocated five days for the consideration of the Estimates. Considerations will begin on 2nd March, 2021 at 10 a.m. and will continue, thereafter, on Wednesday, 3rd March at 10.00 a.m.; Thursday, 4th March at 10.00 a.m.; on Friday, 5th March at 10.00 a.m.; and on Monday, 8th March at 10.00 a.m., being the last day for the considerations of the Budget Estimates. This is in accordance with the Resolution of the Business Sub-Committee. Let the Assembly resume.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, just for your information, the Resolution that we just passed is taken as a resolution of the entire Assembly, so do we not need to put that again. Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on 2nd March, 2021.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Brig. (Ret’d) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10.00 a.m. on Tuesday, 2nd March, 2021.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Members, the Assembly now stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m. on Tuesday, 2nd March.

Adjourned accordingly at 6.10 p.m.