



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

OFFICIAL REPORT

*PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION
(2020-2023) 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*

53RD Sitting

Monday, 16TH January, 2023

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.13 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Order of Government's Business

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the order of Government's Business will change today. Bill No. 24 will be taken before Bill No. 23, Bill No. 24 being the Representation of the People Act (ROPA) and Bill No. 23 being the amendment to the National Registration Act.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Report was laid:

- (1) Annual Report of the Public Utilities Commission for the year 2021.

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

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read the first time:

Planning and Development Single Window System Bill – Bill No. 26 of 2022

A BILL intitled:

“AN ACT to provide for the establishment of the Planning and Development Single Window System; to provide for the management and implementation of the Planning and Development Single Window System; to provide for the establishment of the Planning Oversight Committee; to define the functions of the Planning Oversight Committee; to centralize functions pertaining to land use planning and development and for matters connected thereto.”

[Minister of Housing and Water]

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[For Oral Replies]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are back at Questions on Notice for Oral Replies. My apologies. We have the Hon. Member, Mr. Jermaine Figueira.

Staff Complement of Doctors, Registered Nurses & Nurses and Nursing Assistants at the Linden Hospital

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is going to be put to the Minister of Health. Could the Minister inform this House what is the required staff complement of doctors, registered nurses and nursing assistants of the Linden Hospital Complex, given the size of the population it serves?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let us just give the Minister of Health an opportunity to get settled.

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, you may want to ask the question again, please.

Mr. Figueira: Okay. Let the Minister catch his breath. Minister, can you inform this House what is the required staff complement of doctors, registered nurses and nursing assistants of the Linden Hospital Complex, given the size of the population?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Hon. Member. The complement of doctors for the Linden Hospital Complex is 16; registered nurses, 130; and nursing assistants, 110.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you. Hon. Minister. Could you also inform this House of the number of specialist doctors that should be assigned to the Linden Hospital Complex, given the size of the population it serves? Thank you.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Hon. Member. At the Linden Hospital Complex, there are 13 specialists; two obstetricians/gynaecologists; two internal medicine specialists; two paediatricians; two surgeons; two orthopaedic surgeons; one anaesthesiologist; one intensivist; and one radiologist. There is also a visiting urologist that goes twice per week.

10.23 a.m.

Mr. Figueira: With regard to the information posed, the supporting questions were somewhat answered. Could the Minister assure this House with regard to the information that he has provided, and I know your staff would have probably furnished you with this, are you confident that the information is actually reflective on the ground of the Linden Hospital Complex (McKenzie)? This is because, from my information, what you have provided is not the reality on the ground, Sir.

Dr. Anthony: These specialists are the ones we have on the ground. I must say that we have a number of Cuban specialists and Chinese specialists. The Cubans come under the Brigade and the Chinese specialists are also under the Chinese Brigade. They make up the bulk of the persons we have as specialists at the Hospital. I am very certain that they would be at the Hospital operating because we have assigned them there.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Minister. Do you have another supplemental question or the new question?

Mr. Figueira: I will take that. Thanks.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, you have the floor.

Mr. Figueira: No. I said I do not have anymore. Thanks.

Mr. Speaker: There is a second question in the name of the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira – Specialist Doctors Assigned to the Linden Hospital.

Mr. Figueira: Yes. That one was answered, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Then we have the third one – Equipment for the Linden Hospital.

Equipment for the Linden Hospital

Mr. Figueira: Minister is there an operable Computed Tomography (CT) scan machine at the Linden Hospital Complex? Also, is there an operable BIO Chemistry Machine at the Hospital that is sufficient? If there is, is that amount sufficient to satisfy the size of the population?

Dr. Anthony: In the public sector we have three CT scan machines. One is at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC); one is at Bartica, and one is at New Amsterdam. The scans that we have, in 2016, they were two that were donated to the Government of Guyana then. These two came from RAD-AID and they are four Slice CT scans. The then Government decided they would allocate it to Bartica and one to New Amsterdam. It was only in 2020 that the CT scan was actually installed. The one in Bartica was installed in the first quarter of 2020, and the second one was done in September, 2020 at New Amsterdam. Mr. Speaker, you would also recall that one of those CT scans was stored at the Sussex Street Bond. They costed approximately US\$30,000 to US\$60,000 per scan machine. You would recall that, in the debates in this House, the rental for that facility far exceeded the cost of the machine. We were paying, I think if I remember correctly, an annual sum of \$12 million per month. We probably would have been able to get quite a number of machines so that we could have distributed them to the other hospitals.

At the Georgetown Public Hospital in 2018, a CT scan was purchased and was subsequently installed. That one right now, we are going through some investigations with that. While the 64-Slice CT scan, we are not sure whether it was a refurbished machine. Again, the price is far more than what a CT scan of that nature would cost. We paid close to US\$1 million, when the scan is normally about US\$500,000 or so. Right now, we are doing an investigation into that.

Linden Hospital, persons there would be able to access CT scans from the Georgetown Hospital Corporation, once there is a need for it. I must say to the Hon. Member as well that, over the next three years, the Government is committed to installing at least 10 different CT machines in different hospitals across the country. Already we have given out contracts with the new hospitals that we are building. Inclusive in the new hospitals are imaging equipment such as CT scans.

In terms of the biomedical analysers, there was one at the Linden Hospital that was not working from November, 2019 up to September. We have since installed a new analyser at the Linden Hospital in 2020, and then we installed another one in 2021. There is a third one that went in this year. In September it was operable. We have three analysers at the Linden Hospital.

Just recently, when I visited the Kwakwani Hospital, they also have biochemistry analyser. At the time when I visited, which was about a month ago, it was not installed, but by now it should be installed and operable. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Mr. Figueira, a follow-up.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given the fact that you are up...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Mr. Figueira... Hon. Members, when I call on someone, please, I am beginning to abhor people ceding on the floor. I control this House.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, I was standing before.

Mr. Speaker: Follow-up, Mr. Figueira. Please.

Mr. Figueira: I have a follow-up. With regard to the fact that your response was that there was no CT scan machine at the hospital, in your budgetary planning for the 2023 Budget, has there been a budget request for the provision of a CT scan machine for the Linden Hospital, given the importance of this needed service to such a large population?

Dr. Anthony: Right now, if there is any person who needs a CT scan in Linden, they could get that scan at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation free of cost. You will recall that it used to cost maybe \$30,000 to \$35,000, we have removed that cost. Anybody across the country, could come to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation and get their CT scans done there.

Moving forward, as I said, we have already put plans in place to get seven CT scans over the next three to four years. Next year, we have plans in place to probably get another four or five CT scans machines which we will pay for, and then subsequently install. The Linden Hospital Complex is one of those hospitals that we have earmarked for a CT scan machine. You are going to get it. I cannot stand here right now and tell you that tomorrow it is going to be operational, but the Linden Hospital Complex is scheduled for a CT scan machine.

Mr. Figueira: Minister, you are the head of your Ministry. You play a pivotal role in the planning of your budget. The question I believe was very simple. With regard to your 2023 Budget, is there going to be a budget or is there going to be provisions for a CT scan machine in your effort as the Minister to decentralised important medical services across the country? Travelling to Georgetown is a challenge for a lot of people, especially with the additional increase in cost of living. Thank you.

Dr. Anthony: As I said, we have already planned for the installation of a number of CT scan machines, and the Linden Hospital Complex is one of those Hospitals that have been earmarked for a CT scan machine.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, let me begin by saying to you that I have never disrespected the Speakers in this House. I put my microphone on, and I stood. It was not in disrespect of you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I was speaking to the issue of people giving another Member the floor. Not saying that anyone... That is the principle which I was criticising.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you very much, Sir. During the years for which the Hon. Minister, Dr. Frank Anthony, responded to the question with regard to the two CT scans machines for Bartica and New Amsterdam, I would like to place on record that it was not 2020. Those machines were installed in 2019, and then training began in 2020. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Health, I will give you an opportunity to respond to that clarification which was not a question. Go ahead.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The records would show that the CT scan machine for Bartica, while it was procured or donated from RAD-AID, it came into the country, was stored at the bond in Sussex Street for a number of years and then it was taken to Bartica. I actually had a conversation with the Regional Health Officer (RHO) who was also the Regional Health Officer at the time. He said very clearly to me that this CT scan machine was installed in the first quarter of 2020 at Bartica. The one for New Amsterdam, I was involved in the installation of that one because we actually commissioned that one in September, 2020. I am very clear with the dates. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, that exhausts our questions.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Motion

Consideration of Financial Paper No. 2/2022 – Current and Capital Estimates

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves of the proposal set out in Financial Paper No. 2/2022 – Schedule of Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling two billion, nine hundred and four million, eight hundred and forty-one thousand, four hundred and six dollars. (\$2,904,841,406) – Advances made from the Contingencies Fund for the period 2022-05-15 to 2022-11-29.”

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly will resolve itself into Committee of Supply to consider Financial Paper No. 2/2022.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members we are now in Committee of Supply to consider Financial Paper No. 2/2022. Hon. Members, I know this is about questioning the allocations that are provided in these two Financial Papers. While we will allow some amount of latitude to develop the question, I want to caution Members about making a speech before the question. I will be very firm with respect to people making speeches. Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, you have to make a statement...

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance [Dr. Singh]: My apologies, Sir. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, in accordance with Article 171(2) of the Constitution I signify that Cabinet has recommended for consideration by the Assembly the motion for the approval of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 2/2022 Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) advances made from the Contingencies Fund totalling two billion, nine hundred and four million, eight hundred and forty-one thousand, four hundred and six dollars. (\$2,904,841,406) for the period from 15th August – 29th November, 2022, and I now move the motion, Sir. I presume that will give the signification for Financial Paper No. 3/2022 when that time arises. Very well, Sir. Thank you very much.

10.38 a.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply

Motion proposed.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, the motion is proposed. We will now consider the Paper as usual. The items will be taken from both Current and Capital Estimates in the order for which the respective Minister is responsible.

Current Expenditure

Item 1: 02-023 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Subsidies and Contribution to Local Organisations – \$1,700,000,000

Mr. Chairman: The Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, you may have the floor.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the Hon. Prime Minister: The Contingencies Fund advance of \$1.7 billion is almost 50% of the voted provision, Mr. Prime Minister, even when you take into account the increase in fuel cost. My question to you is, are you saying to this Committee that this is as a result of improper budgeting? If yes, can the Prime Minister tell this Committee what measures are in place to correct this?

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, it is quite obvious to everyone in Guyana that this cannot be a case of improper budgeting. We have experienced a tremendous increase in the cost of fuel during the year 2022. As a caring Government, we have decided that, notwithstanding the increased cost in fuel, Government will absorb that cost and not pass it on to the people of Guyana. Mr. Chairman, that is the only reason we have requested this money. It is to keep the lights on in Linden, Region 10. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Norton]: Mr. Chairman, first of all, before I commence, I want to draw your attention to number 40 of the Standing Orders. There are some people in this House, Mr. Chairman, who behave as though they are part of a menagerie. This is a Parliament. I, therefore, ask you to uphold Standing Order 40 in relation to interruption or else I will consider this to be a menagerie rather than a Parliament. Mr. Chairman, I want to ask Hon. Prime Minister... Mr. Chairman...

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I just invoked Standing Order 40. I might need your ruling because we are still seeing the same behaviour as though it is a menagerie rather than a Parliament.

Mr. Chairman: Are you standing now on a Point of Order?

Mr. Norton: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Restate that Point of Order for me, please.

Mr. Norton: Standing Order 40 states:

“Subject to these Standing Orders, no Member shall interrupt another Member except-

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

This is clear. To me, Mr. Chairman, if we continue with this kind of behaviour, we become a menagerie rather than a Parliament. No one has objection to sensible and skilful heckling but listen to that, unless he does not understand, Mr. Chairman, that a menagerie is a collection of wild animals.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, my understanding, from being a long-standing Member of this Parliament, is that an interruption is when people stand and interrupt. There is always a lot of noise and when it becomes unbearable, I step in. In this case, I cannot see you rising on that Standing Order as relevant.

Mr. Norton: A question to the Hon. Prime Minister

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Norton: Could the Prime Minister tell us what... as a result of what many are saying is the Ukraine war...what is the actual increase in cost that resulted in this kind of demand?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The Hon. Member, I am quite certain, is fully aware of the arrangements for the provision of electricity to the households in Linden. The electricity is generated by Bosai Minerals Group (Guyana) Incorporated. The Linden Electricity Company Inc

(LECI) has a contract with Bosai. This reflects the additional money that is requested by Bosai to cover the period during which they would have provided electricity and we would have suffered an increase in the cost of fuel. This is based on an invoice submitted by Bosai, and we have requested the money to pay in order to keep the lights on in Linden. This is the increase. From the Consolidated Fund, cheques were written and paid to Bosai.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, we are both from Linden and I agree that there should be subsidies to Linden. In fact, we fought for it and lost lives, but I am asking a simple question. Could the Hon. Member tell us what is the increased cost of fuel that caused this exorbitant amount? Or is he saying that Bosai just gave him a bill and he is paying? That is the question; it is simple.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, there have been various increases over the period of time. As fuel went up on the world market, the supplier basically included that cost and passed it on to us. There have been several increases and this request was made to cover all the increases. The overriding factor was to ensure that the people in Linden and its environment have electricity. [An. Hon. Member: Who is against that?] I do not think I am against it.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I am not against it either, but all would agree that these things have figures. I am asking the Hon. Member to give us the figures, *vis-à-vis* this cost. If it increased by so much in March, by so much in November...how did you arrive at it? What figures did Bosai give to you in terms of the increase? That is the kind of information I am seeking. I want it to be made very clear that we support it in Linden, but we need to know the cost.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I think we are just belabouring a point, which is basically a non-issue. All the increases in fuel prices were available to the public; it is in the media. What we are doing is reacting to the increases and ensuring that the people in Linden have their lights on. So, I would say to the Hon. Member that the information is available in the wider public. I feel that it is not my duty to present information that is available in the public.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, as Leader of the Opposition, I have not seen it in the public and I believe it is incumbent upon the Prime Minister, unless he wants to manifest incompetence, to tell this Committee how they arrived at the figure. If he is saying it is in the public domain and Bosai had it in the public domain, it follows axiomatically that you should know. Therefore, I invite you to tell this Committee.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I take offence that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition will try to task me to do his research.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, it is the obligation of the Prime Minister to tell this Committee on what basis he arrived at the figures he arrived at and give numbers. While I will not engage the Prime Minister anymore on this, I see it as a clear case of manifest incompetence or (*inaudible*).

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I will give the Hon. Prime Minister an opportunity to make a statement with respect to your statement. Go ahead, Hon. Prime Minister.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, manifest incompetence has resulted in the Hon. Leader of the Opposition being on that side of the House. This is a public company and all the information for any public company is available to the public. Perhaps, that is a case of what manifest competence entails, which is that someone will seek the information that is already available publicly and not come to waste the time of this House. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, proceed.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much for recognising me. Contingency payments are for urgent unforeseen payments. In his response, he said that this has been going on for a while – this has been going on from February. Could I ask the Hon. Prime Minister why was it necessary for this to be paid by a contingency since this has been a long, ongoing issue?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, again I am bombarded by elementary questions and investigations by Members of the Opposition. There is a sum that was projected for the year 2022. It is obvious that based on our projections – and here I am talking about competent planning – we would have forecasted that by a certain time in the year 2022, we will require additional money. All the staff work, all the checks and all the analyses were done, and we asked Bosai to submit their invoices. We went to the Consolidated Fund – I do not have to explain the procedure for getting money from the Consolidated Fund – and we got the money in time to keep the lights on in Linden.

It is a matter of concern for that community, Mr. Chairman, and I think that is the essence of my involvement as the Minister responsible for energy. It is to ensure that the money becomes available so that the lights can be kept on in Linden, and not have a situation where Bosai cannot

supply electricity and then we are running to get money or asking Bosai to continue to provide electricity while we try to get the money and therefore the people of Linden suffer for a period of time without electricity until we could remedy the situation. What we have done is take all the necessary steps to remedy the situation before we reach to the point of having to cut off the lights because there is no money available. We did not want the \$3.9 billion to run out, there is no money and then after we come and request money to pay Bosai. In the meantime, the people from Linden would be suffering. Come on. It is \$3.9 billion. I corrected myself.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. That is what you call waffling. However, could I ask the Hon. Prime Minister how Bosai bills the Government for electricity? Is it quarterly or monthly? How do they submit their invoices? Can I ask him a simple question as that, Sir?

10.53 a.m.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, on a monthly basis, the money is transferred to Bosai Minerals Group (Guyana) Incorporated based on the submission of their invoices.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, my apologies. Your staff just somewhat interrupted me with a message from you, Sir. It is okay, Mr. Chairman. Can I ask the Hon. Prime Minister what is the total generating output of this \$5.22 billion which is already paid in totality? I have a follow-up question when he answers that. Sir, he is coming for money and so he must know what he is paying for.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I must admit that I do not have the information for the total output. I can lay that information over. However, the preoccupation has been to ensure that we have the money to keep the power on in Linden.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Prime Minister.

Item 1: 02-023 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Subsidies and Contribution to Local Organisations – \$1,700,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 2: 16-161 Ministry of Amerindian Affairs – Policy Development and Administration – National and Other Events – \$5,295,750

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could the Hon. Minister outline what aspects of the Amerindian Heritage Month were not budgeted for? Is it not agency code 16-161? [**An. Hon.**

Member: That is for the National Toshaos' Council (NTC).] Okay. The next one.

Mr. Chairman: We are at chart of account 6291.

Ms. Lawrence: Sorry, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs, you have the floor.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, I am going to the next one. I am sorry.

Mr. Chairman: All right.

Item 2: 16-161 Ministry of Amerindian Affairs – Policy Development and Administration – National and Other Events – \$5,295,750 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 2: 16-162 Ministry of Amerindian Affairs – Community Development and Empowerment – National and Other Events – \$48,851,100

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Hon. Minister outline what aspects of the Amerindian Month Programme were not budgeted for? Also, can the Minister provide a detailed breakdown of the expenditure of this additional amount since it represents over 133% of the voted provision? Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister of Amerindian Affairs [Ms. Campbell-Sukhai]: Thank you. Good morning, Mr. Chairman. First of all, let me remind this Committee that Guyana was experiencing the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and, therefore, our country was not open at the time when we did the budgeting. Subsequently, close to mid-year, our country was declared open. Therefore, for many of the things that were budgeted, we had some shortfalls. For example, for the National Toshaos' Council (NTC) meeting we had budgeted for cluster meetings in the regions so as not to bring leaders out to the coast. After the country was declared open, what happened was we made the decision to have a full-fledged NTC. Thereby, the shortfall was... The voted provision sought to seek approval for \$48,851,100.

The activities that this sum relate to are the Amerindian religious ceremony; the Amerindian Heritage cultural nights; the art exhibition; the Amerindian Fitness Walk; Stephen Campbell's commemoration; the Amerindian Heritage Sports; the Amerindian Heritage Dinner; contribution to the villages; food, and art and craft support; the Amerindian Heritage Pageant; public relations; rehabilitation of works at an Amerindian village and the Amerindian Heritage Festival. So, those were the activities that were not planned for because we were only hoping to have a very virtual extravaganza, as we did in 2020, where we did a cultural concert that was held virtually. So, the opening of our country led to us doing the full-fledged heritage celebrations. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Is there a follow-up question, Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence?

Ms. Lawrence: Yes, just a follow-up. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, you mentioned that all of this is because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the country not being open, but the President opened the country on 21st March, 2022. This activity was in September. Also, some of the items that you listed are regular programmes. So, what is the difference? Was there an increase in the cost? What is it? *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.]

Mr. Chairman, could you please tell the Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy, that this is big girls' and big boys' business?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, I am hearing plenty of people making noise. So, if you hear one person, I am hearing a lot of them. That is why I hit the gavel. Please, continue with your questions.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you. Yes, Mdm. Minister. Could you kindly indicate what specific aspects would have been different from what you planned for? The country was opened in March, and this was in September. Do you know what? Let me just remind you that this amount is being taken from the Contingencies Fund. So, it was unforeseen; it was something that you could not avoid. Why was it not taken from the Consolidated Fund? Why is it being taken from the Contingencies Fund?

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, the national budget was passed in this House in February, 2022 when they all did not care to participate. So, we were planning on COVID-19 and the closure of our country. I have said that the difference is that in 2020 we held a virtual cultural extravaganza. We did not have the numerous face-to-face activities that I detailed here. So, significantly, all that I have listed here have to do with the activities of a full-fledged heritage celebration.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, may I posit this to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance? Sir, this is a clear abuse of the Contingencies Fund because it does not meet the requirement. This activity took place in September.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, you asked me to direct that question to the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance as an abuse of the Contingencies Fund.

Ms. Lawrence: Yes, Dr. Singh.

Mr. Chairman: You can save the lecture.

Ms. Lawrence: I am not lecturing.

Mr. Chairman: I will give the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance an opportunity to answer if this is an abuse of the Contingencies Fund.

Ms. Lawrence: May I say, Sir – because I do not think you heard the last part – to the Hon. Minister that the budget was passed, yes, in March but this activity was in September. Why have we not gone to the Consolidated Fund? Why are we taking it from the Contingencies Fund?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I would have liked to have thought that the answer already provided by my distinguished colleague, the Minister of Amerindian Affairs, was abundant and fulsome in its clarity. We were and are living in uncertain times. The Coronavirus disease 2019 was very much with us during 2020, during much of 2021 and it is still with us. In 2021, when an effort was made to convene the National Toshaos' Council Conference, we I am addressing both items – one relates to heritage and one relates to the NTC. Anybody who has been following developments in the hinterland and in our Amerindian communities would be well aware that efforts were made last year to convene the NTC using a new format. If I recall correctly, because of the reality of

COVID-19, regional and sub-regional events were arranged, I believe, in at least three clusters in the hinterland. In fact, arrangements were made and, in many cases, Toshaos assembled in the designated areas. Due to the incidence of COVID-19 that emerged in situ, those events had to be called off and people had to be sent back home. That transpired in 2021 when an attempt was made to arrange these observances.

In 2022, at the time when we were preparing the budget, those uncertainties remained, and a provision was made in the budget to anticipate a certain scale of observance, both in relation to the NTC and in relation to Amerindian Heritage Month. Assumptions were made about the conditions that would prevail for the rest of the year in relation to the scale, nature and structure of these two observances, and a relevant financial provision was allocated in the budget around those assumptions. As any competent Government would do, we continued to monitor the situation as it evolved. As it evolved, this Government, under the distinguished stewardship of my colleague, Minister Dr. Anthony, managed to bring COVID-19 under control. It was something that the Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence failed abysmally to do when she held that portfolio. It was something that the Hon. Ms. Lawrence failed abysmally and cataclysmically to do. As a result of the distinguished stewardship of the health sector by my distinguished colleague, Minister Dr. Anthony, and as a result of COVID-19 being brought under some semblance of control, the scale of the observances of these two events was reconsidered and revisited. We decided that the circumstances permitted a full observance – a gathering of Toshaos centrally. It would be recalled, in fact, that all the Toshaos came out and gathered in this very venue. In fact, I believe it was for almost five days.

11.08 a.m.

This was because the evolving public health situation permitted it. [**An. Hon. Member:** It was without incidents.] It was without incidents. In addition, the same applied to the Amerindian Heritage Month observance. The evolving public health situation permitted us to reconsider the scale, structure and design of the observance. Because we were able to contain COVID-19 in the manner that we did, we decided, as a responsible Government committed to the Amerindian people of our country, to have a full observance. It is very telling that the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) would now stand in this House and seek to question and challenge this allocation to the Amerindian people of Guyana. I am appalled at that. Thank you very much.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, having listened to the circumlocutions, I want to ask the direct question that was asked. We are committed to the Indigenous people of this country, but we are also expected to defend their resources. The straight question that needs to be answered is, why was it taken from the Contingencies Fund rather than the Consolidated Fund? That is the simple question.

Dr. Singh: May I, Sir? This is not the forum for me to present a class on public finances and on the financial legislation of this country. The Consolidated Fund is the primary fund of the State of Guyana. All budgetary revenues go into the Consolidated Fund and all expenditure is appropriated out of that Fund. In the event that unforeseen needs arise, the supreme law of the land, the Constitution of Guyana, establishes a Contingencies Fund and that Contingencies Fund serves a purpose that is defined in that supreme law of our land. The purpose of that Contingencies Fund is to meet unforeseen and unanticipated needs. The Constitution of Guyana provides for that and the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) replicates and elaborates those provisions. I would have thought to a parliamentary party that is so linguistically endowed as to be deploying words like menagerie this morning, multiple times...I would have thought that such linguistically and oratorically gifted Members of Parliament would be acquainted with the word contingency and would be acquainted with the provisions with our Constitution, which have been in place since time immemorial, since the enactment of that Constitution, and would be acquainted with the provisions of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act.

The purposes of the Contingencies Fund are defined in the Law. Where a need arises that was not provided for in the budget and it is established to be urgent and unforeseen, it is met from the Contingencies Fund. I will say further that a former Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) and I believe... Hon. Member, are you now again a Member of the PAC? [**An. Hon. Member:** She is not.] I do not recall. As a former Chairperson of the PAC and one who held that office for many years, I know that the Hon. Member is well aware of this. So, what we are witnessing today is nothing short of political grandstanding for the purposes of objecting to an allocation to our Amerindian people. That is all that we are witnessing here.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I listened to the Minister with the long title. He kept mentioning ‘unforeseen’, but the law states, ‘unforeseen and urgent’. If in March, COVID-19 went, you had between March and September. How come then yes, we admit it is unforeseen, but it could not

have been urgent if you had until September to apply to the Consolidated Fund. The reason it was done is because for withdrawal from the Consolidated Fund, there has to be parliamentary approval and they wanted to be arbitrary and dictatorial, as they normally are.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I will say I am now going to curtail the statements after the Minister of Finance has his opportunity to make his statement.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, a recent public exchange in relation to a statement made by the World Bank, and in particular in relation to the 2019 poverty statistics that were quoted in a 2022 World Bank statement, which included an original intervention by the Leader of the Opposition and a response by myself and I think a subsequent intervention by the Leader of the Opposition, has already established indubitably, beyond any shadow of doubt, that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition has a fundamental incapacity when it comes to issues of chronology and of comprehension. [Mr. Dharamlall That is because he is a racist and a liar.]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, I do not want to have to circulate the words which we do not use in the Parliament. You may proceed, Hon. Minister.

Dr. Singh: First of all, Sir, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition continues to be removed from reality. He made a statement just now that COVID-19 ended in March 2022 and so we should have known. Sir, I have news for you. The COVID-19 has not ended as yet and every day the public health situation is evolving.

Mr. Norton: I rise on a Point of Order.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, could you state that Point of Order?

Mr. Norton: [*inaudible*].

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister of Finance, proceed.

Dr. Singh: I will repeat. [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Chairman: I cannot hear the Minister.

Dr. Singh: The Hon. Leader of the Opposition astonishingly said that COVID-19 ended in March, 2022 and so we should have known since March, 2022. Why did we wait until September? We should have known in March because COVID-19 ended in March. First of all, COVID-19 did not end in March, 2022 and it has not yet ended. We have continued, day to day, to monitor the evolving public health situation. As a matter of fact, we were in no position in March, February, or, indeed, April to know what the public health situation would have been in September and, therefore, to know what scale and format of observance could have been deployed and implemented for the purposes of Amerindian Heritage Month and the National Toshias' Council. We could make assumptions and projections, but we were in no position.

I do not know if the Leader of the Opposition has some kind of crystal ball that he could have looked into in March...I hear my colleagues are saying that, apparently, he has two crystal balls. I do not know if he has one, two or more crystal balls that he could have looked into in March to know what would be happening in September, especially when it comes to such a serious matter as a global pandemic. We were in no position in March to predict with certainty what the situation would have been in September.

As a matter of fact, I recall Cabinet discussions until July and August. I recall my colleague, Minister Pauline Sukhai, coming to the Cabinet and Cabinet discussions and briefings by Minister Frank Anthony on what the current situation was, day by day and week by week. It was so that we could have made the best decision and ensure that nobody was exposed to.... To ensure that we had the most fulsome observance but at the same time ensure that we did not jeopardise anybody's health and that discussion continued until the very day before those two observances were launched. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, first of all, the Government declared in March, 2022 that Guyana was opened, and they knew that they were been involved in public activities. There were many activities between March and September that would have established that the Government itself opened after declaring that the situation as being much better. It is therefore unfortunate that you would come to this House and talk about COVID-19 not ending, knowing fully that you opened Guyana in March, 2022 and knowing fully that you had that Indigenous month. Now, you have come to say that COVID-19 did not end. By your actions, you ended the activity....

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, ask your question.

Mr. Norton: The question is, is it not true that there were other public activities after March just like Heritage Month, and therefore it could not have been urgent because you knew you had opened for public gatherings?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, proceed.

Dr. Singh: Very well, Sir. Mr. Chairman, I have said what I have to say on this matter. Putting aside issues of political grandstanding, this country has several very good English teachers and there is a subject called Comprehension in English and I would be happy to recommend one or more and they are many good English teachers that could help the Members on that side of the House with Comprehension. Thank you very much Sir.

Item 2: 16-162 Ministry of Amerindian Affairs – Community Development and Empowerment – National and Other Events – \$48,851,100 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 3: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – National Drainage and Irrigation Authority - \$740,156,388

Mr. Ramjattan: In relation to this contingency sum of \$740,156,38, could the Hon. Minister state more specifically where these drainage channels, access bridges and revetments are going to be built or rehabilitated?

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. If I can disaggregate the amount per region, then I can also help the Hon. Member to disaggregate the figure by the amount that he wants. In Region 3, \$260 million will be expended and I will give you the breakdown. In Region 4, \$115 million.

11.23 a.m.

Region 5 – \$153 million, Region 6 – \$121 million and Region 7 – \$89 million, which gives \$740 million. Mr. Chairman, these works are very important because you know, for a fact, that we have

seen an influx in the agriculture sector by people who would have called it a day in 2015 to 2020. We are seeing more and more people coming on now. They want to get into agriculture. We are seeing our agriculture sector thriving. As a matter of fact, almost every single month we are seeing containers of produce going to the eastern Caribbean where farmers in Guyana are now exporting their produce.

I have a list here and I could go through all of the items. There are about 100 items, but I could lay it over and give the Hon. Member. There are places for the reallocation of canals and sluice doors, because many of the sluice doors they did not repair during that period. Now we are looking at those doors that are very vulnerable. Only recently we had to replace the sluice door at Cowan Street. We had to replace the one at Providence and we had to replace the one at Sussex Street. A number of these doors have become vulnerable because the repairs were not done during the time that they were supposed to be repaired. We are doing all of those works and now we have more people coming in the agriculture sector.

Mr. Ramjattan: I want to thank the Minister for laying over where these works will be done. Since it was capital works that was done, I would like to know if these works were all done by the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA), or the NDIA subcontracted certain contractors to get these sluices, revetments and bridges done.

Mr. Mustapha: Like any other contracts, these were public contracts that were published and awarded by the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) or the Tender Board of the NDIA. They were published in the press. There were bids by contractors around the country and the most suitable and responsive bidders were awarded the contracts.

Mr. Ramjattan: For the sake of accountability and transparency, could the Minister also give a list of the contractors within the regions that were awarded these specific contracts for purposes of making the bridges, revetments and so on?

Mr. Mustapha: I think this is for the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board. The Hon. Member could ask that question and get it there.

Mr. Ramjattan: Please, we need the accountability here. It is moneys that are coming out as a result of the Contingency Fund for which we could ask which and which contractors were awarded these bridges and awarded these revetments. Why do you not want to be transparent?

Mr. Mustapha: It seems that the Hon. Member is seeing some problem and that we are trying to hide something from him. [Mr Ramjattan: Absolutely.] He is wrong, and he thinks like the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) that is normally very suspicious. I will give him the entire list of bidders that bid for the contracts – lay it over. We do not have anything... [Mr. Ramjattan: ... and those who won the awards.] ...to hide about it.

Mr. Ramjattan: I do not want the list of bidders. I want the list of awardees of the contract so that we can then come for the next budget and talk about how good a job you are doing.

Mr. Mustapha: It seems that the Hon. Member is trying to *row* with me to get the list of contractors. That is public knowledge. Go to the Tender Board, request it and you would have it. [Mr Ramjattan: You could give us here. We are not getting anything from the Tender Board.]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, could I...? Go ahead.

Mr. Ramjattan: We have not been getting anything from the Tender Board. The Minister is the one who has asked for moneys to go to these projects. Could we get the contractors who have been awarded?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister, it is the responsibility of the Minister asking to provide the answer and not direct the questioner, the Member, to go somewhere else, but if you choose not to, then we cannot force you. You have already said that you have the list to layover with respect to the regions and the amounts. Now he is asking if you could layover the list of award winners.

Mr. Mustapha: I said that I will layover all of the bidders that have bid for these projects so that the Hon. Member could have a copy of it. It is no problem.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, the Minister is prepared to layover the bidders. Thank you.

Mr. Ramjattan: Why is it that the Minister does not want the awardees to be laid in the National Assembly.

Mr. Chairman: You are asking the Chairman to answer that.

Mr. Ramjattan: No. I am asking the Minister why he does not want to provide the awardees or the contractors as against the bidders, because I would not know who won the contracts.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, are you able to provide the winning bidders?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I think that, as a Member of Parliament, we have to be more proactive. The Hon. Member wants me to do his work. This is public knowledge. This has been published in the newspaper. We have had public signings of these contracts around the country, but anyway, I will help him. I will try to give him. He thinks that we have something to hide and that is nothing. I will give him.

Mr. Figueira: Could the Hon. Minister say to this House what was the Guyana Sugar Corporation's (GuySuCo's) budgeted operating expense for 2022?

Mr. Chairman: I am just trying to reconcile the question with this amount. Is it a question saying, is GuySuCo catered for here and what is the amount? Is that the question?

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Chairman, are we not aware that \$1 billion has been allocated? [**An. Hon. Member:** *[Inaudible]*] The other one. All right. My apologies.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister tell this House what was the balance of the voted provision at the time of granting the sum of \$740 million from the Contingency Fund? I would like to ask, given the remarks in the paper here that these works were carried out under the local authorities in cities, towns and Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and so on, has the Ministry taken over the operation and maintenance of these structures, and were there discussions with these local authorities for these works which you carried out in the various townships, NDCs and Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs)?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, definitely. There were a lot of discussions, especially in Georgetown with the incompetence. We had to ensure that we spent excess funds in Georgetown. Up to last night I was around Georgetown, and I looked at the drainage and at the structure. As I

said, these works were executed in conjunction with the local bodies because it was necessary, and it was urgent. We had to ensure that we did this work or else we could have had serious problems around the country. That was the reason – because of the representation that was made to the Ministry of Agriculture through the NDIA – we were able to execute these works.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, just to remind the Minister of the first question: What was the balance of the voted provision when you sought to get the sum of \$740 million from the Contingency Fund?

Mr. Mustapha: I will forward the amount, but the budgeted amount was \$4.1 billion. These works, as I said, were not budgeted in the original budget. That is why we had to ensure that we do these works as emergency. I will forward the balance to the Hon. Member.

Item 3: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – National Drainage and Irrigation Authority - \$740,156,388 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 4: 26-262 Ministry of Natural Resources – Natural Resource Management – Other - \$360,000,000

Mr. Ramsaroop: Could the Hon. Minister state if the total sum in the 2022 Budget...? We had \$208 million which was under a line item, Other, and then there was additional money that was spent from August to 29th November of another \$360 million. Was all this money spent on the resources?

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Bharrat]: Hon. Member, thank you for the question, but I do not think the question pertains directly to the allocation that is being requested this morning. Nevertheless, Mr. Chairman, with your permission, I will seek to provide an answer.

The provision, the amount that is being requested here by the Ministry of Natural Resources, is directly or will go directly for payments to the Architecture for REDD+Transactions - The REDD+Transactions Environmental Excellence Standard (ART-TREES) infrastructure. It is what we term the issuance fee pertaining to the agreement that was signed a few days ago between the

Government of Guyana and Hess Corporation. This agreement, I think, should be supported by all Guyanese. It should be supported by the Opposition, or the Opposition should support the Government on such an agreement that was met between us and the Hess Corporation for carbon credits.

More importantly, part of the sum, the minimum of US\$750 million, US\$187.5 million of that sum, the minimum amount, is for the legacy credit. This is the first and only country in the world – and that is why I say we must be proud as Guyanese and all of us should support it – that will receive the legacy credits. What really is the legacy credit? Legacy credit is us correcting the mistake that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Administration made. It is us doing what should have been done by the APNU/AFC Administration between 2016 to 2020. The sum of US\$187.5 million that we would collect, as part of the agreement, is for payments between the years 2016 to 2020.

The previous Administration had what we call ‘the green state strategy’ I believe it was, but there was no plan, no realistic targets in the first place. There was no plan to bring in revenue and that is why we are saddled with the responsibility today to ensure that we gain the necessary credits and revenue from our forest from 2016 coming right up to 2020. The sum of \$360 million would be paid to the ART infrastructure, the Architecture for the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD)+Transaction, which is the United Nations (UN) body that is certified to validate our forest carbon credits, and it would equate to about US5 cents per credit for which we will be paid US\$15.

11.38 a.m.

So we are paying US5 cents for US\$15. As I mentioned, this is something that all of Guyana should be proud of. It is the first country in the world that is signing such an agreement at the jurisdictional level or the national level. The provision or the amount being asked for is to offset the cost of validating our forest carbon credits. Thank you.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Thank you, Hon. Minister, for that explanation as to where we are in terms of carbon credits. I want to ask the question as to what exactly. The resources that you speak about here are to accomplish the issuance fees, but what are the resources that this money was being spent on, or who was this money spent on? You spoke about the ART-TREES. We know that

during our time we did not learn about the ART-TREES, because there was REDD+, there was the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility (FCPF), and there was the Measuring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) system. Is the ART-TREES a new thing to Guyana or is it taking over the responsibility of all these other areas of certification that I just spoke about?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, the REDD+ programme, the European Union Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (EU FLEGT) programme, and all the other programmes, are completely different from the ART-TREES verification and validation process. This is a United Nations body. In order for countries to sell carbon credits, it must be checked and it must be validated. In order for any organisation, like the Hess Corporation or any other entity that would like to buy credit from any country... one such body is the ART-TREES. There are others, but we are using the ART-TREES to verify our carbon credits, otherwise we cannot put it on the market, otherwise we will not be able to enter into agreements, because nobody will buy carbon credit from a country if it is not verified. The MRV system is a system that we implemented to ensure that we have real-time coverage, that we can monitor the forest coverage and, if there is any change in the forest coverage, to put into action some kind of remedial mechanism or to do monitoring/reconnaissance exercises to ensure that our forest, especially the preservation area, the five conservation areas that span almost 2 million hectares – that is the Shell Beach, Iwokrama, Kaieteur National Park, Kanuku Mountain Ranges and the Konashen area...

The MRV system was put in place to ensure that we have real-time monitoring of any changes in our forest coverage. Then there is the REDD+ programme, which is Reducing Emissions through Deforestation and Forest Degradation. That is a programme being monitored by the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC), which the Hon. Member is aware of because he was on the board, and he worked at the Guyana Forestry Commission. There is a REDD+ Secretariat (RS) that does aggressive work in ensuring that we can bring down our deforestation rate to the lowest in the world, and that is something else that we must be proud of as a country. Our deforestation rate is 0.045%, the lowest in the world. Our commitment in the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) is that we will keep it below 0.07%. Right now, we are at 0.045%, so we are way below our targets in terms of deforestation. That is why everyone is now looking at Guyana as a major player in fighting climate change. It is not only ensuring that our forest is intact but the preservation of it and the monitoring of it, too.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Hon. Minister, thank you for that interpretation, but I was asking: what resources? Maybe, if you want, you can lay out the resources. My next question is regarding the 37.5 gigaton of carbon that was estimated. You said that the Hess Corporation bought 30% of that, which makes it to US\$750 million. Could you say if the estimation of this carbon is for the entire forest of Guyana or if it is a specific area that this carbon is estimated to be?

Mr. Bharrat: As I mentioned, it is jurisdictional or national carbon credit, meaning the entire of Guyana's forest. I know that in some countries they trade in parts. For example, the Federative Republic of Brazil (Brazil) would trade in parts, part of the forest. Guyana is trading as a country, our national forest. The agreement between the Government of Guyana and the Hess Corporation is for 30% of the carbon credits that we have in Guyana—30% for a minimum of US\$750 million. That may very well increase depending on the price of carbon on the market, which is very likely because, as we know, the price will obviously increase over time as the conversation on climate change continues. As we experience the impacts and effects of climate change, there will be more and more efforts to safeguard forests around the world. As we know, the two main standing forests in the world are the Congo Rainforest, in the Congo Basin, and the Amazon Forest. Those are the two main standing forests in the world. Guyana stands to earn a great deal from our forest as we move forward and as there is more effort being placed on mitigation to climate change. I wish to say too, of the US\$750 million that will be received over a 10-year period, 15% of that will go towards development in indigenous communities. That, if we do simple math, I think is about US\$112 million over a period of 10 years. That will go towards indigenous communities, the more than 200 communities throughout the country.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister table the contracts with the Hess Corporation to this honourable House?

Mr. Bharrat: I think the Hon. Member is asking for the agreement that was signed between the Government of Guyana and the Hess Corporation, which is a public document. It will be made public.

Mr. Ramjattan: The \$360 million in addition to the \$208 million we had voted at the budget comes up to a sizeable sum of \$500 million. Who is actually receiving - as I was asking for the

contractor - this issuance payment or money? It was already given between August and November 29th. Obviously, it was paid to somebody. Who is it that it was paid to?

Mr. Bharrat: There is what we call the ART Secretariat, the Architecture for REDD+ Transactions. There is a Secretariat or an organisation that will have structure and personnel because it has to come to Guyana to do physical verification of Guyana's forests. That is how it works, actually. It has been doing this over the last two years. There were people in Guyana verifying the forest to ensure that when companies are paying for our credits, it is actually real credits, because there have been attempts by many others to sell carbon credits for forests that do not exist. It is the ART Secretariat.

Mr. Ramjattan: There must be actual people or corporate entities behind this ART. I would like to know if you could give us some of the actual people who are going to benefit from this more than \$500 million. It is not just the ART Secretariat; is there a body that...?

Mr. Bharrat: The payment to the ART Secretariat is \$360 million and not \$502 million as mentioned by the Hon. Member. As I mentioned, it is to the ART organisation that the \$360 million will be paid to. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** *[Inaudible]*] Mr. Chairman, I am not sure if we are discussing the \$208 million now or whether it is the \$360 million. I think we had an opportunity at the Committee of Supply for the Opposition to ask questions and interrogate me on the \$208 million. I will be willing, at some point in time, to let the Hon. Member know how it was spent. We believe in transparency and accountability, so it is not a problem. But I believe we are discussing the \$360 million.

Mr. Ramjattan: It is important to understand, as the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance just indicated, that contingencies are for urgent spending. It would necessarily mean that the provision you had voted for at the beginning had been used up, so you now have to go into the Contingency Fund to make spendings in addition to what was voted. So, it necessarily means that if you voted the provision of \$208 million, that had been emptied from the till and then you come for a contingency of \$360 million. Where did that \$208 million go if the \$360 million is only for the ART-TREES?

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, I think it is the same question but maybe worded differently, so the answer will remain the same.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Could the Hon. Minister say who owns the carbon credits?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, who owns the carbon credits?

Mr. Bharrat: We have always said that the resources of this country belong to the people of the country. We are the custodians; the people entrusted us to manage resources. The resources, like the oil, like the diamond, like the gold, like the manganese, like the bauxite, and like the carbon credits, belong to the people of Guyana.

Mr. Norton: I would assume that to arrive at price, there was some kind of analysis done and then you would have done some amount of scientific revision as to what the price is likely to be in 10 years. Could you give us an insight into the kind of analysis that was done to arrive at the prices we have?

Mr. Bharrat: Like most commodities that are traded internationally, there is a market price. For example, the legacy credits, which is between 2016 to 2020—and I think I mentioned it earlier—we will be paid a minimum of US\$15 per ton. For the period 2021 to 2025, we will be paid a minimum of US\$20 per ton. For the period 2026 to 2030, we will be paid a minimum of US\$25 per ton. Thank you.

11.53 a.m.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I heard that but here you are selling, and you say it is in 10 years. I am trying to get from you the analysis that was done that will establish that this is a good deal so that, at the end of the 10-year, we benefit significantly and not Hess alone. If Hess buys now and then the estimate is that, while it is like a \$10 now, by 10 years from now, it is likely to be \$75. Are you satisfied that proper analysis was done and are you prepared to table here the document that led to that kind of decision?

Mr. Bharrat: Let me thank the Hon. Leader of the Opposition for the question. It is a new commodity being traded on the market. There is not, quite honestly, much precedence in the world that was set before to determine pricing. We believe that we have negotiated a good price for our carbon credits. In fact, we are the first country in the world to sell based on jurisdiction or nationally. There is no precedent set before, there is no target that was set either.

What we did put in the agreement to safeguard exactly what the Leader of the Opposition is mentioning is, should the price go above a respective flow price for that year or specified under the price levels above, Hess will pay Guyana 60% of the price difference of that year's credits at a higher market price. I think that was what the Leader of the Opposition was trying to find out. We did cater, we did make provision, and we know that, maybe in 10 years from now, the price of carbon credits will increase. It will increase. We have a provision in here stating that once the price increases we will get 60% more of that. Thank you.

Mr. Norton: Thank you, Hon. Minister, but there is another part of the question I asked.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have to allow me to recognise you. You just do not jump up. Mr. Ramsaroop's finger is still on the button. I see Mr. Forde's finger close to the button. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, please go ahead.

Mr. Norton: The most I can do is laugh, Mr. Chairman. There is a question that was asked in the two questions. The question was, are you prepared to provide the Opposition with the analysis that was done that allowed you to arrive at the figures you have arrived at?

Mr. Bharrat: As I mentioned in my initial response, Guyana is the first country to be selling carbon credit at a jurisdictional level. It is basically that we are the trailblazers in selling this new commodity on the markets. We believe that the price that we negotiated is a fair price. We know that the price for carbon credits will increase as we go along. That is why we have made provision so that we can benefit from that increase in pricing too. Thank you.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, I thought this was a simple question. Could you offer us in this National Assembly, so that the people of Guyana will know, the documents that did the analysis, to allow you to arrive at the price you have arrived at and the agreement? That will enable us to do analysis and to conclude.

Mr. Bharrat: Again, I think it is the same question, so the answer is the same.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the Hon. Minister for his eloquent response to who owns the carbon. He stated that 15% will go to the Amerindian community. I want to know if, since the Guyanese people own the carbon, that 15% that you spoke about will it go to the National Toshias Council for them to spend or will it be spent by the Government of Guyana?

Mr. Bharrat: The 15% will go towards development in all of the more than 200 Amerindian/Indigenous communities in the country.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Forde, do you still want to ask your question?

Mr. Forde: No.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Ramjattan.

Mr. Ramjattan: I want to get it clear. I am not getting from the Minister the very positive response that I would like, which is, could you lay the Hess agreement here in this National Assembly? [**An Hon. Member:** It is public.] I would like to have a copy. I do not know where in the public to go and get it.

Mr. Bharrat: As I mentioned before, it is a public document. It is an agreement between the Government of Guyana and Hess Corporation. Yes, the document will be made public. It is probably already public. We can upload it and I can point the Hon. Member to a website where he can actually access it.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chairman, a follow-up on one of the Minister's comments. The Minister noted that 15% is intended to be utilised in the Indigenous communities. We would know that the Indigenous communities could be referred to as the 'lung of this country'. I would like the Minister to say, what level of consultation, if any, was done with the Indigenous leaders in deriving the 15% that is being announced here today?

Mr. Bharrat: We had, I believe, over 1,000 different meetings held in every Indigenous community, throughout the entire country, to draft the Low Carbon Development Strategy. Also, maybe the Hon. Member is not aware that at the last National Toshias Council Conference it was unanimously agreed to. Thank you.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, a follow-up. I am asking specifically how the 15% was derived? What methodology was utilised to arrive at 15%. I know that you are saying, Sir, that you had meetings throughout the Indigenous communities. Are you saying here today, Sir, that you had specific meetings with Indigenous leaders in the various Indigenous communities, consulting on and having discussions to derive at the percentage that they will be benefitting from?

Mr. Bharrat: This agreement is a product of the Low Carbon Development Strategy of 2030. If the Hon. Member is asking if there was a consultation specifically for this agreement, it is tied into the Low Carbon Development Strategy. If we had 1,000 different meetings in different communities to consult and agree on a 15%, therefore, there were consultations. When the National Toshias Council meet, those are the leaders of every Indigenous community – elected officials from every village were gathered right here in this Dome, not only the Amerindian Village Councils (AVC) but the satellite villages and the Community Development Councils (CDCs) as well. They unanimously agreed to this provision being in the Low Carbon Development Strategy. Thank you.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, this is premised on me not seeing the agreement. The Hon. Minister I note, is using the concept of ‘lung of the earth’, which I have no problem with. In using ‘lung of the earth’ you are also using a concept that is very much linked to the global commons. Could you, Hon. Minister, tell us if in the agreement that you have there is a clear pathway to ensure that, as we pursue this, we continue to exercise jurisdiction over a national patrimony and do not allow the idea of the global commons to slip in and affect us in the future.

Mr. Bharrat: The Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030, I must say, is a very comprehensive, well-thought-out document. All the safeguards that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition is asking of, is actually included in the Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030. We have committed ourselves to ensuring that we safeguard our forests, which is a great asset to us. We have to increase, obviously, and to ensure that the Guyana Forestry Commission and all other agencies – the Protected Areas Commission, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and all other agencies that are involved – are well-resourced. We know the state of the Guyana Forestry Commission in August, 2020. The Hon. Member, Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop, was a member of the Board of Directors at the Guyana Forestry Commission and it was bankrupt. This is the main agency tasked with monitoring our forests, our national asset that is worth so much. We have already started to earn from it. We have to ensure that we provide enough resources to these agencies, especially the Guyana Forestry Commission, to ensure that we monitor, besides, as I mentioned earlier, the five protected areas. The five protected areas are close to two million hectares. We are committed to ensuring that we preserve that; and we, as I mentioned, have the lowest deforestation rate in the world.

The Low Carbon Development Strategy also speaks to ensuring that we continue logging in a sustainable and a responsible manner. We know that most of the Indigenous and riverine communities, especially in Region 10 and Region 1, depend on logging activities. What we are working towards, and is stated in the Low Carbon Development Strategy, is to move towards more value-added downstream processing. That is the only way that we can keep the sector viable while cutting less trees, while safeguarding our forests more, even more than we are doing right now.

The common practice has always been to export primary products, export logs. In order for a stakeholder to be profitable, or for his business to be profitable, then he has to export a certain amount of logs. What we intend to do is work with the stakeholders in the sector so that we can cut half of that amount but still make the sector more viable. The only way that can happen is through value-added processing. In the Low Carbon Development Strategy, it speaks to all of this, Mr. Chairman. So I would say that document is a very comprehensive, well-thought-out document that outlines our plan and as to how we are going to safeguard our forests and our biodiversity, how we are going to ensure that we earn, too, not only from the ‘Green Economy’ but also the ‘Blue Economy’. Thank you.

Mr. Norton: Thank you, Hon. Minister. I hear you and I agree in that realm, but I am asking you a specific question. I will put the question differently: Has Guyana rejected the idea of a global commons even though accepting that we are the ‘lung of the earth’, so that in future it is not used against us in terms of control of our national patrimony? That is a simple question.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I think we are now at the stage of repeating for the last few minutes.

12.08 p.m.

Mr. Bharrat: Mr. Chairman, yes. I think in my presentation I answered most or if not all of what the Leader of the Opposition is asking. I want to assure all Guyana that we are committed to ensuring that we safeguard all of Guyana and all our assets that we have. Thank you.

Item 4: 26-262 Ministry of Natural Resources – Natural Resource Management – Other - \$360,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 5: 51-511 Ministry of Home Affairs – Policy Development and Administration – Office Equipment and Furniture – \$50,538,168

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. According to the legend \$50.5 million was taken from the Contingency Fund for the provision of additional resources to support the Guyana Forensic Laboratory (GFL), specifically for the procurement of a deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) analysis machine. I refer to the Crime Chief's remarks published in an online news website dated 16th November. In his remarks the Crime Chief attributed lack of capacity to conduct DNA testing resulting in a backlog of cases. The Minister, on the same date, reported by saying:

“...while a machine was procured, the manufacturer of the machine was acquired by another company and that company later discontinued manufacturing the machine and its components.”

Further, the Minister is quoted as saying:

“So, we are now going again to get the monies get another perhaps more better machine.”

I wish to place on record that we fully support the Guyana Police Force and its law enforcement agencies being fully equipped. That is, both in terms of resources and personnel. However, there must be full transparency and adherence to procedures. In that regard, could the Hon. Minister state the precise date this supposed better machine was procured?

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members. I want to thank the Hon. Member, Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, for her interest in this matter and the question and, also, for *showing her true colours* today. The DNA machine which is being replaced was purchased in 2017. Here, we are talking about full transparency. The machine was purchased and while it did a number of runs, it fell below the requisite standards and capabilities in relation to doing complete analyses relating to DNA or criminological investigations. Further than that... That is to say, the machine could not run analyses for degraded samples. Perhaps, if there was fresh blood or a fresh sample, one will get some result with maybe 75% or 80% accuracy. That was a problem in itself. It could not run degraded, blood or bone samples. It could not provide

analyses results for those types of samples. Usually, that is the largest part of the sample collection that is there.

However, the machine was there. It was already running behind in terms and could not do some samples. Then, the company which produced and made that machine was taken over by another larger company – Thermo Fisher Scientific. Thermo Fisher Scientific stopped the production of that machine which it took over from the other company, but it first started by not sending the reagents to enable analyses to be made. It could not run samples anymore. It discontinued production. It was obviously a machine at the point of obsolescence. In any event, it was not providing the reagents. Efforts were being made to acquire a new, complete, DNA workflow system which could do all types of samples in respect of criminal investigations.

For purposes of transparency in the first instance, I stated the year in which the original machine was purchased. There may not have been investigations as to the full capability of the machine or the life of the machine. In any event, efforts were made and discussions unfolded to get a new machine. A new machine came into the country – and given what the Hon. Member just mentioned and given the fact of the considerations of catching up on the backlog of samples – we went into discussions to acquire the new machine on a replacement basis after a lot of negotiations, at a reduced cost with all the necessary ancillary equipment to provide the complete workload for the machine. In the meantime, in request of urgent backlog cases, critical ones, we have been sending those samples overseas. Yes, we do have a backlog. The new machine is now being accessed, set up and the experts are going to come in to do the setting up and the runs. We expect within five or six months, once it is properly up and running, we will be on top of the situation – in respect of having the ability to do proper sampling, proper testing and providing the right analytical results at more than 95% in relation to all types of DNA samples.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you, again, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Minister, the question was very specific. Could you give us the precise date that this new machine was procured? Additionally, could you give us the type, made and manufacture of this machine? Could you give us the specifications that will justify that this machine that you have now purchased is a better and superior one than the one you claim was purchased in 2017?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I think you have three questions there. Do you want her to repeat?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do not know the precise date. I know it was early in the year. As I said, because of discussions; negotiations; and, of course, albeit upset in the first place and the way in which there was a cessation in the provision of the reagents of the machine which was obtained in 2017, we went through a period of discussion and unhappiness trying to demand that the company sends us the reagents so that even for the type of samples which the 2017 machine could run, that we would have been able to do so. That was not possible. It was earlier in the year. I could layover that information along with the specifications of the new machine to show, indeed, that it is a newer, better and a more complete DNA analysis workflow system. The machine fulfils the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) standard requirements for DNA testing. As I said, we would layover the information for the benefit of the Hon. Member.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

Mr. Norton: I will come after you.

Mr. Benn: Just to say, Sir May, 2022 was when the new machine was acquired.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

Mr. Norton: The Minister, in being critical of the 2017 machine, suggested that they did not know the capacity and life. Could the Minister tell us what is the capacity and lifespan of this new machine?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Benn: The new machine is one done by Thermo Fisher Scientific. It was acquired in or put into operation, worked on in September. The issues in relation to the lifespan and all of those things, I would be happy to lay those over to the Parliament Office. The new machine can produce a larger number of samples. The larger number of runs are as a result of acquiring this new machine. We expect that there would be a higher success rate for bones and environmentally challenged samples which often show no DNA profile with the older, what was called the Rapid Hit 200 DNA system.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Minister virtually said to us that this new machine has more capacity. Could he tell us the capacity of the old machine; what is the capacity of the new machine and at what rate is it likely to get rid of the backlog?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Benn: The older machine would do 28 samples per run and the new machine will do 200 samples per analytical run.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

Mr. Norton: Hon. Minister, you said, in a short time it will get rid of it. When you gave me that figure you had to give me the number of the backlog so that we can calculate how quick we will get rid of this backlog.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Benn: We will do that calculation for you and provide it to the House.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I want to ask the Hon. Minister, clearly you will have to have the trained people to do the job. Could the Hon. Minister say to me, if they have these people, how many of them and how many are required? If they do not have them, how many of them do they plan on training and by when? That will also help us to understand getting rid of the backlog.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We have five analysts who will be trained and certified in the operation of the new machine. I think after the training and certification, they would have the ability to do the runs. I have been saying to the people at the laboratory that they would have to work extra time and train some people so that we could catch up on the backlog. I will not venture an opinion now as to how soon by date... [**Mr. Norton:** *[Inaudible]*] I said next year, hopefully, by mid next year.

12.23 p.m.

In terms of actual numbers and specification in terms of getting on top of the backlog, we will have to look at it because DNA samples are still coming in. In fact, we have to do profiles to determine whether there could be other means and if we could avoid, in some cases, having to go into doing DNA analysis.

Mr. Norton: Hon. Minister, in speaking you said, 'will be trained'. Am I to understand that these persons have not been trained? If per chance, they have not been trained and you know you were purchasing this machinery, why were they not trained? What is the projection in terms of training them? Could you tell us how many people do you need to train to be able to get rid of the backlog you are talking about?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman and Hon. Members, we have five persons already trained as DNA analytical persons. There is a new machine which is being set up now. For the new machine, which is in our complete work prone system, these five will be trained and certified in respect of the machine before they could fully go into the use of machine. That is not expected to take long but, in addition, we will train more persons in the use of the new machines.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Minister, you keep saying, 'we will train new people'. I am asking a specific question, how many people do you need to deal with the backlog? To just say that we will train people will not give us an idea if you will get rid of it, so could you tell us based on projections, how many people you need and how many people you will train?

Mr. Benn: Really, as many as needed. As I said, there are five persons who are DNA Analytical Specialist. They have to be certified for a new machine. In respect of them getting adapted and depending on their functionalities and rates of turning out samples at 200 per run, we envisage in any evident that we will train more people, but I will not venture as to say, exactly, what the matter will be in respect to the number of persons and the specific dates in respect of training and the results for the machine.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I would believe that if we are planning effectively and we know that we have backlog, what we will do is assess that backlog. We know the capacity of the machine, I assume so, therefore, we should have a clear idea as to how many people we need. Therefore, the Minister should be able to tell this House how many people he needs. The other question I want to ask is that they must have had technical advice. Who give the technical advice? In terms of the

technical advice, what is it that was suggested that these machines can do to allow the Government to achieve their objectives?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I think you got a statement and two questions.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, this is a scientific work. This is work, in respect of the result, that much hinges upon in relation to providing the question of justice and the finding of culpabilities in respect of this issue. There are persons who are trained DNA analyst. I have already said that. There is a new machine, which should at runs do 200 verses 28 on the former machine. We, of course, based on the training with the expertise who will come for the certification and the point at which they would be fully up to the levels to bring the number up, so that we could properly identify when we will be at the top of the backlog which I said, I expect will be by mid next year in respect to samples. In the meantime, DNA samples are coming in and we have to assess the types of samples and whether, for those samples which are coming in because it appears that, in some instances, people think that for every issue that they have, they would need a DNA analysis which is not necessarily the case. It appears to be a sexy thing; everybody wants to get a DNA analysis.

In addition, we have put out to the public that we will do DNA samples for private matters, for members of the public beyond criminological matters. Persons who are there now as analyst will be trained by the expertise who will come in for certification and setting up of the machine. We will train the necessary additional persons to bring the backlog under control.

Mr. Norton: Could the Hon. Minister confirm to this House that once this machine is put in place, you will solve the equipment and technical problems of the institution and Guyanese can now expect this institution to do its work?

Mr. Benn: This is in relation to DNA and I think the answer is obvious.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, could I ask him to explain the obvious because I am not getting what is obvious? It is a simple and straightforward question. We would like to put in the records here. Regularly, people come; we hear about this place; we passed it; and it is not delivering. I am simply asking you, Minister, if with this equipment, the institution solved its equipment and technical

problems so in future Guyanese can expect all that should be done by that institution to be done and done expeditiously?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I am hearing this from a leader of an opposition which brought the first machine misguidedly and improperly in the first place. Here, we have come to the National Assemble to ask for more moneys after a lot of discussions, efforts and I think heavy criticism internal, in relation to bringing this matter to this House for approval. When I say that we spent a lot of time on this and that we are trying to make up the defaults and the deficits that we inherited from the A Partnership For National United/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) in Government, they would want to get upset. [**Mr. Norton:** No. We are not upset.] You all will want to get upset. We will fix the things you could not fix and we will deliver to the Guyanese people the responses and the information so that they could feel safe and secure in this country. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, if the Minister was sure he fixed it, he would have been able to make a commitment to this House. That is simply what I am asking him; are you prepared to make a commitment to this House that you have solved the equipment and technical problems of this institution? It is a simple question. [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*] You can say what you want but tell us.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I have allowed the question, now, three times.

Mr. Norton: He did not answer it none of the times.

Mr. Benn: I answered this question already in respect of the DNA equipment.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, did you have a follow up question before the intervention of the Leader of the Opposition?

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you very much, Sir. Hon. Minister, I know the Leader of the Opposition asked you specific questions as it relates to the operation of this machine. My question

to you is, could you tell us if we have the local capacity to install this machine and are there likely to be additional cost for the installation? Could you also give us the details of the service maintenance, agreement, warranty, *et cetera*?

Mr. Benn: I want to thank the Hon. Member for her question. Yes, persons will be train in basic maintenance of the machine. There will also be a virtual regular interface in relation to the functioning and the maintenance of the machine. There are also three years warranty given in respect to this new machine.

Item 5: 51-511 Ministry of Home Affairs – Policy Development and Administration – Office Equipment and Furniture – \$50,538,168 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Question

“That the Committee of Supply approves of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No.2 of 2022 – Schedule of Supplementary Provision on the Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$2,904,841,406 for the period ending 15th August, 2022 to 29th November, 2022.”

Put and agreed to.

Assembly resumed.

Dr. Singh: Thank you, very much, Sir. Mr. Speaker, I wish to report that the Committee of Supply (COS) has approved of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 2 of 2022 and I now move that the Assembly doth agree with the Committee in the said Resolution.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members this completes the consideration of Financial Paper No. 2 of 2022 and this is a good time to take one hour suspension for lunch.

Sitting suspended at 12.35 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.56 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: The Assembly will now resolve itself into Committee of Supply to consider Financial Paper No. 3 of 2022.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: Before we put these items, I want to draw Members attention to Standing Order 20(p) and for the benefit of everyone Standing Order 20(d) deals with Contents of Questions. Standing Order 20(p) states:

“a Question shall not be asked seeking information set forth in accessible or ordinary works of reference;”

And it continues. We have had some exchanges this morning from both sides and if we were mindful of that Standing Order, I am sure we would have made even better use of the time considering these Estimates. Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, proceed.

1.59 p.m.

Motion to approve Supplementary Financial Paper No. 3/2022

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves of the proposal set out in Financial Paper No. 3/2022 – Schedule of Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling forty-four billion, four hundred and forty-three million, one hundred and sixty-four thousand, and one hundred and fifty-four dollars (\$44,443,164,154) – Advances made from the Contingencies Fund for the period ending 2022-12-31.”

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

Motion proposed.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. We will now move to Financial Paper No. 3/2022. I propose the question for item 1.

Current Expenditure

Item 1: 01-014 Office of the President – Public Policy and Planning – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – \$11,755,666

Mr. Patterson: Somebody has their mic on.

Ms. Lawrence: I had my microphone on, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: I am just wondering about that Hon. Member in the bright pink tie. I love the tie. I do not need for people to tell me how to do my job. Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence, if we could get back here on time and start and when I propose the question, people could put on their lights, I think I have a very good view of the Assembly. Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence, you have the Floor.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, I would just like to let you know I had my light on before you put the question. However, my question to the Minister is if she could describe the nature of the additional work being undertaken by Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest)?

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Yes, thank you Hon. Member of Parliament. The funds are \$11,755,666. This is for the purpose of GO-Invest participation in a number of exhibitions which were unplanned. This is not works, this is actually participation in a series of exhibitions which it did not plan at the time in 2021 when the budget was being prepared. There are five exhibitions Madame: one is the International Energy Conference and Expo, the Agri-Investment Forum and Expo, the Agrofest which was in Barbados, the International Building Expo and the Saudi Investment Engagement. Those are the five exhibitions that it participated in which were unplanned at the time of preparing the 2021 budget. This is to allow agency to deal with the short fall in funds before the end of the year.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Minister indicate whether GO-Invest would do a review of these investments and participation in the various exhibitions so that we could be able to analyse what we have gotten from them? They have already been passed. What is it that we were able to benefit from? Was GO-Invest able to wait to see if the next time it should participate in a larger way or whether it should not participate at all? Is there, as I said, a review? Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: I would believe there would be a review and that a number of them have to do with exports, for example, AgroFest Barbados which the Hon. Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha referred to - the number of exports that we are sending out of Guyana of agri-products. Of course, the Saudi Investment engagement which has a number of on-going arrangements between Guyana and Saudi

Arabia. The international energy expo, obviously, in terms of investment... I believe that all of the exhibitions which were added have brought some benefit to our country and obviously, as we expand and improve, this will enhance our investment and opportunities for markets.

Mr. Norton: Minister, normally when there are these investment programmes, they are out there before the year starts. Could the Minister say if she has sought to get the list of these investment activities, and if we have identified those we intend to go with so that we could avoid this in future?

Ms. Teixeira: From what I see from the projections in 2021 in its budgetary releases that it had planned for a number of exhibitions and expos, but these were additional to what it originally planned, and part may have been because of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) a number of exhibitions may or may not have been certain they were coming off. I am sure as the fact that Guyana is going more and more internationally, that this would improve our capacity to plan as well as to project funding to allow us to participate in these in a larger way than originally or maybe in the past.

Mr. Norton: Minister, could you tell us what mechanisms the Government use to ascertain the decision to participate impacts and tell us how it impacts?

Ms. Teixeira: Sorry, I would not necessarily have that information with me, but the annual report of GO-invest would indicate, I believe, what were the benefits for the participation in these exhibitions.

First of all, just in terms of improving the image of Guyana and presenting what Guyana has to offer, as well as integrating networks and linkages with other agencies in the countries which are hosting, as well as those that were held here in Guyana where there were a number of countries and investors present. I think this is part of almost like the soft approach in terms of image building and opening up our exports and markets to the world. I believe that over the next year or so, there will be probably even more exhibitions and expos that we will be wanting to attend. If you look at the International Building Expo that was held, the totalling of this investment of these five exhibitions was \$11.7 million, that is not a larger amount of money, but in terms of the international building expo where you had quite a number of investors come in, that this would allow GO-Invest to make contact and to be able to work with them in terms of interest in our national interest.

I believe these are all opportunities for networking, guiding potential investors of where to go, how the country works and also to just show our products in a very positive way to the world, so that we are not only seen as an oil producing country, but in base of our food security and our transformative agricultural programme that we have now that we have launched both locally, regionally, and internationally.

Mr. Norton: Minister, you already had the building expo. It does follow to me that if you are coming for more funds, you would have looked at those. Having looked at those, you would have decided how it impacts, where it impacts and what needs to be done. I am seeking to get from you, what has been the impact of those things on the country so that going forward, you know which one to select and which one not to select.

Ms. Teixeira: I mean I cannot answer this. That is an academic issue. The agency will have to determine which ones are in the best interest and those that it has the capacity to present. There are logistical challenges to exhibitions reaching different parts of the world and, of course, the cost involved. I believe that is for the GO-Invest's board and for GO-Invest, in terms of its programmes in the future, once they coincide and support the national transformative agenda that we have to promote our country.

Item 1: 01-014 Office of the President – Public Policy and Planning – Subsidies and Contribution to Local Organisations – \$11,755,666 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: I am just checking to see if the Prime Minister is here.

Minister within the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]: Mr. Chairman, I will be answering.

Mr. Chairman: Minister Indar will answer. Minister, you need your team with you, because you could use the...

Mr. Indar: If I need the technical people, Mr. Chairman, I will go there. Thank you.

Item 2: 02-023 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Subsidies and Contribution to Local Organisations – \$1,393,317,000

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Sir. To the Member responding, first question, could he disaggregate the lump sums here totalling to \$1.3 billion? Could he disaggregate them not... I see what the subtotals are per regional entity, please.

Mr. Indar: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to thank the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, for his question. Under this line item 6321 the total is 1,393,317,000. The breakdown of that is as follows: Linden electricity company – \$927,527,000, the Lethem power company – \$110,000, the Mabaruma power company – \$ 106 million, Kwakwani utilities – \$103 million, Port Kaituma power and light company – \$76.8 million, Mahdia power and light company – \$49 million, Matthew’s Ridge power and light company – \$20 million.

Mr. Chairman, a point to note and for the Assembly to digest is that all of these moneys that are requested under the office of the Prime Minister is because of the significant rise in fuel prices over the last year. These power companies operate on subsidies, as you know, and the original subsidy that was planned under the voted provisions at the beginning of the year did not foresee that sort of market fluctuation. Everybody who lives in reality know that these power companies buy fuel and we have seen a 65% increase in the cost for fuel. It is only related to the cost of fuel and not the increase in usage of the fuel. The same amount was used but the cost of procuring it went up by 65% at minimum. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

2.14 p.m.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, very much, Minister, and thank you for re-reading what is in the legend. I was hoping for you to... In the end, you did explain to me what the money is for, but an hour ago, the Prime Minister came here for a contingency allowance of \$1.7 billion for Linden, and he said immediately he paid it. Why is it that you are now coming for another \$1 billion for this year?

Secondly, Sir, Mahdia, Lethem, and Mabaruma have been experiencing power outages lasting more than three days. This is within the last two weeks. Is the Minister saying nothing in this supplementary is going towards alleviating the power outages in these areas? This is just *[inaudible]* for the people in those townships will ensure a dark Christmas because you do not have the foresight to help them, Sir?

Mr. Indar: Mr. Chairman, please allow me to answer the Hon. Member's question and his comments. Linden Electricity Company Incorporated (LECI) expenditure for this year is expected to come in at 5.1\$ billion. That is, the expenditure of \$1 billion, the \$927 million, not 1 billion Hon. Member Mr. Patterson – the \$927 million. Let us get the numbers correct. That amount is for November and December, just to bridge those two months, or else we would have blackout in Linden, which we do not want. That is what the \$927 million is for.

I would like to answer the issue of Lethem, Mahdia, and Mabaruma. Mr. Chairman, when we came into Office, they had a set of old ladies, for want of a better word with the feeble foot, broke up knee sort of generating system...

Mr. Chairman: Might be a wrong analogy. old....

Mr. Indar: Wrong term. A feeble broken up system of generating capacity that we achieved or collected or obtained from the previous Government under the watch of the Hon. Member Mr. Patterson. Let me explain about Lethem. I will go them one by one. In Lethem, we had a lot of engines there that were not working; we had to buy new engines. One of those engines had some issues that we rectified, that had some sporadic outages in Lethem that we corrected, and one of the engines, a Doosan engine that gave us problems, we fixed it. In addition to that, we put a new one-megawatt solar fan to supplement the generation in Lethem, so there is no expected blackout.

The second one is Mabaruma. I would like this National Assembly to recall that when Minister Edghill presented the first budget in this House, he said that for six weeks, Mabaruma was out of power for a single fan belt for the engine. These days we have enough power in the town of Mabaruma to supply. From time to time, Mr. Chairman, there are engines that go down, and we have to fix them. There are three engines in Mabaruma, and one went down; we had to fix it. When we fixed it, the alternator went bad, we had to go and get that. It is not like the alternator is available in a shop down the street. You have to bring it downtown, fix it and then take it back. That is what happened up in Mabaruma, but when problems happen, we fix them immediately.

In Mahdia, similar situations, you have engines running; they do go down, and you have to fix them because it is a riverine community. Some of them have to get a machine in back. They need particular kinds of skills to fix them. You have to bring them out here, fix them, and then send them back in. Mr. Chairman, there is also the issue, sometimes, of the parts being so heavy that

you cannot bring them by aircraft. You have to bring them down on a boat. I do not know if the Hon. Member ever had to do those things, but that is what happened, but we managed them, and I know that he asked the question for the rest of the country to hear, not just this National Assembly. I want the rest of the country to hear what you gave this Government when we came in, and we fixed all of them. Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you for that grand explanation, but I could say without fear of successful contradiction that the same, I did not want to use the word the same one-legged, skinny-legged equipment we had, never gave these problems until you took over and I could say, Sir, in Mahdia 24 hours' lights came under the previous administration. Sir, now they have no light. Sir, could I ask the Hon. Gentleman answering for the Prime Minister, is there any moneys budgeted here to improve... Sir, because all you are telling me about is what happened when you took over when you mismanaged it. Is there any money in this \$1.3 billion to improve the electricity service for these five communities?

Mr. Indar: Mr. Chairman, I answered this question earlier that the money here is to deal with the increase in fuel price but to deal with the issue of the question from the Hon. Member Mr. Patterson about improved supply and reliability of supply. An entire programme under the Hinterland Electrification Company Inc. (HECI) deals with these satellite power companies. They have a maintenance plan. They go, they check them, and they inspect them. So, there is a maintenance plan for the delivery of power to the hinterland communities, so there are thousands of customers that these satellite power stations provide power to. There is a maintenance plan. There are surveillance checks. Multiple layers of engineers go and check them but again, from time to time, they do go down. Just like a human being, you do get sick, although you are running around the place all day, sometimes, you do fall sick, and you are a human being, and you know how your hand feels, so imagine a machine or a car. The Hon. Member, you are gloating about your performance. I am sorry.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Sinclair, proceed.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Hon. Leader. I want to make a point first before I ask this question...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I am sure you are around long enough to be able to ask the question while at the same time being effective.

Mr. Sinclair: I am asking Mr. Chairman if there is any provision in that \$49 million for repairs to the power company's engine that was shut down three days when I was there. I sat on that board that he spoke about, and those engines worked well up to the time when I left for information purposes.

Mr. Indar: Mr. Chairman, maybe I did not hear but he did not say which area you are talking about, had shut down?

Mr. Sinclair: Of course, Sir, Mahdia Power and Light.

Mr. Indar: Mr. Chairman, I said that this money, again, for the fourth time, is for fuel. I also said to the Hon. Member Mr. Patterson that there is a running maintenance plan for all the sets they have in the hinterland. When they go down, a team goes out, they do the checks, and they fix them, put them back into power.

Mr. Chairman: Is this allocation here for fuel?

Mr. Indar: For the cost of fuel.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, very much, Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Sinclair, I saw your lights, a follow-up?

Mr. Sinclair: There was a shutdown for three days last week and I thought that part of this allocation would have gone to the purchasing of an alternator that was presumed bad.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, he answered four times that the allocation being sought now is for fuel. So, you know, this will be the fifth time, you will get the same answer.

Mr. Indar: Mr. Chairman, as the gentleman raised the issue with the alternator, we on this side, we do not come to the National Assembly for another Parliamentarian to tell us that you had a shutdown in Mahdia for an alternator. We knew and we are in the process of getting that alternator. We are already dealing with the problem. We do not sleep. I just want to give you that assurance, Sir, but this heading does not deal with that alternator. It is dealt with already.

Item 2: 02-023 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – \$1,393,317,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 2: 02-023 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Power Utility Upgrade Programme – \$85,800,000

Mr. Chairman: The Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, please, proceed.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman could the Hon. Minister indicate to this House now that the project is about to be closed, what has been the beneficial impact, if any, since we are having all these blackouts.

Mr. Indar: Mr. Chairman, every time we start the National Assembly, the Clerk would go and do a prayer, and in part of that prayer, it says truth must come from the depths of somewhere, so I want to talk of some truth in this National Assembly. When we took Office, we had a company running on bearings and \$13+ billion owed by Government agency, from the Office of the President at that and straight down to the agencies, all of them owed the Guyana Power and Light (GPL).

The company did not have money to run its own affairs. The generation capacity at that time was below 100 megawatts. That is the engines that were working. The rest of them were stringing along. I want to answer the blackout question that the Hon. Volda Lawrence, who stands tall and pedestal to talk in this House about blackout. Right now, the peak demand for GPL that we recorded is 152.5 megawatts, that was the peak demand. Our current operating engines are delivering 170 megawatts, so we have spinning reserves. When we took Government, there is no spinning reserves, anytime a line trip, a truck run into one of the high-tension wires, you have problems with blackout. That is the problem in this country. None of the substations were repaired, all of the switches, the switchgears, the cabinets, all of them in disrepair. Let me tell them about truth in blackout. Now, let us talk about this project and the \$85 million that we are asking for here. This project has come to a close, Mr. Chairman. What has happened when the contractors buy the conductors and the line hardware and so on, and they have excess that the project did not use, GPL would normally buy them because we need the conductors and the line hardware. This is to deal with that. At the beginning of the year, the Power Utility Upgrade Programme (PUUP) did not have this in the budget, and they are asking for it now, and this will be sold to GPL because the contractor had excess, conductors we used, a line hardware that we used for maintenance.

Another thing that the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) under the Hon. Mr. Patterson reduced to next to nothing in terms of maintenance of the lines.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, proceed.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, the Hon. Minister, misunderstood what he read, Sir. I withdraw, misled and I say to misunderstood what he read but Sir, the PUUP programme was intended to reduce... [**Mr. Ramson:** (*Inaudible*)] I am getting there youngster ... technical and economic line losses.

2.29 p.m.

In 2021, the Hon. Prime Minister – I was hoping he was here because he could substantiate it – acknowledged in this National Assembly that as of 2020, the reduction was 5% and will save the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated \$450 million per annum. Sir, could you recall that? That is at the end of 2020. He is coming here. Could I ask, Sir, what are the current technical and commercial line losses now under this, as a result of this programme, as it is now wrapping up?

Mr. Indar: I thank the Hon. Member for the question. Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member comes across in this Committee as if he was the architect of reduction in line and technical losses in this country. That is not so. Let me say to directly answer his question that a number of communities under this programme had heavy line and commercial losses. The programme has come to an end. The last recording that was given to me by the technical people at the Power Utility Upgrade Programme was 23.9%. That is the total of commercial and technical losses under the scope of this programme.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much, Sir. Did the Hon. Minister say that absolutely no progress was made from 2020 to 2022? At the beginning of this programme, our line losses were 27%. At the end of 2022, according to the Hon. Prime Minister, it was 5% which carried it down to 22%. Is the Hon. Minister saying that since he had stewardship, we have regressed, and we have gotten worse by 1.23%?

Mr. Indar: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member Mr. Patterson has a way of plotting numbers out of thin air; I am not in that business. So, I will say to you what was given to me by the technical people – 23.9% in total losses. I do not understand where he talked about regression and all of that.

I would not even go down that road. I do not think that even deserves an answer, Mr. Chairman, with all due respect.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, just for the records and so that the Hon. Member does not think that I pluck numbers out of the air. It is in the project document signed by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the European Union (EU) and the Government of Guyana. It is 27...

[**An Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*] I do not have to bring it to you. I heard earlier that he said they do not want to do work for us. The documents are there. So, could I ask the Hon. Member to disaggregate the figures of 23%, which is made up of commercial and technical line losses? Could he disaggregate it for this Committee, please?

Mr. Indar: For that information, I have the total commercial and technical losses. I do not have the disaggregation at this point. I will give that to Mr. Patterson. I will lay that over.

Item 2: 02-023 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Power Utility Upgrade Programme – \$85,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 3: 03-031 Ministry of Finance – Policy and Administration – Electricity Charges – \$6,600,000,000

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could the Hon. Minister provide the following answers given that once again, there is a request for more money to pay GPL for arrears. A few months ago, the request was for \$4 billion dollars in addition to the voted provision of \$6.062 billion. Now the request is for \$6.6 billion. My question to the Minister is – has GPL provided you with its total arrears? If yes, how much is it? I would like to know whether you are thinking of closing those arrears and how soon?

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Sir. Let me thank the Hon. Member for posing that question. It would be recalled that I said in this House on a previous occasion that when we assumed Office, we inherited a situation where GPL had total receivables in excess of \$12 billion. Said differently, a variety of public sector agencies – this is not the private sector, a variety of public sector agencies – owed GPL and had outstanding debts to GPL in excess of \$12 billion. I indicated at that time that we would set about endeavouring to reduce that inherited stock of arrears owed to GPL and

also progressively, over time, try to stay current. We have been doing so – that is to say – we have continued to endeavour to do so, and we have made a lot of progress.

There are a number of entities whose financial situation continues. I am sure the Hon. Member knows there are a number of entities whose financial situation continues to make it very difficult for them to make the cost of their own electricity bill. Prominently among these, of course, is the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI), which has historically struggled to cover the cost of its electricity. In fact, the GWI at the time that we came into the Office accounted – I believe – for \$9 billion out of \$12 billion. First of all, we continue to try to stay current and also to write down the stock of arrears. We do so at a time when GPL is carrying the cost of imported fuel that was dramatically more expensive than even 12 months ago.

We have taken a position as a Government that we will not pass on to the consumers the increased fuel costs that are being borne by GPL. We have said that publicly, notwithstanding that GPL is buying and has been buying fuel sometimes at more than 50% higher prices this year than last year, depending on the fuel type. As you know, they use a variety of fuel types. We have said, notwithstanding that the costs of its fuel have gone up by a very dramatic percentage, we will absorb the cost of that increased fuel in the bill, and we will not increase electricity tariffs. That also places significant cash flow pressure and significant liquidity pressure on GPL.

In answer to the Hon. Member's question, we do monitor constantly the outstanding stock of arrears. In fact, I should say that there are also entities outside the confines of the central Government. There are also entities such as – I would say – other public sectors if you like. There are the local authorities as well, the city and town councils, and the municipalities that also have significant indebtedness to GPL. I do not have those numbers at my current disposal, but they are available. Thank you, very much.

Mr. Patterson: This is a related question on the same line item. I would like to know, specifically from the Minister responding, how much of these arrears for GPL will be going towards transportation. It is widely known that the Garden of Eden plant is not operating, and they are transporting fuel by road. It is stated that it costs about \$30 million to \$40 million in transportation costs alone. So, could the Hon. Minister say to me, how much of these arrears is there to cover for

that inefficiency of the GPL's Garden of Eden Plant, now that the fuel tanks are not operational to date?

Mr. Indar: I thank the Hon. Member for the question. I would like to add to what Dr. Singh said regarding the amount that the GPL is asking for through the Ministry of Finance. In 2021, the fuel bill at GPL was \$23 million. In 2022, that figure will be \$37 billion. That is on the heels of a 0% increase in the electricity bill going to residences and businesses. We have not increased rates. So, where will that extra \$14.3 billion be paid from? That is what we are asking for. It is to offset the increase in fuel prices. The relationship between fuel price to total operating expense in 2020 – one was 60%. Out of the total expenses in GPL, fuel price is the lion's share of it. This year, that relationship went up to 71%. It is an extra 11% increase in the relationship. That tells you the impact that the fuel prices are having on the operations of GPL.

Now, Mr. Patterson tried to tie that into the Garden of Eden Plant. The Garden of Eden Plant started under his stewardship when he was the Minister; they contracted to do this plant. For the tanks that he is talking about, when the contractor did them, they had some cracks. When the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) testing was done, we could not put fuel in those tanks because they had cracks in them. The EPC contractor who was supposed to build the plant is standing the cost for the transportation and the storage because GPL is not taking that cost. So, it is not here, Mr. Patterson. Mr. Chairman, this is to assist GPL with all its debts. In addition to that layer of debt that was outstanding to GPL from all the Government agencies, we now have an extra broadside of fuel happening in this sector. It is no love story that we are dealing with here, Hon. Members Ms. Lawrence and Mr. Patterson. It is the issue that came forward, and now you have fuel adding to it. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you. This is a follow-up. I do thank the Hon. Minister for being quite honest about the Garden of Eden plant, which he took over and which the Hon. Prime Minister touted will end all blackouts. It has not; it is not functioning correctly. Sir, as you mentioned that the fuel tanks are not working, can you enlighten this Committee on when it can expect a fully functioning Garden of Eden Plant as mentioned?

Mr. Indar: So, I do not know if the Hon. Member Mr. Patterson has been living under a rock, but that plant has been producing 46.5 megawatts since we made the announcement. The fuel supplied

into the plant is not through the tanks that were originally set up by a sub-contractor of the EPC contractor that we have. That is the fuel tank element. What we have done is to make sure that the fuel is fed through a different mechanism. If those plants were not operational and we did not push to get them operational, then you would have seen blackouts. The demands for this country, because of the industrial boom that is happening, are rising daily, and we have to cater for that demand. Thank you, Mr. Chairman

2.44 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, proceed.

Mr. Patterson: Once again, thank you for that response and thank you for acknowledging that if we did not have those plants, which is a foresight of the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government, we would have been facing.... What is the word you used? '[*inaudible*]'. The question to the Hon. Minister, what other issue or what plans do Guyana Power and Light (GPL) have to [*inaudible*] the daily blackouts that we are suffering from? Since obviously....

Mr. Indar: Mr. Chairman, if I may.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I will allow you to answer. I was about to stop him because this question that he had to ask relates to this fuel increase that you are talking about. Now, we are going into plant maintenance and who built what and who did not maintain. Please, go ahead.

Mr. Indar: Mr. Chairman, I would engage in a debate with Mr. Patterson and the entire gang under a mango tree if they want. It does not bother me. I will answer them. The issue about blackouts that he is talking about, the Hon. Member and the team believes that Guyanese have goldfish memory that from the time we go up and come down, we forget what has happened, but we do not. We remember every detail. They had this sector, mismanaged it, and now that we took it over.... In an economy that is growing double digits every year on the year, demand in the new meters application has been skyrocketing, new warehousing, the whole country is asking for power. All the industrial customers, like the Banks DIH Limited, Sterling Products Limited, and Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL), who use to run on self-generation, are now back on the grid. All of those require generation capacity. We put it in.

I want to answer the question about the 46.5 megawatts plant that he is gloating about. You did not build it. What you did was take money from a place that you should not have and at the time that you should not have. That is why the Hon. Minister of Finance, my esteemed Colleague Dr. Singh, and the Minister of Public Works made that argument when we took Office in of 2020 and 2021 about how you took the money. Do you see what we are doing here? We are doing the right thing. We are coming to the House. We are defending the spending, and then we are going to spend not in the way that you did it. Thank you.

Item 3: 03-031 Ministry of Finance - Policy and Administration - Electricity Charges – \$6,600,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 3: 03-031 Ministry of Finance - Policy and Administration – Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF) - \$145,325,602

Item 3: 03-031 Ministry of Finance- Policy and Administration - Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF) - \$145,325,602 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 4: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations - \$3,000,000,000

Mr. Ramjattan: Additional resources for operational expenses is what is stated here for Guyana Sugar Corporation Inc. (GuySuCo) in relation to \$1 billion that is now being.... Is that \$1 billion going towards wages and salaries?

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For the Hon. Member, I have a disaggregation of the amount. As he rightly mentioned, \$1 billion has been allocated to GuySuCo for operating expenses, and those are expenses relating to the operation of these estates. In terms of factories, the rehabilitation of critical areas in the factory, we have the plantation, and we had to put new lands into cultivation. As a matter of fact, under the APNU/AFC, 23,000 hectares of land were abandoned by them. With the closure of Wales, Rosehall, Enmore, and Skeldon estates, we were able to put back approximately 2,000 hectares already under cultivation at the Rosehall Estate, and

we will continue to move a pace with the work that we have going on with, hopefully, by the second crop of the year, 2023 Rosehall can come into operation. We have already employed about 1,500 workers who were laid off or put on the breadline by the APNU/AFC.

These moneys are the critical funds to rehab GuySuCo, and we are seeing now, because of the flood that we had encountered in the year of 2021, a lot of the prime estates like the Albion and many other cultivation areas there were damaged. Now, we are retooling back and trying to get enough land under cultivation so that we can have enough cane and increase productions.

Mr. Ramjattan: I would still like an answer in relation to which estates will be getting what in this disaggregation that you are talking about? How many hundred million and for what purposes? You do not just give GuySuCo \$1 billion like that. Is it for wages and salaries? Is it for buying new equipment? I would like that disaggregation. Do you not want to state it?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I think my colleague Dr. Ashni Singh answered it correctly this morning. It seems like the members over there have problems with their comprehension. I just said that these money are budgeted for operating cost in terms of retooling. I will list for example, \$363 million is being allocated to Albion Estate, \$76 million is being allocated to Blairmont Estate and \$561 million to Rosehall Estate, and I have the disaggregation, for example, seven-disc plough 30 inches each will be procured for Rosehall Estate, five tilling harrows for Rosehall Estate. I can list all and lay it over to you.

Mr. Ramjattan: I do not understand. Well, it would appear that the Minister did not comprehend English Language that is what I was asking for and he give it now. Thank you, very much.

Mr. Mustapha: No. Mr. Chairman, I mentioned earlier probably the Hon. Member.... He is talking about wages and salary and I specifically said not wages and salary... [**Mr. Ramjattan:** Now you are excluding wages and salary.] I said....

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, please.

Mr. Ramjattan: In relation to the moneys that Albion Estate would be getting, do you see yourself as from today's date to the 31st December, 2022 spending these moneys out for whatever the purpose you disaggregated there for?

Mr. Mustapha: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ramjattan: Would the spendings involve the procuring of any equipment like you have mentioned? It is procuring equipment, this disc whatever, and ploughs and all of that, would these things be put out for procurement?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I think I see its stated here 'current'.

Mr. Ramjattan: Well, whatever it is. He is indicating that it is for certain equipment, that is what I understand him to be saying.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister of Agriculture, I am a bit confuse, I see 'current' here.

Mr. Mustapha: Yes. I said that these funds that have been allocated will fix all these equipment that are laying at the estate presently and we will fix them to get them in action, so that we can start back and retool the estate. That is what I am saying.

Mr. Ramjattan: For the fixing of them, some contractor or mechanic would have to do that.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, we started the cross talking just now and the two of you had a shouting match and you have been here long enough...

Mr. Ramjattan: Yes. I have been here longer enough, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: so please address the question to me and let me put it in.

Mr. Ramjattan: Would there be procurement services for the rehabilitation of these and would the rehabilitation of these be contracted out?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, each estate is equipped with field workshop. Albion Estate is equipped with a central workshop, other estates are equipped with mechanical tillage department where they service these equipment. The estate, GuySuCo, itself has the capacity to fix these equipment.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, please proceed.

Mr. Ramjattan: No. It is *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, proceed.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you Mr. Chairman. With regards to the operational expense Hon. Minister, could you indicate to this House what was GuySuCo's budgeted operation expense for the year of 2022, for all the said estates combined?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, to date \$12 billion have been budgeted for the operating estate for the entire corporation.

Mr. Figueira: Could the Hon. Minister inform this House how much GuySuCo earned from the normal business of selling sugar and molasses in November 2022?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I am not going to put that question to you. We are talking about a specific sum here and the purposes.

Mr. Figueira: How much of GuySuCo earnings from its core activities was spent on operation expenses?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I do not have that figure with me I will lay that figure over later.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, please proceed.

Mr. Ramjattan: I would like if the Minister, through you Mr. Chairman, could give a disaggregation of the \$2 billion for the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) in this subsidy?

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Region Two – \$46,253,000, Region Three – \$272,000,000, Region Four – \$588,000,000, Region Five – \$97,000,000, Region Six – \$228,000,000, Region Nine – \$9,000,000 and Region 10 – \$70,000,000. Then you have the mechanical works to NDIA equipment pumps, which is \$426,000,000, and fuel, \$261,000,000. The disaggregation in the regions we can also supply regionally.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, very much, Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Volda Lawrence, please proceed.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, some clarification did the Minister said the total expenses for all of the estates, in his response to the Hon. Member Figueira is \$12 billion?

Mr. Mustapha: If I could answer the Hon. Member, Mr. Chairman, up to October 2022 it is \$12 billion.

Ms. Lawrence: A follow up, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, you came to this House for a previous supplemental of \$3.541 billion. Then you had another one for \$3 billion, and now you are here asking for \$1 billion. You said it is for the overheads. So, what is happening at GuySuCo?

2.59 p.m.

You budgeted \$12 billion, your total expenditure was \$12 billion, but then you came to the House and you got another \$6 billion. You are here for another billion dollars. What are we doing with all this extra money if you had money to cover these expenses?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, if I could explain, for the operating estate as I said, we are rehabilitating those equipment and for the shuttered estates, we are trying to get those estates back on track. As I said, there are a lot of money being expended at the Rose Hall Estate. We have budgeted for the entire year. To date we have spent \$12 billion but then we have another set of equipment that we have to set up to ensure that we continue with the tillage. Let me be very frank. There were a number of equipment that was set aside and left in the field that we have to rehabilitate – critical pieces of equipment. We have to do a lot of work on the gantry, and we have to do a lot of work on the punt dumper. Those are things that are critical for improved production in the sugar industry, and that is what we are doing to ensure that we get these things done.

Ms. Lawrence: A follow-up on what the Minister just explained. Are you saying that, in your planning for 2022, what you are asking us for, the money to do all these things that was in the field *et cetera*, it was not in your plan? If it was not in your plan, what type of budgeting are you doing?

Mr. Mustapha: You see probably, Mr. Chairman, through your office, I could invite the Member of the Opposition to take a tour of the Estate. The Estate equipment – as you go in, you will find that different things are deteriorating overtime. They left the Rose Hall Estate, locked it up and the Rose Hall Estate has deteriorated badly. The point that I am trying to make is, as you go into these estates and you go in more to these factories and look at the equipment, you would find more equipment and parts that have to be rehabilitated. That is why there was unforeseen budgeting

when we did the first budget. That is why you have to get these supplementary funding to spend on these estates.

Item 4: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations - \$3,000,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 5: 23-232 Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce – Business Development, Support and Promotion – National Quality Infrastructure - \$282,855,916

Item 5: 23-232 Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce – Business Development, Support and Promotion – National Quality Infrastructure - \$282,855,916 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 6: 31-311 Ministry of Public Works – Policy Development and Administration – Security Services - \$70,000,000

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Minister indicate with regard to this supplemental request for \$70 million, which is added to the voted provision, how much of this request is due to the increase in the minimum wage for the private sector, and which security agency has been contracted to guard which buildings?

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and I thank the Hon. Member for the question. We had budgeted for 2022, under this line item, that we would have expended \$117,666,000. You would be aware, Sir, that for security, one would go through the procurement process and get the most responsive bidder. That process was completed, and this is for a number of buildings across the Ministry's installations.

We expended between January to September a total of \$121,701,000, which meant that we had arrears for that period. Our projected cost to complete the years' security expenditure required another \$65,964,000, with the arrears that were accrued as of September, giving us a total of \$70 million. For the benefit of the Hon. Member, the award of the contracts for security service varies

depending on the location. For example, the dumpsite at Laluni, there is one security firm; at Paradise or at Coldingen, there is another; at the Ministry's headquarters and at the Transport and Harbours Department (T&HD). We have a combination of private security firms as well as the Special Constabulary force that operates at various installations. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I now put the question that the sum stated...

Mr. Norton: Could I just ask one question?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor

Mr. Norton: What is the average cost per month you spend on security services?

Bishop Edghill: The answer to that question would be \$121million plus \$70 million divided by 12. Thank you.

Mr. Norton: If you divide it by 5, you will end up somewhere in the vicinity of \$2022 million for the next four months because you said it is up to [inaudible] October, November, and December. That is three months. This will work out to about 66 using your figures. How is it that you are operating at this cost, and you end up at \$70 million here?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I think you may have an explanation because you said \$121 million plus \$70 million divided by 12. Is that right?

Bishop Edghill: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: All right. Go ahead.

Bishop Edghill: I went through to indicate that our budgetary allocation was \$117 million. From January to September, cumulatively, we had spent \$121,701,000 which meant that the Ministry was in arrears by more than \$5 million. To complete the year, October, November and December, we will need an additional \$65,964,000 based on the contracts we have. To get the average per month, from January to September \$121,701,936 and from October to December \$65,964,064, divide that by 12. That would be the average.

Item 6: 31-311 Ministry of Public Works – Policy Development and Administration – Security Services - \$70,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 6: 31-311 Ministry of Public Works – Policy Development and Administration – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations - \$560,437,427

Mr. Patterson: First off, let me say that I fully support the subsidy for the Transport and Harbours Department. I do think that they desperately need it. Could I ask the Hon. Minister what has necessitated the increased operational expenses for the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) for \$297 million?

Bishop Edghill: I thank the Hon. Member for the question. Had the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), while in Office, not totally depleted the more than \$1 billion that my Hon. Colleague, under his stewardship, Minister Robeson Benn, left in the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority's account, there would have been no need for the GCAA, even during the Coronavirus disease (COVID- 19), to come to this House for a subsidy because it would have had sufficient amount of money in its reserve to buttress the effects.

If we go through the expenditure of the period that the Hon. Member who is asking the question and who was the Minister that presided at that time, we would not have been coming here. The facts of the matter are, GCAA is in the red. It is in the red because of one – COVID-19. The majority of GCAA's revenues come as a result of air navigational services and the fees that are charged. For the benefit of the House, Sir, we do not see that operation because it operates in the sky.

We provide services for aircrafts that are flying in our space, and we are paid for that. Because of the reduction of flights, as a result of COVID- 19, a significant chunk of the GCAA's revenue went. Now, what has actually happened because of that drop and then the billion plus that should have been in reserve and was depleted by wanton expenditure or unexplained expenditure, we had to come to this House in 2020 to get the money to cushion GCAA. We had to come back in 2021 to get money to cushion GCAA and here we are today with this supplementary.

It is purely to ensure that the money that GCAA is eating out, so to speak, from its authorised reserve to keep in compliance with the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) is restored and that we could ensure that the operations continue to be smooth, and we provide effective services to the people we have to provide that service to, in keeping with our international obligations. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you for the opportunity, Mr. Chairman. However, we are in 2022. Could the Hon. Minister say that in the beginning, in preparation for Budget 2022, if the GCAA did not prepare a budget and did not do full anticipation?

3.14 p.m.

He has given us all sorts of historic facts. We are in 2022. What has necessitated the \$297 million budgeted extra for 2022?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I am sure that every Hon. Member of this House is aware of budgeting as a principle; you make assumptions. You assume that a certain level of normalcy will be introduced. Any reading of the literature would tell you that, around the world, even if you want to be able to increase flights, there is a shortage of crew. This is because, during the pandemic period, a lot of pilots were not flying. As a result of that, many of them had to be retrained and all the rest of it. There is still need, while there is equipment, for personnel to fly those planes. A lot of airlines have not yet come back up to peak, so the route that allows for the Guyana overpass so that we could earn revenue is not yet up to its optimal level, or we have not reached the 2019 period. We had anticipated that there would have been a greater increase, but it is not there yet. I repeat for emphasis: any regulatory agency like the Guyana Civil Aviation Authority, and all of the things it has to do, even in the difficulty of a pandemic, standards have to be maintained because safety is our number one priority. We have to keep all the inspectors onboard. One has to do everything that had been done in the pre-pandemic period, but is receiving less revenue as a result that it is not yet up to the optimal level. We anticipated that we would have had a greater increase, but the fact of the matter is, in terms of our overpass flights, we are not there yet. Revenue is still restricted, Sir. Thank you.

Item 6: 31-311 Ministry of Public Works – Policy Development and Administration – Administration – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations - \$560,437,427 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – East Bank – East Coast Demerara Road Linkage - \$2,079,159,134

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – East Bank – East Coast Demerara Road Linkage - \$2,079,159,134 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Miscellaneous Roads/Drainage - \$18,187,975,000

Mr. Patterson: *Budget 2022* was passed in January or February of this year, I think. The capital works for this Ministry was \$88 billion in total. As of July 2022, this agency – this is the current Ministry of Finance – had expended \$27.321 billion, which is 31%; at the end of November, \$39.72 billion, which is 45%; and currently, according to the Ministry of Finance’s reports, \$44.931 billion. In other words, this Ministry has been capable of spending \$4 billion per month since January. The balance in the capital works portfolio is \$43.166 billion. This addition will give the Ministry a balance of \$65.34 billion to spend in the next 26 days. That would account for almost \$2.3 billion per day. My first question on this matter is, how does the Minister and the Ministry intend to spend this \$18.1 billion when they are unable to spend \$88 billion allocated since January?

Bishop Edghill: I thank the Hon. Member for the question, but I would like to inform the House that we are dealing here with a specific line item – Miscellaneous Roads. The sums that are being sought here are to be spent on roads, Miscellaneous Roads or what we call community roads. Mr. Chairman, you would agree with me because I do get some of your messages when representation is made to your office about interventions that are required in different places.

The moneys that are being sought here today are to accelerate and to continue to bring relief to the thousands or tens of thousands of people who are waiting for their roads to be fixed. We came a little earlier in the year when there was a supplementary provision of \$3 billion. I said that was for advances, but I would like to give a report card so that Mr. Patterson, the Hon. Member, who just quoted figures... The fact of the matter is that the sums that we are spending on Miscellaneous Roads alone under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) in this year’s budget, is more than the entire Ministry of Public Infrastructure’s budget when Mr. Patterson was the Minister. What we are spending on one programme... I guess that is why his Math is so fuzzy and he is coming with different things. What we are spending on one item... I am not talking here about hinterland roads, highways and bridges and so on, I am talking here about just community roads.

For the benefit of Mr. Patterson and all Members of the House, we currently have 1,053 community roads under active work across all 10 Administrative Regions of Guyana for 2022. I would also like to tell Mr. Patterson that, as a result of these 1,053 roads, we have engaged more than 942 contractors. Do you know what that means? It means that we are creating history in Guyana's road development project, because the cognitive number of community roads that would have been done in five years under Mr. Patterson's watch, who is asking me this question, does not represent 50% of what we are doing in the year 2022.

The Hon. Member's question provides me with an opportunity to indicate to this House that the Ministry of Public Works, which has been charged with the primary responsibility of modernising and transforming Guyana's infrastructure, in partnership with my Colleague from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and my Colleague from the Ministry of Housing and Water, in a collaborative manner, across the length and breadth of Guyana, we are bringing relief to people. Even with these 1,053 roads that we are out on, we still have more people who want more roads, and we are committing that we intend to fix everybody's road, because every citizen, in every community, in every region, deserves to be driving and walking on the best roads. One of the reasons why we are able to do this and to move implementation so swiftly is because we have been able to get into the communities and recognise that if we do things differently, we will be able to get things done faster.

Among these roads, a number of them are concrete roads or rigid pavement roads. This is because some of these roads are so narrow you could not have even gotten a paver, the normal size paver, to go through. We have been able to engage contractors in communities to carry out these works and even create employment for people in those communities.

I guess the Hon. Member had seen the Live, because I think they follow His Excellency the President on his various outreaches. We were in the Valley in Wismar, Region 10. The people came and they complained that the water is running and that they have no roads. Myself and my Colleague, Minister Indar, are working to find the contractors in the Valley to do the concrete roads in the Valley. The Hon. Prime Minister, just at lunch, indicated to me as a person who grew up in a certain part of Wismar, when he went to visit the issue with the mudslide, and he drove around the community, he was presently surprised at the volume of roads that have been fixed in an area that he was so acquainted with. I am sure the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, who is the

representative of Region 10, would be happy to put on his *Facebook* page that when he was coming to Parliament this morning, the road right in front of the Forestry Station, where every truck going through Linden has to stop and pay, and where none of the moneys collected from the tolls come to the Ministry of Public Works or to the Consolidated Fund, that even though that road was left in a deplorable state, even though they are collecting the money from the tolls, he had the picture that he has not yet posted on his *Facebook* page, that the road has been paved. This is what this programme is doing.

3.29 p.m.

I am sure that the Hon. Member, the Leader of the Opposition, who lives in Prince William Street, Plaisance, would be bold enough to tell the National Assembly that the street that he is living on is under construction. Even though the contractor who has been awarded the contract has created great unease to the people in the community because of his bad performance, we did not close our eyes and say ‘you know is who, never mind’. We stepped in, we cautioned him, we tried to work with him. We had to terminate his contract. Mr. Norton, Hon. Member, would be pleased to tell the National Assembly that, when he left home this morning, there were active works to complete Prince William Street, Plaisance. That is what this programme is doing.

I am sure that the Hon. Member from Essequibo, Region 2, would be able to tell this honourable House that everywhere we have fixed Block 22 for you. The street is already fixed. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)]. Yes, for you. You put it up on your *Facebook* page and we fixed it for you.

The Hon. Member from Region 2, who hosts his weekly programme on *Facebook*, who is also the Chairman of the People’s National Congress (PNC), would be happy to tell this House, would be able to tell this honourable House that everywhere he travels in Essequibo he is seeing roads being fixed, whether they are in constituencies that voted for the People’s Progressive Party/Civic or voted for the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC). All across, the roads are being fixed.

The Onderneeming Road is being fixed. The Mainstay Road is being fixed. The Charity Road is being fixed. I am sure that the Hon. Member from Region 3, who is now under suspension, at least would be honest enough when he appears in one of those side shows that offer some amount of entertainment to the Guyanese people, would be honest enough to tell about the multitude of roads

that are being done in Region 3, whether it is in the islands or on the mainland. Everywhere you see... to the point where my Hon. Colleague, Minister Indar, had to intervene to ensure development comes to Den Amstel because they were seeking to prevent the contractor from executing works in Den Amstel.

I am sure that the Hon. Members from Regions 5 and 6, who sit on this side of the House would be able to explain to the Members of this House the magnitude of what is being done. I am sure if we put aside politics, and go to Region 10, what we are doing in Region 10 in 2022 – \$1.3 billion worth of roads is being done in Linden and Kwakwani, more than what the APNU/AFC did in five years.

We are extremely happy. The Hon. Member from Region 7 will be able to tell the people ‘the PPP/C did not only fix the roads in main Bartica town, they went all the way over to Fowl Mouth and they fixed the roads’ because wherever people live, it matters. That is where we go.

For the benefit of the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, I am sure when he drove to Parliament, he had some diversions. This is because roads are being fixed in the Campbellville/Prashad Nagar/Bel Air area, bringing relief to the people in North Georgetown.

If you go to South Georgetown, the same story exists. Right now, in Albouystown, contracts have been signed to do roads and drains to fix South Georgetown. [**An Hon. Member:** From the community.] From the community, people from the community.

If you go to Buxton... I should have walked with some of the letters that I got from Buxton and those places where people send to tell us ‘man we waited so long, thank you Minister, thank you PPP/C for the work that you are doing’. While we sing our praises, Mr. Chairman, and we are satisfied that we are doing everything we can do, let me take time to say this, I want to thank my Colleague, the Minister of Finance and I want to publicly thank the Vice-President, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, for understanding and responding to the needs of the people, as represented through the Ministry of Public Works, to make a bigger allocation to accelerate community roads.

We are working on an expanded programme. More is available. We are doing more. We are building the capacity of small contractors and we are increasing the capacity of medium-size contractors. We need to debunk this myth. If you go through the list of new entrants into the field

of building roads, it will put a pleasant smile on the face of Guyanese women – women – single women, men, people who are sub-contractors of the past and foremen working with people have ventured out on their own and are doing a fantastic job.

This is what we will do between now, 31st December... We are pushing implementation. Like I said, this is not just the Ministry of Public Works, it is a collaborative effort. We are the leading partner here – Local Government as well as Housing and Water. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Norton: The Hon. Minister invited me to respond to the things he raised. Before I ask the question, I will proceed.

Mr. Chairman: The Hon. Member cannot tell you to respond. I have to give you leave to respond. I can give you leave to ask a question.

Mr. Norton: Can I not respond?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, please.

Mr. Norton: I want to start by saying, last Sunday I drove in Victory Valley which you spoke about and the road was paved. There is only a little piece left for you to pave. That is the first thing I want to say. Let me ask you the question, you said that you are building 1,053 roads. That works out to about an average of 100 roads per region. Name 25 of the 100 in Region 10 that you are talking about?

Bishop Edghill: The first thing is, let me help the Leader of the Opposition, he drove into Victory Valley on an asphaltic concrete road. A mix that was built by us, but he is not remembering that there are five roads that go up from that asphaltic concrete road to residences that live up the hill. We do not just build for the picture; we build for the people. The five roads that we are building would help the people who have to go up and come down to get access to their homes.

The second thing that Mr. Norton is asking a question that he wants me to name 25 roads in Linden in Region 10. [**Mr. Norton:** Yes.] If you were following, we are currently doing 27 roads. [**Mr. Norton:** Name them and stop talking garbage.] Public knowledge. But Mr. Chairman, just not to mislead, the population might be listening to us. Guyana's geography is well known to us. Because

of the expanse of some regions and how people live, some regions will have more roads, longer roads because of how people live. We should not divide 1,053 by 10. That is a simplistic way of misleading people. I would indicate by saying at this stage, there is need for rational and reasonable ... [*Interruption*] Mr. Chairman, I will be happy to conclude my answer to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition. My staff has graciously allowed me to name all the roads, so let me name names.

Phase 2 – Wisroc. I think Mr. Figueira is very much acquainted with that: Boner Street, Amelia's Ward; Canvas City, Back Road; City Gate Street, Amelia's Ward; Pompey Street, Christianburg; Do you know those areas, Mr. Norton? Rehabilitation of Rochelle Road, Wismar; Fourth Corner, Amelia's Ward; Water Lily Road, Wismar; First Cross Street, Silvertown, Wismar; Second Alley, Wismar; Third Alley, Wismar; Buck Hill Site Road, Wismar; Water Treatment Plant Road, Wismar; Wismar Hill Access Road; rehabilitation of Old Kara Kara Road; rehabilitation of School Circle Road; rehabilitation of Matthew's Lane; Self Help Road, Amelia's Ward; Fourth Corner Lovers Lane, Amelia's Ward; Industrial Area Road. Some of these roads are actually networks. They are not just a single road, but they operate in networks. Rehabilitation of Toucan Drive; rehabilitation of Spikeland Main Road; rehabilitation of internal roads in Kwakwani and that is five; rehabilitation of Spikeland Back Road, Lower Amelia's Ward; and the rehabilitation of the entire Mines Road, from Old England all the way to Three Friends. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Norton: Apart from the fact that a lot of what was said is not true, ...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, are you saying that what he is saying is not true?

Mr. Norton: I am saying that Pompey Street has not ...

Mr. Chairman: Pompey?

Mr. Norton: I am saying that it was not done and until now, it is not finished. I could go and bring to this House the pictures. Just like how you claimed that Burnham Boulevard was done. and it was not done. I can bring pictures to show you at least three or four of those called... May I also now turn and ask the Hon. Member to name the 25 or 20 streets in the South of Georgetown that have been completed.

3.44 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I did not hear the Hon. Minister say completed, but that it ‘will be completed by’. I think that is what he said. Hon. Minister, you may proceed. Twenty-five. I could start you off with Ketley Street. Thank you very much for doing that one.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, this will have no ending if we continue like this. Let me just say that I take very strongly the comments that the Hon. Leader of the Opposition just made. I take serious umbrage to that. He is saying that I know fully well. Let me tell you what I know. Every one of these projects I have just named, I walked these streets with the engineers, the contractors and representatives of the APNU/AFC who followed along. It is either that they are afraid to tell you about the development that is taking place in Linden because they... [**An Hon. Member:** *[Inaudible]*] Yes, they shook my hands. Mr. Chairman, I probably should be very discreet about this, but the Clerk of Works in Region 10, who is overseeing these projects, is a counsellor who represents Mr. Aubrey Norton at the Regional Democratic Council (RDC). You want to come here and pretend that you do not know.

I am assuring the people of Guyana that all across this country, in a nondiscriminatory manner, we are making every effort to address this issue of roads. The reason we have this great backlog is the deficit that we inherited when we came to Office. Thank you, Sir.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. To the Hon. Minister, with 26 more days before the end of the year, how are you going to go about getting these works done? Are you going to go to tender or are you going to go to force accounts? Could you kindly tell me how many of these projects are work in progress and how many are new projects? As you do your list, I do not know, could you add Albouystown to your list – Callendar Street, Belair Street, Nonpriel Street, Curtis Street and all the side streets in Albouystown? Also, could you add Sophia to your list, especially B Field? The streets are inaccessible. Could you do something about that? Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, knows that I always take her calls and I respond to her requests. I will start at B Field Sophia as I was there up to yesterday. You would be aware that the last concrete bridge that was built there was done under the stewardship of my colleague sitting right there, Mr. Robeson Benn. There was a second bridge that was to be built, which was to be wooden, but nothing was done in the last five

years. That bridge is now in a very deplorable condition. The contract for that bridge over the 'Blacka' was signed on a Sunday. My Permanent Secretary (PS) was here. He worked on a Sunday. If we are going to fix the bridge, we do not need grandstanding to tell us that we have to fix the road. If we fix the bridge, we know we have to fix the road.

We will fix B Field. Everything cannot be done at the same time. We will continue. Mr. Chairman, there were some roads that were done in Sophia in the last five years. There were some roads that were done. I have to admit that there were some roads that were done. I would not deny the APNU/AFC of the fact that there were some roads that were done in Sophia, but I would be hard-pressed to tell the people of Guyana what criteria was used to fix those roads. I guess it had to do with who is living there. This is because one would find a road here and then three, five or seven roads in a deplorable condition and then another one fixed. When people asked, they were told that the APNU/AFC never fixed a particular one, but they fixed another one two times or three times. Then one started to hear about why the road was fixed and it was dependent on who was living there.

Mr. Chairman, the issue that we are dealing with here is accelerating our processes. Procurement is something that we follow, and we observe the law. One of the things that the nation is discovering is that we have been engaging small contractors. When we talk about \$18 billion, it is not \$18 billion for the boys – the five, six, seven big boys whom we knew operated then. We are talking here about more than 700 small and medium sized contractors that are being meaningfully engaged in getting these roads done in a proper manner.

I have to admit...because Mr. Patterson, the Hon. Member, is sitting there wondering how on earth we are able to manage and supervise all of this. Yes, our engineers are under great stress of work. I want to take this opportunity to thank my team at the Ministry of Public Works for the excellent job that they have been doing in designing these roads and supervising them. We have to admit that there are times when a road...one expects the crusher run to be there at a particular time and there was a shortage and so the road was kind of left back for a week or two and people complained. But every effort is being made to satisfy the needs of the people and comply with the law. Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, I would like to repeat my question to the Minister. He ended up at Revelation and he did not start from Genesis. Could you kindly say how you are going to go about doing these roads and these drains? Are you going to use force accounts? Are you going to use tendering? You did not say that. Hon. Minister, I also asked, through the Chairman, how many of these projects are works in progress and how many are new projects? **[Mr. McCoy:** If you read the procurement laws *[inaudible]*] Oh, hush up.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Bishop Edghill: I know the Hon. Member asked me a question and then ended it by saying hush up. I do not know if I should answer. Was the hush up for me, Sir? I am not sure.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Chairman...

Mr. Chairman: Are you standing on a Point of Order?

Mr. Ramjattan: No. I am asking a question.

Mr. Chairman: The Minister was on the floor.

Mr. Ramjattan: My apologies.

Bishop Edghill: If I am asked a question and at the end of the statement the Hon. Member says hush up, it is like taking *licks* and your mother says do not cry. I do not know what to do.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, you have the floor.

Mr. Ramjattan: I am very happy to hear that there are 1005 new contractors who are doing all these roads...

Bishop Edghill: It is not 1005.

Mr. Ramjattan: Was it 700 you said? Whatever is the number of contractors that you said, small and big, could we get a disaggregation of those contractors and which roads they are doing? I know you cannot get it today but certainly, like we used to get with Mr. Benn, all the roads and the names of the contractors – \$13 million, \$130 million – and we will know. We want to do a check on this.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, my understanding is that in the procurement process of Guyana, the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) awards contracts and upon the completion of those awards, there is a declaration on the website of all those awards. I do not know what I should do under these circumstances. Remember...

Mr. Chairman: Refer to the Standing Orders I quoted, 20(p).

Bishop Edghill: Yes. Thank you, Sir. I will be guided.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, you have the floor.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Sir. It has been a long time since I asked my question and I still have not gotten a response. This Ministry, at the end of November, had only expended 51% – \$44.9 billion of the \$88 billion that was allocated to it in January, 2022. It shows that there is an issue with the disbursement and implementation of the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP). In the all the Minister's responses, he did not deny that they are only at 51% or 52%. I give you plus or minus 1%. He is asking for an additional \$18 billion. All of my colleagues asked, I would like to ask, and I think the whole entire country would like to ask, how and what is the Minister and the Ministry going to put in place to spend \$2.3 billion over the next 26 days? It is simple and straight. That is all we are asking.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I would have thought that the Hon. Member who occupied office at the Ministry of Public Infrastructure for five years – questionably between 2018 to 2020, unlawfully... [**Mr. Dharamlall:** Unconstitutionally.] Unconstitutionally. At least in the three-year period that he presided lawfully, he would have understood that in the implementation of one's PSIP, there are some transactions where just one transaction could change the whole game of one's PSIP because of the nature of that transaction. [**An Hon. Member:** The size.] The size. Just one transaction. In my \$88 billion, if you went through your budget book, you would see line items for transactions of a particular size and nature. Do not be too worried about how we are going to spend so much money in so many days. We are dealing here, under this line item, with miscellaneous roads. The other transactions will fall in line because our teams that are dealing with various projects are advancing the culmination of those transactions. At the end of the year, Mr. Patterson will get a full report of the overall performance of the PSIP. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much for the lesson that you are trying to give us. Therefore, Hon. Member, could you tell this Committee what are the large items that you were unable to do because of your lack of whatever it is that has caused your PSIP to be at 51%? You made a very grand speech about large numbers.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I do not see how this pertains to the allocation here. This is a bigger... Do you have another question? If you do not, I will put the question.

3.59 p.m.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I am still trying to find out, on behalf of the people... Sir, we do not want corruption, squander mania and those things.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, could you ask a question pertaining to these Miscellaneous Roads/Drainages allocation?

Mr. Patterson: Sir, if you cannot spend what has been provided for you, that is [*inaudible*], Sir.

Mr. Chairman: You are giving an opinion.

Mr. Patterson: I am telling you that the PSIP is at 51%.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I think we have exhausted the questions on this. Now, the Member is giving an opinion.

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Miscellaneous Roads/Drainage – \$18,187,975,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Highway Improvement East Coast Demerara – \$7,243,784,213

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Highway Improvement East Coast Demerara – \$7,243,784,213 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Linden – Mabura Road and Kurupukari Bridge – \$938,220,000

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Linden – Mabura Road and Kurupukari Bridge – \$938,220,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 7: 39-392 Ministry of Human Services and Social Security – Social Services – Security Services – \$19,000,000

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I notice under the caption, ‘Security Services’, there was a voted provision of \$90,082,000. What is being sought now is \$19 million. I want to know what is responsible for the increase in security charges. Is it due to new personnel, added personnel, new locations, extra locations or security updates? Could you tell us which security service stands to benefit from this increase in this supplementary allocation? Thank you.

Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Dr. Persaud]: Thank you, for the question Hon. Member. There has been an increase because we are using more firms compared to one in the last year. There had been an increase in the rate projected versus the rate that is actual. We are asking for that additional sum to cater for this. Those security firms that will benefit are: City Constabulary, RK’s Guyana Security Services, Hossein’s Security Service Incorporated, Sheriff Security Service and Castle Security Service Limited. This went to open tender. In addition, we also asked for radios and armed security for some of the locations. So, this has contributed to the additional.

Item 7: 39-392 Ministry of Human Services and Social Security – Social Services – Security Services – \$19,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 39-392 Ministry of Human Services and Social Security – Social Services – Dietary - \$10,000,000

Dr. Cummings: Under this line item 6292, the voted provision was \$139,500,000. Now, a further \$10 million is being asked for. I have also noticed that the remarks states, “...additional resources to meet the dietary needs of the growing populace at Night Shelter and Hugo Chavez Centre”. I recall the Hon. Minister of Agriculture had stated that persons are going into farming more. I recall that the Hugo Chavez Centre is, more or less, self-sufficient where they had cash crops and so forth. I am wondering if they are still planting cash crops and if this is an addition. What is this

extra addition for? Also, in terms of the Night Shelter, do you have a cap on how much a person gets like for dinner, breakfast and lunch? How many persons are you catering for under this line item?

Dr. Persaud: Thank you for the question. It relates directly to an increase in the residents at the Night Shelter. We had catered for 71 residents and now we are catering for 120. This is directly related to the fact that we have been working on our homeless programme. We have increased persons at both the Night Shelter and the Hugo Chavez Centre. We have had to cater for those persons. With regard to the agricultural component, the Ministry of Agriculture had helped us with a shade house project at the Hugo Chavez Centre. That is happening but the yields are not as high in terms of what you are referring to in terms of cash crops. I hope that answers it. We are also working on a similar project for the Night Shelter going forward.

Item 7: 39-392 Ministry of Human Services and Social Security – Social Services – Dietary - \$10,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 39-393 Ministry of Human Services and Social Security – Child Care and Protection – Dietary - \$24,000,000

Dr. Cummings: Under this line item 6292, under the caption ‘Dietary’, the voted provision was \$90 million. Now, they are asking for \$24 million to provide for the dietary needs of children in the homes. Which homes are we talking about here? Could you give a list of the various homes?

Dr. Persaud: Thank you for the question. I am a little surprised that we are questioning sums that have to do with food for children but okay. It relates to all of the State institutions that we currently have under our ambit. What had happened is that there was an increase in the cost of perishables and non-perishables. As you know, for those children who come to the institutions, numbers vary. It is a fluid situation. So, we had a number of increases and that really contributed to what is being asked for.

Dr. Cummings: Could I have a follow-up question, Mr. Chair?

Mr. Chairman: I just acknowledged you.

Dr. Cummings: Okay, thank you. You said State-owned, so this excludes the other agencies that you had given subvention to. **[Dr. Persaud: *[Inaudible]*]** Okay. That is one. Two, you had a STREET FOOD Initiative. Is that included in this State owned?

Dr. Persaud: State owned refers to all of those institutions that fall under the State. When we speak of subventions to other child institutions, that would come under an entirely different line. The Street Light Project refers to children who would, from time to time, come temporarily into State institutions. So, it is a combination of many things. As I said, the numbers will always be fluid, depending on the reports we have. We are seeing an escalation in the number of reports and so, from time to time, the numbers will spike.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Item 7: 39-393 Ministry of Human Services and Social Security – Child Care and Protection – Dietary - \$24,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 8: 45-453 Ministry of Housing and Water – Water Services Expansion and Management – Hinterland Water Supply – \$275,980,000

Mr. Henry: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to ask the Minister if this sum includes satisfying the needs of the people of central Nappi who are suffering greatly from very bad water supply which could even lead to their health being deteriorated to a very low level. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, is Nappi catered for?

Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Croal]: Of this amount, and I will be happy to share that bit of information, of \$152.4 million will be going towards allocations in Region 9 for a number of wells and systems in a number of areas. This came about as a result of the recently concluded visit by His Excellency. Let me share the bit of information on the allocation for Region 9.

For example, we are on this programme now for the following areas: for Shulinab and Meriwau we are catering for extension; Karaudarunau, commonly called Crowdar, is for expansion of the distribution network; for the far-flung village of Masakenari, it is extension, similarly; Achiwib,

likewise it is for the extension of the water system there; and at Shea, Sawariwau, Quarrie and the far-flung village of Parabara, Rupunau and Waramuri we will be supplying some tanks.

With respect to Nappi, I am not aware of any deteriorating health concerns in Region 9. However, Nappi is going to be address internally and that is part of our 2023 programme.

4.14 p.m.

Mr. Sinclair: I notice that there is an increase in excess of \$275 million. Could the Hon. Minister state what has caused the request for this additional sum in excess of \$275 million? Could the Minister state what was unforeseen and why this was not included in the original budget?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, I already alluded to Region 9. The other major expense under this supplementary is for the procurement of another path rig. We have done a comprehensive analysis of the hinterland region. In fact, we are operating with a document which is our Bible: 2021-2025. This is to ensure we have 100% access in the hinterland by 2025. Our ability to fast track is matched by our ability and the availability of resources by the State. In a number of riverine areas and far-flung communities, simultaneously with awarding of contracts, we have also been building the capacity of Guyana Water Incorporated. (GWI). That is why, for example, from last year's programme we procured a path rig. The currently is drilling in the Moruca Sub-Region. This rig that we are procuring now, in fact, the first area it will be sent to when it arrives will be the Pomeroon. I am not sure if everybody is familiar with what is happening because of the rising water level. We will be sending that rig to Pomeroon for the drilling of a number of wells. Then, we would move onwards, catering to or targeting more of the riverine communities, which will allow easier mobility and access.

Mr. Sinclair: Could the Minister state what method of procurement will be used for the acquisition of this new rig?

Mr. Croal: The method that was chosen is through the methodology that has been approved by the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) and it is through a tendering process.

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Is over the creek, beyond the Campbelltown community, going to be benefiting from the drilling operation?

Mr. Croal: On this supplementary, El Paso will be benefiting from a new system there. I am addressing the supplementary, and so this is where some resources have been made available. In fact, it is \$10 million.

Item 8: 45-453 Ministry of Housing and Water – Water Services Expansion and Management – Hinterland Water Supply – \$275,980,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-511 Ministry of Home Affairs – Policy Development and Administration – Citizen Security Strengthening Programme - \$56,395,177

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Minister, could you indicate the expected date of the closure of this project? Also, within the last eight months, could you indicate what goals and objectives have been achieved? Also, could you indicate the specific areas that benefited from interventions under this programme?

Mr. Chairman: Is it under the programme or under the allocation being sought?

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: It is under the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme (CSSP).

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you are speaking to the allocation.

Mr. Benn: On 31st January, 2023 is when the project will be closed. In relation to the overall work which has been done for the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme, we have done work all over the country I could generally speak about. In relation to the supplementary provision, it is for: additional works at the Blairmont Police Station, which include an increase to cater for the renovation of lock up areas, which was not included in the previous scope, for \$21 million; additional furnishing for police stations and divisional headquarters which were rehabilitated under the CSSP - \$18 million; procurement of bunk beds in support of the Lusignan Prison - \$5.4 million; airing of public awareness videos on the achievement of the CSSP - \$1.9 million; and mid-term evaluation of the project with those who supported the project - \$9.2 million.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, could you indicate, under this programme, how many community action councils were established? Also, could you indicate how many persons have benefited from vocational and entrepreneurship training, and the spread of those persons across the 10 administrative regions?

Mr. Benn: Twenty community action councils were established and are in existence. Some 1200 persons were trained across the entire country, particularly for stress communities in relation to the work of the CSSP.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, I know there is component of this programme that deals with crime prevention and investigative capacity. Could you indicate how many officers benefited under this programme and the location of these officers?

Mr. Benn: Generally, in respect of the crime prevention programmes, officers were taken from each regional division and trained either locally, meaning at the Guyana Police Force Officers' Training Centre, or in the divisions themselves in respect of issues relating to crime prevention, and engagement with communities to mitigate issues which may lead to crime. That is generally the posture in respect of training with respect to that. I do not have a figure right off the hand in respect of the number of officers, but we could get that for you.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, could you indicate to us the status of the social integration programme under the Guyana Prison Service?

Mr. Chairman: Under what?

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Under the Guyana Prison Service.

Mr. Benn: I do not think we are at the prison.

Mr. Chairman: We are still at the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Under this programme, there is a component that deals with it. There is also a census that should have been conducted under the Guyana Prison Service.

Mr. Benn: Yes. The census was done. There are outcome reports in respect of the works done, particularly in relation to the prison. It was completed. We have had support from the CSSP in relation to what we are calling and piloting now, through their support, a fresh start programme, where we are training persons who have been trained in the prison and who are being released. We are giving them the tools for reintegration in the community. It is about having the means, the tools and the opportunities to go into employment for themselves and others and to earn moneys so they

could more quickly integrate into their communities and with their families. This is for both men and women coming out of the prisons.

Item 9: 51-511 Ministry of Home Affairs – Policy Development and Administration – Citizen Security Strengthening Programme - \$56,395,177 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Field Materials and Supplies - \$139,000,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, there is a request for in excess of \$139 million to facilitate the procurement of lab kits for the crime laboratory. Could you give us a detailed breakdown of how this amount will be spent? Is this request premised against the backdrop that there is an increase in crime, and more so an increase in crime of a particular nature that would require the usage of these crime lab kits?

Mr. Benn: I thank the Hon. Member for her question. The increase is being requested not simply because there is an increase in crime. There was actually a 20% reduction in crime last year, year on year. We are running at that same number now in respect of serious crime. The request is being made to replace kits at the regional divisions where the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) officers in those headquarters or large stations, in particular divisions, would need to replace kits which are old or used out. Particularly, it is related to finding out those who have committed crimes. There have been issues of an increase in rape in a few areas. There have been questioning sometimes of whether they had enough fingerprint capabilities and other chemicals and issues in kits to properly do the CID and the forensic investigations in the field with respect to a crime which was committed.

4.29 p.m.

I would say that the rate at which the police force is finding persons who have committed crime, has risen dramatically over the last two years; they are catching more and more criminals and we are going to catch more by the provisioning of these kits.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, can you indicate how you intend to spend this amount here before the 31st? Will you be single sourcing these kits? Who are your intended suppliers? Could you also give us a breakdown on the type of crime kits that you intend to purchase?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Hon. Member. We have an award that we have to supply. There is an urgent need that we are responding to; there are also issues continuing in relation to the acquisition and proper care of dogs and horses; there is a question of electrical materials for the police stations which we have to open just now; there is a submission for a public tender award for \$18 million in 2022 which is included in it; and there are issues related to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) guidelines. I have to say that the Forces have been either in line or working diligently during the COVID-19 pandemic, and their efforts are still needed in relation to that kind of support at this moment. So this is how the moneys will be spent.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Field Materials and Supplies – \$139,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Office Materials and Supplies – \$225,183,610

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister \$225,183,610 is being sought; \$70 million was voted for under this line item; the legend indicates that this amount is for expanded work programme; this is very vague. Could you indicate what is the expanded work programme? What are your aims and your objectives and what exactly comes under this line item? Essentially, could you give us a breakdown?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Hon. Member. The request is to take into account the fact that we have had to accelerate the establishment of computer centres in New Amsterdam, Cove and John, Linden, Kwakwani, LaGrange, Parika, Leonora, Charity and Bartica, in addition to which we have new police outposts at Lima Sands, Onderneeming, Cummings Lodge, Little Diamond, Mocha and Herstelling. The community relations department is also currently being decentralised to all police regions and there has been, finally, the reopening of the three police colleges. Essequibo, Georgetown and Berbice have reopened in relation to the training of new recruits, so there are additional needs in respect of the materials, equipment and other things needed to operationalise these centres.

The centres, particularly where the computers are being established, are because we are transitioning the record keeping and record management system in the Guyana Police Force to one which is computer friendly, capable, and upgraded of course – not that we do not have a few computers – but also to have the ability not only to train policemen and women but also youths from the communities. I think that is already being done at some of these centres. I recall the one at New Amsterdam particularly, where a large number of youths are also being trained in relation to computer skills, algorithms, and other things in respect of that type of activity.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, could you indicate to us what tender process will be utilised? Will there be any sort of advertisement in the paper? These questions are premised against the backdrop that you have a few more days remaining until the 31st.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Hon. Member. There were public tenders awarded and responded to in respect of these amounts which are being requested here.

Item: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Office Materials and Supplies – \$225,183,610 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Fuel and Lubricants – \$400,000,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, \$460,000,000 was voted on; you are now seeking an additional \$400,000,000; the legend says that this is for an expanded work programme. Bearing in mind what you just said is that there is not an upsurge in crime, there is indeed a reduction, we anticipate patrol during this season, but can you justify why \$400,000,000? Do you anticipate your officers travelling with Ministers across the country?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Hon. Member. I did say that there was a reduction in serious crime, and overall, there is a reduction in crime. The reason we have this is because we have been able to procure more vehicles, more stations, more and better-trained policemen in spite of what people might think, and we have to maintain an operational system and culture to suppress crime. In the current environment, the increases relate to more patrols, more vehicles, more man hours and vehicle hours, and vehicle miles being spent in relation to the suppression of crime and keeping it down as much as possible. The vehicles have to be provided, have to be maintained, have to be up

and running and properly used to keep our crime rate down, to keep that downward trend going to [inaudible] the positions in which we might even think it is acceptable. This is why the request is being made.

The question was answered before by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, in respect of increases in the price of fuel as a result of global issues, particularly in Europe, and problems with the logistical supply of fuel and other items. They have not only driven up the price of fuel and lubricants but also driven up the cost of vehicles, spares and other things which are being used by the police force and the other agencies and the whole of Guyana as such. So this is why this request is being made. And, no, I do not see or there is no suggestion anywhere in this that the Ministers will be accompanied by large or more numbers of policemen. I do not think we have that level of security presence amongst Ministers. We are careful but not reckless in the way we approach our engagements publicly.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, could you indicate to us which regions will receive the largest allocation under this \$400,000,000? In relation to the comment that you made about your officers, I recently visited the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Headquarters and I had a very pleasant experience with your officers, so I think they are benefitting from the training.

Mr. Benn: The Region 4 Divisions will get the largest amount of the request – 4A, 4B and 4C; that is Georgetown, East Bank and East Coast. They represent the largest population area for the country and, unfortunately, too, naturally as a result, the greatest number of crimes occur in those areas, so the greatest amount of effort is required in those areas – 4A, 4B and 4C. That is generally it in respect of that.

Not to say that we are also paying attention to issues in Region 9, Region 6 and Region 5, where some types of vehicles, which were acquired in the previous dispensation of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Chance (APNU/AFC) in Government, were not suited to the rigours of the terrain, the *backdam* and the interior. Those vehicles – I think they call them Fortuners – are being replaced and would be taken off the listing of vehicles which would be brought back into action.

There are a number of areas in the North West District, Regions 7 and 8, which would have to benefit from a large number of all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). Even now in the wet weather persons can really, practically, only traverse those areas with ATVs.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Fuel and Lubricants – \$400,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Maintenance of Buildings – \$61,096,846

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, you are now seeking an additional \$61,096,846. Could you provide a breakdown of this amount and the specific buildings catered for under this line item?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Hon. Member, for your question. I am glad you did state that you had a pleasant experience at the CID Headquarters. I am not sure which building you went to in respect of them because the building that they are in is indescribable and we are moving them out to a building which we are renting while we make a new CID Headquarters building. That is the same for many of the buildings. I have 34 buildings here which require serious maintenance and rehabilitation. Without mentioning the numbers I will just go: repairs to female barracks, Tactical Service Unit (TSU), phase one; repair to external wall and ceiling of the Special Projects Unit (SPU); repairs to senior officers quarters – number, four: repairs to Mandela living quarters; repairs to temporary location of Brickdam Police Station – I think we know all of that; not much money; repairs to living quarters at Chalmers Place; repairs and painting to transport workshop; repairs to tailor shop; repairs and painting to the Public Relations Office building (PRO) building.

4.44 p.m.

Repairs to living quarters of the Mounted Branch; repairs to the Police Officers' Mess room; repairs to the Sports Secretariat, one and two; installation of concrete base and timber roof to Lima Sands Police Outpost; installation and concrete base to Onderneeming Police Outpost; refurbishing of the La Grange Police Station; refurbishing of the Cove and John Information Technology (IT) Centre; refurbishing of the Commander of Regional Division 4(C), Registrar; refurbishing of the Parika Police Station and same for Lenora and Charity Police Stations; renovation of female quarters at Police Headquarters, two; renovation and remodelling of Police Headquarters;

refurbishing of Richard Faikall Police College, barracks; refurbishing of Richard Faikall Police College, kitchen; refurbishing of the Commissioner of Police's residence; repairs to the Officers' Mess Annexe; and repairs to the Mounted Branch living quarters. That is in relation to those particular requests.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Maintenance of Buildings – \$61,096,846 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Janitorial and Cleaning Supplies – \$72,254,700

Mr. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, you are seeking here an additional \$72.2 million. Could you give us a breakdown of this amount and, also, kindly indicate which agencies or departments will benefit?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Hon. Member, for your question. Yes, for the issue of Janitorial and Cleaning Supplies, there was a top public tender awarded for more than \$72 million. The question of the new facilities, the computer centres we spoke of previously, the outposts, and the fact that there has been a deficit with respect to both the maintenance and cleaning efforts in the police divisions, allow for this request. Much additional cleaning and effort is needed, particularly after the COVID-19, to maintain quarters and areas. These are the systems, particularly, to make sure that we have things at an acceptable standard.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Janitorial and Cleaning Supplies – \$72,254,700 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Maintenance of Other Infrastructure – \$80,615,224

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, you are seeking here an additional \$80.6 million. Could you again provide a breakdown of this amount? What consists of other infrastructure? Could you give us some details on your expanded work programme under this line item?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Hon. Member, for the question. Again, it is the question of the reopening of the two training colleges; the maintenance of drainage; the securing of bridges, fences, and

revetments; and the enhancements of Police Headquarters, Eve Leary, and surrounding areas. I think when one passes there now, one will see some of that work ongoing. There are new police outposts established at Lima Sands, Onderneeming, Cummings Lodge, Diamond, Mocha Arcadia and Herstelling; and repairs – emergency of course – to various police infrastructures for members of the public.

[Mr. Chairman left the Chair.]

[Mr. Seeraj assumed the Chair.]

One of the things we have said is that our police stations must be welcoming places for the public. The public must not feel threatened when they go to a police station. This is why we are building benches and having washrooms and so on there for the public. Those places should be properly provisioned with things so that people can use them. There are 41 projects with respect to that sum here. Without calling the numbers which add up to the \$80.6 million, they are: repairs to car park, shed and ceiling, Commissioner of Police Headquarters, Eve Leary; the Corporate Communications Unit's (CCU), the Finance's Department and the Control's Department car parks; repairs to the eastern compound of the Police Headquarters; repairs to the flag pole and lawn fence; repairs to the Tactical Service Unit fence; repairs to guard huts and fences; revetment of Police Headquarters; revetment of senior officers' living quarters' fence and compound; repairs to Guyana Police Force Sports Club's fences, phase one and two; repairs to the Guyana Police Force Welfare Department's parking lot; repairs to drainage; repairs to the Special Organised Crime Unit's (SOCU) eastern boundary, the Special Branch/Intelligence's western boundary; repairs to Special Branch/Intelligence's western boundary, phase two and the TSU's bridge and gate; repairs and sand filling to Mandela Avenue Police living quarters, revetments, parking lots and walkways, bridges; the Felix Austin Police College's walkway; rehabilitation of fences, walkway and ablution facilities at the Felix Austin Police College in Adventure, Essequibo; the maintenance of the Officers' Mess Annexe's compound; the same for senior officers' living quarters' compound, one and two; and repairs to the central police station's canteen. Much of this appears to be repetitive but, overall, there is an effort to improve the environment and the ergonomics for the work of the policemen and women. This is also for the public whom they serve and when they encounter police on duty and in those police stations.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Maintenance of Other Infrastructure – \$80,615,224 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$360,000,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, \$1.1 billion was voted on; you are now seeking an additional \$360 million; the legend states it is for an expanded work programme. Could you provide a breakdown of this amount – rather, lay it over? Why is there an increase in the amount for Local Travel and Subsistence? Have you conducted a study or an assessment to arrive at this amount? Also, can you state whether you have conducted a study or an assessment to determine if all the police stations across the country are properly and adequately staffed?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Hon. Member. Under Local Travel and Subsistence, the renewed request, of course, is a result of us coming out of the COVID-19 restrictions. There have been, naturally with the new vehicles – motorcycles and other things – more outreaches in Divisions 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 10. There have been many visits of dignitaries, heads of state and other persons from regional and international countries for conferences held here, and they had to be secured in a proper manner. Payments had to be made in relation to that.

In relation to certain issues over the year, there has been a requirement for policemen and women to be in line for responses and support. With respect to these issues, meals accommodation and other payments, especially those for interior locations, visits, and assessments, more funds are required. This is why this supplementary provision is requested.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: I thank you, Sir. There was a second part of the question as it relates to the study and assessment to determine whether all police stations across the country are properly and adequately staffed.

Mr. Benn: Yes. Sorry, Ma'am. I did not go to that question. The reason we are training new policemen and women is so that we have new recruits to make up the staffing deficit in relation to divisions and particular stations.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister. I now put the question that Chart of Account... Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, you have not answered the question. It is a very specific one: Have you conducted a study and/or assessment to determine whether all police stations are adequately and properly staffed?

Mr. Benn: The Guyana Police Force has a strategic department. The information comes through from the Commanders and we review the requests. We do not necessarily agree with everything. As I said, the reason we are bringing in new policemen and responding to issues particular to staffing, professional training, upskilling, and upgrading police training, is that we want to fulfil the training and staffing needs of the Guyana Police Force. There is a comprehensive programme in relation to this and studies, yes assessments, in relation to this problem overall. Yes, adequate staffing has to be done at all stations. There must be adequate equipment, but more particularly, the soft issue is the properly trained policemen who will be at the police stations. This is based on the assessments which have been made.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister. I now put the question. Do you have another question, Hon. Member?

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: It is a follow-up.

Mr. Seeraj: Please, go ahead.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you. Minister, in cases where requests are made by Commanders and those requests are not approved by you, how do you resolve them?

Mr. Benn: I am not sure which particular request you are referring to. The Guyana Police Force has its operational and administrative meetings. The question about requests relates to the type of request or how to approve or support them. So, it is more a question of tweaking or shaping the requests to take care of policies, national guidelines and requests/needs, more adequately. There are those things which occur that are normal things in the toing and froing of the administration.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$360,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Postage, Telex and Cablegrams – \$2,500,000

4.59 p.m.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Postage, Telex and Cablegrams - \$2,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$40,000,000

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$40,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Telephone and Internet Charges – \$60,000,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, \$171 million was voted for under this line item and you are now seeking an additional \$60 million. Could you provide a breakdown of this amount? Also, kindly indicate the offices, agencies and the stations that would specifically benefit from this additional \$60 million.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Hon. Member, for your question. I did say, previously, that we are going to more online services – questions of building websites which are interactive from the police stations, and even now we are discussing having applications (apps) built where persons can access the services and the responses from the police and others, from their cell phones. The question of telephone and internet charges are important. Right now the learner driver examinations are being done by computer and that knocks out issues of corruption. The question of the computer centres which I said are in the New Amsterdam, Cove and John, Linden, Kwakwani, La Grange, Parika, Lenora, Charity and Bartica, all these places have to be supported by additional services. There are more telephone charges for the new outposts and there is a new connection for the Automated Fingerprint Identification System (AFIS) at the Lenora Police Station. All these new connections have to be supported and paid for.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Telephone and Internet Charges – \$60,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Equipment Maintenance – \$20,000,000

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Equipment Maintenance – \$20,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Cleaning and Extermination Services – \$20,000,000

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Cleaning and Extermination Services – \$20,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Other – \$70,000,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Sorry, I was a bit distracted, Sir. Are we dealing with the line item 6284, Other?

Mr. Seeraj: That is correct.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you.

Mr. Seeraj: Line item 6284.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you. Minister, \$115.9 million was voted for and you are now seeking an additional \$70 million. Could you lay over a detailed breakdown on how you intend to spend this amount, an explanation of what entails the detailed work programme?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Hon. Member, for the question. Under the line item 6284, Other, there are several other operational costs which were incurred by the Force. They were placed on hold because sufficient funds were not available to deal with these issues. There were issues relating to the question of the rebuilding of the new Brickdam Police Station – the fact that the police are out there in the weather and the rentals for tents and portable toilets, and same thing for the other operational areas where they were at. There is the question of activities for the remainder of the financial year; the protest that we had which required the police to be out there and to be adequately supported in relation to hygiene and other requirements – again, rentals. There are requests in relation to issues where there are protests even in Georgetown – barriers and the other ancillary

issues have to be there so that the job would be done in a proper and hygienic manner. That is what this request is about.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force Other – \$70,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Dietary – \$400,000,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, \$483 million was voted on. You are now seeking an additional \$400 million. Could you provide a detail breakdown of this amount? And does this amount cater for you new recruits?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Hon. Member, for the question. Yes, it relates to the requirements for the establishment for the new training and victualling of the new police recruits at the police colleges and places where they are being trained such as Essequibo, Georgetown and Berbice.

There is the question of additional meals needed. An estimated breakdown of how the cost will be allocated per mess: at the Felix Austin Police College, Eve Leary, \$76 million; the Richard Faikal Police Training College, \$11.2 million; Berbice police college, \$11.2 million; the Tactical Service Unit, \$47.1 million; Brickdam, \$125.6 million; the Presidential Guard, \$16.8 million; and the Officers Mess, \$11.2 million.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Dietary – \$400,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Refreshment and Meals – \$4,500,000

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Refreshment and Meals – \$4,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Other – \$60,000,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, under this line item 6294, Other, you are seeking an additional \$60 million. Could you provide us with a detail breakdown on this amount?

Mr. Benn: Hon. Member, there has indeed been an increase in deaths in some interior locations – Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9 – which required flights to response from the CID; issues in relation to drowning and questions of handling, storage and transportation of the bodies from various locations for post-mortem examinations. Basically, these relate to issues of murders, suicides, drownings, and fatal accidents in the interior locations.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Other – \$60,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Land and Water Transport – Police – \$371,115,389

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, you are seeking here an additional \$371 million. Could you provide a breakdown for us – the type, make, manufacturer, cubic centimetres (CC) of these vehicles that you intend to procure and the number of vehicles? And could you also state the police stations that would benefit and the procurement method?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Hon. Member, for the question. Again, this relates to making replacement or making provisions for vehicles for the more difficult areas. We are acquiring 40 Toyota Double Cab motor pickups; 10–2400CC; 10–Honda ATVs; and 850 CCs for the Guyana Police Force. Again, these are to traverse the more remote and difficult areas. In addition, you may have seen some of it – more patrols are being conducted during this festive season. Of course, it will boost the Force’s capacity to mitigate, prevent and to respond to issues of crime in the country.

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, with 26 days remaining in the year, are you purchasing these vehicles in Guyana or are you importing them through some importer or agency?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Hon. Member. Yes, the vehicles are being purchased in Guyana. Beharry Automotive – the sole provider of a particular type of vehicle – and Marics are two particular agencies providing most of these vehicles and the ATVs.

Item 9: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force - \$371,115,389 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 9: 51-513 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Prison Service – Drugs and Medical Supplies – \$26,000,000

Item 9: 51-513 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Prison Service – Drugs and Medical Supplies – \$26,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

5.14 p.m.

Item 9: 51-513 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Prison Service – Fuel and Lubricants – \$29,000,000

Item 9: 51-513 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Prison Service – Fuel and Lubricants – \$29,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-513 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Prison Service – Vehicle Spares and Service – \$9,000,000

Item 9: 51-513 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Prison Service – Vehicle Spares and Service – \$9,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-513 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Prison Service – Other – \$17,600,000

Item 9: 51-513 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Prison Service – Other – \$17,600,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

[Mr. Chairman assumed the Chair.]

Item 9: 51-513 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Prison Service – Dietary – \$200,000,000

Item 9: 51-513 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Prison Service – Dietary – \$200,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-513 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Prison Service – Refreshment and Meals – \$18,400,000

Item 9: 51-513 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Prison Service – Refreshment and Meals – \$18,400,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-517 Ministry of Home Affairs – Customs Anti-Narcotics – Fuel and Lubricants – \$7,500,000

Item 9: 51-517 Ministry of Home Affairs – Customs Anti-Narcotics – Fuel and Lubricants – \$7,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-517 Ministry of Home Affairs – Customs Anti-Narcotics – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$4,500,000

Item 9: 51-517 Ministry of Home Affairs – Customs Anti-Narcotics – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$4,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-517 Ministry of Home Affairs – Customs Anti-Narcotics – Vehicle Spares and Service – \$8,500,000

Item 9: 51-517 Ministry of Home Affairs – Customs Anti-Narcotics – Vehicle Spares and Service – \$8,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 51-517 Ministry of Home Affairs – Customs Anti-Narcotics – Other – \$3,000,000

Item 9: 51-517 Ministry of Home Affairs – Customs Anti-Narcotics – Other – \$3,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Drugs and Medical Supplies – \$30,000,000

Item 10: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Drugs and Medical Supplies – \$30,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: The same Agency, Chart of Accounts 6231, Fuel and Lubricants...

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman [*inaudible*].

Mr. Chairman: Sorry. Is that the previous one you wanted? Sorry. You have to press the button a little faster. I will re-put the agency.

Item 10: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support –Drugs and Medical Supplies – \$30,000,000

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I notice there was a voted provision of \$55 million and now \$30 million has been sought. Under the remarks here of:

“...additional resources to purchase drugs and medical supplies for training, border deployments and routine activities of the Force.”

I would like to ask the Minister or the personnel who is going to answer the question if he or she can give the list of the drugs and medical supplies to be purchased under this line item? What procurement method is to be delivered? Would it be selective tendering or sole source knowing that just 26 days are remaining for the year? Could he or she answer this question?

Mr. Chairman: Let the Minister get settled. Hon. Minister, you have the floor. The microphone, Hon. Minister, press it.

Ms. Teixeira: In response to the Hon. Member, as you are aware, there have been some price increases that has to do with consumable items under drugs and medical supplies. Therefore, this is to provide funds to the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) for the end of the year for consumable items like x-ray supplies, laboratory supplies for operational issues, training *et cetera*, including border deployment and routine activities. It is \$13 million is to ensure that the GDF has enough drugs and medical supplies for the end of the year.

Item 10: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Drugs and Medical Supplies – \$30,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Fuel and Lubricants – \$140,500,000

Item 10: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Fuel and Lubricants – \$140,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Security Services – \$10,700,000

Item 10: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Security Services – \$10,700,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Dietary – \$145,000,000

Item 10: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Dietary – \$145,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Other – \$70,000,000

Item 10: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Other – \$70,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 11: 71-711 Region 1 – Barima/Waini - Regional Administration and Finance – Expenses Specific to the Agency – \$14,055,596

Item 11: 71-711 Region 1 – Barima/Waini - Regional Administration and Finance – Expenses Specific to the Agency – \$14,055,596 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

5.29 p.m.

Item 11: 71-711 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Regional Administration and Finance – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$4,914,000

Item 11: 71-711 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Regional Administration and Finance – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$4,914,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 11: 71-712 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Public Works – Fuel and Lubricants – \$60,639,900

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, I am particularly interested in the sum from this \$60 million, the sum which will be going to Santa Rosa, Kamwatta and Waramuri for electricity.

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Dharamlall]: For Kamwatta – \$840,000; for Waramuri – \$560,000; for the Moruka Power Station, which I suspect you are referring to Santa Rosa – \$9.8 million.

Mr. Chairman: A follow up question Mr. Cox Hon. Member?

Mr. Cox: Yes Sir, just one follow up question. I know it is not stated here but there is no provision under this item for Mabaruma and Port Kaituma. This is just for clarity.

Mr. Dharamlall: Yes, Mr. Chairman. We have provisions for both Mabaruma... There are 11 installations that provide electricity to citizens. The twelfth installation that we covered was the Public Works buildings as well at Moruka. So, 11 plus one.

Item 11: 71-712 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Public Works – Fuel and Lubricants – \$60,639,900 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 11: 71-714 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Health Services – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$10,000,000

Mr. Cox: Could the Hon. Minister give a sort of breakdown as it relates to the increased number of inpatients at the Mabaruma Public Hospital? What exactly are the projects that will be catered for? This is for the Mabaruma Public Hospital. While the Hon. Member is answering that question, he could also do it for the Pakera District Hospital in Matthew's Ridge.

Mr. Dharamlall: Mr. Chairman, are we at Dietary?

Mr. Chairman: We are at agency 71-714, Health Services, line item 6261: Local Travel and Subsistence.

Mr. Dharamlall: Right. Part of the question that the Hon. Member asked has to do more with capital stuff. Local Travel and Subsistence is basically to take care of expenses that are foreseen in the future as well as those that have been...not foreseen but unforeseen to the extent that we have to cater for additional inpatient load. For the year 2022, we have already seen 3,900 patients at the different installations in Region 1 compared to last year. At this time, it is 3,900, and to the end of last year it was 2,940. There are many more patients who are now accessing better facilities across Region 1.

Item 11: 71-714 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Health Services – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$10,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 11: 71-714 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Health Services – Dietary – \$41,000,000

Item 11: 71-714 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Health Services – Dietary – \$41,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 12: 73-731 Region 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara – Regional Administration and Finance – Other – \$4,000,000

Item 12: 73-731 Region 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara – Regional Administration and Finance – Other – \$4,000,000

Item 12: 73-735 Region 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara – Health Services – Janitorial and Cleaning Services – \$12,000,000

Dr. Cummings: The voted provision under this line item was \$28 million, now an extra \$12 million is being sought for additional resources for cleaning. One would have thought that due to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and post-COVID-19, an adequate amount would have been budgeted for this line item. I want to know what additional resources are being procured now for the West Demerara Regional Hospital.

Mr. Dharamlall: We are seeking to procure additional janitorial and cleaning supplies to the tune of \$12 million. We have seen also at the best hospital, the West Demerara Regional Hospital, an increased number of patients during the course of this year compared to last year. As a matter of fact, last year it recorded 3,122 patients and this year, so far, 3,744. Naturally, you would find that much more would be required to take care of the facilities at the hospital.

Item 12: 73-735 Region 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara – Health Services – Janitorial and Cleaning Services - \$12,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 75-751 Region 5 Mahaica/Berbice – Regional Administration and Finance – Security Services – \$2,933,539

Item 13: 75-751 Region 5 Mahaica/Berbice – Regional Administration and Finance – Security Services – \$2,933,539 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 75-754 Region 5 Mahaica/Berbice – Education Delivery – Security Services – \$37,243,615

Item 13: 75-754 Region 5 Mahaica/Berbice – Education Delivery – Security Services – \$37,243,615 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 75-755 Region 5 Mahaica/Berbice – Health Services – Security Services – \$13,606,600

Dr. Cummings: Regarding the \$13,606,600 new allocation that is being sought, could I ask the Minister which security agency will benefit from this amount, this extra charge? What is it due to? Is it more personnel? More locations? Could you explain?

Mr. Dharamlall: Mr. Chairman, am I at liberty to say which security agency here?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Dharamlall: It is Security In Action Guyana (SIAG). That is what I know the acronym to mean. That is the name of the security agency and it has been providing service in Region 5 during the course of this year. This request is to supplement shortfalls.

Item 13: 75-755 Region 5 Mahaica/Berbice – Health Services – Security Services – \$13,606,600 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 14: 77-773 Region 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni – Education Delivery – Dietary – \$98,800,000

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say which dorms we are referring to here?

Mr. Dharamlall: There are two dorms primarily that we focus on in Region 7. [**Ms. Fernandes:** Could you say that again?] There are two that are primarily focused on, Waramadong and Three Miles. The enrolment at Waramadong increased substantially in 2022, especially beyond the September term and, so 504 students are currently being catered for, compared to 383 before the September term began. That is why we have this increase.

Ms. Fernandes: Could you give also the increase for the Three Miles Secondary School, from what to what?

5.44 p.m.

Mr. Dharamlall: Mr. Chairman, I will lay that over.

Ms. Fernandes: Just for clarity, you said this number increased from September?

Mr. Dharamlall: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Fernandes: Are these students being housed at the same facility, all of them that is?

Mr. Dharamlall: There are two facilities that have dormitory quarters at Waramadong, that is, the Dr. Desrey Fox Secondary School... [**Mr. Fernandes:** I am not hearing what you are saying, Sir.] Are you not hearing me? [**Ms. Fernandes:** No.] Sorry. *Oh, when I heckle, I make more noise eh?* There are two dormitories that are usually catered for – Three Miles, as well as Dr. Desrey Fox Secondary School at Waramadong. The increase will cater for students who are housed in these two dormitories. Primarily, the students housed at Dr. Desrey Fox dormitories are the ones who have greater needs because we can access a lot of the other stuff from the town of Bartica, food stuff, that is.

Ms. Fernandes: Could you say what is the design capacity of the dormitories at Waramadong?

Mr. Dharamlall: I am here dealing with the food requirements of the children of the Upper Mazaruni. I am not here dealing with the design requirements of a Secondary School or the dormitory of a Secondary School. Our focus is on making sure our children get adequate nutrition. I would stick to what the Supplementary request is which is to ensure that our children get enough food and proper nutrition in the Upper Mazaruni.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. I am specifically looking at the line item that is catering for the Dietary. If we are catering for Dietary and we are saying the number moved from 382 to 504, then it gives the impression... I asked a question before, if all the students are being housed at the said facility. I am being told that the two dormitories are the Three Miles Secondary and the Waramadong Secondary dormitories. If you have Dietary being facilitated there, then it is only

natural that I am asking if the students are actually having the capacity being met there. If they are sleeping in beds and so forth there.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, this deals with Dietary. The Minister did explain the increased number. With increased numbers you will have to provide increased quantities of Dietary.

Ms. Fernandes: I have a follow up on Dietary, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, go ahead.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Minister say if from this allocation, it will assist with the current water shortage that the children have at the Waramadong Secondary School? [**Hon. Members:** *[Inaudible]*] That is not true. I am currently speaking with them.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister? Allow the Minister... I know all of his Colleagues are anxious to assist in the answer. Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Dharamlall: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, this line item deals with the provision of adequate food and nutrition to the children of the Upper Mazaruni.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what methodology is being utilised to make sure that the students at Waramadong Secondary School, in particular, are not left without food supplies, as was the case earlier in the year? I know that the allocations here is stating that there would be resources available. The last time, the reasoning given was that there was a delay because of shipment of the supplies and all of those things. Students were left with basically bare rice to eat. What provisions are being put in place to make sure that this allocation is utilised efficiently and effectively?

Mr. Dharamlall: I want to be unequivocal on this matter. We have never left any child in the interior without food. [**Mr. Nandlall:** Any child in the country.] Any child in the country without food. When I was growing up in Berbice in the 80s, we were struggling for food under the People's National Congress (PNC). That is what the record is. There is no child in the Upper Mazaruni or any part of the interior... Since 1992, not a child in this country has suffered from white mouth and beriberi as happened under the PNC.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what portion of the money will be utilised in Waramadong and what portion will be utilised for the Three Miles Secondary School dormitories?

Mr. Dharamlall: The procurement process, based on the numbers, would determine how much will go towards Waramadong and the rest for Three Miles. I would be happy if we could leave that to the procurement process. I have no authority to determine the procurement process, quite unlike what happened in the last Government.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, we are looking at the provision here, a specific number, therefore, some thought I would only assume was given when putting together this number. The Minister said that it is to be utilised between those two dormitories. I am going to ask a different question, if that is going to help the Minister a bit. Could the Hon. Minister say what is the amount – give an average of if you could at the very least – that is utilised per student per year?

Mr. Dharamlall: I can work out the Mathematics in terms of what each meal will cost. I can lay that over in lieu of me saying it now.

Item 14: 77-773 Region 7: Cuyuni/Mazaruni - Education Delivery – Dietary – \$99,800,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 15: 79-794 Region 9: Upper Takatu/Upper Essequibo - Education Delivery – Dietary \$53,000,000

Mr. Henry: Dietary: there is a very big problem in Region 9 dormitories which may directly be affected by the diet that has been given to the students and other factors. We are speaking about dietary so I will leave the other factors aside. The problem there is that the children are suffering from low sugar count and because of that, all sorts of paranormal activities may be happening and or happening there. This problem is very serious and the other side will laugh at it because their children are not suffering. The Indigenous children are suffering in Region 9 and we have to solve that problem. I am asking, which dormitories are being catered for under this heading? That is the first question.

Mr. Chairman: Which dormitories, Hon. Minister are being catered for under this heading?

Mr. Dharamlall: Mr. Chairman, I think that it is extremely irresponsible for a Member of Parliament to come to this House and make such an unsubstantiated generalisation as ...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you are imputing. An Hon. Member stands up in the House and makes a statement, one would accept that honourable person to bring something that is substantive to the House.

Mr. Dharamlall: Mr. Chairman, I would, therefore, with your indulgence question the credibility of that statement by the Hon. Member, that children in the Rupununi are affected by low blood count... [Ms. Teixeira: No sugar.] Sorry, no sugar. I think that is...

Secondly, I do not understand the link between paranormal activity and dietary requirements, and which dormitories. The dormitories that we are catering for and I can give the numbers. Again, I will say without fear of contradiction, there has never been a food shortage in the Rupununi since the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) has been in Government. Every child in the Rupununi, because this Programme started under the PPP/C: Annai – 364 students, St. Ignatius – 236, Sand Creek – 298, Aishalton – 134, Karasabai Primary Top – 120 and Nappi Primary Top – 77.

Mr. Henry: Thank you very much, Minister, for answering that question. I would just want to say that the Minister of Education should have been answering these questions. Since the paranormal activities have been happening in all the dormitories, which may be related to the dietary condition, there has not been a statement from the Ministry of Education stating what are the root causes and how it could be solved. [An Hon. Member: How it could be solved?] How it could be solved, here is not a place for it now. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, would you want to respond to the statement with respect to the appropriate Minister to answer and the linkages between the lower dietary or the low sugar count and paranormal activities across the region?

Mr. Dharamlall: Mr. Chairman, I think it is a paranormal question. That is the most that I can say, probably from a paranormal person.

Item 15: 79-794 Region 9: Upper Takatu/Upper Essequibo – Education Delivery – Dietary \$53,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, this completes consideration of all the items on Financial Paper, No. 3 of 2022.

Question

“That the Committee of Supply approves of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 3 of 2022 – Schedule of Supplementary Provision on the Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$44,443,164,154 for the period ending 31st December, 2022.”

put and agreed to.

Assembly resumed.

5.59 p.m.

Suspension of Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Assembly to proceed with the introduction of the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 1 of 2022) Bill 2022, Bill No. 17 of 2022.”

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I move that Standing Orders No. 13(n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Supplementary Appropriation Bill No. 2 of 2022, Bill 2022, Bill No. 25 of 2022 to be introduced at this stage to go through all stages.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Mr. Speaker: We will now have the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance report to the House.

Dr. Singh: Thank you, very much, Sir. I now wish to report that the Committee of Supply (COS) has approved of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 3 of 2022 and I now move that the Assembly doth agree with the Committee in the said Resolution. Thank you, very much, Sir.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: This completes consideration of Financial Paper No. 3 of 2022. We will now deal with the Appropriation Bill. The motion having been moved that the Standing Orders be suspended to take all stages of the Bill.

Dr. Singh: Thank you, very much, Sir. In accordance with Article 171 (2) of the Constitution, I signify that Cabinet has recommended the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2 of 2022) Bill 2022, Bill No. 25 of 2022 be considered by the National Assembly. I now present this Bill to the Assembly and move that it be read for the first time.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read for the first time:

Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2 of 2022) Bill 2022, Bill No. 25 of 2022

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2022, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for specified purposes, in conformity with the Constitution.”

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

Question put and carried.

Bill read the first time.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2 of 2022) Bill 2022, Bill No. 25 of 2022 be read a second time.

Bills – Second and Third Readings

Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2 of 2022) Bill 2022, Bill No. 25/2022

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2022, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for specified purposes, in conformity with the Constitution.”

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

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this would be a good time to take a short suspension of half an hour and we can resume to consider the other business on the agenda for today.

Sitting suspended at 6.03 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 7.06 p.m.

Thank you, Hon. Members. Kindly be seated. We will now proceed with the second reading of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2022, Bill No. 24 of 2022, published on 1st November, 2022. The Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, you have the floor.

Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2022, Bill No. 24 of 2022

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to amend the Representation of the People Act.”

[The Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members of this House, I rise to move that the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2022, Bill No. 24 of 2022 be read for the second time.

This Bill and the one that will immediately succeed it are two of the most important pieces of legislation that we will be discussing, perhaps, in the next few years as they seek to enhance, modernise and reform the democratic polity and architecture of our country. In particular, to make our electoral machinery, our registration process of citizens, and the compilation of the list of electors more transparent, more accountable, and more effective.

The Bill that is before us has been in the public domain for some time now and has been the subject of much public commentary. Therefore, no one in this House, or by extension listening to this debate, ought to be unfamiliar with the contents of this Bill. For the purpose of the record, it is important that I state that these amendments were immediately triggered by the unfortunate incidents which marred the 2nd March, 2020, General and Regional elections, where flagrant attempts were made to thwart the democratic will of the electorate. So much so that the head of the Organization of American States (OAS) Electoral Observation Mission to Guyana, a former Prime Minister of Jamaica, said that it was the most transparent attempts to alter the lawful results of an election that he has ever seen. That precipitated our political party when we were in Opposition and then when we were declared the Government to make three fundamental commitments through His Excellency the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. Firstly, we promised these electoral reforms. Secondly, we promised that the investigative arm of the State will be activated, and criminal charges will be instituted if there is evidence to support those charges. And,

thirdly, a Commission of Inquiry (COI) will be launched under the hand of the President to inquire into the facts and circumstances surrounding the irregularities that took place subsequent to voting day in relation to those elections.

The investigative arm has been activated as promised, and there are currently pending before the criminal courts of our country, some 32 charges against persons implicated in the alleged wrongdoings which we all witnessed. That is an ongoing process. That is commitment number one delivered upon. Commitment two is the Commission of Inquiry. That is also a work in progress. Now, we are delivering on commitment three, which are the legal reforms that we are proposing here tonight.

The road to this destination has been a long one. This Bill, and the Bill that we will discuss subsequently, enjoyed several rounds of consultations involving and engaging many important stakeholder organisations and receiving the inputs from those organisations. The bills themselves were sent out to a variety of these organisations, and they were given ample and adequate time to scrupulously examine them and submit their contributions to the bills. Those contributions were examined and taken on board when it was considered necessary to do so. Then, we concluded that consultative process with a grand consultation right here in the halls of this House where over 100 persons emanating from various important stakeholder organisations were present. They benefitted from a marathon five-hour engagement. Again, recommendations and submissions were taken on board and the bills benefitted from them.

The first thing that I want to address is the state that our laws were in even before we began the amending process. Our electoral laws, unfortunately, have been passed over the last 25 to 30 years in a very piecemeal fashion. There are several pieces of amendments scattered all over the legislative landscape amending the Representation of the People Act (ROPA), amending the National Registration Act and then we had the anomalous situation where we had a Bill called the Election Laws (Amendment) Act that was passed in 2000, that presents itself as an amendment but, in fact, it was a principal act as there is no principal act in the country called an election laws act. That Act became the cradle of a whole slew of important provisions relating to the Elections Commission, the electoral process, the powers of the Commission, the establishment of a permanent secretariat, the power of the Commission to take charge of that secretariat, the power of the Commission to hold the Chief Elections Officer (CEO) answerable, the power of the

Commission to hold the Chief Elections Officer answerable even for the hiring of staff, the provision to empower the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) to deal with situations of emergency and difficulties after there is a recession of Parliament and there is no legislative body to intervene to make laws.

7.17 p.m.

All those wide and very crucial plenitude of powers were assembled in this one piece of legislation called the Election Laws (Amendment) Act. Then as I said, the National Registration Act was amended several times when we, the Government, introduced the cyclical form of continuous registration into our registration system, abolishing the cyclical form of registration which existed *hitherto*. Even when one reads the letter columns of the newspapers and hears the political narrative emanating from the Opposition, one gets the distinct impression that there is great misunderstanding still yet in appreciating that there is a continuous cycle of registration, and that difficulty comes from the scattered and piece meal way that our law finds itself currently now. Any person who had the opportunity or the occasion to research our law would tell you the difficulty and tedious nature of the exercise simply to find the law and then to understand which one implied or expressively repeal which one, which one has not been repealed and which has been repealed. Lawyers doing election cases and cases of a political nature have had the miserable ordeal of deciphering pages and pages of legislation. Then, of course, one had to find them in the first place. I recall, distinctly, when I was arguing the case in 2019, in relation to the then house-to-house registration process that commenced by the Chairman of the Elections Commission at that time, James Patterson, the Chief Justice of our country, the Hon. Madam Justice Roxane George expressed great disquiet at the state the law was in because it was so difficult to assemble the various pieces of legislation and then try to understand them in a coherent and chronological way. Half of them were overtaken by events because they were passed to meet peculiar events that had been contemplated, expected to take place or to feature at a particular election time or a particular election. When that election passes, that eventuality no longer exists, but that provision or those provisions remain on the statute book creating unnecessary ammunition for lawyers who want to advance disingenuous arguments because they use that to make clear positions ambiguous by injecting these different and various pieces of legislation.

What this exercise enabled us to do was to examine all this *gamut* of loose pieces of paper all over the landscape scrupulously, dissect from them the irrelevant provisions; those that may have been overtaken by events, put aside those provisions that have been repealed and to consolidate or revise, as is the technical term, all those various provisions. For example, the Election Laws (Amendment) Act of 2000 had about 30 or more provisions. We had to migrate them back to their respective homes where appropriate, either in the Representation of the People Act or in the National Registration Act. Even without the amendments, this exercise has been great for our law revision process in that it has now, for the first time after approximately three decades, assembled all our election laws, registration laws, and related laws to those two processes, we are now putting them in their respective abode, so that they could be easily and conveniently access them. Even if we have accomplished nothing more than that, I believe that we have accomplished a great lot. These amendments go much further than that.

The Bill that is before us is 63 pages in length. The amendments that are contained therein are wide ranging. They cover from the beginning to the end, almost of the ROPA. It is, therefore, physically impossible for one to go through clause by clause in this Bill. One will only have to deal with the conspicuous and salient aspects of the reforms that are being proposed. The first component of the Bill deals with the various sections of the Election Laws (Amendment) Act (ELA) and recites them at convenient places within the ROPA. There are a series of provisions here that we are now inserting into the ROPA as they are relevant to the ROPA, which were found, and in the 2000 ELA – Election Laws (Amendment) Act. We have done similarly for the National Registration Act. They are all there; the establishment of the permanent secretariat, *et cetera*. These are all in the laws already. It is just to situate them appropriately. There is also the clarifying of the commission's powers over the Commissioner. Importantly, one of the main policies, and perhaps, I should speak to the main policies of this Bill.

Let me digress a little to speak about the main policies of the Bill. The Representation of the People Act is nearly 100 years old and, by share passage of time, had required a review in any event. However, the 2020 Elections brought to light the way that the legislation in its current form can be subject to abuse. Mind you, this is the very legislation that governed all the elections, including the 2015 Elections in which the joint Opposition won and formed the Government. It presented no problems for the Returning Officers working in that electoral machinery. It presented no problems

for the very Chief Elections Officer who administered the 2020 Elections. Both of those categories of officials and all others seem to have understood their functions quite well and perform them quite creditably. Come 2020, 2nd March, election day, was well. President Granger speaking on behalf of the Government, lauded the activities of voting day, and so did all the political parties contesting the elections, so did all the major international observer agencies and local observer agencies observing E-day (Election Day) activities or D-day whichever wish; E-day I believe.

It was when the tabulation of Region 4 began then the mad orchestra began to play. Nine other regions tabulated their results and transmitted their Statements of the Poll and the consequential legal documents to the centre under the legislation without any significant complaints or difficulties. It was when the tabulation of Region 4 began that we saw a different story unfolding. It gave the world an opportunity to see how discretion can be abused, how discretion can be manipulated, how irrelevant consideration can contaminate the exercise of discretion, how ill-motive, and how fraud could contaminate the exercise of power. It did not start there. It began before with an unlawful house to house exercise in 2019, where the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) wanted to scrap the existing database, construct a new one and carry out a house to house process which, in a record six weeks, purported to register, according to them, over half of the electorate, when we took a full two years in 2008, the last time such an exercise was undertaken, to complete the entire country. What was found out in that aborted house to house exercise was a clear and present intent to alienate a number of qualified persons to be registered so that there would have had a very limited and deficient base from the national register of registrants from which a voter list would have been extracted, thereby, rigging the election even before it was called. That was the first problem that surfaced quite apart from the unilateral appointment of the GECOM Chair. I have to abbreviate my presentation to give me focus. That was challenged in the court. The court ruled, as we all know, that one cannot remove existing registrants from that database, especially or rather specifically, if he/she is not a resident in the country because that was the stated purpose of the exercise. It was to remove from the database persons whom GECOM felt were residents of the country, and their rationale is simple. The combination of articles 59 and 159 of our Constitution imbues to every citizen or imbue to every citizen of this country a power to register once that citizen is 18 years, and over and once that citizen is a Guyanese. There was no mention of residency, meaning if one is a resident in Timbuktu, Sri Lanka, or the United

Kingdom (UK), once he/she is 18 years and over and he/she is a Guyanese, he/she can come here and be registered. Once registered, you are qualified to vote. A very simple equation.

We had to then deal with that issue and that is reflected in the amendments here as well as in the amendments in the National Registration Act. We have a duty as lawmakers to ensure that Article 8 of the Constitution is complied with. Article 8 of the Constitution states:

“...any ... law...”

That...

“...is inconsistent with ...”

The Constitution is ...

“...void.”

To the extent of that inconsistency. When we are making laws or amending laws, we have to ensure that those laws meet the constitutional litmus test. There are many instances in the current National Registration Act and in the ROPA where it relates to the compilation of the list of electors that misplace emphasis on residency. Wherever that has occurred it is now being removed to bring the legislation, both the ROPA and the National Registration Act, in conformity with the four corners of the Constitution. That is a major thrust of these amendments.

Secondly, the public will be well aware that the Chief Elections Officer has a great and necessary latitudinal width and breadth of power when it comes to the appointment of polling places. The Guyana Elections Commission took a policy at the last election and possibly previous elections too, that I have no doubt was made with the best of intentions that it will use as far as possible only public places as polling stations.

7.32 p.m.

However, you have places in this country where they may not be a sufficient number of public places. Therefore, you have to, by necessity, ensure that there are available voting stations for the electorate to exercise their franchise by renting private places. What we found on the last occasion. Not what we found, what we made public was that areas in Georgetown, for example, where there

are far more public places that could have been used for polling places, private residences were used. In my constituency, on the East Coast of Demerara, where there is a distinct paucity of public places, sufficient number of polling stations were not appointed. When the election agents of the People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) Cde. Zulfikar Mustapha, and I am an assistant election agent queried it to the then Chief Elections Officer; he gave me the excuse that they are confined only to deal with public places. I travelled around Georgetown, and I photographed over 15 private residences that are in close proximity with public places, but those private residences were retained or rented, and the public places were not being used. I presented that to him and I said this cannot be fair.

Then, we had to take a team from the Guyana Elections Commission accompanied by A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC). Basil Williams was part of that team. I cannot remember who else but the consultants from the Commonwealth, myself, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, and a team from GECOM. We had to travel to the East Coast to show the lengths of villages and to show where the polling places were located.

Firstly, they were inadequate in number. They were not properly geographically located, so there was not an equitable spread, but quite apart from the geographic spread to make it convenient for voters, there was a minuscule number totally inadequate to satisfy the voting population in localities. That was a major problem. What was even worse was that in Guyana, we must always recognise our problems as leaders. We know in Guyana, at elections times, there are peculiar problems because of the ethnic voting patterns. We also know that there is a propensity sometimes for violence at election time. What we discovered in many areas, persons of one stronghold were taken from that, and the list for which those persons were to vote was located in a distant village, causing them to walk miles or travel miles into a different constituency to cast ballots. Clearly intended to expose our atmosphere to unnecessary tension and possibly combustion having regard to our history at election times and what is associated with that. Those are the things we had to confront so much so three days before elections, there were a number of big areas where the people did not know where they were going to cast their ballots because GECOM was still not... We had to go with torchlight, flood light into dark areas of villages on the East Coast to identify open spaces because... And we accepted their explanation they do not want to go to houses. We accepted that. The next alternative is a public space if you do not have a public building. We had to go with

torchlight and find playgrounds and empty house lots, and then GECOM had to get tents and equip them over night for people to go and vote there the next morning.

I say without any fear of contradiction, and the Leader of the Opposition would say, the fear of successful contradiction that there was a pattern. Do you know what the pattern was? We travelled both strongholds of the different political parties because the APNU/AFC was part of that exercise, insisted that we go into areas such as Bachelor's Adventure, Victoria over the line, *et cetera* and we went. The position was not the same. There were not comparables. Only in the PPP/C perceived strongholds did we have these difficulties. The PPP/C electorates or supporters did not know where they were going to cast their ballots 48 hours before the elections day. These provisions intend to address that. Not to take away the power of the CEO. To circumscribe those powers, regulate those powers, and insert into the law factors that he must take into account before he chooses a polling station. Also, there is a delimitation of numbers that could cast ballots at one polling station, so we do not have overcrowding.

I have said repeatedly, publicly, and I am going to say it again if anyone... I have put out this challenge over a year and nobody has accepted it. I hope that someone would try to do it tonight. If anyone could point to a single provision in these proposals which create an electoral advantage for the PPP/C, I am prepared to stand up here and debate it rather for any political party. The point I want to emphasise is that any single person concerned about free, transparent, and accountable elections in this country will support every single amendment here because they are all designed to bring clarity, transparency, and accountability to the electoral machinery. That is all, and I will examine them, one by one I will go through. I may not have the time, but there are all here. Let us go to the Bill itself now. Clause 7 is amended and that deals with the establishment of polling stations. It states:

“Where there is no public building is available to be appointed... the Chief Elections Officer may rent a separate private building unconnected with a political party or politician, and appoint it as a polling place...”

How could you have a problem with that? Clause 8 states:

“A large polling place with adequate space... maybe divided... into polling stations.”

No more than 400 electors to vote at a polling station. How could you have a problem with that? Factors to be considered in dividing a polling place into polling stations include;... This is the circumscription or regulation of the discretion that I am speaking about.

Clause 10 states:

“(a) the number of electors on the list...;

(b) the size of the polling place;

(c) the availability of internal and external space in the polling place to accommodate electors lining up at reasonable distance apart;

(d) the accessibility of the polling place for persons with disability;”

How could anyone find this objectionable? Also, the Chief Elections Officer, later in the Bill is mandated to give notice ‘x’ number of days. I believe five days before polling day; he has to publish the list of polling stations for all to see. How could that be wrong? There is a provision I believe, a last minute change but as far as possible he has to publish the notice to poll, the list of polling stations in the Official Gazette for everyone to see. How could anyone concerned about transparent elections find that in any way objectionable?

Then, we have the division of the polling districts into sub-divisions. This is a direct answer to Clairmont Mingo's *shenaniganism*. A direct response to him. There is no two or three ways about that. We have countries in the world where millions and millions of ballots are counted, and results are declared within a matter of days, weeks sometimes depending upon the number. We have a couple thousand ballots in Region 4 that took us from March to August to count and resolve. How much were the total ballots for Region 4? **An Hon. Member:** [(Inaudible)] A couple tens of thousands of ballots, out of 160,000 or there about. About 200,000, I am told. It took us six months to count that. It means, unfortunately, that we are unable to count 200,000 ballots properly, fairly, and in accordance with the law. That was on display at the Ashmins building. The stories are now unfolding before the Commission of Inquiry (COI) to refresh our memories if it is becoming dull. We proposed Region 4 first, as that was the problem region, and no one can dispute. No one can dispute, and that is where the problem arose. Then, the Opposition Party said we are singling out Region Four because it is their stronghold. We rejected that because there was nothing to do with

stronghold and weak hold. It was where the problem arose. We consulted, and I believe the Private Sector Commission (PSC) and some other electoral body came to us and said look, just to appear even-handed, and we are, just chose another two regions or another rregion, that is considered a PPP/C stronghold and do the same thing. We are motivated by no sinister motive. Therefore, we are unopposed to such a gesture if it could bring the Opposition on board because we want the Opposition to embrace these changes. After all, whether I like it or not, you are the country's major Opposition. I do not know how long that will remain, but you are a major player in the electoral equation. Therefore, you must have a say. You have the support of a significant constituency in this country.

Hon. Members, what we did is what we were proposing originally for Region 4. We replicated it in Region 3, a known PPP/C stronghold, and in Region 6, a known PPP/C stronghold. If there is any disadvantage by the sub-division, the PPP/C suffering it more by 100% because we have two and you have one. That is the extent that we are going to satisfy the queries that you have raised.

What we have done is not create unknown divisions. We used existing polling sub-divisions within the polling districts. All of us who have done election work at election time would be familiar with the different regions and the polling sub-divisions within the regions. All we have done is used those same boundary demarcation, so that for GECOM, they will correspond with the existing electoral division system in its system. There is not going to be much work for GECOM to do when they have to enforce this legislation. Region 3 is divided, as it is now in a poll district, into Essequibo Island and River sub-district. That is one. Two, Saint Lawrence, Cornelia Ida sub-district, and three, Hague to Arabio Creek sub-district.

7.47 p.m.

Now what this amendment seeks to do, is to replicate the identical structure which exist in the polling districts and to put them in sub-polling districts now, whereby you will still have a Returning Officer (RO), but in each polling sub-district, you will have a supernumerary Returning Officer who, for all intent and purpose, will perform the very function that the returning officer would have performed for the entire region. In Region 3, you will now have three tabulations being done instead of a tabulation being done in a central place.

Each of these sub-districts will be tabulating their votes and they will be sending their documents straight on to the elections... All of that is outlined. To the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), to the Chairman of the Elections... This is because we have amplified the persons who documents have to be sent to so that no one person will hold election documents at a ransom anymore. We will also send it to the RO, and the RO at the end, of course, will have to tabulate. The supernumerary Returning Officer will tabulate in the same way that the RO tabulates, allowing all the election agents, the observers, *et cetera*, to participate. We specify how he must tabulate, no bread sheet and spreadsheet, he must use his statements of poll. He can project it on an electronic mechanism if he wishes, but the basis of the tabulation must be the statements of poll and nothing but the statements of poll. If there is any transposition from the statements of poll, then it must be done in a transparent way and with the concurrence of all the participants in the process – the statutory participants and they are listed there. The aggregates of these totals will then be sent to the RO who shall declare. These supernumerary Returning Officers also shall declare. The RO shall declare as well. So, we have... and then... but I am going to deal with that later. So, that is Region 3.

Region 4 is East Bank sub-district, North Georgetown sub-district, South Georgetown sub-district, East Coast Demerara sub-district. Region 6 shall be East Bank Berbice to Canje sub-district, Upper Corentyne sub-district and lower Corentyne sub-district. I hope that you understand what will happen there.

Now the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are going to be sent to the CEO, to the ROs and to the Chairman of the Commission. The ROs, upon receipt, must post on the website. If the RO fails to do that and he must do it upon receipt... So, within 24 hours all the SOPs should be on a website. The CEO, if there is a default, and the RO must also post to the website. So, within 24 hours all the results are known in the country. Of course, with the various duties that are being created here, if there is any breach of these duties, serious criminal offences are created, and high fines and high terms of imprisonment are imposed.

Disciplined Forces – when the Disciplined Forces cast their ballots, it is then inked, it is crossed off and that list is put into the ballot box and sent to the polling place where that person was registered to vote. That is to guard against voter impersonation.

We clarified the position of identity papers, and it is now stated what is acceptable as a form of identification (ID). A valid passport is now acceptable. Any person who refuses to allow a voter to vote when that voter presents a valid ID is also liable to some serious offences. Any person who impersonates a voter is subject to a number of offences as well. Anyone who obstructs voting day activities shall be liable for a series of offences, *et cetera*.

Then, of course, we deal with how the votes are totalled. Clearly, at the polling stations, the amendment sets out how the votes are to be counted, who are to be present, how the Presiding Officer must listen to the queries from the various persons and must sign off only when there is a consensus. A very transparent process of counting. When the count is finished, of course, like what exists now, the results, a statement of poll, is posted there at a conspicuous part of the polling place. Anyone who removes that statement of poll also commits a serious offence.

Mr. Speaker, also we deal with post tabulation now with the declaration of the results. Clear directions and guidelines are now set out to guide the Chief Elections Officer on how to compute the results and how to aggregate, and what he must count as valid votes and what will be the total results which he will do in accordance with Section 96 to pass over the Elections Commission for those to be the basis upon which the Election Commission will declare the results. Mr. Speaker, we have also mandated the CEO a time period, once he is receipt of all the aggregate numbers from the various regions. He has 12 hours to compute his results in accordance with Section 96.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General (AG), as we are on time, you will need an extension of time to continue.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Attorney General, you may continue with your contribution.

Motion carried.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, he has 12 hours from the receipt of the documents on the numbers to calculate and give to the Elections Commission. He will not be operating as the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) said. What was the word they used? They used a western word from the cowboy movies. What was it? I cannot remember. [**An Hon. Member:**

Lone wolf.] Yes, he was a ‘lone wolf’ or something like that. [Mr. Ramson: Lone ranger.] Yes, ‘lone ranger’. That was it, I remember. Thank you, Mr. Ramson. He is not a lone ranger, and he does not operate on his own timeframe. He now has a statutory mandate. There is a fine of \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years for breach of these obligations.

The Elections Commission publishes manuals and I have no doubt that they do so with utmost bona fides to guide their elections staff on Election Day on how to perform their respective functions. What we have found and all electioneers in this House will agree with me that, on Election Day, sometimes when ‘*push comes to shove*’, crunch time, you have to argue with a Presiding Officer or some junior staff in the machinery about what the manual says or how the manual is being misinterpreted. Most times Mr. Speaker... well on every occasion, the manual ought to be in conformity with the Representation of the People Act, the statutory code by which elections are conducted in this country. Sometimes the manuals collide with ROPA or sometimes they contravene ROPA, but to convince a junior staff on Election Day of that is an impossibility. They are following that guideline, that manual, like a *Bible* and that can lead to problems. When you try to get on to a CEO or a RO, you have great difficulties.

What we are stipulating now as a matter of law is that any manual that the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) wishes to use, and they have the autonomy to use any number of manuals as they wish, they must make them public at a period of 30 days after proclamation. Thirty days before Election Day they must make those manuals public so that they cannot change them after making them public. This is so that all political parties have the time to scrutinise those manuals and find objections to them.

Mr. Speaker, I am sorry that I have had to hurry my presentation. As I said, it is impossible for one to cover the breadth and width of the amplitude, gravity and magnitude of the menu of proposals that are here. They are wide-ranging. I know that there are many speakers after me who will speak competent, experienced politicians in the election field. I have no doubt Mr. Speaker that they will carry the baton on further and explain the various facets and tenets of this Bill. Mr. Speaker, this is a good piece of law-making which every sensible Guyanese should throw their full support behind. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Attorney General. Our next contributor is the Hon. Member Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir. Just before the Hon. Member starts her contribution, I would like to call on the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs to move the suspension of the Standing Order so that we can continue with this sitting to the end of the business of the sitting.

Suspension of Standing Order No. 11

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Order No. 11 be suspended to enable this sitting of the National Assembly to continue until the conclusion of the Order Paper.”

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to move the Standing Order to allow for the sitting to continue until the conclusion of the Order Paper today.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may now make your contribution.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I wonder why is it that before I have gotten a word in edgewise, the Hon. Member seeks to distract and that is a good thing. Predictability is a very good thing when it comes to governance, but you would not know that would you? Anyway, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for the opportunity to make my presentation to the honourable House on this Bill before us for consideration. It is absolutely important, and I have to agree with the Hon. Attorney General. He went into great depth and took great pains to point out that this is indeed a matter of gravity.

In fact, Mr. Speaker the Representation of the People Act is intituled as an Act to make provision for the election of Members of the National Assembly under a system of proportional representation and for purposes connected therewith. I agree with the Hon. Attorney General that

this Bill is indeed a very weighty one. I noted he indicated that he could not, at this time, go through in detail, the provisions as set out.

8.02 p.m.

I want to propose to the Hon. Attorney General that, given how grave and important this is, the place for us as Members of Parliament (MPs), the place for us as representatives of the people, is to take this Bill... [**An Hon. Member:** *[Inaudible]*] ...you are absolutely right – to a select committee where we can, clause by clause, peruse the amendments that are being proposed. To quote the Hon. Attorney General – who with an interest in free and fair elections and who with an interest in law and order, would oppose this honourable House sending this Bill to a select committee so that we can peruse these amendments, one by one, to understand and get clarification from the Attorney General for the rationale of the proposals contained herein? Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member, the AG, pointed out that it is 63 pages in length and the amendments are wide-ranging. I doubt that a responsible Assembly would seek to tonight, in the dead of night, foist upon the people of Guyana a Bill that has not had the scrutiny of the select committee, bearing in mind the importance that the Attorney General has outlined it has.

The Attorney General referred to a number of the main policies of the Bill. What I want to say to us tonight, and I said it on the last occasion that I stood here, is that the People's Progressive Party/Civic conveniently remembers history. The PPP/C, in the person of the Attorney General, has come here to say to us that the reason for these amendments is what happened in 2020. Again, operating as if Guyana's history began in 2015 to 2020. I want to say and caution us that they really should not, as a responsible Assembly, ram these amendments down the throats of the people of Guyana using their one-seat majority. The Hon. Attorney General himself said and acknowledged that we on this side of the House represent a significant proportion of the people of Guyana. Should the Attorney General be interested in fairness, I do not think that he will want to go on record as denying what he has said to be a significant proportion of Guyanese, the opportunity to have their representatives – now that a Bill has been presented to us – peruse these amendments, section by section.

Anyone interested in law, order, democracy, and all of the other tenets that you said, will not resist such a call. The Representation of the People (Amendment) Act, as admitted by the Hon. Attorney

General touches and concerns the entire legal framework for elections. It directly impacts a number of pieces of legislation. It is important that, as representatives of the people, we be given the opportunity to, provision by provision, peruse these proposed amendments to make sure that we are satisfied with what is being proposed by the Government. The Attorney General does not get to come here...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I was able to listen to the Attorney General. I would like to listen to the Hon. Member now presenting. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, I thank you for that. We, on this side of the House, will say that we support electoral reform, unequivocally. We support meaningful, we support honest, and earnest electoral reform. Let the record show what we will not support is the PPP/C Administration coming to this honourable House, as I have said before, to foist these provisions upon the people of Guyana. The Hon. Members on the other side of the House must know that public consultation and scrutiny of a piece of legislation by a select committee are two completely different things. Mr. Speaker, let them not come with that excuse.

I want to say this because my task tonight before us is to examine the context within which these amendments are proposed. Just like the Attorney General, I have Colleagues who will speak after me, who competently acquit themselves of the various aspects of the Bill. We can predict with certainty what will be said here tonight, just as the Attorney General who started with the 2020 Elections, Mingo, and all those things. I want to say this – we know that this is nothing short of a gimmickry. The PPP/C Administration knows that. As of today's date, any talk from them about democracy, about transparency, and about good governance is simply that, talk. The people of Guyana have had two years to see and assess the PPP/C Administration. I will say today that the people of Guyana have seen that this country is in a state of democratic backsliding, the likes of which we have never seen before.

The guardrails of our democracy are so brazenly and so wantonly being eroded – brazenly and wantonly. When we talk about democracy, the PPP/C wants us to pretend as if they are the bastions of democracy. If we recall, even the so-called branded *Guardians of Democracy* have parted company with them and are now openly critical of their corruption, their greed, and their avarice. I am addressing before us, the context in which the PPP/C is seeking to move these amendments.

They have come into this House with the hopes that they can rally the people of Guyana to support them with cries of Mingo, and who rigged and who did not rig. They are doing it with the sole aim of distracting from their mismanagement of the economy. They are doing it with the sole aim of distracting from their inability to bring relief to the poor and working-class Guyanese. The lived reality of the people of Guyana today is a blackout multiple times a day; dirty water coming through their taps if any water at all; and the average man struggling to put food. This is the context in which the PPP/C is coming today to ram these amendments down our throats.

Let me say that they can scream and detract all they want, but it does not take away from the lived reality of Guyanese. I want to address our minds to the theoretical underpinnings of what is being brought here before us. I anticipate from the array of speakers, we will hear *ad nauseum* about the 2020 Elections, the threat to democracy, and all of that. The truth is that for decades now, the call has been clarion for electoral reform, both by international observers, and by Guyanese and civil society. These calls were not born out of thin air, events happened, events before March, 2020.

We remember in 2011 the then Chief Elections Officer (CEO) presented to the Commission the allocation of seats he purportedly arrived at using a formula that he never presented to the Commission, but he arrived at a result. Mr. Speaker, we remembered that. Thankfully, Mr. Vincent Alexander caught him in the act. Guyanese remember in 2006 when the same CEO announced a result that was not in keeping with the votes cast and it resulted in the Alliance For Change (AFC) in Region 10 being denied its rightful seat. We remember in 1997 when the then Chairperson left a meeting of the Commissioners and swore in the late Ms. Jagan as President unbeknownst to the rest of the Commissioners. Our history records the throwing of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Act *over your shoulder*. The greatest act of judicial disrespect we have ever seen as Guyanese. The PPP/C does not get to come in here tonight to pretend to be the morality police. They do not get to come in here tonight to be the morality police. I make this point to say that, as a House, we have two options. We can come here and continue to point the finger, or we can get down to what the people of Guyana deserve – proper meaningful, electoral reform. What that does not look like, is what the PPP/C is purporting to do here tonight – bring amendments and using the tyranny of its one-seat majority to foist it on the people of Guyana. That is not what meaningful electoral reform looks like.

We have to be serious about what we are doing. I want to say that I sat and heard the Hon. Attorney General go through the raft of promises that they have delivered to the people of Guyana, and he has named this, as one such. On the last occasion that I was here, standing in this very spot, I spoke about the quality of the legislative enactments that we are purporting. It is not about ticking promises; it is also about the qualitative elements of what we are doing. I am submitting to us tonight, that there is no way in one night we can go through and assess the quality of this Bill in this session. It needs to go to a select committee. I want to say that the Government, for all intents and purposes, is not serious about electoral reform. They are not serious. Their attitude says to us that they have no intention of getting down to real meaningful reform. Very important to this issue of electoral reform – bearing in mind, I will say, that the International Registries Incorporated (IRI) recently concluded a poll which showed that 38% of the people of Guyana did not believe that the results reflected the will of the people and 81% of the people of Guyana want electoral reform. I am submitting to us tonight that does not look like the PPP/C is coming to ram down our throats these amendments.

8.17 p.m.

I want to look at a few elements of the Bill in terms of the context within which this Bill is brought. When we look at the issue of fines and penalties that the Hon. Attorney General addressed here tonight, we note the very draconian fines and penalties that have been placed in this Bill. These are matters that ought to be properly discussed because, not only us on this side of the House have raised the objection noting that what this does is deter qualified competent people from participating and working with GECOM to administer our elections. The Hon. Members on the other side of the house can heckle, they can say whatever they want to say, it does not change the reality that the fact is that this will serve to deter qualified competent people from being employed with GECOM.

I am finding it very difficult to rationalise the draconian penalties in view of this particular fact. We are driving away qualified people. Why would a qualify person want to work with GECOM? If it is a case where, for example, a genuine mistake is made and they are facing draconian fines and penalties, unless that is the intention, one must wonder, is the intention to dissuade competent qualified people from manning our election system so that it could be stacked with persons favourable to the PPP/C Administration. One must ask the question, just so that we know that this

is not conjecture, they must tell you that they objected to 72 persons who were appointed to be officials at the upcoming Local Government Elections (LGE). They wrote to the Chief Executive Officer objecting to those persons. Do you know what the CEO responded and said to them? 'Listen to me, if you are going to object to these people, we already have such a challenge with manpower that the LGE will not be able to come off at the time that you want it to come off by.' They must tell you that. So, this is not about conjecture. This is a live situation that is happening right now as a result of these proposed amendments.

We have to ask the question whether this is the motive? It does not strain credulity that the PPP/C would want to stack the system with people that they view as their people. They will be as the Government in a position to offer persons that support them, the protections from the types of prosecutions they are prescribing here in Law. In other words, 'man you do your thing we got you covered'. It does not strain credulity when the PPP/C has demonstrated their willingness and their ability to shelter their agents who are involved in wrongdoings. In my own portfolio, I am thinking now of our High Commissioner to India, who for all intents and purposes unleashed the vilest of attacks against a female in India and he still sitting comfortably as our High Commissioner. They have demonstrated this ability to protect their people who are involved in wrongdoings. They will tell them 'you all go, we got you covered. We will not allow you to be charged'. That is the motive. Let us not fool ourselves, they want to stack the system with their people.

I want to say.... [**Mr. Nandlall:** You are a special talent... *inaudible*.] Thank you for recognising that I am a special talent Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall. But I will say this, we on this side of the House, in taking up what the Attorney General has said, are not opposed to electoral reform. We are willing to support the amendments as long as we are satisfied that they meet the criteria that the rational is sound. I am repeating here that we will be able to do that in a select committee sitting with the Government and reviewing these provisions one by one and bringing them back to this honourable House to say that this is an effort that we have made collectively. The point that I wanted to make... I cannot help but be amused by the Attorney General's statement that I have not made one comment on the Bill. Anyway, he left the room, so he must have not been following. In excess of 46 amendments and the Hon. Attorney General has indicated that he will not be able to go through all tonight but is trying to take me to task for not rushing. Mr. Speaker and Hon.

Member, Mr. Nandlall, this is my 30 minutes and, therefore, I will say what I want to say on this Bill. You will not prescribe what I say.

The final point that I want to make in terms of the context within which this Bill is brought, is that, as noted by the Hon. Attorney General, there are a number of interrelations with other pieces of legislation. One we will consider here tonight, the National Registration (Amendment) Bill 2022, the Electoral Laws. There is a web of provisions, and we are not satisfied on this side of the House that they have been able to be properly and thoroughly reconciled. My suggestion as the Hon. Member on the other side of the House has ask, is for us to take this to a select committee so that we can review it. Anyone interested in transparency and democracy will not object to that. I want to turn our attention to, Part 4 A, the Preparation of the Official List, and I will give you, for example, one concern that we have on this side of the House, that we believe has not been properly ventilated in terms of the rational,

“If the Commission so directs by order, notwithstanding anything contained in any other written law, the list of electors to choose the members of any local democratic organ (other than a regional democratic council) or other local government authority shall consist of names extracted from the official list of electors prepared under this section and registered with an address in the area of that local democratic organ or local government authority.”

The Hon. Attorney General went into detail to speak, well not detail, he mentioned in passing the issue of residency. We believe that this is a matter that requires much more thorough interrogation to come to the position that is progressive and responsive to the reality on the ground. That is what we truly believe. We are asking, and my Colleague the Hon. Shadow Attorney General will speak to this in greater details. We want to examine Section 87, in terms of the context again and the Hon. Attorney General mentioned the issue of the supernumerary officers. The question arises as to the capacity of the system with these new manpower requirements that we are imposing. How has that been studied out? What are the implications for GECOM? What are the implications for its operating cost? These are all very pertinent and relevant issues that have to be considered.

The Hon. Attorney General mentioned, as well, the issue of premises for which polling stations must be located. For example, we wish to recommend that the House considers – and this is something we can speak more to in a select committee – that the House considers perhaps giving

parties the option of a no-objection, rather than leaving this to the Chief Elections Officer. For example, the Opposition parties may say ‘look, we do not agree with this premises, we agree on this one’. That is an option that is not explicitly spelt out and should be explicitly spelt out. The other issue that we want to look at in terms of the interrelated nature of this, we want to look at two issues....

Mr. Speaker: Before you look at the two issues, I will need to give you some time.

Mr. Ramjattan: Could the member be given five minutes to conclude?

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead Hon. Member, you have five minutes to conclude.

Motion carried.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I have five more minutes, and, in that time, I wish to say to us that, these over 46 or so amendments require a thorough examination. We will continue to repeat on this side of the House that we require, as the representative of 49% of the population as the Hon. AG stated, that this Bill goes to a select committee so that we can review it. I will say that this issue of consultation and public consultation is a different matter from when a bill comes into this House that it should invoke the parliamentary procedure of being sent to the select committee.

In wrapping up I want to say this, that we have to be serious in this House about electoral reform. We are standing here, and we are talking about this wide sweeping ROPA and there are low-hanging fruits that we can pick to demonstrate to the people of Guyana that we are really interested in free, fair and transparent elections. This issue of biometrics at the place of poll, any person interested in free and fair elections, why would they, to use the Hon. Attorney General’s words, reject this issue of biometrics at the polls. They are saying, ‘oh it precludes people from voting’ when the truth of the matter is, all that it is doing is confirming that you are who you say you are. Which person interested in transparency and in fairness would resist that? One other observation, and this is in the context in which this Bill is brought.

8.32 p.m.

I note that there is a harkening back to the 2001 database. Given that these matters are interrelated, I wonder whether the Attorney General (AG) could make clear here, tonight, why we are not referring to the 2008 database that was created out of that house-to-house exercise. To quote a document from the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), it states:

“The imperative to conduct the house to house registration was born out of the need for the creation of an indisputable NRRDB which could be used as the basis for the preparation of Electoral Lists that would be commonly acceptable by all stakeholders as being unblemished.”

When taken together, this Act and the amendments to the National Registration Act (NRA) seek to bypass that 2008 National Register of Registrants (NRR) that was created to refer us back to a 2001 NRR. It appears to me the result of that would be to disavow that 2008 NRR and harken back to 2001. What the intention is, I am presuming, by the operation of the law to allow people who did not present themselves in 2008 to be registered to somehow be brought back in through the back door. The result of which, if we continue on this trajectory, would be that Guyana would soon have a voters list that exceeds its population. It cannot be that in a democratic society we are going to say to the people of Guyana that our hands are tied, and that dead people who have died overseas and whose deaths have not been registered here in Guyana, must remain on a list, must provide an opportunity for mischief, and we, in this honourable House, can do nothing about it. That is an unacceptable position for us to put to the people of Guyana.

What I have attempted to highlight here, tonight, is that this matter is a complex and far-reaching one. The people of Guyana are far more deserving of a proper review and not a three-hour debate in which we will come, trade words and they will foist down the throats of the Guyanese people a sham of an attempt at electoral reform, when the people of Guyana deserve deep, meaningful reform so as to curb this current trajectory of democratic black slide on which we find ourselves. Mr. Speaker, I thank you for affording me the opportunity. [*Applause*]

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker, it was really difficult and still somehow traumatizing to have heard the Hon. Member, who just spoke before me, go through a presentation which basically suggests that the APNU/AFC has no real interest in electoral reform and in dealing with the issues which we have experienced and which we have suffered in relation to the question of elections in Guyana –

the subversion of democracy; and the criminal acts which were perpetrated in relation to the elections as recent as the 2020 elections, but, in fact which go several cycles, several decades and several elections periods where, they, in the form of the People's National Congress (PNC), later the APNU and now the APNU/AFC have been involved in elections rigging in Guyana and subverting the democracy of our people and stealing the will and the votes of our people.

It is indeed a tragedy that such a younger person – educated, erudite but irrational – is not paying attention to the facts of the matter and the historical reality and experience of the Guyanese people in elections. It is really, really a tragedy. The fact that she has been put as the lead, the first speaker on that side in respect of this matter, ahead of other persons – ahead of the Ramjattans and the others and some who are not here and ahead of Ms. Volda Lawrence – to present on this matter speaks to the continuing insidiousness of this political party, the APNU/AFC, on that side of the House, in respect of continuing to undertake acts and to undertake stratagems in relation to continuing to undermine, to suborn and to destroy our democracy and the peace, the security, the goodwill, the proper living together and the coming together of the Guyanese people.

The problem with elections is one – whether you say there is ethnic voting or whatever kind of voting – where advantage has been taken of ethnic differences and other differences to hold on to perceived vote banks, to hold on to enclaves and to hold on to persons who are kept enthralled and who are kept captive by political messaging of a negative form merely for the position and merely for the intent of holding on to or attaining political power wrongfully.

Even though the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, who spoke before me, said that they were somehow in support of electoral reform, the APNU/AFC in this House and in this place owe the Guyanese people an apology. In putting the young lady to make the presentation, without resorting to the other known acolytes in respect of electoral malfeasance, I had hoped that the young lady would have been the one to proffer the apology to the Guyanese people, and that we would have been able to take a new path, take responsibility with respect to falling introspection and retrospection, take account of our failures, perhaps, in respect of these matters and let us go forward to a new plane, accepting what should be for our people, for the future of our people and for our country, now that we are at the most propitious moment in our economic, social and, hopefully, political development.

The presentation just now, in the context of what is intended in this Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, was disgraceful. It was disgraceful. I am deeply disappointed that the young lady was allowed to and enjoyed the moment in deflecting, avoiding and taking account of the real need and resort here in this Amendment Bill to fix issues which were clearly not properly operated on, or which had to be dealt with in relation to the most recent experiences in elections. I continue to say that we had problems in 2015. Of course, there were 20 odd boxes which should have been opened and counted. [**Bishop Edghill:** It was 21.] It was 21 boxes. There were issues, as usual, with voter suppression which were talked about. There were issues in relation to preventing people from getting to vote and there were issues of people being threatened and locked out of places. Persons either could not come out with the boxes or were threatened. There were people going around with guns threatening polling agents in 2015, and even before that in 2011. There is a long list of crimes in relation to the question of assuring the free and democratic will of the Guyanese people in voting to elect a government of their choice to represent the people.

The Hon. Member spoke about going to a select committee. I am aware that there was widespread national consultation on this matter. I am aware that, in this very place, the opportunity was afforded for consultation with the political parties, either as groupings or individually. I am aware that there was a walkout in respect of this matter, too, by the Hon. Member who just spoke before me, amongst other persons. They walked out on the question of the consultation on this document.

Having had over a year and then a specific engagement to have the clause-by-clause consultation on the matter in a public forum and having walked out, they have now come here to say that they want the Bill to go to a select committee. It is insincere, of course, and natural for the APNU/AFC. I have to say this insincerity is a trademark of theirs along with the willingness, the intent and the interest to always take illegal resorts and to undertake fraudulent measures in respect of elections. It is in their Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). It cannot be changed. They will always attempt fraud at elections in Guyana. They are riggers by nature and that cannot be changed. The fact that there is a Ramjattan and some others who have recently joined with them will not change it. The fact that persons who were willing participants in the great fraudulent 2020 elections exercise can sit here unashamedly and enjoy this debate, speaks volumes to their nature, their intents and their continued willingness to continue fraudulent resorts in respect of elections in Guyana.

The Hon. Member before me talked about there being no real interest in the working-class people and that this engagement is merely a talk, and this document is a gimmick. Every time they have had the opportunity, particularly from 2019 I believe, in respect of the NRR, in respect of the appointment of the GECOM Chairman in the form of a Mr. Patterson, and all of the stages and all of the efforts which were made at the courts to change the undertakings in respect of their electoral laws and the proper conduct of the elections, they lost in the courts, not only in Guyana but at the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ), the apex court.

8.47 p.m.

In spite of all of that, a young, trained Guyanese lawyer was the first speaker to speak on this matter and say that the amendments in this document, which are clearly intended to protect the electoral system, the machinery, from continued malfeasance and from distortions, prevent any issue which will thwart the will of the Guyanese people, and which were given by repeated examples from the presentation of the Hon. Attorney General....They come here and say that this is gimmickry, this is not useful of itself and really should go to a select committee, where I expect there will be great time wasting. In fact, it would bring us into problems in relation to the holding of the Local Government Elections (LGEs). In fact, I do not think they want to partake in Local Government Elections. They do not want Local Government Elections. They only like elections when they can corrupt it, frighten people, terrorise people, conduct fraud, bully people, chase people out, and beat people. That is when they like and want elections. It is historical; it is documented.

I think, fundamentally, this document gives us the information, the resorts and the platform to move to a new and better stage in relation to the conduct of elections in Guyana. The Members on the other side should gladly embrace the amendments in this document in relation to the conduct of polls, in relation to the provision of the supernumerary officers, in relation to the placement of polling stations, in relation to what were termed draconian fees or fines, and imprisonment in relation to misconduct by persons who are appointed to conduct the elections according to the spirit, letter, and intent of the Representation of the People Act and the *Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana*.

There is a suggestion that it may deter some people from wanting to become elections officials. If it deters anyone, it would be those persons who would have either the subliminal message, the distinct intent, or would have been placed to conduct the elections in an improper way. What is termed draconian in terms of the fines and imprisonment is appropriate to bring this great disgrace to an end – the issue of electoral fraud in our country. It is disgraceful, not only regionally but internationally. You were in here five or whatever months, as was said, to count 200,000 or whatever number of votes. We had all kinds of shenanigans in relation to protecting the ballot boxes. The most distressing moment in Guyanese history over the last three or four years was that period, those moments. **[Ms. Parag:** They even threw you down.] I will not make it personal. **[Mr. Mustapha:** You have to make it personal.] I am not going to make it personal now, but I still have to thank Hon. Members, Priya Manickchand and Dr. Frank Anthony, for coming to my aid and assistance while I was still out there. I am not going to make it personal; I never will.

The most important thing, totally and in context of this document, is for an open admission to be made by leading Members of the APNU/AFC so as to charter a new course; to accept wrongs which have been done, either in their name personally or as a grouping; and to recognise that what is required for the stability and the proper development of our country is to fix this problem. There are other problems which we should be more paying attention to: the question of the sovereignty on the western border, the question in our discussion in terms of the budget, in terms of making the most efficacious use of the moneys for development, the question of how we restore our agriculture sector, the mining sector, the bauxite people who suffered because the Berbice River was blocked and the incredible imposts which were made on the life of the people by way of value added tax (VAT) and other imposts while they were in power. Those are the things we need to get past at this moment and to agree on a new approach as to how we will protect and develop our people. The door is not closed, of course, but unfortunately, the first presentation which was made here does not help it.

I want to posit that, of course, in spite of the opportunity of making a long speech, we should spend more time, take the opportunity to go through it, the presentation and the review, clause by clause, with the Hon. Attorney General. It is 40-odd amendments, and it would not help for me to go speaking beyond what I have already said, given the seeming time constraint and the necessity to specifically identify the clauses here which need to be dealt with in committee.

With that, I fully support the amendments in this Bill. I fully support these amendments and I recommend the Bill to the House. I see, again, that it provides us with the opportunity to gather around and put our minds together around the necessity for accepting and working with these amendments and making them work for our elections. This is so that we could protect our democracy and so that we could protect our people as we go forward in the ennobling task of developing our country, the ennobling task of developing, bringing together this multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country. It is remarkable to any other place in the world. The failures which we have had so far are resident in the changes which could be brought around by way of these amendments on the question of this democracy here in Guyana. We have to acknowledge our collective failures on the matter. This document provides the opportunity to get around and get past and above these collective failures in respect of electoral democracy. It is for that reason that I fully support and commend this Bill from the People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) in relation to further strengthening democracy, democratic culture, and behaviour in this our country, Guyana. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister of Home Affairs. Now for the Hon. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Lennox Shuman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker [Mr. Shuman]: Mr. Speaker, can you hear me?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Shuman: In the unlikely event that we have some technical difficulties, I want to place firmly on record that this Bill enjoys my 100% support. It was only about two weeks ago that I testified before the commission of inquiry on elections in Guyana. I had to go through the very horrifying task of having to identify what transpired after the 2nd March polls closed and everything that ensued after voting and with Region 4. I have had to relive, minute by minute, all of the events that transpired. It was the first time in my life, and in many other young peoples' lives, that they had an opportunity to vote or to witness an election. What the people saw was not representative of what the future of Guyana should look like.

I remember some of my colleagues – and when I say colleagues, I am talking about Opposition Colleagues who are in the House – who were part and contributors to the possible theft of a nation. I remember, very explicitly, having to pick up the Hon. Robeson Benn, right at the back of the

very Chamber where parliament is held now, after he was thrown over a rail. These things should not happen in a modern democracy.

I am taken aback by my parliamentary colleague, Ms. Walton-Desir, presentation which spoke about sending a Bill to committee. The reality, as it stands, is that there are Members in the Opposition who want to send this to committee, who want to hinge it on constitutional reform and tie the two of them together. Yet, in their quiet conversation, they have no intent and no appetite to support constitutional reform. Essentially, what my colleagues in the Opposition want to do is to send this Bill to committee so it can die a slow and painful death and have no reform executed on the electoral system. The reality is that having been a witness to what transpired post-2nd March, 2020, I will say that these reforms are desperately needed.

The fact that there may not be requirements for biometrics at a polling station does not eliminate the possibility of that. Having lawyers on both sides of the House, who are more amply qualified than I am in legal matters, they would know fully well that article 163 gives the Elections Commission the authority to utilise whatever measures it has to ensure that the process is fair and transparent. What this Bill does not do is hamstringing the Elections Commission from being innovative in how it conducts polls. It opens the door for the Elections Commission to now explore those possibilities. I would rather be very short, very succinct and to the point. There is no point in *beating around the bush*. This Bill does exactly what it needs to do to ensure that what transpired in 2020 never happens again. That is where I rest my remarks. As I have said previously, time and time again, I would rather be very succinct and to the point. This Bill enjoys my 100% support. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Deputy Speaker. Now, for the Hon. Member, the Minister of Natural Resources, Mr. Vickram Bharrat.

9.02 p.m.

Mr. Bharrat: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to make my contribution and to fully support the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, Bill No. 24 of 2022.

It is very strange that any opposition would not support amendments that would strengthen the electoral process in a country, when this very Opposition is protesting every day for some of the

very measures that were placed in these amendments tonight. Every amendment in this Bill, this evening, is to strengthen transparency, strengthen fairness, strengthen accountability and ensure we have free and fair elections in Guyana. If there is an opposition that is not prepared to read the Bill and to debate it tonight, then we are in a sorry state as a country. The Opposition loves to speak about Government using taxpayers' dollars. I wish to remind them and let the people of Guyana know that the very taxpayers' dollars are paying the Opposition Members of Parliament (MPs) as well. They are receiving taxpayers' dollars. They are enjoying unlimited duty-free concession similar to us on this side of the House. They are receiving benefits as Members of Parliament similar to us on this side of the House. It is their duty to the people of Guyana to ensure that they come to this House prepared to debate such an important Bill. It is a very sad state and a sorry state when there is an Opposition that is not willing and prepared to debate such an important Bill but wants to use the easy path and say let us take it to a Special Select Committee.

Having been in the National Assembly since October, 2016, when this very APNU/AFC was in Government, I have seen them taken a number of Bills to the Special Select Committee and they are probably still somewhere in the Special Select Committee. We have never seen the daylight of some of those Bills that they took to the Special Select Committee. It is just a ploy to delay the process. It is just a ploy to frustrate the work of the Government. It is just a ploy to delay the 2023 Local Government Elections which will obviously embarrass the Opposition. Already, there are issues among them. That is why they were not participating in the consultations that we had. Instead, they were busy dealing with divorces. The AFC is divorcing the APNU on 31st December, 2022. They are busy fighting who should be Opposition Leader and who should not be. They are busy rigging their own internal elections. As one Member of Parliament, who, unfortunately is not here for obvious wrongdoing, commented in the public, there is internal rigging. How can you trust an Opposition where their own internal issues with elections...they are rigging their own internal elections; how can they safeguard a national election?

The year 2020 is being mentioned so casually as if it was no big thing. That was an embarrassment to the people of this country. It was an embarrassment to this country as a whole, where many of their Members were sanctioned, many of their Members, unfortunately, lost their visas as well too. Yet, they come to the Assembly and behave as though 2020 was nothing that we should talk about and as though we should just move past that. We are probably one of the only countries in the

world where there was an election on 2nd March, 2020 and five months after, then we were able to swear in the next President. We had multiple court cases that were basically baseless. We had GECOM officials who compromised their positions and their integrity to undermine the electoral process and democracy. Yet, we speak of 2020 as if nothing really happened. The year 2020 and the APNU/AFC disgraced our country. They brought shame to the people of this country.

As I mentioned, this Bill is necessary and the amendment to this Bill is necessary, regardless of whether we have a very strong electoral system in our country. We heard about the list from the Member who spoke from the Opposition benches before the Deputy Speaker. Mr. Speaker, let us remind them that this is the very list with which they claimed to have won the 2015 elections. When they won in 2015, the list was good, the list was clean, and the list was perfect. When they lost in 2020, it was a bloated list, the list was padded, and dead people voted and all sorts of excuses we are hearing from them today. It is the very list with which they won the elections in 2015 that we contested the 2020 elections. Now, we are hearing about election petition, we are hearing about court cases, we are hearing about bloated lists, and we are hearing that the People's Progressive Party/Civic is not interested in biometrics. The PPP/C has never said that. The People's Progressive Party/Civic has never said that we are against biometrics. What we have said is that it must be used to complement the existing system right now. It should not replace the existing system, but it could be used to complement the system, to put further safeguards to our electoral process and the verification of voters on election day.

It was mentioned that we only speak of 2020 but maybe we should go beyond sometimes. Mr. Ramjattan said that Guyana started in 2015. We know what happened in the past – post Independence. We know what happened post-Independence. The 1968 elections were rigged; the 1973 elections were rigged; the 1998 elections were rigged; and the 1985 elections were rigged by the PNC. Imagine, in 1973, the PNC claimed that they won 70.1% of the votes; in 1980, 77.66% of the votes; and in 1985, the PNC claimed that they won 78.4% of the votes. Imagine that, Mr. Speaker. Then, they come to this House and talk about democracy and about how our democracy is being derailed. We witnessed the biggest rigging ever in this hemisphere during those periods. When we finally got the free and fair election in 1992, the PNC moved from 78.24% to about 45% - from 1985 to 1992. As I mentioned, we have a strong electoral system in Guyana, but we need

to improve as time moves on. We need to ensure that people do not abuse, as the Attorney General said, their discretion, compromise their integrity because that is what we saw in 2020.

These amendments seek to address those issues, seek to address the abuse of authority, abuse of the office, abuse of their power and abuse of the discretion that is given to them, and to ensure that we legislate it, and people must follow the legislation and the laws, and ensure that there are strong penalties. It is very disheartening to hear an Opposition Member coming to this House and the only relevant issue that she could have spoken on was that penalties are too tough. This is wrongdoing that we are talking about. One is rigging an election. It is fair enough for one to be fined \$10 million and imprisonment for 10 years. One is snatching the rights of every Guyanese in this country. One is taking away our democratic right; one deserves even more than 10 years. Maybe the Attorney General was a bit easy or flexible.

There are a number of infractions, a number of inconsistencies and abuse and compromise that we would have witnessed over the last few elections, hence our position today of bringing these amendments to the House. I will go through a few. One such infraction deals with tendered ballots. For the Guyanese people who are looking at this live broadcast, there are ordinary ballots and there are tendered ballots. They are two different colours. Yet, we had instances, right on the East Bank, where I worked in 2011, where a Presiding Officer issued 19 tendered ballots to voters who properly identified themselves, who were eligible to vote and who were on the list. Yet, they were given tendered ballots. We know that the law states that a tendered ballot is basically an appeasing ballot paper. It is only used when somebody comes to the polling station, claims that they did not vote but there are indications that they did. It is verified by the Presiding Officer that they would have voted. Because they are behaving unruly and disorderly, a tendered ballot is issued to appease them, but it is not counted. Because of that, 19 voters in Herstelling, in 2011, lost their right to choose a political party to govern this country, even though they did nothing. It might sound very simple but one of the amendments listed here is to correct this injustice that was done to the electors in Herstelling and many other areas across the country. Every election, if one totals up the number of tendered ballots that are issued to legitimate voters, it is probably in the thousands, Mr. Speaker.

Moving on, we had similar instances in many polling stations where Presiding Officers issued ballot papers to voters without stamping them. Based on the counting procedure and our laws, once a ballot paper is not stamped, then it is not valid. It cannot be counted. We are correcting all these

wrongs that have been part of our electoral process over a number of years. Another such infraction, which we are amending here, is misinformation given to voters by GECOM staff. Some time, I think it was 2006 or 2011, they introduced what we call Information Officers. These are Information Officers who sit at the gate or the entrance of a polling place. A polling place will carry more than one Polling stations. They will misinform voters, in some cases wilfully, as to where they can vote and that their names are not listed on that particular list. There is a penalty for that because that is taking away the rights of people. We know that once people are frustrated, and that is the purpose of doing that, they do not go to a polling station, but they return home, and a vote is lost.

9.17 p.m.

The issue of lists being given to polling/counting agents on the morning of the election. This has been a big issue. We have recognised this, and we have seen this during the recount when we sat in this very building for 33 days to recount every ballot cast in this country. Yet, the Opposition mentioned 2020 as if it was nothing to worry about. There were many instances where polling agents were given the lists, and we know that they are normally given the Official List of Electors (OLE), the list of proxies, and the list of disciplined services members who would have to vote. Those lists are given to the polling/counting agents on the morning of the election. In most instances, at the close of poll, the Presiding Officer (PO) will tell the polling agents that they will have to recollect the lists. We are changing that. It should not be based on the discretion, but with amending it here to say that lists given to the polling/counting agents must be kept by the polling/counting agents. Mind you, every party will have a polling/counting agent at every polling station depending on the ability to do that. It is not favoured or it is not designed to benefit any particular political party. Moreso, it is not designed to benefit the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). It is designed to ensure that there is fairness among all the parties and that all the polling agents representing all the different parties are allowed to retain and keep their lists so that it becomes the property of their party in case of any dispute after that.

The list of proxies: The list of proxies is very critical because this is one avenue that was used in those years of rigged elections. It was abused in those years of rigged elections when people were forced to sign proxy lists to give up their right to vote to a next person. What we are attempting to do here is to ensure that we put it into the law, to state that the list of proxies must be posted outside

of the polling station before election day, so that if there is any objection it can be taken into account. How can this be an amendment that will work against anyone who wants a free and fair process? How can an amendment like this only favour one political party? It is amendments that will bring fairness to the process. It is amendments that will bring fairness and transparency and ensure that there is a *level playing field* for all political parties and not only the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

The Hon. Attorney General spoke on the tabulation but if I may go a little beyond that as to a recount – requesting a recount. We may recall that in 2015, when our counting agent in Georgetown, the Hon. Charles Ramson, requested a recount but we could not find the officer. We could not find the officer before 12.00 p.m. of the following day to submit that letter requesting a recount, because the officer obviously went into hiding. We are changing that now. We are changing it so that if we cannot find the Returning Officer (RO) for some reason or the other – or in some cases the supernumerary Returning Officers as in the cases of Region 3, 6 and 4 – that the letter of recount can be served to the Chairman as well as the Chief Election Officer (CEO) before 12.00 p.m. of the following day. That is fair. What is wrong with that? What is unfair about that? What in that is giving the advantage to the People's Progressive Party/Civic? It applies to the Opposition too. They can do the same. They can also serve a recount letter or request to the Chairman or to the CEO. There is nothing in this, as the Opposition wants to say, that is giving advantage to the People's Progressive Party/Civic. We have heard a lot about that. We have heard a lot that the People's Progressive Party/Civic is amending the Representation of the People Act (ROPA) to favour themselves and to ensure that they stay in power. We will stay in power because of our track record, because of the development that is taking place, because Guyana is the fastest growing economy in the world, because we are having new revenue streams every day. The latest one being the sale of our carbon credits.

The Opposition is obviously running scared. They know that *the writing is on the wall*, that they will remain in the Opposition benches for a number of years. They are trying to *clutch at every straw*. They are trying to *clutch at every straw*, bringing out two, three, five or six persons to picket the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) every day about bloated lists. The Member said that we may have a list that is bigger than the population of Guyana. If one looks at some of the Caribbean islands, it is a common trend. It is a common trend in small, populated countries where

there is a high migration rate and where people travel to work in different countries. But it is their democratic right to stay on the voter's list once they are Guyanese. That is their right. We cannot take that away from them. That is their entitlement as Guyanese. As the Attorney General mentioned, they could live where they want to live, but because they are Guyanese they are entitled to be registered and come home to vote. The APNU/AFC is trying to take that away from Guyanese. That is undemocratic. That is undemocratic. They are trying to *clutch at every straw*.

We made it clear on the biometrics issue. We heard tonight that the PPP/C is against that. We have never said that. We said that it must be used, or it can be used to complement the existing system, and to give more strength and robustness to the electoral process or the verification process. There are many other infractions which we have looked at, where people obviously have used their position in the office and their authority to abuse and to favour political parties that they are aligned with. We have seen that in 2020. We have seen a CEO trying to disenfranchise almost 180,000 voters in this country. Yet, we talk about 2020 as if it was nothing, when we had a CEO who was trying to say that approximately 180,000 votes are not valid. By what means? What was the criteria used? Only he knows, and the people whom he was trying to put into Office or to keep in Office.

In the past, we have always heard this complaint from our polling agents that, one, the Presiding Officer does not want to give them a statement of poll. That is illegal. We have enforced it in this amendment here, that every polling/counting agent must be given a signed, correct copy of the statement of polls – a signed, correct copy of the statement of polls. It is an offense – there is a fine and there is jail time to it too. Another complaint that we have heard many times is the GECOM officers telling polling agents – when I say polling agents, I mean agents representing all political parties, not only the People's Progressive Party/Civic – the staff of the GECOM, saying to polling agents that they do not have space in the vehicle for them to accompany the ballot boxes, and that it is based on their discretion how many persons they could take and whom they want to take. We are seeking to change that in this amendment to state that they must be accommodated, if not in the vehicle where the ballot boxes are being transported maybe another vehicle accompanying them, to ensure that it is safely delivered to the RO's office or the supernumerary RO's office in some regions. What is wrong with that? It is not about the PPP/C agent alone. It is about all the polling agents representing all the different political parties.

These amendments are about bringing further fairness to the process. It is ensuring that we have an electoral process that is rig-proof. We have seen in 2020, even though we have a strong electoral system – an electoral system of verification, of identifying voters, of voting, counting – we have seen where people use their discretion or abuse their discretion to favour political parties. That is what we are seeking to change in these amendments by taking those out.

Mr. Speaker, I want to wrap up because I know my time may be going. I want to wrap up on the issue of consultation. There have been so many consultations held on the ROPA. The ROPA has been in the public domain for almost a year, or maybe over a year, where every Guyanese, every organisation in and out of Guyana, had an opportunity to make their presentation, to make their submissions, to make their contributions. I have personally seen many submissions from a lot of organisations in Guyana, but none from the Opposition. None from the Opposition has been paid with taxpayer's money – who enjoy the same benefits as our Members of Parliament (MPs) over here – because there is no interest. Yet, they come to the National Assembly and say, send it to a special select committee without a single recommendation, without speaking on a single issue, without saying, you know what, we support splitting Region 4 into four subdivisions because it would help with the transparency and the efficiency of the process of counting votes and tabulation. We have not heard that. We have not heard them coming to say, you know what, it is a good thing that we are reducing the number of voters per polling station to 400 because we believe that 400 persons can adequately vote at a polling station without any interruption, and 500 is too much, or 600 is too much. We have not heard, *oh*, it is good polling stations are within the districts or in close proximity to the people who are voting. We have not heard a single comment on the amendments that are being made in the Representation of the People Act this evening. Yet, all we have heard is about sending it to a select committee, we heard about how the context is 'Charrandas', the context is 'blackout', the context is 'bad infrastructure'. I do not know how the context to the amendments here can be about those things.

It shows that we have an Opposition that obviously does not value democracy. They do not value the rights of our people and they are not willing, or they are maybe not able, to represent their constituency. Yes, the Hon. Member is right, they have a large constituency. During the last elections 216,000 Guyanese voted for the Opposition. The figures are there; it is public. We respect that. As a matter of fact, we love the 216,000 voters. We are trying to win them over right now,

with much success too. We are representing them; we are representing all of Guyana. We are not only representing the people who voted for the People's Progressive Party/ Civic.

These changes are being made to safeguard the rights of every Guyanese, regardless of which political party one supports, because every Guyanese would like to know that their vote is secured, that it is counted and that their right is protected when it is being tabulated or declared at the end of the election. These amendments are a representation of the will of the people; it is a representation of good governance; it is a representation of true democracy. As a Government creating a new, modern Guyana, we will continue to make amendments to strengthen every process, including our electoral laws. I wish to fully support the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2022 for successful passage in this House this evening. Thank you. *[Applause]*

9.32 p.m.

Mr. Forde: Mr. Speaker, having listen to the Hon. Minister, Mr. Bharrat and the Attorney General speak before, one might feel that the motivations of this Bill, or the reality or the purpose, for which this Bill was brought to this House would have been actuated by the best of motives. Regrettably, we *all too well know* that the political context that brought this Bill is one in which the People's Progressive Party/Civic seeks to put in place a mechanism and a regime that is self-serving. It came out very clearly in the repeated comments made by the Hon. Member, Mr. Bharrat. For most of his presentation he made bare to the public and citizens of this country that this Bill was motivated by what they were told. We were told – being the People's Progressive Party/Civic – and the measures that they wanted to put in place in terms of their subjective understanding of their subjective reality as to what is necessary to change the system.

As in any system, those who would have emerged victorious whether by plunder, whether by fraud or whether by deceit but take governmental control would obviously seek to implement a system that supports them. It cannot be denied that a number of areas of importance for the people of this country, that the People's Progressive Party/C this evening wants to speak so much about, are not captured in this Bill. Why it is not captured in the Bill is because, obviously, listening to what Hon. Minister Bharrat said, it would not have been the things that they would have heard or would have been told to them. For example, the recount period revealed numerous and hundreds of instances of voter impersonation; it revealed hundreds of thousands of instances of multiple voting; it

revealed hundreds or thousands of instances of substitute voting; it certainly indicated and revealed instances of persons who were deceased and recorded as having voted; and also, it revealed instances of persons who were not in the country at the time and were recorded as voting.

The absence or the failure by the People's Progressive Party/ Civic to address these issues leave one to come to the conclusion that they are comfortable with such a state of affairs, that they wish to benefit and continue to benefit politically from such a state of affairs. Mr. Speaker, is it not amazing that the Hon. Mr. Bharrat will come to this House and, in the course of his odd-20 minutes presentation, say at least twice that his Party supports biometrics but it must be used in complement to the existing system? We, the Opposition, thought that such an important and remarkable discovery made by Minister Bharrat this evening would have formed an essential part of this Bill. It is easy to talk the talk about biometrics but to come up short in this Bill on the issue of implementing such a system because it is absent from the Bill altogether.

The first speaker on our side clearly pointed out the circumstances and the obvious rhetoric which was absent, because if one wants to come and speak about electoral reform and one wants to start not many years ago, one does not want to speak about a Chief Election Officer who almost ran off with an election years ago; one does not want to speak about a chairman of an elections commission who publicly told the President or the incoming President, 'that was good', and later became an Attorney General of the People's Progressive Party/Civic; one does not want to speak about a Prime Minister who sat on a seat that he was not entitled to; one does not want to speak about the Chief Election Officer coming up with a different electoral system to calculate ballots; one certainly wants to keep the issues purely in a context of a political divide and is not coming to the table with ones hands clean.

The greatest irony tonight is that a Bill of such importance was brought to this House by the Hon. Attorney General who, in the course of these electoral matters, mention was made of his participation, one way or the other, in relation to Identification Cards (IDs). That is probably among some of the greatest ironies that affected the preliminary matters in relation to this Bill. I would like to address three areas of concern in relation to the Bill. First, the Bill precedes, based on what the Hon. Attorney General said, to deal with the issue of residency. I understand and appreciate his efforts to remove residency. I understand it from a legal perspective. I understand it more so from a political perspective, in that certainly the question of residency will not operate to

the benefit of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. What I am concerned about – and I will refer to the Bills alternately – when we look at, for example, clause 4 of the National Registration (Amendment) Bill and even in the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, they seek to replace the reference to residence...

“... with an address at the date of the application...”

But, certainly, at subsection 4(D), the reference is made to the fact that:

“On a successful verification of the address, the particulars of a first-time registrant...”

...has to be determined by the officials of the Guyana Elections Commission. Qualitatively, the issue of residency has historically formed part of our criteria for an assessment of the allocation or the location of a member of the public as to where he/she would have voted. That was said by the Chief Justice in the Christopher Ram matter. Even though in her opinion, which we disagreed with but respectfully, she said that there is no issue of a residency requirement, residency was important in terms of allocating a person as to where he/she should vote. She went on in her decision – it is right here; we are being objective – to say that in those instances it is where the person lives.

What is here is the fact that the learned Chief Justice, in her decision, made that position clear, and even though up to now it has not been vocalised by the Attorney General, clearly in his mind, or in the mind of the Government, was the fact as to how could he/they deal with that issue in view of the statement of the Chief Justice. To remove the residency requirement altogether for resident Guyanese and to put in place the phrase, ‘with a registered address’, across the board for all Guyanese persons who are seeking to be registered, whether they are resident or not, in my respectful opinion and in my Party’s position this evening, brings into question, or brings into the legislation, a very important area that is unclear, because now they must produce prove of address. There is no recognition in terms of what is the assessment that the Guyana Elections Commission is to engage in, in the verification of the address. We believe that is an area that ought to be fixed and addressed in the Bill.

The issue of the new systems for Region 3, 4 and 6 and their subdivisions, whilst it might be motivated, according to the other side, by their understanding of what is in the best interest of the Guyanese people, these represent only three of 10 administrative regions, and automatically, this

would be the first time that our electoral system will have differences in the manner in which votes are counted and tabulated throughout the system. [Mr. Nandlall: That is the intent.] I am happy to hear the Attorney General say that he agrees that is the intent. We believe that this opens the system clearly, on the face of legislation, for the creation of an inequitable system that is partially structured in a particular way in relation to those regions, while the same concerns that existed or probably would have motivated this effort remains extant for the other remaining regions.

I would like to commend the staff of the Attorney General's Chamber for the obviously tremendous work that they have undertaken in the attempt to rationalise and put in place the different aspects of this Act into the respective areas. I believe there is one significant area of the attempt which requires some reviews and that is section 33(A)(6) of the Representative of the People Act. Without the obvious change in 33(A)(6) which previously, I believe, was section 5(6) of the Election Laws (Amendment) Act, which has now been changed to deal with the question of registered address instead of residency, this provision came into existence in section 5(6) originally of the Election Laws (Amendment) Act. It is important to note that at no time, in relation to the local government elections, was this provision applied in relation to local government election for the extraction of a list. In 2016 and 2018, the Local Government Election laws were used. In relation to the 1994 Election, the PPP Government passed a specific amendment to deal with the use of the 1992, I believe, electoral list. This is the first time that this provision is being used in a local government election. What it does, while maintaining in the Local Authorities (Elections) Act the specific provision to deal with the manner of preparation of a register of voters, it deals with the manner in which a register of voters is to be produced, and more importantly, the Local Authorities (Elections) Act deals specifically with the standards or the qualifying criteria for an elector in those elections, in this one, in 33(A)(6), it specifically states:

“If the Commission so directs... notwithstanding anything ...”

...set out in...

“... in any other... law...”

...allows one to use the electoral laws dealing with the election to the National Assembly. What section 33(A)(6) in its present format does is to give the Elections Commission – and I respectfully believe, and my Party feels so too – the option of determining what would be the criteria. That is

because under 33(A)(6) the persons who are to vote would be the persons with a registered address in a local democratic organ.

9.47 p.m.

If one looks at section 10 and 8 of the Local Authorities (Elections) Act, one will see it is a person who is ordinarily resident. Even though in the current cycle of the Local Government Elections, the list would have already been extracted without reference to persons with a registered address, it would have been extracted on the basis of a person who would have simply been resident in the local authority area, the definition of resident under this Act and ordinarily resident under the Local Authorities (Elections) Act are two completely different provisions. When one actually looks at the introductory language in the Election Laws (Amendment) Act, it states that it was to pass laws in relation to the National Assembly. This section falls completely into the representation of the Representation of the People Act which says specifically that it should pass laws for the elections to the National Assembly, but we have this anomalous section lying here in section 33A(6).

We believe that this Bill cannot be supported by the Opposition. We do not offer our support to this Bill. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Minister of Public Service [Ms. Parag]: Mr. Speaker, I stand in full support of my colleague, the Attorney General, in bringing Bill No. 24/2022 to this honourable House. I will begin by saying that I have sat here most of the evening as my colleagues have, as well, and we have listened. I heard the Hon. Member Amanza Walton-Desir say a lot about nothing relevant to this Bill. I have also heard the Hon. Roysdale Forde who did not say as much, but still about nothing.

The Hon. Member says every time they come to this House they will come and they will tell about a bloated list and they will tell about the 2020 Elections. Every time we come to this House, we have to remind this country over and over of the trauma that they put the Guyanese people through. We will not stop. Every time there is a piece of legislation that is passed by the Hon. Attorney General on this side of the House it is because of democracy; it is because we want democracy to prevail. The Members on that side of the House are anti-democratic, they are anti-progressive, they are anti-development, and they are anti-Guyanese.

The 2nd March, 2020 to 2nd August, 2020 was undoubtedly one of the darkest, most heartrending periods of our nation's history. Anyone who knows the history of Guyana will associate rigging of the elections with the People's National Congress (PNC). I will borrow a phrase that my honourable friend on the other side used tonight associated with the PNC: A sham of a reform to APNU/AFC. It did not change what their true nature is – to always be undemocratic. Every time I come here – and I do not know if it is the same thing for my colleagues – to this honourable House and we present a Bill, it shocks me that words like democracy, the Constitution, and upholding the law comes out of their mouths.

A lot of us, and I can tell you I worked on elections day; I worked at the recount all 33 days; I worked at the Ashmins building. Just before the elections I was doing my work, and the Hon. Attorney General who was the election agent for the East Coast placed me the night before in a different area. I can tell you that the process and the system that is in place for elections is a robust system. The amendment in the ROPA today that we are trying to pass, seeking to pass, is to strengthen the integrity that already exists, to strengthen the integrity of the electoral system. Electoral reform is something that we promised this nation. It is something that was necessary and relevant and became a priority after the 2020 Elections. Never in the history of our country were we able to see exactly what the PNC and their operatives, and their minions would have done. This is the Bill.

When I went to a polling station to vote in my area, I voted without an Identification Card. I had to go through all of the processes set out by the law, by the manual. I was identified and the process was followed: There was an agent for the APNU/AFC: there was an agent for the PPP/C. Likewise, when I went to the district in which I worked and sat in as a polling agent when my polling agents went to vote, I had the first-hand experience of working the system. It worked. It was strong; it still is. The problem that we had was the rogue elements in GECOM. Nobody wants to address that. They want to deflect with a bloated list, and biometrics, and this is what we need to do. The real problem was the rogue individuals, the Clairmont Mingo's, and I dare say...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we are going to have refrain from naming persons who cannot represent themselves. While I am at it, be careful how you talk about those on the Opposition, because the Hon. Deputy Speaker is waving his hands at me. Please.

Ms. Parag: ...except, of course, the Hon. Deputy Speaker. I dare say as well, that we have an Hon. Member in this House who sits on the other side, who walked – not stood up and went up in an escalator – up to go sign, fraudulently, a declaration when the count for Region 4 was not even completed. It is because of those fraudulent actions that a Bill is brought here today, and it is for the world to see. It is the Hon. Volda Lawrence; I will call the name. This country must never forget that it was held by a very thin thread, that it could have come crashing down. For five months people could not sleep, they could not eat, they could not move on with their lives, all because there were elements who wanted to steal an election and hold an entire country hostage. The difference in 2020 was that they were not as smart as their leaders before, they put it on national television and did not care. They put it on social media and did not care. They put it for the entire world and did not care, but Guyanese care. They cared enough; all the right-thinking Guyanese cared, whether they were here or they were abroad. They cared enough to fight for their country and to fight for democracy. We on this side of the House – and I believe I could speak for all of my colleagues on this side of the House – will never, ever allow the Opposition or any rogue element to hold this country hostage ever again.

I would like to speak to the consultation of this particular Bill. The Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, is suggesting that the Bill goes to the Select Committee. I will humbly beg to differ. This Bill, this is the second reading. We are debating this Bill. This Bill has been laid in this National Assembly *many moons ago*. There was enough time for that to be raised. Not only that, but all the amendments in this Bill were also placed on the website the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance. Do you know what is worse? It is that I sit on a Committee on the International Republican Institution (IRI) just as the Hon. Members, and I have brought it to their attention many times that it is on that website. Not only that, but I actually attended the in-person consultation that was held by the Hon. Attorney General and the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance with different stakeholders of this country. A lot of people attended. I was here in person. Do you know what else? The Hon. Mr. Ramjattan was here representing the Opposition. The Hon. Member Tabitha Sarabo-Halley, suspended, also attended that consultation. Their response to the Attorney General's presentation was to '*suck their teeth*'. We all know when Guyanese '*suck their teeth*' what it means. They got up and '*sucked their teeth*' and walked out of this honourable House without contributing anything, without saying anything meaningful. As a matter of fact, they said nothing. They just walked out, while other stakeholders came and made

their contributions in addition to contributions that were made online. For the Hon. Member to come here and pretend as if this Bill is now coming and *ram down their throats*, I do not think so. I have been through the process from the beginning as well. Many others who do not belong to the PPP/C or the APNU/AFC came along on this journey as well and made their contributions. This Bill will be passed tonight because it is long overdue.

I would like to bring up the issue of the bloated list. We have been told so much about how this list is bloated and they are opposing this list going ahead, even taking it to court because they claim it is bloated. Mind you, in 2015, the same list was there, and they won, and they accepted their winnings on this list. How hypocritical can they be? In addition to that, for anyone to be removed from a list it would be unconstitutional. Then again, I do not expect the Members on the opposite side, except for Mr. Shuman, to come and say anything differently because they have never been constitutionally inclined. They have come, they have asked for a list to be cleansed. Our elections Act of 2001 provides for continuous registration. We are even adding to that by having continuous registration throughout the year. That takes care of anything on the list that has been registered – dead voters *et cetera*. The Hon. Chief Justice ruled on the matter, and she said people cannot be taken off the list. Guess why, Mr. Speaker? The Constitution states at article 59 states:

“...every person may vote at an election if he is of the age of eighteen years or upwards and is either a citizen of Guyana or a Commonwealth citizen domiciled and resident in Guyana”

10.02 p.m.

One cannot wipe away somebody from a list who is a citizen of Guyana because he/she believes the list is bloated. It is unconstitutional. If the Opposition wants that then they have to go and table something for the Constitution to be reformed.

As it relates to biometrics, first of all, we have biometrics in this country that was implemented in 2008. It was done so with a heavy financial; yes, it carried a heavy financial burden but, do you know what? It was implemented. What you do not want to tell the people – Mr. Speaker and I do not mean ‘you’, but what the Hon. Members on the other side do not want to tell the Guyanese people is that they want to be able to disenfranchise voters. We the Government, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration will not make decisions that will disenfranchise

anyone. As matter of fact, we will make them more inclusive which is what the Representation of the People Act (ROPA) is doing right now. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** (*inaudible*)] I do not listen to irrelevance. The systems that we have in place, the mechanisms that we have in place on Elections Day makes it virtually impossible for us to have impersonation. When the Opposition want to gain political mileage, you have to make sense. They are not making sense.

As it relates, again, to the biometrics, there is no requirement in our Constitution for biometrics. As all of you know, this was tested in the Esther Perreira case of 1998, albeit that addressed an issue with an Identification (ID) card. The Honourable Justice Claudette Singh who presided over that case concluded that the right to vote is recognised as a constitutionally protected right and can only... [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** (*inaudible*)]. Imagine you want to go the other way; imagine you sit there and want to go the other way. ...use that right in accordance with the Constitution and no other method. When they wanted to bring biometrics, they were not telling the country that when people go to vote at a polling station and they want to use electronic voting, *et cetera* because, basically, that is what they are calling biometrics. People will have to only vote by electronic voting or by biometrics. If people cannot vote like that, they are left off the list, they are disenfranchised and that is what they do not want to tell people. That is why it is unconstitutional and, as a matter of fact, that system is not broken in our country where we have biometrics, so why are we fixing something or why must we fix something that is not broken? [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** (*Inaudible*)] no, no, no, no, no, you shut your mouth when you were in there.

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

Ms. Parag: No. I am not saying to shut your mouth here. I said she shut her mouth there when I said it.

Mr. Speaker: You know, I think an Member of Parliament (MP), today, used another ingenious word ‘hush’.

Ms. Parag: She closed her mouth quietly when she was in there, Sir. Of all the amendments being proposed here today, I believe that we can agree that one of the most significant is the proposal to implement hefty fines of up to \$10 million and lengthy imprisonment of 10 years on persons found guilty of electoral misconduct or fraud. Now, speaking directly to the Amendments, I have also

heard the Hon. Members on the other side say they are archaic and they are draconian. This is actually progressive. One can never allow a rogue element in an administration such as the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) to hold an entire or to violate people in the most heinous way it can do and get away with nothing.

When they say that this is going to act as a deterrent for people who are qualified, I have to ask the question, those people are coming with the intention of rigging an Elections because if they are coming with clean intentions and they are going to do your work, then this should not affect them. These penalties [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** *(inaudible)*]. Yes, they are to act as a deterrent and it is exactly because we experienced what we experienced in 2020. I am sitting there 33 days and Members of the Opposition as well as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the Deputy Chief Executive Officer (DCEO) of GECOM at that time... [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** *(inaudible)*]. ‘Circumvent’ would be too small of word. Probably we should bring it to the public’s attention that the Shadow Minister of Legal Affairs and the Shadow Attorney General are mimicking the situation that happened in 2020. Sitting on the opposite side right now mimicking the situation [**Mr. Forde:** I am mimicking you.] That is also mimicking the situation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister let me just again caution the Hon. Member, Mr. Forde, about interrupting people. There is a Standing Order with that and we would not condone that behaviour in the House. Go ahead, Hon. Minister.

Ms. Parag: This Bill introduces Section 78 (b) which specifies that it as an offense to mislead an elector or provide him/her with misleading directions or information. We are also trying to make voting easier for persons without identification cards who under the Amendment could be accommodated using an alternative form of identification in the form of their Guyana passport.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, we are proposing several amendments to Section 84 of the Representation of the People (Amendment), one of which includes increasing the number of persons who can inform a presiding officer of a material error on the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to not only accounting agent and a polling agent but also a duly appointed candidate as well. This particular section also sets out to have request for a recount of the votes be submitted in writing by hand to the Returning Officer or to the Deputy Returning Officer of a particular district. In a case where those two officers are unavailable, the request would be directed

to whomever was appointed as the standing Returning Officer or the supernumerary as we would say in legal language. Should all of these persons be unavailable for whatever reason, the request for recount can either go straight to the Chief Elections Officer or directly to the Chairperson of the Elections Commission. We have also included a new subsection which would require that certified copies of each tabulation form sent to the CEO must also be given to the appointed candidates, the counting agents and the Chairperson of the Commission.

Again, these tabulation forms must also be posted online on the Commission's website. Social media played an important role in exposing the discrepancies of the 2020 Elections, so it is quite fitting for us to now use it as a tool to prevent any further attempt at skulduggery. It is in a sense ensuring that we *cross our T's and dot our I's*. If the Government has to continuously school and spoon-feed the grossly inactive Members of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) on every matter brought before this House, we would have no time left to run this country.

I will end my presentation here and by saying that this Amendment Bill was crafted with a long consultative process which benefitted from the impactful contributions of the majority of key stakeholders. It is a Bill which seeks to save us from the heartache and trauma that characterised 2020 for us. Mr. Speaker, I commend this Bill to this House and I fully again support the ROPA. It is something that is going enhance our integrity of our electoral system and I cannot emphasise that enough; we have recognised; we have promised and we are delivering. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister of the Public Service, the Hon. Member, Ms. Sonia Parag. I now call on the Hon. Member, Mr. Sanjeev Datadin, to make his presentation.

Mr. Datadin: Good evening, Mr. Speaker. In every society the laws must evolve to meet the needs of the citizens. This Amendment, the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill – Bill No. 24 of 2022, is such a piece of legislation. May I add that I fully support this Bill and commend the Hon. Attorney General at an exceptional effort to organise our electoral laws, which as he alluded to was located in diverse Amendments and pieces of legislation. For those of us who from the time the Government fell in 2018, until the swearing in of President Irfaan Ali in August, 2020, had no

easy task, constantly keeping track of the legislation where it was located, and which one was applicable.

The insane and blatant attempts to steal an election in 2020 must never happen again. In 2020, Ashmins building was a circus. There were many unorthodox performers. The clear language of the legislation was simply cast aside, bizarre and utterly ridiculous interpretations were afforded to the law. Simple things Mr. Speaker became so complicated that you began to wonder what had become of English language. Despite clear language, the Returning Officer refused to use the SOPs in tabulating the results for District 4. Despite an order from a High Court judge, that same Returning Officer refused to use the SOPs. It is interesting to note that the Returning Officer insisted on using a spreadsheet. No one knows where it was prepared and where did the numbers on that spreadsheet came from. Surprisingly, a Member of this House who sitting was at that recount – the Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence – said that those numbers matched her SOPs. To this day, we have not seen those SOPs. The law cannot allow that. These amendments are necessary. The SOPs must be used and displayed.

10.17 p.m.

That is the amendment to section 84 of the Act. In clear, crystal language, it must be displayed by electronic means. If it is not done so and a person wilfully does not do it, then the person is subjected to imprisonment and a fine. Mr. Speaker, permit me the latitude, perhaps there should be more severe penalties. There are more but it does not warrant on this occasion. Happening then, was an entire nation on its knees, powerless to stop a public official from taking a perverse and bizarre route to interpreting the statute which was written in plain English. He simply did not want to use the SOPs. The laws have been amended to address that too. When he receives the SOPs – under the amendment – he is now obliged to display them on a website. He cannot sit on them forever. The Chief Elections Officer of the GECOM is obliged to do the same. We all remember that the last Chief Elections Officer, despite having received SOPs, refused to use them in any way, fashion, or form or disclose them to anyone, so that the circus with its multiple performances would come to an end. Instead, they were concealed and are concealed to this day.

Instead, the law was interpreted and the perverse interpretations pervade to this day. To refuse to use the SOPs by that Returning Officer despite a clear order from the Chief Justice... The Chief

Justice sent to call him, make him be present in court and explain that he had to use the SOPs under section 84 of the then Act and he refused. He graduated to GECOM's building. He used a white bedsheet and a projector with the setting sun behind him – a white bedsheet and a projector. My Friend and Colleague, the Hon. Minister, Ms. Parag, had the unenviable task of sitting in that room unsupported and trying to decipher a very fast flow of numbers. Slides in that environment, under those circumstances must be seen for what it was – an attempt to steal an election.

Now, what happens under the amendment of the law is that the new section 83 (b) requires the posting online of electronic copies of the Statements of Poll. The Returning Officer is obliged to do this. Now, every person, every party and every candidate are allowed to be present when that count is taking place – when that tabulation is taking place – from the SOPs. If it is, as was the case....It was pointed out to the Returning Officer that the numbers he was calling were like a game of bingo, no one else has them and we are not sure if we have covered all but the position was ignored. The Returning Officer kept going. The party scrutineers, the candidates and the Polling Agents were powerless to stop him. This is why the law has to be amended because one man has proven that the simple English language is insufficient, and he had feared nothing at that point. Now, under the law, if there is an objection, the Returning Officer cannot move on until he has resolved and addressed whatever the concern is. He must use the original SOPs that he used. He must display those using electronic means so that everyone can follow. This was being done – in fact – in the same Ashmins building for two days and it then suddenly stopped.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

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

Now, where there is a material error in a Statement of Poll, an Election Officer or a Counting Agent can ask for it to be corrected. The displays must suit and confirm with what the other persons who are there agree to. The Presiding Officer shall post the original. If there are corrections, he should post the original and the corrected ones at the place of the poll. The display that is required by law, must be accompanied by the catering and listening to whatever complaints there are about the numbers. In the past, when we had bedsheets and situations in that building at GECOM on High Street, one person was allowed in. The Hon. Minister Ms. Parag was the person that was there. Nobody else was allowed in who claimed or represented the PPP/C. Candidates were not

allowed into that count despite the law clearly stating that they could be present. The Counting Agents were not allowed despite the clear wording of section 84. [**Ms. Manickchand:** That was that guy (*inaudible*). What was his name again?] Mr. Yearwood, I think it was. That is when Mr. Yearwood was charged.

In a most astonishing situation at the Ashmins building, despite an order from the court the Returning Officer who was hospitalised initially, miraculously returned on the following day. He did not start to do his work at 9.00 a.m. as was promised but came downstairs with a sheet of paper in the room where the tabulation was taking place – supported and egged on by a Member of this House – to read his results. He was not permitted to do that because of the vociferous objections of all who were present. The Hon. Minister of Agriculture was present and the Minister of Human Services and Social Security. There were so many who were present. I have never heard the Minister of Natural Resources, Mr. Bharrat, scream so loudly – then or since. He was not allowed... The Returning Officer, Mr. Mingo could not read those results because they had not been tabulated in the presence of anyone – whether from a spreadsheet, a bedsheet or the SOPs. It had not been done but he said he could do it, despite the clear law that it had to be done in the presence of the parties' Polling Agents. He went to do it and was not able to do it. He turned, walked away, went upstairs and two hours later – two floors up – in a very cowardly manner, hid from everyone and purported to declare the results. That was such a transparent attempt to not count and not tabulate the votes.

Then, having made that declaration... The court had ordered that the tabulation be made from the SOPs. That is when we went to the GECOM's building and lo and behold, he declared another set of numbers. Lo and behold, the Member in this House had those numbers too to confirm them. Importantly, no one seemed to recognise that this Returning Officer was a magician. He got no credit for the magic he performed. He changed numbers magically within days and was able to have a Member of this House have those magical numbers too. It is like a card trick. Mr. Speaker, you take a pack, tell a guy to hold a card and then you find his card. This is what happened – he took the Hon. Member's numbers and he found it later.

We will not be a country to lock candidates out of the count. To get a recount – curiously by law – it had to be by 12.00 p.m. the next day after the declaration but it had to be done by a Counting Agent. The approval of the Counting Agent was part of the responsibility of the Chief Elections

Officer. We managed to go into the 2020 General and Regional Elections without a single appointed approved Counting Agent to any political party. The CEO whose responsibility it was, must take the blame for that. All the candidates stood powerless to stop that process. In the end, we now have a law that states, the Counting Agents or the candidates can make the request for a recount and shall be granted.

Also, we could not find the Returning officer. He had disappeared again. Under an interpretation of the law, if it is that a person will have to go to any Returning Officer.... The CEO had disappeared. The Deputy CEO who was there would not let people into the premises and the whereabouts of the Chairman were unknown. For the Ashmins building which had been a hive of activities with all the persons – including those who had to be lectured to by the Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, about what they were allowed to do as observers – that would no longer happen. Now, we do not need to find any; we have so many options. We could find the Returning Officer, a Deputy Returning Officer, the CEO, the Deputy CEO and the Chairman. We have now by the power of law that requesting a recount should not be that difficult. It should be the 10 tasks of Hercules; it should be a democratic right. We now have a law that states that that is the democratic right. We now have the issue of the declaration. We are going through this process. So, we do the tabulation and we have to declare. The Returning Officer must declare. Now, he wants to declare whenever he wants. He wants to declare in his private time. That is no longer allowed. Now, we still do not know why the Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, signed Mr. Mingo's declaration. It is quite a curious thing. I would dare like to know, how it was that a then Minister, a candidate and a chairman of one of the political parties was able to access Mr. Mingo in time to sign as a witness to what he was doing.

10.32 p.m.

Now, this was the curious thing, why does one want to witness that? How could one side of the political divide, a person who was a sitting Minister of Government sign as a witness. Now, it is easy. There is a time limit within which it has to be done and it has to be posted online, so the whole world could see it. If a person is clown enough to sign it for his/her own reason by all means, sign. There was an even curious thing that followed. Following that signature, on the second declaration a week ago, there was another signature a 'Carol Joseph' who was a candidate... [**Mr. McCoy:** A Petroleum Director.] Who was a Petroleum director I am told, but who was also a

member of a political party. How did they get to sign Mr. Mingo's declaration? That thankfully has been consigned.

Thankfully, this statute makes it clear that when a request is made for a recount it must be granted, so it will be undertaken. The Honourable Attorney General has *gone to great pains* to indicate that in the areas where there is the population density Regions 4, 6 and 3 are now being separated. The separation should allow for better transparency because there is now not one Mingo, there would have to be four – three more. That is what has to happen. It makes it harder because of the spreading but it also makes it much harder because of the requirement now which is the website that exists for these things to be published. You will recall, Mr. Speaker, that the PPP/C the Vice President announced that all of the PPP/Cs SOPs were made public. They were put on a website and published online for the whole world to see. We have still not seen the SOPs of the APNU/AFC despite repeated promises. We have not seen it as yet. Again, legislation is born to meet the needs of the citizens. We must remember – Mr. Speaker, if you were at the Ashmins building – when the Returning Officer fell ill; went to the hospital; and, later, he came back miraculously. He was supported by Members of this House who were there and that inference of interference will never ever go away. The whole world saw it; the whole country saw it.

Then, we had an even more curious position, where Mr. Lowenfield who was the CEO had to tabulate 10 pieces of paper. What was written on the 10 pieces of paper, he had to tabulate and come up with one piece of paper. My four-year-old son can do that quite efficiently. It took him nearly two weeks and he did it wrong. How could that be? The CEO ascribed a meaning to votes in the Law to mean valid votes. I am not sure what in heavens name else were we counting other than valid votes. A Member of this House, in being the representative of the CEO, went to the court and said this could only be valid votes and, therefore, Mr. Lowenfield another magician is able to decide valid votes. Mr. Lowenfield like Mr. Mingo came back with an even different set of numbers, again a magician which we did not give credit to. The first set of numbers he produced he did not explain how he came to it and the second set he did not. He went to court to say that it meant valid votes and then had the audacity to tell the nation that having received a ruling from the Court of Appeal of Guyana, which at best could be described as bizarre, that you cannot go and appeal this and you cannot go to the Caribbean Court of Justice – our apex court – because this court's ruling is final.

A battery of lawyers from as far as Antigua and Barbuda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada and Belize across the Caribbean stood in support of that nonsense which is to tell this country that it has to stand with whatever it is that the CEO and the bizarre ruling of the Guyana Court of Appeal was. Thankfully despite all of the legal luminaries across, the Caribbean the Caribbean Court of Justice was simple – valid votes could only mean valid votes. He essentially said to Mr. Lowenfield ‘just go back and add the numbers, you have no discretion you cannot decide for yourself’.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure you may have been aware during that time where the CEO was deciding how he would display his numbers, which ones he would pick and what issues he would do. Those of us who were trying to figure out the legal ways of going around things could not imagine what would happen. Mr. Mingo, at one time, wanted to convene a meeting with everybody and hold a hearing to decide which votes were valid and which were not. This was beyond preposterous. For five months, it was like watching a bad movie that would not end. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** Scary.] Scary would be an understatement; it was impossible. However, now, we have a Law. The amendment to the law is that he has a fix period of time, where he has 12 hours within which he must do the tabulation. When he does the tabulation, he must publish it to a website. He must give it to the Chairman of GECOM. He must give it to the scrutineers.

[Mr. Speaker assumed the Chair.]

All of that held a country hostage for two months is no more. It is very clear that if he does not do it, then comes the jail and the fines. It is very clear and expressed of what constitutes the jail and the fines. A symptom of what was experienced in the courts, we witness in this House a little while ago. The Hon. Member said, hundreds of thousands of multiple voting, hundreds of thousands of dead people voting and hundreds of thousands of instances of electoral fraud. As I understand it, we only totalled approximately 400,000 votes, so we pass the 100% to that now. This was what the Hon. Member, Mr. Forde, said hundreds of thousands. This is why the law was necessary because simple English language and the truth are divorced from the Hon. Member. The indication is a bold promotion of a false narrative supported by the typical twisted and bizarre interpretations, and a narrative that we witnessed in the electoral cases. It is a cane to the nonsensical theory that was espoused for months and, in fact, supported by the Court of Appeal that 33 was not the majority of 65. Once again, my four-year-old Sawyers knows that is different. It is important, as a

record in this House, that we do not let it be said that these sorts of figures have any bearing to reality. Those assertions are unsupported by any fact whatsoever. Those assertions are untenable and could not stand.

There is and there was the issue of biometrics and the use of biometrics. I only wish to add one short thing to that, biometrics are already in use. They are used for the benefit of GECOM. There is no need for it to go any further. It will unduly complicate a very effective system of voting, which now being electronic is very difficult to manipulate. Its simplicity being primitive is its strength. This strong Law that we had before is now being made stronger. This simple language is being made more explicit. I support this Bill. It protects every citizen of this country from tyranny. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Member Mr. Datadin and now for the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker, I want to indicate that for a very long time whilst this Bill was present in this National Assembly, I had indicated that we have a law revision commission set up with a Justice of Appeal Roy heading it, which ought to be the body, which should have reviewed and dealt with these amendments because it is an expert area. **[Mr. Nandlall:** What expert area?] You feel that there is not a bias in you that is going to be entrenched in these amendments as a result of all of you having participated in the elections. We have been creating institutions of this Government and we have been creating institutions of the State that ought to be used for purposes of ensuring that they are not prejudices. I will come to the prejudices in relation to the residency requirement just now.

We have been indicating all along that it will be far better an amendment and reform process for elections after that ugly period, I still refer to the period. We do have independence watching the process. It is because, in the elections process, we know that the narratives are carried on everything, even when we are doing the Hire Purchase Agreement Act the Government talk about the 2020 elections.

10.47 p.m.

The narrative is always drummed into our ear and... [**Mr. Nandlall:** *(Inaudible)*.] Well fine. But when you are now making amendments to a fundamental sphere of activity that involves 49% of the Opposition and you give yourself 51%, it is necessary then that the Attorney General's Chambers make sure that it insulates its prejudices by virtue of letting it go into the Law Revision Commission that you created, but you did not do that. Let me say that in consultations too, it is not an area that those who you would be dealing with in very high constitutional matters, would be the best experts to deal with these issues... [**An Hon. Member:** Really?] Oh yes. And to the extent that you have that being the quality of the reform, you ought to have carried it to the Law Revision Commission.

If it had also gone to a Select Committee, I am certain that lots of the benign amendments here would have been supported, but you know what? They do not want it to go there. We went with a Hire Purchase Bill, we dealt with it, and it did not have a slow death, as they said. No, we came out with the amendments, agreed with some, made some suggestions, and we dealt with all of those only a couple of days ago. Do you know they do not want to indicate what is the certain mischief afoot in relation to the residency requirement. It is important to understand, as quoted by the Hon. Member, Ms. Sonia Parag, that the Constitution makes certain provisions which it states explicitly, that a person has to be a citizen of Guyana and he or she has to be a citizen who is registered before he or she could be a voter. Those are explicit. Article 159 goes on to state that a voter should also be one who:

“... satisfies such other qualifications as may be prescribed by or under any other law.”

Any other law in this context for qualification of a voter in Guyana, in all of the laws, the National Registration Act, the Local Authorities (Elections) Act, or ROPA sorry, all of them indicate a certain residency requirement. I remember when I was in the People's Progressive Party /Civic (PPP/C) with Dr. Jagan, fighting for a brand new list in 1990, the list Dr. Jagan and all of *the PPPites* were talking about was that it must only have those who are a resident in the country. The resident requirement was made the most important pillar for the 1992 elections. Today, you see the *PPPites* wanting to erase it from our laws. These people now come and want to say how powerful a law it is. This kind of amendment – and I am not saying that there are not positive amendments – it is retrograde when it comes to making the residency requirement be removed.

When a law states or the Constitution states that other qualifications as may be prescribed by any other law and knowing that the residency requirement of those who are living here would make that list be rinsed of over 200 and so thousand more names than is possible, it will ensure the kind of purity of the list that will ensure there is no impersonation. The impersonation was proven in a recount process in this same building here. We went through a process, and the recount proved that 88 dead people voted and 4,229 or so people who were overseas and never came back voted. The Chairman sent it to the Police Commissioner and the Chief Immigration Officer, and we got how it happened. It is all part of the Report. That is why I am saying, the Election Laws (Amendment) Act 2000 at Section 3 states:

“...Where instructed by the Commission so to do, every divisional registrar... either by himself or officers appointed... by house to house visits within the registration division assigned to him, obtain as far as practicable the application for registration of every person, who is... appointed ... date at the age of fourteen years or above for the purpose of ascertaining every person qualified for registration as an elector for election to the National Assembly and is resident in that division.”

I come to the existing law, and that is why, with all due respect to our Hon. Chief Justice who made a ruling that the residency requirement is not a requirement under the Constitution. Requirements under the Constitution could come *via* any other law and let us understand this. Under the Representation of the Peoples Act it states:

“The official list of electors for any division shall be the preliminary list of the electors resident in that division...”

Similarly:

“...pursuant to any alteration... of the National Registration Act...for the purpose of changing the registered address of any elector’s residence within Guyana...”

Residency requirement is written large all over the laws. In the Local Authorities (Elections) Act, Chapter 28:03, section 10 states very clearly:

“A person shall be qualified to be registered as a voter for a local authority area if... not be so qualified unless, on the qualifying date... he is ordinarily resident within the local authority area.”

This tirade that it is not constitutional is a hapless argument because the Constitution, effectively, states, as I just read, any other law that prescribes the qualifications thereto. A person has to be a citizen, and he or she has to get registered and satisfy such other qualifications as any other law provides. That law is in all our National Registration Act, the Local Authorities (Elections) Act, and also the Representation of the People Amendment Act. I want to say when such a requirement is made in another law, that qualification prescribed there under that law, as in Article 159 (2) of the Constitution, that requirement of residency must be elevated from the status of ordinary law to constitutional requirement.

I will give you an example because I argued in the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) on this matter. Our Constitution gives us the right to property, and in our statutes, it states that if a person squats on a land for 12 years, he or she can prescribe on that property and can get it. Assuming we in Parliament now go and change that law that a person cannot prescribe for 12 years, and he or she must prescribe for three years, and he or she could get another man's transported property, the requirement cannot just be changed as the Hon. Attorney General wants it here. This residency requirement is a core value, and we are now saying that we are going to take out residency requirement. When you take out the residency requirement like that, you are taking away from the right of property and reducing the 12 years to three years prescription. It is very retrograde, and I want to make sure that we must not go there.

This is very important because what the Hon. Attorney General is trying to do here by taking out the residency requirement... Let me say this. Even if a person feels that the Hon. Attorney General and we have to be respectful here, has made that ruling in view of the fact that he or she wants a list that is going to be without bloat and the need for biometrics when he or she is voting, he or she can make an elections amendment law that states the residency requirement now is part and parcel of the requirement for the criteria of a voter. A person can do that. Right now, we have gone back to a 2001 situation. We know from the facts that we have been getting from the international organisation on migration and the diaspora Guyana is the biggest diaspora *per* population in any other country. A lot of Guyanese are going away, and they are not coming back but they are going

to be on our voters list as if the residency requirement is not a requirement. The Constitution never indicated that if a person is not a resident here, he or she cannot be excluded. We are going to have a bloated list. Year after year, as 20,000 will be going away because they are going away at the rate about 20,000, our list will still have them, and it will not reflect a cleansed pure list for which indeed we can go to an election and find it acceptable. It is the other extreme. People might have tried other things before, but now it is this list that is going to be the bugbear of unacceptability here in any elections to come. That is probably what they want.

Mr. Benn does not want us to run because the list would be so bloated and the potential for impersonation to the tune like what happened at the last elections – 4,200 and something. This is what we must learn to get away from. We cannot, in the evolving society, as was stated by Mr. Sanjeev Datadin, evolve into something that is highly irregular. If we are going to have democracy enhanced, your voter's list must be a list that reflects those people who are in and around the country, and we are not disenfranchising those who are overseas. When the elections and the qualifying date come around, they can come back and get registered. But there is no right that if a person leaves the country and goes, just like how if you leave the country and you cannot be the President. But your narrative excludes a very big part of that election, which is the recount process.

11.02 p.m.

But there is no right that if you leave the country and you go, just like how if you leave the country and you cannot be president. You cannot. You cannot allow that sort of qualification. It is important. I want you, Mr. Speaker, to understand that in paragraph 139 of the learned Chief Justice's judgment. The Chief Justice made this statement that:

“...there are no laws setting out any additional requirements, more particularly residency, in relation to a person qualifying to be registered to vote, '...’”

Section 6(ii)(a) of the Elections law has it. Section 9(ii) of the Representation of the People Act has it. Section 11(ii) of the National Registration Act has it. That is why, after reading the decision of the learned Chief Justice, with all due respect, I must say that it was somewhat—we lawyers call it—*per incuriam*, meaning that it is obvious that there was an oversight of that residency requirement. A proper interpretation of that article states that apart from being 18 years and over,

apart from being a citizen, such other qualifications as may be prescribed under any other law. The other law all over the place.

We must be very concerned, not only of what is called this “disparity,” as it were; we must adhere to the laws. I noticed just now after an elections litigation was brought against the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), quickly, you had Mr. Vishnu Persaud indicating that I would correct myself, and now we have to go and do a 14-day period of claims and objections. [Ms. **Manickchand**: That is good.] Exactly. Because now it has been brought to his attention. I am bringing this to your attention that indeed there is a residency... [An Hon. Member (Government): (*Inaudible.*)] Yes, well, fine. Even if was not appealed to the Court of Appeal, we here, knowing that we do not want a list that is bloated, we want a list like what Mr. Jagan called for in 1992, that it must be pure, then you should have put back in that which was not clear, and that is the residency requirement. We are going to have a scenario where so many people can take advantage of the bloat, as we saw in the last recount. That part of it, if I may say, in both of these bills that were brought here was not emphasised. If Members look at the explanatory memorandum of the Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill, it goes straight to Section 2, and it never mentions the fact that you have called a residency requirement inside of the Principal Act that is being amended. The Government Members seem to want to do it by stealth and ambush us by not putting in the explanatory memorandum that they are changing “resident”. Listen to me, this is what they did here. In the amendment in Section 2, it states:

“In subsection (3) –

(a) in the opening part, for the word “resident” substitute the words ‘with registered addresses’...”

It goes on to state, in the new part comprising new sections, at section 33A (6):

“If the Commission so directs by order, notwithstanding anything contained in any other written law, the list of electors to choose the members of any local democratic organ...or other local government authority shall consist of names extracted from the official list of electors prepared under this section and registered with an address in the area of that local democratic organ...”

Do you know what the original Act has? It states who is a resident of the local democratic organ. They are now deleting that serious pillar that is now going to make all our voter's lists, now, be questionable That is not right. It is not right. When you go to the other amendment, the National Registration Amendment Bill, the Government seeks now to take away... In Section 6(4):

“(a) the application for registration of every person eligible therefor, with an address at the date of his application in a registration division...”

Do you know what the original Act has?

“(2) Subject to subsection (3), such Order shall apply to all person...”

Who is resident in Guyana. This residency requirement, as I said, is writ large in all our... And our Constitution makes the provision that not only 18 years are registered but such qualifications as is by any other prescribed law. This is a prescribed law, the local government one is a prescribed law, and the Representation of the People Act is a prescribed law. It is important. I will tell you this, Mr. Speaker, a lot of these amendments, if you take them to the Select Committee, a lot of them will be supported. But this one, here, is the big setup for some very nasty things that can happen in future elections by impersonation, as we found in the recount. That is what is going to happen. That is why we now have a regime that is being presented by virtue of the deletion of the residency requirement. That is fundamentally wrong. It is fundamentally wrong when the Local Authorities Elections Act, Chapter 28:03, states that ordinary residents are the people who should be the voters. Then it goes on to state what “Ordinarily resident” means:

“(a) ... the question whether a person is or war ordinarily resident at any material time or during any material period shall be determined by reference to all facts of the case;

(b) the place of ordinary residence of a person is generally that place which he has always been...the place of his habitation...”

The place of his habitation. So, if the man is living in America, he does not have habitation characteristics here in Guyana. He cannot be on the list because you have to be a resident of Guyana inside of a local government area. Now, do you know what it went and did for the local government list? The official list that one would normally use for national elections, which is based on so many

bloated names of people overseas, it does not want to correct. It is saying that it is going to give you a power... It is like an option. It states:

“If the Commission so directs by order, notwithstanding anything contained in any other written law, the list of electors...or other local government authority shall consist of names extracted from the official list of electors prepared under this section and registered with an address...”

Not resident. You now have the GECOM getting a humongous amount of power for Local Government Elections (LGE), contrary to the residency requirement. Notwithstanding any other law, that GECOM can say now that it is going to deem this Act or deem this list of voters the thing. This thing is retrograde. This thing is disastrous for this country because if you do not have a proper list, just like when the Jagans and the People’s Progressive Party (PPP) had wanted a list for the 1992 elections. I remember the famous book that Janet Jagan had written, *Elections Crooked As Barbed Wire!* The list has too many people who are not supposed to be there. You remember that Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Elections *Crooked As Barbed Wire!* We now have what is called “a coming back to that extreme position, by law now, of having a barbed wire sort of arrangement.” Ms. Jagan is probably *turning in her grave* now because you have a scenario whereby you are going to utilise a list that is going to be even more bloated. The list in 1992 was about 200,000. This list has people who are not resident here to the tune of about 200,000. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible.*)] And so, what? It is important because it will halt impersonation, the possibility or the probability of it.

It is important then, Mr. Speaker, that this Bill, as it is, be sent to a Select Committee for the purpose of clearing up some of these issues and not because of the ruling of the Chief Justice. We can now put back into the Act in very explicit terms a requirement of residency, because we are going to have huge problems here, big problems. In the Esther Perreira case, we were arguing, the PPP, Mr. Ralph Ramkarran, Senior Counsel, and I were arguing because the voter identification card was part of a law that prescribed new qualifications. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible.*)] But the PPP was arguing that.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, for you to continue not arguing but contributing, you will need an extension.

Mr. Norton: I rise to request five minutes for the Hon. Member.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may continue, but please address the Chair.

Mr. Ramjattan: The biometrics that is required and is not being argued for by the Government's side makes me make the deduction that it does not want to halt impersonations. We gave you all a lot of oil money. Yes, this Government has a lot of oil money because we signed a rotten deal that it is collecting billions for. Can you not have 2,000 biometrics that is going to deal with your fingerprints at the place of poll to stop the impersonation we saw in the recount? [**Mr. McCoy:** What are you talking about?] Four thousand two hundred and something people who were not supposed to be in Guyana voted. Eighty-eight dead people voted [**An Hon. Member (Government):** *(Inaudible.)*] You only want your narrative. Yes, that is what the recount report stated. That is why the narrative as to that recount is something that you try to avoid. You eschew all the time, but you come to your narrative, which probably has some authenticity, but your narrative excludes a very big part of that election.

11.17 a.m.

I am urging that we understand the context in which the residency requirement is. We must appreciate that, indeed that it is fundamental to any elections, especially a voter's list, that you must be resident. You do not go and extrapolate and say, that as a result of the Chief Justice's decision, we are now going to say that we are going to have a padded list of 200,000. This issue should not be supported here. It should not be supported because there is an underlying piece of mischief that has not been cured, notwithstanding five months of that elections coming out with certain things that indicated impersonation.

We are now going to the other extreme. I am urging, Mr. Speaker, that they have a change of heart and put this Bill in a Special Select Committee so that we can clarify all those points and make a list, whether it is going to be for Local Government Elections or Regional and Democratic elections, National elections or Presidential elections, that will be one that will find acceptability from all the parties that will be doing the contestation. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Now, for the Hon. Minister Mr. Mustapha, Minister of Agriculture. Please proceed.

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to support this piece of important legislation that has been brought to the House by the Attorney General. We remember the first Address to this Parliament by His Excellency the President. He made it very clear that his Government would spare no effort to ensure that never in our history of our great nation will there be dishonesty, which took place during those elections, repeated. We are hearing tonight about impersonation, and we are hearing tonight about all sorts of skulduggery that took place in the last elections. I want to address a few concerns that were raised by the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan and some of his Colleagues

First of all, there were 2,239 polling stations across this country. In the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), we received 2,239 Statement of Polls signed by all the agents who represented political parties, including the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change. There was not one case where there was any objection to impersonation. Today, Mr. Speaker after two years we are hearing a senior Member of the APNU/AFC coming to this National Assembly and accusing its polling agents of being part and parcel of impersonation. That is the thanks it is giving to its polling agents. As stated by the Attorney General, we have a mechanism at these polling stations where a voter enters a polling station. His identification card has to be examined against the folio to certify that is the person. They are taken to the other election official to check all the other particulars and then given a ballot to vote. The polling agent is then given the identification card to check if that is the correct person that has voted when they are coming out of the polling station. I am telling you this evening that there was not a case that the APNU/AFC polling agent objected to in the 2020 General and Regional Elections. I do not know what sort of report the Hon. Member is talking about.

The Hon. Member came here this evening and talked about residency when that matter was heard in the Court, and the Chief Justice ruled that residency is not a requirement for registration. Our Constitution provides that Commonwealth citizens living in Guyana for one year are qualified to be a voter and register on the voter roll. The APNU/AFC wants to deny people who were born in Guyana their Constitutional right to vote in our country. We in the People's Progressive Party respect the Constitution. Remember, during your term in Office, 18 names were submitted by the Leader of the Opposition to pick a Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission, and you all went outside of that and picked an illegal Chairman that had to go to the Caribbean Court of Justice

(CCJ). The CCJ ruled that that was an unconstitutional action by the Government. The APNU/AFC used... It knows how to flout the Constitution... You heard the Hon. Member was talking just now about the 'Esther Perreira matter.' You came to the National Assembly, and you agreed that they would need a voter's ID card, and when it lost the election, it went to the Court with that matter, saying that it never agreed to it. [**Ms. Teixeira:** Unanimously]. Unanimously. Those are the kind of events that are associated with the APNU/AFC.

We then heard the Hon. Member who just left, Hon. Member Mr. Forde said, in this Act, there are mechanisms and regimes that are self-serving. Up to now, I have been waiting to hear one of them that is self-serving. He never mentioned it. He just rabble roused and talked about impersonation, talked about the division of Regions 3, 4, and 6, he talked about residency and those things. He never went into this document and highlighted one clause or one section that is against or that will put the election in dispute. This here will strengthen the process. I will highlight some of the issues that we had in the 2020 Elections and the issues that were condoned by the APNU/AFC, who gave officials in GECOM encouragement to flout the Constitution and disenfranchise thousands of Guyanese. As I said, we had a Representation of the People Act (ROPA) before this Act, which is totally silent on actions that the GECOM Secretariat has taken without any legal cover whatsoever. Further, Mr. Speaker, there have been clear cases where the provision of the ROPA has been deliberately observed in the breach, for example, ascertaining the vote cast for each list of candidates by the District 4 Returning Officer. We know what took place. We know how many names, voters, or votes were cast aside by the Chief Election Officer.

Another glaring example is the transmission of Statement of Polls from polling stations to Returning Officers and Returning Officers opening the designated envelopes containing Statement of Polls. It is as a result of the undertaken given by the President during his inaugural address that we are here today to debate the identified crucial legislative requirement, which all Members if concerned with free, fair, and transparent elections, will support in this honourable House tonight. Against this, Mr. Speaker, I will now deal with some specific issues that happened in the last election. Statement of Polls – it is a public fact that the Guyana Elections Commission, and if our memory is short, let us listen, declared that fake Statement of Polls for the 2015 General and Regional Elections had found its way into the GECOM system. We all remember that.

We in the PPP/C are not aware of any effort that GECOM made to investigate how this occurred and who was responsible. Moreover, GECOM has never since then even attempted to put a legal procedure in place to prevent any recurrence. The 2015 Elections saw the APNU/AFC accede to government. It never had an interest to investigate and say, where did the fake Statement of Polls come from? How it went into the system? The Hon. Member Mr. Benn, just talked about the 21 boxes that we asked for in 2015, **[Bishop Edghill: To be recounted.]** To be recounted. It was never given to us at that time. The APNU/AFC after two years, cannot show its Statement of Polls in the 2020 Election but just after two days in the 2015 Elections, it had its Statement of Polls walking about with it saying they won the elections in 2015.

In this Bill, we will find a comprehensive set of proposed measures which are aimed specifically at preventing manipulation of the Statement of Polls, as was done in 2015. With the approval of this Bill, legislation will be provided for the serial numbering of Statement of Polls forms in similar manner, as is with the case of the ballot paper. We have proposed in this Bill that the templates for the Statement of Polls form, like ballot paper, be encrypted and sent by electronic mail (e-mail), to overseas printers because there was a lot of these things were taken by people to the printers to be printed, with the relevant established technical and security instructions, to prevent the template from falling into the wrong hands, like what took place in 2015. Depending on the number of parties contesting the elections, only the required number of copies of Statement of Polls forms, plus 5%, must be printed, and that is in this ROPA. Also, Mr. Speaker, depending on the number of Parties contesting the Elections, only the required number of Statement of Polls forms must be given to the Presiding Officer (PO) in charge of the respective Polling station. Those are measures that will strengthen our elections system in this country. I did not hear anyone of you mention these measures.

In this Bill also, we have proposed that all extra Statement of Polls forms must be kept in a secure custody of the respective Returning Officers. Additionally, Statement of Polls forms that may be requested as a result of damage must be provided by the Returning Officer *via* the relevant Deputy Returning Officer (DRO). The damaged Statement of Polls forms must be returned to the Returning Officer before the replacements are uplifted. All of those are in here if the Members go through and read all the clauses. I want to commend the Attorney General and the consultation that took place. The Opposition had its chance, but it came here, and it walked out and left without

making a contribution. There will now be legal provisions for all used and unused Statements of Polls forms to be accounted for by the POs and the Retuning Officers, respectively. This will be done on a Statement of Poll account form similar to the ballot paper account form and will be used in the same manner as the ballot paper account form. Party agents will, at all times, be involved in the procedure pertaining to the receipt, storage, allocation, usage, and accounting for Statements of Poll forms, as in the case of the ballot paper and other sensitive matters, to ensure that there are no fake Statements of Poll and to ensure that such an illegality never occurs again, we have proposed these safeguards to, which no member of any political party or civil society grouping should find objectionable.

11.32 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, you may recall that the APNU/AFC praised the manner under which the election was conducted in March, 2020. They claimed victory and they said that the election was free, fair and transparent. If one goes back on record, one will see that the former Attorney General was praising the election in his vehicle, saying that the election was free, fair and transparent and that they won the election. Very shortly after the Election Day, the Coalition had declared that they had won the election, but that claim was a falsehood. Thereafter, we all became aware of the APNU/AFC. The rigmarole that took place up to August, 2020, to prevent the real result of those elections from being officially declared. During the CARICOM team supervised recount of the ballot, we began hearing accusations that the PPP/C had rigged the elections by somehow falsifying voting by dead people and by persons who were overseas on Election Day, and they have made that claim just now. No report was received from any contesting party on Election Day that any such malpractice had taken place. The only way something like that could have happened was if the party agent for the APNU/AFC was sleeping or left the polling station. They claimed that they had polling agents at all the polling stations. We have statements of poll signed by their polling agents.

It is for this specific reason, and to ensure that party agents are always present at containers to witness the movement of ballot boxes and administrative bags or containers to the polling stations, this Bill proposes the appointment and accreditation of alternate Polling Agents for every polling station. Every polling station will now have a Polling Agent and an alternate Polling Agent. This proposed safeguard seeks to ensure that contesting political parties have the right to appoint two Polling Agents to each polling station to alternately, as may be necessary, observe all polling day

activities commencing with the movement of the ballot boxes on the morning of Election Day from their point of storage, right up to the delivery of all statements of poll to the respective Returning Officers

I do not want to go into the Division of Regions 3, 4 and 6. The AG and other Members have dealt with those. I think this will help us because we remember... I think the Hon. Member Sanjeev Datadin would have alluded to the fact that the Returning Officer for Region 4 faked a heart attack, then there were people who moved away with the... [**Mr. Ramson:** Flash drive.] The flash drive and a number of other issues. This will help us to conduct the election in a more manageable way and the results will be more forthcoming. It is also proposed that each of the four subdistricts be managed by the supernumerary Returning Officer charged with the tabulation of the election result for the respective subdistrict. In recognition of the numerous loopholes within the process, the counting of the votes at the polling station, transmission of the statements of poll from respective polling stations to Returning Officers, and tabulation of votes cast by Returning Officers, we have made provision in this legislation to safeguard all those processes. This Bill proposes a regime of safeguards which are all aimed at making the procedure more robust as well as eliminating all existing room for manipulation for different motives.

One such safeguard will be the mandatory requirement for Returning Officers to make adequate provision for all persons who are authorised to be there to witness the tabulation of the result using the actual statements of poll, while the progressive tabulation will be displayed on a screen for the benefit of all concerned. As the Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin, said, there will be no more need for spreadsheet and bedsheet arrangements. In recognition of the security checks and balances which currently exists in the ROPA, this Bill proposes a series of step-by-step procedures intended to strengthen the above listed procedures and guarantee the integrity of the result of the elections which are tabulated by the Returning Officer.

Transparency is one of the hallmarks among the established international standards for the conduct of elections. However, apparently, this was not done by the former Chief Elections Officer who refused to show the copy of the statements of poll, given the manner in which the District 4 Returning Officer did his tabulation and made falsified declarations of the result. In fact, the former GECOM CEO made his own tabulation, which varied considerably from the result declared by the Returning Officer, and still refuses to show the statements of poll which he had gotten in his figure.

We then heard excuses like the CEO is the lawful custodian of the statements of poll and that he is not obliged to show them to anyone. It took a court order from the Chief Justice to instruct the CEO to release his copies of the statements of poll.

As a nation, we cannot go forward in this scenario where the laws, or lack thereof, would allow any GECOM CEO to withhold a copy of the statements of polls from the entire county. This is why, to avoid what transpired in 2020, this Bill proposes the introduction of legislation which will make it mandatory for the Chief Elections Officer to publish all statements of poll by district, as he receives them. Further, the Bill proposes that the CEO will now be specifically authorised to ascertain the result of the election by adding up the result received from the Returning Officers of the 10 Electoral Districts which he will be legally required to submit to the Commission for ratification and declaration.

These measures are here to strengthen our electoral process and it is very sad that we are here today to pass this legislation to make our electoral laws stronger to strengthen the process and the Opposition has just left the Dome. It is very sad because we know for a fact they are not interested in the democracy of our country. From 1964 to 1985, we have had rigged elections in our country. From 1992 to 2015, elections were certified as free and fair. In 2020, we had yet another attempt to rig the election. This here will help us to never, in the history of our country, allow another rigged election to take place. With this, I support this legislation and want to commend it to the House. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Ms. Teixeira: I know the time is late. I first of all wanted to start by really appreciating the presentations by all my Colleagues on this side to deal with what is a historic Bill and one that took time both internally for the Government and the PPP/C, with many supporters and civil society organisations to come to this point.

More importantly, at this moment, and just this moment, it is really for the Parliament and for those of us who have struggled for free and fair elections for a long time, to recognise the passing of Father Malcolm Rodrigues, a Jesuit who fought for free and fair elections in the very difficult days of the 70s and 80s. Tonight may be ironic in the sense that we are discussing a Bill to do with electoral reform and enhancing the electoral systems to try to prevent the attempt by very evil-

minded people in our country to steal an election and to steal the people's rights to choose who they wish to have as their Government over the five years.

We have witnessed in this House... I could say disgraceful, and yes, it is disgraceful, and I can say I am embarrassed, and yes, I am embarrassed, but really, I am horrified by the fact that an Opposition comes here – the APNU/AFC, to make it distinct from Mr. Shuman's joinder parties – after a year of a bill being put on *Facebook*, hardcopies sent to all of the political parties and in particular, the request by Ms. Volda Lawrence as the then Chairman of the People's National Congress and the then General Secretary of the PNC, Ms. Amna Ally, to request copies of the bills in November, 2021. It is not our fault they had elections in their congress, and they overturned their party upside down and inside out. The point is that the consultation process which they are making fun of today, and they are making light of today, is real. The President made a commitment in October that the Bill would be available within a week's time. So said, so done.

The Bill remained on *Facebook*, hardcopies were given to anybody who called in and organisations did submit – although not the kind of response we expected because we thought that a number of organisations would have been more active. The Guyana Elections Commission itself, that is, the Chairman and the CEO, put forward their views, the Guyana Consumers Association (GCA), the Electoral Reform Group (ERG), the Private Sector Commission (PSC), A New and United Guyana (ANUG) Party and several persons who lived overseas wrote comments, *et cetera*. In May, we had the invitations to the Attorney General who consulted with the submissions in writing by the organisations and individuals I called. What was clear was that a number of the amendments that they were talking about had to do with constitution and not electoral reform in terms of statutes. That led to further amendments in terms of the Bill. For example, the one that we talked about tonight, that is, the comments that instead of one just having Region 4 with subdivisions, have other regions. In fact, that is how we made the amendment to do with Region 3 and Region 6.

This view that came out that the subdivisions was some type of dastardly plot by the PPP/C to disenfranchise and to corrupt the system, is a hoax. In fact, in Region 4, there has always been subdivisions for the East Coast, East Bank, North Georgetown and South Georgetown. What one is taking is the same apparatus that led to the four subdivisions in Region 4 to be able to now manage the count. Region 3 has always had the three subdivisions. Region 6 has always had the three subdivisions. Nothing was done to, in any way, overturn the way in which GECOM manages

itself. We come here almost a year and a week later from when the Bills were first posted and not one comma, not one colon, not one semicolon, not one word, not a comment from the APNU/AFC, who say and claim that they represent 49% of the people of this country. This abnegation of the responsibility as political leaders is horrifying and one in which their behaviour tonight reveals their agenda. Their agenda is not one to cooperate. Their agenda is not one to say, let us have a select committee and let us sort it out. What are we meeting to sort out?

First of all, there were speakers tonight who have said they oppose it. It is all this bad plot, and this attempt by the PPP/C to control the Elections Commission and to overturn this and overturn that. What are we changing? What is there to meet and talk about? Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir spoke about a select committee. Mr. Ramjattan and Mr. Forde opposed the Bill and one of them, Mr. Ramjattan, said that it could go to a select committee. Mr. Forde did not commit himself to that.

11.47 p.m.

Mr. Norton, who I was advised wish to speak and would speak before the Attorney General, suddenly walked out just now. So, what kind of political leadership... This Bill tonight and these bills to do with the electoral reform are very revealing in terms of the Opposition's behaviour. It is not surprising because we have gone through their behaviour for decades. We have gone through rigged elections for decades from the 1970s and 1980s. Their Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) has not changed. They still cannot function in a democratic environment. They cannot function in an environment where they have to play the role of sharing, of comprising and of leading in the best interest of the people of this country.

The Bills before us are not perfect, but in our whole struggle for democracy, our whole struggle for free and fair elections and to protect the electoral system of Guyana, we have made changes over and over again. We must never forget that the first Universal Adult Suffrage Election in Guyana in 1953, where the People's Progressive Party (PPP) won 18 of 24 seats was overturned by the British with warships and the implanting of an interim government. From then on, we have had to struggle with gerrymandering of the boundaries in 1964 with the conspiracy of Her Majesty, the Queen, now passed; with the Governor General to have Mr. Burnham and Mr. D'Aguiar create a coalition; to 1968 with what was called the Making of a Prime Minister by the Granada Television (TV); to 1973 where Mr. Burnham did it again, another Granada TV; in 1980 when the

electoral report that we did came out calling it a toothless poodle which had to do with GECOM being totally incompetent and unable to protect the rights of the people of this country; to 1985 with an election crooked as barbwire which came out with the PCD – the Patriarchal Coalition for Democracy. So, we have been there. We had to fight for the most important thing before the 1992 Election and that was the counting of the votes at the place of poll. That is what preserves the electoral system in Guyana. They were vexed with Hoyte about that because Hoyte was pressured by Carter, the Belize President and others across the world. We take for granted this counting at the place of poll, but it has saved democracy in 1992, 1997, 2001, 2006, 2011 and it has saved us in 2020. The counting of ballots at the place of polls.

I was an observer of the British elections in 2016. We have always had this impression that other people's elections are more scrutinised and better than ours. I was sent to Edinburgh. On the day of the elections, whilst a person can mail in his/her vote, there were persons who turned up at the polling station and voted manually. There was no electronic voting machine. Then, to my horror, they never counted the votes of the place of poll. That was done in an enormous room where thousands of ballot boxes were coming in. Ballots were thrown on different tables. Scrutineers were standing way back – 30 feet back – and they were counting and shouting the numbers. It was worse than a fish market.

So, the appreciation of where we had come as of 2020, no legislation can anticipate, I believe, the evilness of man, we cannot. If we can conceptualise how evil people can be then, maybe, we may be becoming evil ourselves. But the fact that the 2020 experience, the torture and trauma as my Colleague Minister Sonia Parag said, the trauma that the Guyanese people went through for months after months. Forget about before that with the no-confidence motion, we were supposed to have the elections in three months. We had the election 14 months later and we had to wait five months after that for the declaration. Nineteen months in the lifespan of a nation – unthinkable. It slowed down the country. It impacted on people's lives. It increased poverty. It increased a number of social problems we had and, on top of that, we had the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID)

We are here to rectify, remedy and to ensure that whatever loopholes like *inaudible* and others in the law that existed and allowed the conspirators, those within the GECOM hierarchy and those outside in the former Government who conspired to ensure that the will of the people was overturned... These bills try to rectify the entire process from the time a person gets registered at

the age of 14, gets his/her Identification card (ID) and gets on the voters' list at 18 years old; two, the allocation of the polling stations. I just want to mention one aspect of that in the Bill which has been received well and that is the provision in the law for accessibility of persons with disabilities to be able to vote. That has been greeted with great aplomb by the organisations representing disabled persons. We have written it into the law as a consideration that must be protected and recognised in the selection of the polling stations. It is clear from the behaviour of the Opposition that they have no appetite for electoral reform and I do not believe they have an appetite for constitutional reform either. [Mr. Nandlall: No appetite for work.] Well that too, thank you, Attorney General. In fact, in the consultation, what was surprising is that one of the GECOM representatives for the Opposition who was representing civil society at the meeting stated, very clearly, that we were doing things upside down. What we were supposed to do is constitutional reform and then statutory reform. But, if we are going at the speed at which they would have us go at, we would never have constitutional reform and certainly would not get to statutory reform by the time the 2025 elections come.

This is all the agenda of the Opposition. To be obstructionists, to be able to try to mamaguy the Guyanese people and to talk about a bloated list, dead people voting and overseas people voting. I think my Colleague, Minister Zulfiqar Mustapha, answered it very well. The scrutineers signed the statements of poll and, therefore, if they had conspired with the PPP and the Presiding officers to allow people to vote who were dead or people who were overseas or not in the country, then, obviously, the Opposition has a bigger problem than we know.

The Opposition had raised the issue of residency and I am sure my Colleague, the Attorney General, will raise it. We had the experience in 1997 of bringing legislation here that were unanimously supported by everybody for a voter's ID card which was overturned by the court. So, the arguments by Mr. Ramjattan about residency, that it is in all of the electoral laws and, therefore, we should be doing it, *et cetera*, in the face of the Chief Justice's ruling, will send us down the same road as the 1997 case which occurred. We want to make sure that the system, wherever there were opportunities... To fix some other issues that had been historical. We put into the Bill about Polling Agents accompanying the ballot boxes. This has been an issue from 1993 with the young people who were killed in what was called the Ballot Box Martyrs. This puts into the law that GECOM provides transportation and/or it allows private vehicles to follow. The issue of the

Polling Agents being able to have the list of voters, which for almost every other station around the country for years, there is always the battle that Polling Agents want to walk out with the list that has been ticked off and the Presiding Officers say ‘no, you cannot take it. It is the property of GECOM’. These are what you call irritants that have been in the system for a long time. These are being fixed by the legislation and they give comfort to the Polling Agents.

The issues of the SOPs, the tabulation and ensuring that one does not have to wait for the ballot boxes to come in before he/she starts tabulating the statements of poll, the posting of the statements of poll on the GECOM website and the way in which it is to be handled, these are critical components for transparency and accountability to the Guyanese people and to give our people assurances that their votes count and that they will not experience what happened in 2020 ever again. We owe the Guyanese people this as Parliamentarians.

It is regrettable that the Opposition does not seem to have that conscience or that moral obligation to the Guyanese public. But we on this side of the House have a moral obligation, a constitutional responsibility, to protect the rights of our people to vote at free and fair elections without interference and without GECOM itself being the organisation that is actually undermining the election. We have to restore trust and confidence in the electoral system. It is our responsibility to do that. Therefore, the Opposition will continue to play an obstructionist role. It will continue to find excuse after excuse. It will continue to mix up constitutional reforms and statutory reforms. It will continue to cry that it wants a select committee and we denied it. It will continue to find ways to stall things such as the constitutional appointments of the Public Service Commission, the Teaching Service Commission (TSC) and the Judicial Service Commission (JSC). It will continue in this vein of obstruction, by these means, trying to prevent Guyana from moving forward. Regrettably, they are on the wrong track, they are on the wrong side of history. The country will continue to move forward. We will continue to build our country. We will continue to transform our country. We will continue to enshrine and strengthen the democratic institutions of our country, including GECOM. We will continue to build the trust and confidence of our people under One Guyana. Thank you, very much, Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister Teixeira. I see on my list has the Leader of the Opposition. Let me just check to ensure that he is not online. Hon. Leader of the Opposition?

Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, you have the floor right on the stroke of midnight.

Mr. Nandlall (replying): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank all my Colleagues who, as said in my opening presentation, would have covered the breadth, amplitude and magnitude of the Bill in all of its different facets and they have done so with remarkable clarity and coherence. I do not believe, in fact, that there is any aspect of the Bill that is left unanswered or have not been addressed by the various speakers on our side.

12.02 a.m.

On the other side, we have heard presentations but, what have they said? The Hon. Amanza Desir clearly has not read the Bill, did not read the Bill and came here expecting to speak and apparently thinking that the Hon. Member would sound intelligent. I do not know how one could do such a thing. How could one choose voluntarily to speak on a Bill, a lawyer at that, knowing full well that you are going to be streamed live and the country and the world will be watching you, and you have not read a sentence in the Bill, as was evident in her performance this evening. All the Hon. Member spoke about was taking the Bill to a select committee. A Bill that was on the Order Paper for how long? It was on the Order Paper for nearly three weeks. It was in public circulation for an entire year – never chose to read it. Even when it came to the Parliament for the past three weeks, even when we were here eight hours before the debate actually begun on the Bill, did not care to even read one page, but stands there and speaks for 30 minutes wasting all of our time – and about the quality of water that comes through the tap, blackouts, *et cetera*.

I hope that the people of Guyana are recognising, are seeing the type of representation that they are getting from this useless pack of Hon. Members in this Parliament. They are honourable but completely useless. The people of Guyana must determine how long they will fetch them on their backs. If the people determine at the next elections that they will not be here, they will not be here. It is the people who will determine... After looking at how they have abandoned the people's business, it is the people to determine whether they want to perpetuate this kind of irresponsibility in this Parliament. Mr. Forde spoke and I am still to decipher whether he supports the Bill, or whether he does not support the Bill. In most of his presentation he paid compliments to the Bill and to the staff of the AG Office. He has some problems with residency, which I will deal with in

due course. But at the end of the presentation, he does not support the Bill. It is difficult for one to even address what Mr. Forde said. Mr. Forde has a problem with Section 33. I will read Section 33 because I cannot fathom what the problem is. Clause 33A (6) states:

“If the Commission so directs by order, notwithstanding anything contained in any other written law, the list of electors to choose the members of any local democratic organ... or other local government authority shall consist of the names extracted from the official list of electors prepared under this section and registered with an address in the area of that local democratic organ or local government authority.”

I do not understand what his problem with this is. All this says is that GECOM could, by order, extract from the list of electors the list of names that could go to an election for the purpose of a local democratic authority. So, one looks at the voters list and extracts the names based on the address on the list for the purpose of going to a local government election. What is mystifying about that? That is how lists are extracted. This is not an addition. We are not putting an addition here. We have simply migrated from the Election Laws (Amendment) Act of 2000 a provision and situated it appropriately where it should be within ROPA. We have not interfered with the existing law. There is absolutely nothing wrong with the law in its current construct. As I said, this law has been here since the year 2000. I do not know *Rip Van Wrinkle* now Mr. Roysdale Forde, discovers it and finds some problem with it.

I come now because the Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan spoke at length about residency. First of all, let us start with the Constitution. Mr. Ramjattan begins in 1992 and refers to the struggle of the PPP/C in 1992 or approaching the 1992 Elections to get certain reforms done. Among the reforms was the abolition of overseas voting. That was one of the crucial reforms, Sir. I believe you were part of the process that agitated for those reforms. It was against phantom voting that took place overseas. Hence, the requirement if that is the danger, then the emphasis has to be residency within sovereign Guyana. Obviously, Mr. Ramjattan does not understand that up to now. The focus at that time was against overseas voting and for the establishment and the ensconcement within the law of a requirement that would ensure that only local voting takes place. That mechanism was residency. It was a big thing in the law then.

It remained part of the law until in the 1999-2001 Constitutional reform process. Mr. Ramjattan was part of that process. Mr. Speaker, if you look at the Constitution, Article 59 which is subject to Article 159, they speak about the qualifications to register and the qualifications to vote. Both, if one reads the marginal note, they were amended by a 2001 amendment Act No. 3, and I believe Act No. 6 of 2001. It is the Constitutional reform that injected into these provisions in the Constitution, the removal of any shred of evidence which requires residency. It was not I who put it here. It is what the people of Guyana decided in a Constitutional reform process and which this Parliament unanimously passed. Article 159, which is the mother provision, states:

“(1) No person shall vote at an election unless he or she is a registered elector.”

Nothing to do with residency. One sentence. Article 59 tells you, before that...let me quickly go to Article 59 to put it on the record. It states:

“Subject to the provisions of article 159, every person who may vote at an election if he is of the age of eighteen years and upwards and is either a citizen of Guyana or a Commonwealth citizen domicile and resident in Guyana.”

The resident there relates to the Commonwealth citizens. Once you are 18 years and upwards and you are a citizen of Guyana, you are qualified to vote. That is further entrenched by Article 159 which states:

“(1) No person shall vote at an election unless he or she is a registered elector.”

You could only be registered if you are 18 years and over and you are a citizen of Guyana. It continues:

“Subject to the provisions...a person shall be qualified to be registered as an elector for elections if, and shall not be so qualified unless on the qualifying date, he or she is eighteen years or upwards and either –

(a) Is a citizen of Guyana; or

(b) Is a Commonwealth citizen...”

Resident in Guyana. Where is residency part of the requirement either to register or to vote. That is what I cannot get into their heads. Mr. Ramjattan cites this provision. He says that... also the Constitution does state at Article 159 2 (c):

“(c) satisfies such other qualifications as may be prescribed by or under any law.”

This is the very provision that put us in problem in 1997. Invoking this very provision to add qualifications, this Parliament unanimously added a voter's ID card as a qualification. It was authorised by the Constitution. It was passed by a law and the Constitution permits it. It added a requirement. Do you know what the judge held, properly so? The requirement, though the Constitution authorises, cannot detract from the fundamental right provided for by the provision. In other words, you cannot have a section of the law departing and derogating from the piths and substance of the Article. The piths and substance of the Article was to protect the right to vote. That was the fundamental right. Everything else in the Article was secondary. When one puts in something there that is secondary, and that conflicted and affected the performance of the fundamental right, the fundamental right took precedence over that one. You had to read down the secondary one and read up the fundamental one. It is that cannon of interpretation that Mr. Ramjattan cannot understand up to now. Similarly, if as he is advocating that we pass a law and add residency, it will suffer the same fate. Why? Because that fundamental right to vote will now be diluted by a residency requirement. In the same way that the fundamental right to vote was diluted by an ID card requirement. That simple legal logic eludes Mr. Ramjattan. Mr. Forde is no better, he is worse.

They spoke at length about the Chief Justices' ruling. The Chief Justice ruling did not fall out of the sky. I filed the case to challenge the house-to-house registration process that was started by GECOM under the Chairmanship of Mr. Patterson. Why did we challenge it? We challenged it and it was part of our legal case that they intended to scrap the National Register of Registrants (NRR) and start a new database because they wanted to remove overseas-based Guyanese on that database and only register resident Guyanese on that database. That was the crucial and quintessential question for the court. That was the very question before the court. It was not that the Chief Justice woke up one morning and rule in abstract. Those were the competing legal arguments. Exactly what they are saying here and exactly what I am saying here. They were arguing that residency is a requirement. It is because it is in the National Registration Act; because

it is in several pieces of legislation. The Chief Justice said no. Insofar as you insist on residency, you are colliding with the Constitution. This is because the Constitution only list two requirements: citizenship and adulthood. Insofar as all the legislation to which Mr. Ramjattan made reference speaks to residency as part of the electoral equation of this country, they are all unconstitutional.

12.17 a.m.

That is the *ratio decidendi* of the Chief Justice's ruling. The Chief Justice only declared one. We need to take all to court and have them declared unlawful. What we are doing here now, as I said in the beginning of my presentation, is to get all the scattered pieces, sterilize them of their constitutional impurities and then add the reform to them. That is what we have done here. That is why we have removed the residency. It has no place until we change the Constitution. If we wish to make residency an equation in the formula, we have to change the Constitution or else we have to change all the laws because all the laws must conform to the Constitution. That is why residency has been removed and replaced with an address at a particular location. So, one could have an address; one does not have to be resident there. My parents, who live in the United States of America (USA), have an address at 69 Narine Street Annandale. When GECOM staff go there, they must go and verify that is their address, not their place of residence. It is their address. That is what GECOM must put in their system now to become compliant with the Constitution. When they go to verify, they are not verifying the existence of residency. They are going to verify the existence of that address, that there is a house there and that the address exists. That is what the law states now. That is what the Constitution states since 2001. That is all. If we do anything other than that, we would be derogating and violating the Constitution.

Mr. Ramjattan or Mr. Forde asked the question, how does one go and verify a person's address or that he is living there? All one has to go and verify is that the address is not fictional. Perhaps, somebody can say they know that person and that person is using the address. That is all that our Constitution requires and there is no magic in that. Nobody can get disenfranchised because of that. Someone has that address, and that address is where he or she would be voting at the time of national elections. When Local Government Election comes, whichever constituent one falls into, one would be voting from that address or using that address as a base to find one's place on the electoral list. What is mystifying about that? What is confusing about that? This whole – I do not want to say diatribe – argumentation that we have been hearing tonight about residency...I am

surprised that Mr. Ramjattan, an experienced lawyer, cannot appreciate what the Constitution states and how the law must be refashioned to suit the Constitution. Mr. Ramjattan has it the opposite way around. Mr. Ramjattan wants us to refashion the Constitution to suit the law. That is *putting the cart before the horse*. It is the law that must be brought in conformity with the Constitution, not the other way around. No one from the other side has really put forward any serious argumentation about this Bill.

There is very little to answer because I have answered what they have raised. Mr. Forde raised this argument without even developing it. He said that we have chosen three regions and we are subdividing them. The reason we chose the three regions...we started with Region 4. They objected. They said that we were targeting their stronghold. We chose two other regions because of their populous nature. That is why we chose three regions. It does not create any disadvantage over the other regions. The other regions do not have this number of votes to count. We chose the three regions because they are the three most populous voting regions in the country. It is as simple as that. There is no other advantage or disadvantage that is created. All that will happen is that the votes will be tabulated in different parts of the polling district. That is all that will happen. There will be different aggregates, the count will be quicker, and there would be smoother results. There would not be the skulduggery of Mr. Mingo.

This is the last thing. Mr. Ramjattan kept repeating that discredited narrative about phantom voting and voting impersonation, *et cetera*. It is the same nonsense that they said before the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) audit team. I just read the Report of the CARICOM Observer Team. First of all, they selected that team. Remember, they put out all of the other observers. They chased the Carter Center out of the country. They did not give them permission to come back in. They did not permit any other observer team. President Granger said the CARICOM Observer Team was the most legitimate interlocutor – I remember those words – and they appointed the CARICOM Observer Team. When the CARICOM Observer Team gave *them the shaft*, *they bawled*. The CARICOM Observer Team said to them that they looked at their allegations of irregularities and it was all a fishing expedition. Those were the exact words. They cast the net so wide that they pickings was very slim. I am quoting from the CARICOM Report there. Their allegations were incredible and incredulous. Those are to words I also remember from the CARICOM Report.

Then they got an opportunity to go and challenge the elections in the court to prove all the 75,000 *jumbies* that voted all the impersonating that happened. They had an opportunity. The law gave them an opportunity to go to the court, file an election petition and litigate their matter, and bring all the witnesses who they had to say they saw the 75,000 *jumbies* who voted. Do you know what? One petition was not served properly and that was dismissed and the other one was dismissed on points of law. Who is it they want to blame for that? They are blaming us. We should not win the case. We should allow the case to go to trial. They filed a case, and they could not even serve it right. The man who they *miss served*, short served or did not even serve was their own leader. Now, if they had *miss served* Cde. Bharrat Jagdeo or he had hidden from them and so on...He accepted his serve on the first day. It was Mr. David Granger that they had a problem serving. If they had a problem serving Mr. Vishnu Bandhu, a party in the action or anybody else, even Mr. Lowenfield, they had an explanation. They could not find their own leader, and they come here to blame the world for losing the elections.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very important Bill. I know the hour and I ask that the Bill be read a third time and passed. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: I think you might be premature in asking that the Bill be read a third time. You have to ask that the Bill be read a second time. Hon. Members, this concludes the debate on Bill No. 24 of 2022 – Representation of the People (Amendment) Bill 2022.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Clauses 1 to 4 and Schedule

Clauses 1 to 4 and the schedule agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

National Registration (Amendment) Bill 2022-Bill No. 23 of 2022 published on 2022-11-01

A Bill intituled AN ACT to amend the National Registration Act.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This Bill accompanies the ROPA (Amendment) Bill and it completes a cycle of amendments in relation to our election system. As is well known, registration of electors, registration of citizens and the electoral process are all connected. Like the ROPA Bill, there were scattered amendments all over which we had to accumulate and put them together here. What this Bill seeks to do, generally, is to, first of all, strengthen and clarify the concept of a continuous registration system, which is this registration system provided for by our law. That is the first thing.

There are sections in the law that can create some kind of doubt and that is why there is an argument continuously made for house-to-house registration. House-to-house registration cannot take place in the face of a cyclical continuous registration system.

12.32 a.m.

This cycle continues by operation of the law. It is now being clarified and, also, fixed intervals are now being dealt with here. So, it is not left to GECOM to determine, by order, when it will start a cycle and when it will stop a cycle. We are now fixing in the law that there are going to be two cycles of continuous registration per year.

Importantly, we are creating a new regime of directives for the Chief Registration Officer, who is also the Chief Elections Officer (CEO), to comply with so as to ensure that registration as a civic system is disengaged from registration for the purpose of elections. In Guyana, we seem to conflate the two and it causes untold problems by that unnecessary confusion; they are different processes. Citizens, when they become of registrable age, they must register. Once they register, they must be given their Identification Cards (ID) upon registration. This has nothing to do with elections. However, the cycle continues, and every six months that registration goes over. There is a break – a one-month period – and then the numbers are extrapolated and put on a register. Then, the cycle continues again for another six months. It breaks for a month and names are transferred over again, once they become of age to be put on a list. It is that list that will eventually become the voters' list. Why is that system there now? It is because at any given time within a three-month notification period one can have an election list ready. This is going on independently of ID cards being issued all the time. There is a duty imposed now for ID cards to be continuously issued upon registration.

So, one does not have to wait and line up at elections time only to get one's ID card. That system is being broken up and clear guidelines are now provided for when ID cards are to be issued. The cycle of registration begins from January to May with a qualifying date of 30th June and during the months of July to November with a qualifying date of 31st December. That will not stop. The GECOM has nothing to do with that; the GECOM must carry out this. This is the cycle that the law is creating now, and this will not stop. That, hopefully, will clear the air forever. If you want to stop this and you want house-to-house registration, we have to come back here and amend the law. Then, we will have to deal with the legal consequences, because what are you going to do with the database? There is already a ruling from the court that the database cannot be thrown away. So, I do not know for what purpose one would go to house-to-house registration.

As I said before, there is removal across the board of any residency requirement anywhere. The language used to substitute is an address at some locality or an address in Guyana. That satisfies the constitutional position – an address. One does not have to be a resident there, but one must have an address. There is the verification process that I have spoken about, and it is provided for here. One can do one's change of address, *et cetera*, and the person will go and verify where one's new address is. It has nothing to do with if one is a resident at that address or not; one does not have to be. Of course, we are creating a list of offences as we are going through each new requirement we are now establishing in the law.

We have the troublesome matter of deaths. We agree that dead people ought not to be on the list. Under the Constitution, they are disqualified, and they must be removed. Unfortunately, it would appear that they have not been removed at periodic intervals from the list. That is the report out there. I do not know; I never checked it. What we are doing now is make it mandatory for the General Registrar's Office to furnish the Chief Registration Officer with a list of dead people every four months and the requisite information confirming those deaths. So, every four months, a list of the persons whose deaths are recorded at that department would go from the General Registrar's Office to the Chief Registration Officer. More than 90% of the deaths in Guyana, as far as I am aware, are recorded. So, that should take care of about 90% of the dead people or persons dying within the country. If that mechanism is not complied with, again, there is an offence created. So, that is one issue to deal with – recorded deaths.

How do we capture unrecorded deaths? The Bill establishes a mechanism that brings together the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and the Commissioner of Police (CoP). They must send to the Chief Registration Officer deaths that come within their knowledge every four months as well – deaths that are not on the register at the General Register Office (GRO). So, this is another net that we are creating that would, hopefully, capture unregistered deaths. So, the Chief Medical Officer would have to now create a network among the medical institutions of the country to collect data on persons dying in the system. The Guyana Police Force (GPF) has its current mechanism already of uplifting that data within the police system. These two statutory officers, now, will have to play a role in furnishing the information to the Chief Registration Officer.

The Chief Registration Officer, when he receives that information, because it is not confirmed, must now carry out a process. He must send it to his divisional offices across the country where the person died or where the person may have lived. When the claims and objections take place in that locality, those names will be a part of the claims and objections period. It will be published that these are persons who are believed to be dead because their deaths are unconfirmed. If there is no objection and no one can confirm or dispute that the persons are dead, only then their names will be deleted from the national database.

We believe that the combination of these two initiatives will cleanse the voters' list and the national database of over 95% of dead persons in the country. That is all that we can do at this point in time. We asked at all the consultations for another mechanism to be suggested and none came forward. Some persons are raising issues about what will happen if someone dies overseas and is still on the list. Well, we do not have a mechanism in place to deal with overseas deaths. We do not have that type of infrastructure in our diaspora that will send that kind of data to us here in Guyana. Until such an infrastructure is established, we have to continue the way that it is. If someone has a better idea, we are still open. Nobody has come forward.

I spoke about the ID card, *et cetera*. Let me just dwell a bit on those biometrics. A lot has been said about biometrics this evening. The misunderstanding and ignorance that passes in this Parliament are shocking. Biometrics to the other side means electronic voting. Do you realise that? They are equating biometrics with electronic voting. Concepts are not understood in this place. I want to put on the record that we have biometrics in our electoral system. When one registers, one has to give his or her date of birth. They check your eyes; they check your height; they check your

colour; and they check your distinguishing marks. All those things are biometrics. [Ms. Teixeira: Fingerprints (*inaudible*).] There are fingerprints. That is what constitutes biometrics. They are put on a registration card. It is the information on that registration card, when one is registered, that goes onto the national ID card. It is that registration card, essentially, that is kept and converted to that Registration Folio. That is why at that Polling Station one's Registration Folio and one's ID card coincide. They come from the same source, and they contain your biographic and biometric data. Electronic voting is a mechanism for voting. It has nothing to do with biometrics. There are big and educated people, whom I am listening to in this House, conflating and confusing separate and distinct concepts, and they have the innocent population listening to them. You might read in the newspaper tomorrow that the PPP/C rejected biometrics, Opposition called for biometrics. Mr. Ramjattan said all we need is 2000 electronic voting machines (EVM). That is what he called biometrics. Mr. Speaker, it is going on now to the morning and I ask that the Bill be read a second time. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Are there any other contributors? We have a number of other Members online. Let me just check. Hon. Attorney General, there being no other contributor, you have the opportunity to close again.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Clauses 1 to 4 and Schedule

Clauses 1 to 4 and the schedule agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

12.47 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Members, I am advised that the two other Bills – the Criminal Law (Procedure) (Amendment) Bill 2022- No. 21 of 2022 and the Court of Appeal (Amendment) Bill 2022- No.22 of 2022 – will be deferred along with the other motion on the Order Paper.

This brings us to the end of our business for this 52nd Sitting of the National Assembly. I am not sure if we will meet again before the holiday season and so I want to take this opportunity to wish you and your families, along with the staff of the Parliament Office, security forces, the media and all those who have been watching, Season Greetings and a very Happy New Year.

ADJOURNEMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly be adjourned *sine die*.”

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

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, we would like to adjourn this sitting, *sine die*. We are not certain whether we would have another sitting before the end of the year. However, we would like to extend greetings to everyone – yourself, your family and the staff of Parliament Office. Have a wonderful Christmas weekend, just in case we see you before New Year’s, but at this point I am not aware that we will have a sitting before then. I hope that everyone has a safe Christmas. Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is on the rise again. I know at Christmas time everyone enjoys themselves and goes out and socialises, but I believe we need to be careful, yet enjoy being with our families. Stay safe and drive carefully. Do not drink and drive. I know none of you will do that, of course. All the best to you. We hope to see you if not before New Year, then certainly in the New Year 2023. Thank you very much all your support for this year in the Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Minister. Hon. Deputy Speaker, proceed.

Mr. Shuman: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank you so much for this opportunity. I would like to wish all of my parliamentary colleagues and their respective families, yourself and all of Guyana a very happy holiday season. It has been a very fruitful year and I look further to what the holidays

would bring in terms of rest and relaxation with family time and also to a bright future continuing in the New Year of 2023. Happy holidays to everyone.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Deputy Speaker and Hon. Minister Teixeira. Hon. Members, this is a good time to adjourn the sitting to a date to be fixed.

Adjourned accordingly at 1.02 p.m.