



**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*

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53<sup>RD</sup> Sitting

Monday, 16<sup>TH</sup> January, 2023

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**PARLIAMENT OFFICE  
HANSARD DIVISION**

*The Assembly convened at 2.24 p.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

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

**Speaker (1)**

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

**MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)**

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

**Prime Minister (1)**

+ Hon. Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Anthony Phillips, M.S.S., M.P.,  
*the functions of the Office of the President]*  
*Prime Minister,  
Prime Minister's Office,  
Colgrain House,  
205 Camp Street,  
Georgetown.*

*[Absent – Performing*

**Vice-President (1)**

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

*[Absent]*

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Speaker**

## **Senior Ministers (17)**

+ Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,  
(Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni),  
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,  
Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,  
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+ Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P.,  
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[Absent – on leave]

+\*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,  
Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance  
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Main & Urquhart Streets,  
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,  
Minister of Public Works,  
Ministry of Public Works,  
Wight's Lane,  
Kingston,  
Georgetown.

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

+ Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P.,  
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Ministry of Education,  
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Ministry of Home Affairs,  
Brickdam,  
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Minister**

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*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),*  
*Minister of Agriculture,*  
*Ministry of Agriculture,*  
*Regent and Vlissengen Road,*  
*Bourda, Georgetown.*

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*Minister of Amerindian Affairs,*  
*Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,*  
*Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,*  
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*Ministry of Labour,*  
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*Georgetown.*

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*Minister of Natural Resources,*  
*Ministry of Natural Resources,*  
*Lot 96 Duke Street,*  
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*Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,*  
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*[Virtual Participation]*

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*Minister of Housing and Water,*  
*Ministry of Housing and Water,*  
*Brickdam,*  
*Georgetown.*

+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Minister**

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

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

+ Hon. Sonia Savitri Parag, M.P.,  
*Minister of the Public Service,  
Ministry of the Public Service,  
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Hon. Deodat Indar, M.P.,  
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Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P.,  
*Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,  
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*[Virtual Participation]*

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+ **Cabinet Member**

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*East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Alister S. Charlie, M.P.,

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*Central Rupununi,*

*c/o Freedom House,*

*41 Robb Street,*

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Hon. Mr. Sanjeev J. Datadin, M.P.,

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*Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,*

*Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,*

*c/o Freedom House,*

*41 Robb Street,*

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Hon. Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.,

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*South Cummingsburg,*

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*41 Robb Street,*

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*East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Faizal M. Jaffarally, M.P.,

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

[Absent – on leave]

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

[Absent – on leave]

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

## **MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)**

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Leader of the Opposition

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Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence, M.P.,  
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Castello Housing Scheme,  
La-Penitence,  
Georgetown.

Hon. Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P.,  
Lot 933 Block 1,  
Eccles,  
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Hon. Mr. Christopher A. Jones, M.P.,  
Opposition Chief Whip,  
Lot 609 Conciliation Street,  
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*[Virtual Participation]*

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Lot 214 Lovely Lass Village,  
West Coast Berbice.  
C/o Christopher Jones

*[Suspended]*

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Lot 1285 EE Eccles Sugarcane Field,  
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Hon. Ms. Coretta A. McDonald, A.A., M.P.,  
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*[Virtual Participation]*

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East Coast Demerara.



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(Culvert City Lethem)

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East Coast Demerara.

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[Suspended]

Hon. Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.,  
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[Virtual Participation]

Hon. Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P.,  
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[Suspended]

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(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),  
Lot 136 2<sup>nd</sup> Street,  
Silvertown,  
Wismar, Linden.

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Lot 14 Plantain Walk,  
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*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),  
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Port Mourant, Corentyne Berbice.*

Hon. Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P.,  
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Lot 17 Block 1, Section F,  
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East Coast Demerara.*

*[Suspended]*

Hon. Ms. Beverley Alert, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)  
Lot 169-170 Stanleytown,  
West Bank Demerara.  
c/o Lot 13 A, New Providence,  
East Bank Demerara.*

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

Hon. Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),  
Lot 90, Section C,  
Wismar, Linden.*

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

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

## **Officers (2)**

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

Ms. Hermina Gilgeours,  
*Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly,*  
*Parliament Office,*  
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Monday, 16<sup>TH</sup> January, 2023

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**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER****Invitation to the gallery**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I have extended an invitation to the Hon. Prime Minister who is performing the duties of President to join us in the gallery to listen to the presentation of the Budget Speech by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of President with Responsibility for Finance.

**Best wishes for 2023**

Hon. Members, on behalf of the Clerk, staff, my family and I, as we meet for the first time in 2023, wish to extend our best wishes for health and prosperity to you and your family for 2023. This also goes out to all of the staff who assist in making our sessions in Parliament and support the work of the National Assembly. These good wishes go to them also.

**Welcome to Visiting Students**

Today, we are also joined by the students of Chase Academy who are in the gallery. We want to extend a hearty welcome to them for this sitting.

**Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]:** And to President's College, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** And, also, the students of President's College.

**PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS**

The following Papers and Report were laid:

- (1) Government Notice No. 1/2023, regarding Notification Receipts of all petroleum revenues paid into the Natural Resource Fund during the period 1<sup>st</sup> October, 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2022.
- (2) Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of Guyana for the financial year 2023.
- (3) Financial Paper No. 4/2022 – Supplementary Estimates (Capital) – Advances made from the Contingency Fund totalling \$3,812,999,559 for the period 2022-11-30 to 2022-12-31.

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

2.29 p.m.

*The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance indicated that the financial paper*

*will be considered immediately after the conclusion of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2023.*

**QUESTIONS ON NOTICE****[For oral replies]**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, there are seven questions on today's Order Paper. Questions one, two and three are for Oral Replies. Questions four, five, six and seven are for Written Replies.

Hon. Members, the three questions that are for oral replies are in the name of the Hon. Member, Mr. Jermaine Figueira, and are for the Hon. Minister of Health. Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, please, you may ask your first question.

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

**Mr. Figueira:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I venture to ask my questions, permit me to wish all Members, staff and visiting individuals who are here today a happy and productive 2023.

Could the Minister inform the House what is the required staff complement of doctors, registered nurses and nursing assistants for the Linden Hospital given the size of the population... Mr. Speaker, before I take my seat, I am of the view that these said questions were asked at the last sitting.

**Mr. Speaker:** Close to...

**Mr. Figueira:** Could I be guided which part of the...?

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes. It is the one dealing with administering blood gases testing, viral load testing, and cardiac enzyme testing...

**Mr. Figueira:** I do not have my Order Paper here actually. It is not on the desk. The one that is on the desk that I am borrowing from my Colleague is the wrong one.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister of Health... It is on the Order Paper correctly.

**(1) Testing at the Linden Hospital**

**Mr. Figueira:** Could the Minister inform this House whether the Linden Hospital as of 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2022, was administering blood gas testing, viral load testing, and cardiac enzyme testing, given the size of the population it serves and its proximity to the Georgetown Public Hospital?

**Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the question that the Member would like to ask relates to blood gases testing, viral load testing and cardiac enzyme testing. In the first instance, blood gases testing was never done at the Linden Hospital Complex. Last year the Ministry of Health bought the equipment to do blood gas testing at the Linden Hospital Complex. That equipment has been installed, it has been tested, so as of this month, blood gas testing is now available at the Linden Hospital Complex.

In terms of viral load testing, I think the Member would be referring to Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) viral load testing. It was never done at the Linden Hospital Complex or at any of the other regional hospitals. Anyone of the hospitals that require viral load testing would normally send their samples to the National Public Health Reference laboratory where that would be done.

In terms of cardiac enzyme testing, these tests are available at the Linden Hospital Complex.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, are we on the same page now?

**Mr. Figueira:** Yes.

**Mr. Speaker:** Great.

**Mr. Figueira:** We were given the wrong Order Paper. Thank you, Minister, for your assistance.

### (3) The Charles Rosa School of Nursing

**Mr. Figueira:** I would like to go to question three which the question asks:

- (a) Could the Minister inform this House whether Charles Rosa School of Nursing in Linden was in operation as of 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2022?

Could I proceed with all three of the questions, our Colleague answering...?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, that was question three. I think question two dealt with drugs.

**Mr. Figueira:** Yes. I indicated.

**Mr. Speaker:** Go ahead.

**Mr. Figueira:** Sir, I will ask all three...

**Mr. Speaker:** Go ahead Hon. Member.

**Mr. Figueira:**

(b) Could the Minister further inform this House, if his answer to (1)(a) is yes, how many of the students for the year 2022 are from Linden?

(c) Could the Minister also inform this House of the number of students at the nursing school who are not from Linden?

Thank you.

**Dr. Anthony:** I think the Hon. Member skipped question two, but we will answer three. In terms of the Charles Rosa School of Nursing, yes, the school was operational as at the 30<sup>th</sup> June, 2022. On the role or the intake that we have at the school for the periods, there are nursing courses that will last for three years. Currently, we have enrolled 67 students, 29 of whom are from out of the region and 38 are from Region 10.

We also have, as of early this year, started the assistant nursing programme. There are 25 students who are currently enrolled in that programme. Next month we will be starting the pharmacy assistance programme and persons will be enrolled in that as well.

In terms of nursing, overall, in the country, we have limited capacity to train nurses because we have been using physical classroom space where we could only train about 200 to 250 persons... and the intake of 200 to 250 persons per year. We are going to change that. We are now going to do a hybrid programme starting from this year where we are hoping to enlist approximately 1,000 persons into the register nursing programme.

**Mr. Figueira:** Yes. I heard the Minister say 250 nurses per year or is that for the...Is that for the entire country or is that for the region?

**Dr. Anthony:** The entire country.

**Mr. Figueira:** In this year you said you are going to endeavour to do 1,000 students. Could you provide the House, with regard to Linden in particular, how many students you will facilitate at that institution, in Region 10 rather?

**Dr. Anthony:** Again, this would be a national programme where we will be doing it online. So, anyone who would meet the eligibility criteria would be part of the programme. I do not know how many would apply from Linden, but certainly from the whole country, whoever applies, once

they reach the eligibility requirement, they would be allowed to be on the programme. We will do the online component which is theoretical, and there will have a practical component where we have several simulation centres where people would come in to do the practical.

**Mr. Figueira:** One thousand students for the entire country. Would the determination, based on region, be premised on the need for nurses within each respective region, or once the student is qualified – the first one thousand? What are the criteria with regard to how we determine how we are going to choose these nurses from across the country, given the fact that there is need for nurses and the population of each region is different?

**Dr. Anthony:** One – a person has to meet the basic qualifications. That is the first thing. Secondly, we are expanding the number of students we could have in the country, moving it from 200 or 250 per year to where we would now have close to 1,000. If there are people out there that meet the academic requirements, they would all be accommodated on the programme. If we need to go beyond 1,000, the platform would be able to accommodate that. If there are 200 or 300 persons from Region 10 who would like to apply, then that is fine. They could apply. They would have a space to start the theoretical training online.

**Mr. Figueira:** Thank you, Hon. Minister. I did say that based on the qualifications of the applicants. Given the fact that Linden in itself has an established nursing school, would the Ministry endeavour – one – to extend the capacity for the accommodation of students in the physical classroom given the number of students who would have applied and would not have gotten an opportunity to attend based on the present capacity of the institution. Would you... As the Minister, given your position to have this as an online programme, why is there a limitation to just 1,000? We would have seen with the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) reality in 2019 and onwards. At the University of Guyana (UG), there was a far larger intake because more students could have gone on the virtual platform, applied and go through the courses. Given the need for healthcare that we would have seen with regard to COVID-19 and how it has ravaged many countries, and there was a greater demand for nurses, why as a country are we limiting the amount to just 1,000 when we are doing it on a virtual platform? Why not endeavour to do probably 3,000?

**Dr. Anthony:** Again, we are starting with 1,000. If when people apply, we get 2,000, then fine, we could accommodate 2,000. There is no limitation. We want to start

with at least 1,000. Right now, we take in 200 to 250. This is a big jump. Whether we will have enough people applying, that we will see when we do the intake.

In terms of expanding the physical space at the Charles Rosa School of Nursing, we do not think we need to do that at this point because we are migrating our training to be more online training. What we will have to do in almost all the regions is to make sure that they have simulation centres where the nurses who are in training could go and do their practical. That is what we will work on this year.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, question two with respect to the drugs...

*Mr. Figueira indicated no.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you.

**[For Written Replies]**

#### **(4) Status of Guyana's High Commissioner to India**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, question 4 for Written Reply is in the name of the Hon. Member Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir and it is for the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

#### **Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]:**

Mr. Speaker, I seek your guidance to defer the submission of this question as Minister Todd is overseas, and I am not aware that a written submission has been made to the House. I would ask that under Standing Order 22 sub-clause 9 that this be deferred. On his return, I will ensure that the response be submitted in writing.

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

*Question 4 deferred.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Question 5 is in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Volda Lawrence, and is for the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security. We have received that answer. Question 6 is in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Volda Lawrence, and is for the Hon. Prime Minister. We also have that response. Question 7 is in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Volda Lawrence, and is for the Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security. I see the Hon. Minister of Public Works trying to catch my eye...

#### **(5) Old Age Pension**

**Ms. Lawrence:** Could the Minister provide the House with the mechanism used by her Ministry on the sum of \$28,000 as a one-off payment to pensioners as opposed to an increase on their present Old Age Pension?

(ii)

**Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Dr. Persaud]:** As the Hon. Member is no doubt aware there were two one-off cash grants, each equivalent to one month's old age pension (\$28,000). These were in addition to the increase given to our elderly above the age of 65. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the global fuel and food crisis, the Government took a decision to bring further relief to our pensioners. It should be noted that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration has given an increase of 37% in old age pension within the two years that we have been in Government as well as two one-off cash grants. In contrast, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government increased old age pension from \$13,125 to \$20,500, an increase of 56% over 5 years, and gave no relief when the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020.

The PPP/C Government remains committed to ensuring that our elders are afforded a better quality of life and we will continue to implement policies and programmes which will benefit our pensioners.

**Ms. Lawrence:** Would the Minister outline her Ministry's policy on the payment of old age pension to pensioners who spend time overseas on holidays or to seek medical attention?

**Dr. Persaud:** The statutory conditions are stipulated in the Old Age Pensions Act. The policy of the former Government, inherited in 2020, was that persons were required to be resident in Guyana for two years immediately preceding the claim for pension has remained intact. However, if a pensioner is in receipt of a pension book and has been out of the country on holiday or seeking medical attention and was unable to encash his/her coupons, this can be facilitated once the pensioner can show proof of a valid form of Guyanese identification.

#### (6) Gas To Shore Pipeline Project

**Ms. Lawrence:** What is the cost of the Gas-to-shore pipeline project?

**Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]:**

The pipeline cost is US\$1 billion which includes the entire pipeline, enabling works, contingencies, and supervision by ExxonMobil for infrastructural development.

The above does not include the (a) EPC costs of the 300 MW CC Power Plant and the Natural Gas Liquids (NGL) plant and (b) the supervision of this EPC contract.

- The EPC Contract sum is US\$759,882,080
- The Supervision Contract is US\$23 million.

**Ms. Lawrence:** Where or whom is the Government sourcing the financing from and what are the terms and conditions?

**Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips:**

EEPGL is funding the above-mentioned US\$1 billion project cost from Cost Oil.

The Government is sourcing the funding of the EPC costs from the proceeds of the National Budget over a multi-year period from 2022-2025. An early estimate was included in the 2022 Capital Budget; this figure will be revised in the 2023 Budget in line with the above sum. The Government expects to fund a portion of the EPC Contract from loan financing to be pursued in 2023.

**Ms. Lawrence:** Would this create a contingent liability on the Government of Guyana if ExxonMobil is unable to repay the Loan?

**Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips:** No contingency liability is expected. When the project is completed, Government will make an annual payment to EEPGL co-venturers over a 20-year period to recover the cost of their investment in the pipeline used to deliver a minimum of 50 million cubic feet of gas/day (MCFD) to Wales. The total cost of electricity exiting the power plant which includes (i) the payment to EPPGL Co-Venturers, (ii) operating costs of the power plant/NGL plant, and (iii) recovery of capital costs, shall be less than US 5 cents per kWh.

#### (7) Burial Assistance

**Ms. Lawrence:** Given the steep increase in the cost of burial over the last 2½ years, is the Minister considering increasing the Burial Assistance of \$30,000 (Thirty thousand dollars) to our families in need of this type of Assistance?

**Dr. Persaud:** Funerals are usually budgeted for through the Difficult Circumstances Unit. Under the previous Government, there was no system that was applied to



helping with funeral costs; this was done in an *ad hoc* manner and there was no parity.

In 2020, a matrix was developed to assist based on several objective criteria catering for low-cost funerals. The basic cost of funerals was ascertained from comparing quotations brought in from all funeral homes. The criterion is based on age, employment and source of sustenance, geographic location, vulnerability, household income, number of dependents, *et cetera*.

Based on the scoring of these categories, a total score is achieved, that score is then used to determine the percentage of the low-cost package that would be made payable to the parlour.

Allocation:

Above 85 = 50% of Cost

71-85 = 40% of Cost

56-70 = 30% of Cost

41-55 = 20% of cost

32-40 = 10% of cost

Consideration is given to gruesome murders, more than one death of family members and other such extenuating circumstances.

This is a system-based approach that lends to accountability, transparency and objectivity. While we are not opposed to increasing the support, the Difficult Circumstances Unit must work within its budgetary allocation, and, at the same time, ensure that there is parity to allow the most vulnerable persons to benefit from this support.

Over 300 persons have already benefited at an approximate cost of \$1.06 million per month.

However, the amount was reduced across the board to \$30,000 from late November, 2022 to the end of the year to be able to assist everyone who requested assistance within the remaining funds.

2.44 p.m.

## **MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE ASSEMBLY AND MOVED BY A MINISTER**

### **Suspension of Standing Orders Nos. 10(2) and 38(9)(a)**

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Orders Nos.10(2) and 38(9)(a) be suspended to enable the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance to complete uninterrupted the reading of the Budget Speech for 2023 at the Sitting of the National Assembly on Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2023.”

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

**Ms. Teixeira:** I wish to bring a motion of suspension of the Standing Orders Nos. 10(2) and 38(90)(a):

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That Standing Orders Nos. 10(2) and 38(9)(a) be suspended to enable the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance to complete uninterrupted the reading of the Budget Speech for 2023 at the Sitting of the National Assembly on Monday, 16<sup>th</sup> January, 2023.”

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Standing Orders suspended.*

## **PUBLIC BUSINESS**

### **GOVERNMENT’S BUSINESS**

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we have now come to the item Budget for 2023. The Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance will move the motion for the approval of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Financial Year 2023. Hon. Senior Minister, you may proceed.

### **MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2023**

WHEREAS the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana requires that Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for any financial year should be laid before the National Assembly and that, when the Estimates of Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly, an Appropriation Bill shall be introduced in the Assembly providing for the issue

from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure;

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2023 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on January 16, 2023, as summarised in the attached Schedule 1;

AND WHEREAS the Constitution requires that the expenditure of each of the Constitutional Agencies listed in the Third Schedule of the Constitution be financed as a direct charge on the Consolidated Fund determined as a lumpsum by way of an annual subvention approved by the National Assembly after a review and approval of the Constitutional Agency's annual budget as a part of the process of the determination of the national budget;

AND WHEREAS the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, Cap. 73:02, requires that the annual lump sum subvention recommended by the Minister with Responsibility for Finance for each Constitutional Agency be included in the annual budget proposal for approval by the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Minister with Responsibility for Finance recommends lump sum subventions for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2023 as summarised in the attached Schedule 2;

AND WHEREAS the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021 provides that the amount that the Minister with Responsibility for Finance shall request the National Assembly to approve, and the amount that the National Assembly shall approve, as the withdrawal from the Fund for the next ensuing fiscal year shall be included in the annual budget proposal and shall not exceed for that year, the ceiling calculated in accordance with the said Act:

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2023, of a total sum of seven hundred and twenty-one billion, five hundred and twenty-nine million, and seven hundred and thirty-four thousand dollars (\$721,529,734,000), excluding sixty billion, three hundred and fifty-one million, two hundred and twenty-nine dollars (\$60,351,229,000) which is chargeable by law, as

detailed therein and summarised in Schedule 1, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and make further provision in respect of finance:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly approves the recommended lumpsum subvention for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2023 as stated in Schedule 2, amounting to a total sum of thirteen billion, eight hundred and six million, five hundred and seventy-seven dollars (\$13,806,577,000) which is charged upon the Consolidated Fund by the Constitution and for the sums voted for the Constitutional Agencies to form part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures of Guyana for the financial year 2023.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the sum of \$208,944,156,942, equivalent to US\$1,002,130,249, to be withdrawn from the Natural Resource Fund for the financial year 2023 in accordance with the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021.

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

### Introduction

**Dr. Singh:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise, Sir, to move the motion for the approval for the Estimates of the Public Sector and the budget for the financial year 2023. In doing so, Sir, I wish to indicate that the Cabinet has recommended that the National Assembly proceed upon this motion pursuant to article 171 paragraph 2 of the Constitution of Guyana.

*Budget 2023* is the fourth budget of this People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government, formed in August, 2020, after the protracted struggle to ensure that the constitutional consequences of the December, 2018, no-confidence motion were adhered to and that the results of the March 2020 Elections were respected as the democratic will of the people. Inevitably, even if belatedly, democracy and the rule of law finally prevailed, and our beloved Guyana was rescued from the precipice of becoming a rogue dictatorship and a pariah state.

Since assuming Office, our Government has set about the task of repairing the deep and lasting damage caused by five

years of misrule and mismanagement, rebuilding Guyana's credibility in the international and global community, restoring our attractiveness as a destination for private investment, improving infrastructure and social services, and ensuring enhanced opportunities and improved quality of life for the Guyanese people. All this we endeavour, while guided by His Excellency's overarching and abiding philosophy of 'One Guyana'.

*Budget 2023* comes at the 30-month mark, or approximate midpoint, of our current term of Office. It therefore presents a timely opportunity, both to look back at the first half of this term and even more importantly, to look ahead at that which is yet to come and which beckons with such abundant and exciting promise.

To give just a few examples, in the two and a half years since assuming Office we have:

- Combated the COVID-19 pandemic, providing protection to citizens by administering 958,365 doses of vaccines in total and achieving a fully-vaccinated rate of 68% of the adult population and, at the same time, provided relief to households by distributing over \$7 billion in cash grants;
- We have improved social safety nets, by increasing old age pension by nearly 40% to \$28,000 monthly resulting in transfers of over \$21 billion in 2022 to our senior citizens, and increasing public assistance by over 55% to \$14,000 monthly resulting in transfers of over \$3 billion in 2022 to the most vulnerable in our society;
- We have reintroduced and increased the "Because We Care" cash grant to \$25,000 per child in 2022 which, along with the \$5,000 uniform grant, resulted in total transfers of \$5.6 billion to parents of over 196,000 school age children in 2022;
- We have awarded nearly 14,000 online scholarships under the GOAL programme, giving the awardees an opportunity to pursue higher education or specialised training and certification in the comfort of their own home;
- We have distributed over 20,000 house lots, about three times the total distributed in the previous five years, giving all those recipients –

Guyanese families and young professionals – the opportunity to become a homeowner for the very first time; and

- We have increased hinterland access to water from 46% in 2020 to 75% currently.

Just to list a few. Similarly, looking ahead just to give a few transformative examples on which work has already commenced. Before the end of our current term of Office, Sir, we will have:

- Constructed and rehabilitated thousands of community and urban roads in towns and villages across the country;
- Constructed a new and modern four-lane Demerara River Bridge;
- Completed the Linden to Mabura Highway; and
- Completed the construction of Guyana's onshore gas pipeline and natural gas plant which will significantly reduce the cost of electricity to the benefit of households and businesses, thereby catalysing rapid growth and industrial activity.

As we engage in this important exercise of reflection on the past and planning for the future, it is apposite to recall that my preamble to *Budget 2021* pointed out the clearly distinguishable phases in our country's economic journey. On that occasion, I emphasised the conspicuous correlation between our economic history and our political history since independence. More specifically, I highlighted that the years from 1966 to 1992 were characterised by State domination and economic decimation. The years from 1992 to 2015 were a period of restoration and rebuilding, and the years from 2015 to 2020 were scarred by renewed State domination and economic degeneration. Against that background, Sir, the current PPP/C Government under the visionary leadership of His Excellency the President Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali has resolved that the post-2020 years will be an era of positive and lasting transformation.

On that occasion two years ago, when I spoke of these phases in our economic history, I did not elaborate on the factors that helped distinguish the economic stewardship by successive PPP/C Governments from the economic mismanagement by our Colleagues on that side of the House. As we contemplate the future, it is important that we consider some of the cardinal distinguishing principles that have guided successive PPP/C Governments in our

economic policy formulation. These guiding principles contributed to the outcome realised during our stewardship thus far and will continue to guide our stewardship going forward.

First amongst these is policy continuity, consistency and credibility. Our Government, like previous PPP/C Governments, is committed to positions that are longstanding and well-known. For example, our commitment to work towards improving the lives of all Guyanese is entrenched in our Party's founding principles, has been a constant feature in all our election manifestos and our budgets, and has informed all the policies contained therein. We have remained faithful to the commitments in our successive Manifestos, and we have delivered on those commitments. Except where needed to adapt to evolving circumstances, our core principles and policies have not shifted over the years, and do not vary depending on the audience or issue we are addressing for the moment. This has earned us incomparable credibility.

Secondly, our Government is committed to sound policies for long term sustainability. The People's Progressive Party/Civic Governments do not compromise the long-term well-being of our country and our people at the altar of expediency or populism. As a responsible Government, our policy choices are constantly guided by their long-term implications. These implications will be borne by this generation, in our twilight years, as well as by generations yet to come. We owe it to ourselves and, even more so to them, not to make decisions today that have short term appeal but will have adverse consequences in years to come. Long term sustainability and the avoidance of policy myopia remain a paramount concern for us. This is absolutely critical for many of the fiscal choices with which we are faced today.

Third, our economic policymaking is guided by objective, sound, and rigorous examination of prevailing realities. In this regard, economic policymaking at this particular juncture in our economic history is by no means an uncomplicated task. To give perhaps the most obvious example, as a resource-based economy, the avoidance of Dutch Disease and the containment of over-exposure to and over-dependence on any one sector of the economy necessitates concerted policy action now. The threat of Dutch Disease is real and nontrivial, and we need now to take the actions necessary to ensure that we broaden our non-oil productive base and to secure the long-term competitiveness of our non-oil economy.

It is for this reason that we are investing so heavily in the catalytic infrastructure that is so critically needed for expanding productive capacity and improving competitiveness in the non-oil economy. It is not accidental that we are investing as heavily as we are to build roadways to open up new cultivable acreage for agriculture and to improve access to our non-oil extractive resources such as minerals and forestry. It is similarly not accidental that we are investing in energy infrastructure to increase supply and reduce the cost of electricity, to ensure a competitive industrial and manufacturing sector.

*2.59 p.m.*

At the same time, we are working assiduously to reduce and remove supply-side bottlenecks, both in the market for goods and services as well as the labour market, given that these can exacerbate the risk of overheating. Examples of this include facilitating ramped-up domestic production of construction inputs such as quarry aggregate and sand, both of which will be needed in vastly increased quantities in the coming months given the construction boom underway. In the labour market, we have been investing heavily in training to maximise the availability of skilled personnel and to enhance the capacity of Guyanese nationals to take up new and emerging job opportunities.

Fourthly, we are always mindful of the global environment in which we operate. In the current instance, we are navigating the transformation in our country at a time when the global economic context is extremely unhelpful and highly unpredictable. Having only partially exited the throes of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) crisis, the global economy is now characterised by elevated inflationary pressures as well as strong recessionary risks for a variety of reasons, which I will discuss shortly. This is a reality from which we in Guyana are by no means isolated and to which we are by no means immune, and this is the very real background against which economic policy is being formulated.

I emphasise all these points for the following reason: our Government considers it extremely important for the entire population to be fully attune to the complexities of the policy environment in which we are operating, the very real threats and risks we face, as well as the policy choices before us and their implications. For this reason, we consider a high level of economic literacy countrywide to be a high priority, and we will continue to ensure that the complexities of the policymaking environment are explained in the most accessible way possible, to build broad-based appreciation of

the very real issues that confront us and the policy choices that lie before us.

Finally, even as we remain focused on ensuring the long-term well-being of Guyana and the Guyanese people, our Government remains fully cognisant of the importance of addressing the most urgent and immediate imperatives. We understand and appreciate the urgency with which the most pressing problems and irritants of today need to be fixed. Matters like ensuring decent quality community infrastructure, including community roads and drainage and irrigation (D&I) structures to reduce the risk of flooding, good quality education for our children, good quality health care for all, reliable electricity and water supply, and decent jobs for everybody of employable age, are all urgent and immediate needs.

We recognise and appreciate the urgency with which these basic needs must be met. The initiatives contained in *Budget 2023* represent a major step forward in ensuring that these needs are met in the shortest possible time. At the same time, we attach an equally high level of importance to ensuring that the investments needed for longer-term well-being are also being made. Reflecting this recognition, *Budget 2023* is presented under the theme *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*. It, therefore, captures the essence of simultaneous attention being paid to both the immediate issues and irritants of the day, as well as the longer-term investments needed to secure the well-being of all of the Guyanese people well into the future. I will now briefly review the global and regional economic context against the backdrop of which *Budget 2023* is prepared.

### **The Global and Regional Economic Context**

Global growth for 2022 is now estimated at 2.9%, down significantly from the 5.9% expansion recorded in 2021 in the initial recovery from the doldrums of the COVID-19 pandemic. The weaker output level reflects significant slowdowns in economic growth in the world's two largest economies – the United States of America (USA) and China – as well as the Euro area. Pressures on global growth came from protracted lockdowns and a property market crisis in China, along with the spill over effects from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, leading to tighter gas supplies in the Euro area. Weaker output is also partially attributed to a continual tightening of global financial conditions to curb soaring inflation levels worldwide.

Growth in advanced economies was estimated at 2.5% in 2022, slower than the 5.3% recorded in 2021. Growth in the

emerging market and developing economies was estimated at 3.4 % in 2022, down from 6.7% in the prior year. Latin America and the Caribbean region is estimated to have grown by 3.6% in 2022, weaker than the 6.8% growth in 2021. The latest estimates show that economic recovery in the Caribbean continued in 2022, with the region recording growth of 7.7%, albeit slower than the 9.7% recorded in the previous year.

Looking ahead, the global economy is expected to expand at an even slower rate in 2023, reflecting the recessionary risk to which I alluded earlier. With one-third of the world economy expected to be in recession this year, the global outlook will be heavily impacted by several factors. These include but are not limited to the continued monetary policy responses to inflation, the lasting effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and enduring supply chain disruptions still in the aftermath of COVID-19. Within this context, the latest forecast for global growth in 2023 is 1.7% as advanced economies are predicted to grow by only 0.5%, while the emerging market and developing economies are expected to keep pace with 2022 levels with growth of 3.4%. Growth in the Caribbean is anticipated to slow further to 5.6% in 2023.

Meanwhile, inflation levels remain elevated, with global inflation estimated at 8.8% in 2022, rising from 4.7% in 2021. In advanced economies, inflation rates have risen to their highest level since 1982, up from 3.1% in 2021 to an estimated 7.2% in 2022. Emerging market and developing economies have also suffered from markedly high inflation, up by four percentage points year-on-year to an estimated 9.9% at the end of 2022. Finally, inflation levels closer to home have also remained elevated as tourism-dependent Caribbean nations have seen inflation rise from 5.4% in 2021 to an estimated 8.3% in 2022. Inflation for the commodity-exporting countries of the Caribbean was estimated at 10.8% in 2022, though declining marginally year-on-year by 0.2 of a percentage point.

Stemming from the existing geopolitical developments and weather-related production shortfalls, the price of some of Guyana's key commodity exports rose in 2022, especially in the first half of the year. In particular, prices for oil, sugar, and metals were up year-on-year, while a decline was observed for rice. The world market price for sugar increased to US\$0.41 per kilogramme (Kg), representing a 4.7% increase over 2021. On the downside, the average world market price of rice fell from US\$458.3 per metric tonne in 2021 to US\$436.8 per metric tonne in 2022. With respect to the price of metals, aluminium prices averaged US\$2,705 per metric tonne in 2022, up 9.4% from 2021. Gold prices

averaged US\$1,800.6 per troy ounce for 2022, up from US\$1,799.6 per troy ounce in 2021. Lastly, the price of crude oil averaged US\$99.8 per barrel in 2022, 41.7% above 2021 levels.

Looking ahead to 2023, a general decline in the prices of Guyana's main exported commodities is expected, as we are confronted with the possibility of a global recession. Rice and sugar prices are expected to fall by 0.4% and 6.8%, respectively, to US\$435 per metric tonne and US\$0.38 per kilogramme. Metal prices are also expected to fall in 2023 with aluminium prices expected to average US\$2,400 per metric tonne or 11.3 % lower than 2022, and gold prices are expected to decline by 5.6 % to US\$1,700 per troy ounce. Most recent forecasts suggest that the price of crude oil is projected to average US\$83.10 per barrel in 2023, a decline of about 17% year-on-year, even though this level of price is expected to remain above its 5-year average of US\$60 per barrel. On the whole, the commodity price outlook of the global economy is, therefore, heavily tilted on the downside for key commodities produced and exported by the Guyanese economy. I now turn to developments in the domestic economy in 2022.

## Developments in the Domestic Economy in 2022

### A. Real Gross Domestic Product

At the time of *Budget 2022*, it was expected that the real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would grow by 47.5%, with the non-oil economy expected to expand by 7.7%. As the year ensued, the oil and gas sector performed even better than expected. At the same time, our Government's policies continued to focus on supporting the traditional and new and emergent non-oil pillars of the economy, helping to ensure stronger and more broad-based growth than originally anticipated.

It is now estimated that our economy grew by 62.3% overall in 2022 in real terms. I am pleased to report that we recorded a very strong expansion of 11.5% in the non-oil economy. At 62.3% overall, Guyana was the fastest-growing economy in the world in 2022. I now turn to sectoral performance.

3.14 p.m.

### B. Sectoral Performance

#### a. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing

The agriculture, forestry and fishing sector is estimated to have expanded by 11.9% in 2022. This growth is attributed

to notable performances in the other crops, rice growing, livestock, and forestry industries. Growth in these industries more than offset contractions in sugar growing and fishing.

The sugar growing sector is estimated to have declined by 18.9 % in 2022, with sugar production for the year totaling 47,049 tonnes. This performance was largely the result of lingering effects of the 2021 floods, which caused lower yields per hectare and reduced cane quality, as well as persistent technical challenges encountered throughout the year.

In contrast, an expansion of 8.1% is estimated for the rice growing sector in 2022, with total production of 610,595 tonnes. Like sugar, there were some lingering effects of the 2021 floods that affected rice production. However, production grew to surpass 2021 levels, with yields increasing to 5.9 tonnes per hectare in 2022, compared with 5.5 tonnes per hectare in 2021.

The other crops sector is estimated to have grown by a very commendable 15.3% in 2022, with expansions observed across all crop categories. Significant growth was recorded in the production of crops such as eddoes, coconuts, sweet potatoes, plantains, lettuce, and sweet peppers. The contributing factors to higher output include increases in acreage cultivated and increased yield. The livestock industry is also estimated to have expanded, growing by 9% in 2022. It is estimated that the production of pork, poultry meat, mutton, and beef grew by 15.8%, 12%, 10.1% and 1.8%, respectively. On the downside, the production of eggs and milk declined by 37.5% and 10.8%, respectively.

The fishing industry, however, is estimated to have contracted by 4.8% in 2022. This is attributed to lower marine production, with shrimp and fish production falling by 7.1% and 0.7%, respectively. Marked underperformances were observed in the production of red snapper and prawns. On a more positive note, Government's efforts to transform the aquaculture industry, inclusive of the construction of over 60 ponds in 2021, have resulted in growth in the overall productive capacity of shrimp ponds, and 454.1% growth in the production of brackish water shrimp with production totaling 621,000 kilogrammes in 2022.

On the upside, the forestry sector is estimated to have expanded in 2022, growing by 13.4%. It is estimated that approximately 441,000 cubic metres of timber products were produced in 2022, largely on account of growing demand from the construction sector.

## b. Extractive Industries

The mining and quarrying Sector is estimated to have expanded by 109.7% in 2022. The estimated growth was driven mainly by an expansion in the oil and gas and support services industry which, when combined with the growth in the other mining and bauxite industries, outweighs the contraction in gold mining activity.

The oil and gas sector is estimated to have expanded by 124.8% in 2022, with a total of 101.4 million barrels of oil produced, compared with 42.7 million in 2021. This performance is attributed to the commencement of production on our country's second Floating, Production, Storage and Offloading (FPSO) vessel – Liza Unity – early last year. In 2022, the Liza Destiny produced crude oil at an average rate of approximately 128,000 barrels per day (bpd), compared with 117,000 barrels per day in 2021, and the Liza Unity FPSO produced at an average rate of about 169,000 bpd, reaching a peak monthly rate of just over 233,000 barrels per day in December.

The bauxite mining industry is estimated to have expanded by 35% in 2022, with increasing output from both producing operators. Total output from the industry is estimated to have expanded from 618,452 tonnes in 2021, to 706,634 tonnes in 2022. Output from the largest producer increased from 388,510 tonnes in 2021, to 407,225 tonnes in 2022, despite delays in the start-up of a new kiln. Moreover, it is estimated that output from the smaller operator grew from 229,942 tonnes in 2021, to 299,409 tonnes in 2022.

On the downside, the gold mining industry is estimated to have contracted by 2.5% in 2022, stemming from lower output from the small and medium scale producers. Overall declaration of gold fell marginally from 499,054 ounces in 2021 to 486,415 ounces in 2022. The single producing foreign operator recorded a notable increase in declarations, with 101,418 ounces declared in 2022, while output from the small and medium scale operators fell by 10.6% to 384,998 ounces, attributed to lower declarations from the top two dealerships.

Output from the other mining and quarrying sector, which comprises diamond, sand and stone mining, continued its upward trajectory, resulting in the sector expanding by an estimated 38.5% in 2022. Diamond declarations are estimated to have grown by 85.6% to 83,720 metric carats last year. Sand extraction and stone production are estimated to have grown by 35.6% and 18.6%, respectively, supported by the heavy emphasis of construction activity in

Government's Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) as well as rapid expansion in private sector construction activity. Notably, within the other mining and quarrying sector, for the first time in the last five decades, 255,081 tonnes of manganese were produced in 2022.

## c. Manufacturing

The manufacturing sector is estimated to have expanded by 3.9% in 2022. While sugar manufacturing is estimated to have contracted by 18.9%, the rice manufacturing and other manufacturing subsectors are estimated to have grown by 11.7% and 2.8%, respectively. With respect to the latter, growth was driven largely by fabricated metal products, plastic products, and paper products, which grew by 4.9%, 35.7%, and 98.8%, respectively. On the downside, there was a 33% contraction in the manufacturing of pharmaceuticals and a 9% contraction in the manufacturing of chemicals, particularly oxygen, amid lower COVID-19 related hospitalisations in 2022.

## d. Electricity and Water Supply and Sewerage

Both electricity and water supply are estimated to have expanded in 2022 by 9.3% and 0.7%, respectively. The expansion in electricity supply was driven by higher total consumption, while growth in water supply is attributed to higher demand combined with the commissioning of three new wells, which were more productive than the wells removed from the distribution line due to failure or damage.

## e. Construction

Latest estimates show that the construction sector indicate that the sector grew by a very strong 26.3% in 2022. As was the case in 2021, this expansion is supported by intensified activity in the public and private sectors. Alongside massive Government investment in new and improved roads and bridges, housing developments, educational and health facilities, and agriculture infrastructure, private sector investment in the oil and gas and hospitality industries have continued to boost construction activity.

## f. Services

In services, the sector is estimated to have expanded by 9% in 2022. While growth was recorded across all service industries, the overall 2022 performance is mainly attributed to growth in wholesale and retail trade and repairs, administrative and support services, financial and insurance activities, real estate activities and transport and storage.

3.29 p.m.

These industries grew by 15.6%, 11.8%, 6.7%, 4.1% and 8.9%, respectively. Growth in wholesale and retail trade and repairs was largely driven by higher demand for building materials and consumer goods. While with respect to administrative and support services, the expansion was driven by greater activity related to the rental and lease of machinery and equipment used in the construction industry, greater demand in the business process outsourcing (BPO) industry, and higher activity in the provision of security services. I now turn to balance of payments.

### C. Balance of Payments

The overall balance of payments recorded an estimated surplus of US\$128.3 million at the end of 2022.

The current account improved from a deficit of US\$1,999 million in 2021 to an estimated surplus of US\$4,262.4 million in 2022. This was supported by the trade balance moving from a deficit of US\$19.9 million to a surplus of US\$7,780.7 million over the period.

Total export earnings surged to an estimated US\$11,404.3 million at the end of 2022. When compared with 2021, there was estimated growth of 161.8% driven largely by an increase in crude oil production and, of course, exports. Also, favourable global oil prices also supported export earnings growing year-on-year by an estimated US\$7,003 million to US\$9,978 million. The non-oil export commodities also fared well with earnings expanding year-on-year by an estimated 3.3% to US\$1,425 million. This outturn is largely the result of growth of US\$57.1 million in the 'others' category, and of US\$18.9 million in bauxite earnings. These increases offset an estimated US\$28.6 million and US\$5.8 million decline in gold and rice receipts.

Total imports declined year-on-year by an estimated 17.2% to US\$3,602 million amid no new FPSOs arriving in Guyana's waters. That is, of course, during 2022. As such, overall importation of capital goods fell by an estimated 61.4%, with mining machinery imports falling by 80.7%, to US\$345 million. Within capital goods, growth was recorded in the importation of agricultural equipment, transport machinery and building materials. Furthermore, payment for intermediate goods and consumption goods increased by 38.4% and 8.1%, respectively, with the former primarily resulting from an estimated 54.1% increase in fuel and lubricants, on account of higher global oil prices.

The capital account is estimated to have recorded a deficit of US\$4,120 million at the end of 2022. This primarily stems from a contraction in net foreign direct investment (FDI) on account of no new FPSO being deployed during 2022. Additionally, the non-financial public sector's deficit is projected at US\$599.9 million, reflecting an increase in deposits into the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) from US\$409.2 million in 2021, to US\$1,408 million in 2022. Notably, also, of course, 2022 marked the first year of withdrawals from the Fund pursuant to the necessary approvals having been granted by this honourable House with US\$607.6 million withdrawn during the year.

The balance of payments surplus is estimated to have resulted in the Bank of Guyana's external reserve position increasing to US\$939.2 million at the end of 2022, up from US\$810.8 million at the end of 2021.

### D. Monetary Developments

The supply of money expanded year-on-year by an estimated 14.5% to \$673.3 billion at the end of 2022. This reflects the proactive and stimulating policies crafted by this Government to foster sustainable business and buoyant consumer sentiment in the economy.

Net domestic credit is estimated at \$224.6 billion at the end of 2022, up from \$224.6 billion in the previous year. This largely indicates lending to the private sector growing by an estimated 14.6%.

A 19.1% expansion is estimated in credit to private sector enterprises and in particular to increased credit to businesses in the services, manufacturing, and agriculture sectors of 15.8%, 36%, and 15.5%, respectively. The outturn in the services sector resulted mainly from expanding credit of \$9.4 billion and \$4.2 billion for other services and distribution, respectively. The estimated growth in the manufacturing sector is based largely on increased lending for other construction and engineering as well as beverages, food and tobacco expanding. Lastly, the projected rise in the agriculture sector is mostly on account of growth of \$1.7 billion and \$1 billion in lending for paddy and livestock production.

Strong growth is also estimated for lending for real estate mortgage loans and to households of 9.8% and 8.8%, respectively. The real estate mortgage loans position largely reflects mortgages granted for private dwellings rising by \$6.7 billion, while the projected growth in households



mainly stems from a \$2.2 billion increase in credit for other purposes. I now turn to prices and income.

## **E. Prices and Income**

### **a. Inflation**

As highlighted previously, the global economy continues to grapple with the persistent inflationary pressures triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and exacerbated by developments in Ukraine. In 2022, it is estimated that global inflation rose to 8.8%. As I indicated a few minutes ago, Guyana was not and is not insulated from these pressures. Here at home, prices continue to rise with the 12-month inflation rate estimated at 7.2% in December 2022, above the 5.7% recorded in 2021. This is primarily based on account of higher food prices, which contributed 6.4 percentage points to the overall inflation rate.

As is well known, in order to soften and cushion the impact of imported inflation, our Government implemented a suite of fiscal measures throughout the year, including lowering the excise tax on fuel products to zero in March of 2022; extending the application of the freight cost adjustment to pre-pandemic levels for the calculation of import taxes to the end of 2022; and distributing subsidised fertiliser to farmers to encourage replanting and to reduce the impact of imported fertiliser price spikes. This, of course, would have contributed to the swift recovery from the 2021 floods and the growth observed in the production of other crops.

### **b. Interest Rates**

Treasury bill yields were largely stable over the review period, with the 91-day and 182-day treasury bill yields unchanged at 1.54% and 1%, respectively. The 364-day treasury bill yield is, however, estimated to have increased from 0.99% to 1.09%. On the other hand, the commercial banks small savings rate and weighted average lending rate declined from 0.83% and 8.8%, respectively, to an estimated 0.81% and 8.54%, respectively.

### **c. Income**

Our Government remains committed to improving the wellbeing of all Guyanese citizens and recognises and appreciates the hard work of employees delivering services to the people of Guyana. In 2022, an 8% across the board salary increase was paid to over 52,000 public servants, teachers, members of the Disciplined Services and Government Pensioners. The members of the Disciplined Services also benefitted from a one-month tax-free bonus

which, it would be recalled, was most unconscionably taken away by the previous government. Its restoration and payment in 2022 placed over \$1.3 billion in the hands of over 11,000 members of the Disciplined Services.

As highlighted in the 2022 Budget, all workers benefitted from the increase in the monthly income tax threshold from \$65,000 to \$75,000, injecting some \$1.3 billion into the pockets of both public and private sector workers. Furthermore, the minimum wage for private sector employees was increased by 36%, from \$44,200 to \$60,147, with effect from July, 2022.

Furthermore, as part of this Government's suite of measures to combat imported inflation and supplement household income in 2022, the hinterland and riverain communities also benefitted from a \$25,000 one-off cash grant. This injected more than \$1.2 billion into these communities. Almost 8,000 fisherfolk benefitted from the provision of a \$150,000 one-off payment totalling \$1.2 billion and over 1,400 sugar workers at Uitvlugt, who were affected by the Estate downtime, were provided a one-off payment totalling over \$277 million.

Our Government remains committed to ensuring that all categories of workers at the end of the day have a better standard of living, better opportunities, and greater prospects in the future. I turn now to the fiscal position.

## **F. Fiscal Position**

### **a. Non-Financial Public Sector**

*3.44 p.m.*

At the end of 2022, the non-financial public sector deficit (after grants) was \$152.5 billion, or 11.5% of GDP. This deficit is attributed to Government's continued ramp up of capital investments, continued expansion in public expenditure to finance improved social programmes, and higher outlays related to the implementation of measures to provide relief to citizens as we continue to combat both external and domestic economic shocks.

### **b. Central Government**

On Central Government, a deficit of \$155.5 billion, or 11.8% of GDP, was recorded at the end of 2022. This was on account of a 53.1% increase in overall expenditure. The expenditure totalled \$593.1 billion at the end of the year, and its growth outweighed the \$162.4 billion increase in total revenue.

Total revenue of the Central Government, net of inflows of the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF) and the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) was \$302.1 billion at the end of 2022, 13.3% above 2021 collections, reflecting the strong and dynamic growth in the economy. Within this, tax revenue collections amounted to \$292.3 billion, growing by 14.6%.

Internal revenue collections totalled \$176.1 billion at the end of 2022, attributed largely to higher collections of private sector corporation taxes, personal income tax, and withholding taxes. These grew by \$16.9 billion, \$12 billion, and \$10.4 billion, respectively. Of note, growth in withholding tax collections is mainly attributed to higher collections from the oil and gas sector.

Collections of value-added tax (VAT) and excise tax contracted by \$9.6 billion in 2022, amounting to \$85.2 billion at the end of the year. This is attributed to the reduction of the excise tax rate applied to petroleum products, which resulted in a total loss of \$17.2 billion on the collection of excise tax on petroleum products. That revenue loss translated to direct relief to the consuming and travelling public of Guyana. On the upside, collections from VAT (net of refunds) expanded by \$8.5 billion, totalling \$56.8 billion on account of higher collections related to both domestically supplied goods and the importation of goods and services. Customs and trade tax collections grew \$4 billion above its previous year's level, largely attributed to higher collections of import duties, again reflecting the marked recovery and dynamism in our economy.

In contrast, non-tax revenues totalled \$9.8 billion at the end of 2022, \$1.8 billion below the 2021 collections, driven by lower collections of rents and royalties.

Within Central Government, non-interest current expenditure grew by 18.6% to \$326.1 billion, largely on account of growth in transfer payments and outlays for other goods and services. The 21.3 % growth in transfer payments was driven by transfers to local organisations, higher outlays on such social programmes as education grants and old age pension, and reflected many of Government's initiatives highlighted previously.

In 2022, Government's Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) grew by 147.2%, with total capital expenditure amounting to \$258.1 billion at the end of last year. This reflects our Government's commitment to continue to invest in repairing, rehabilitating and expanding our country's

infrastructure and in building strong implementation capacity.

#### c. Public Enterprises

At the end of 2022, the public enterprises recorded an overall surplus of \$3 billion. Total receipts were \$177.2 billion, \$36.9 billion higher than in 2021, and total expenditures amounted to \$174.2 billion, \$27.7 billion above the level spent in 2021. The growth in expenditure is largely attributed to higher operational costs associated with the Guyana Oil Company Limited (GUYOIL), as a result of higher imported fuel prices, the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL Inc.), as a result of the same factor, fuel being its primary input, and the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), which I addressed earlier.

### G. Public Debt Management

Since the presentation of the last Budget, Government has maintained its long-standing practice of prudent debt management. Consequently, we continue to enjoy strong debt sustainability fundamentals, even as we expand investments in public infrastructure, social services, and other initiatives geared at ensuring improved standards of living for all Guyanese. This delicate balancing act hinges on our time-honoured debt management strategy of contracting development financing and meeting debt service obligations at the lowest cost, within prudent risk parameters. [*Water break*]

Contrary to malicious speculation on that side of the House, it is not by any measure the Guyana Water Incorporated's (GWI) water that I am consuming. This is not the 1970s and the 1980s. I am in fact consuming medication prescribed by a duly licensed medical practitioner, including a particular application to the water that causes the coloration that might be visible. I thought I might clarify that, Sir, and in the process commend my colleagues, Ministers Collin Croal and Susan Rodrigues, for the outstanding work they are doing to repair and restore the water supply infrastructure in this country after inheriting that infrastructure in a decrepit and dilapidated state from their predecessors in office.

Moving swiftly on, Sir. Total public and publicly guaranteed (PPG) debt amounted to US\$ 3,654.9 million at the end of 2022, up 16.9% from the end of 2021, on account of growth in external and domestic debt. Notwithstanding, the ratio of total public and publicly guaranteed debt-to-GDP declined substantially over the past year, from 38.9% at the end of 2021 to 24.6% at the end of 2022. This outcome is testament

to our judicious contracting, as I said earlier, of development financing at a level well within Guyana's debt carrying capacity.

## H. Natural Resource Fund

I turn now to the Natural Resource Fund. In 2022 there were 102 lifts of crude oil from Guyana's floating production storage and offloading (FPSO) vessels, 13 of which were for Government. For the year 2022, the Fund received US\$1,099.1 million in profit oil, US\$510.2 million from Liza Destiny, and US\$588.9 million from Liza Unity. I can understand that we might appear to be a government operating on steroids when compared to the lethargy of our colleagues on that side of the House. I forgive you for believing that we are a Government operating on steroids. Even a turtle or a tortoise would have made the A Partnership for National Unity, Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) look like it was moving on steroids. Even the proverbial turtle or tortoise would have appeared like they were moving on steroids compared to the APNU/AFC.

Profit oil receipts in 2022 correspond to 11 Government lifts as the remaining two will be received this month. Additionally, US\$155.2 million was received in royalty payments from the operator. In keeping with the Natural Resource Fund Act, US\$607.6 million was withdrawn to finance national development priorities in the 2022 Budget. At the end of 2022, the overall balance in the Fund, inclusive of interest income and after transfers to the budget, amounted to US\$1,271.8 million, accumulated pursuant to the provisions of the Natural Resource Fund Act, enacted by this honourable House on 29<sup>th</sup> December, 2021, amid scenes of chaos and confusion at the behest and on the occasion of the conduct of our colleagues on that side of the House. I turn now to sectoral development and the agenda for 2023.

## Sectoral Development and the Agenda for 2023

### A. Introduction and Macroeconomic Context

In my budget speech for 2022, I outlined our Government's development priorities, which are grounded in our 2020 manifesto, the basis on which we were elected by the people of Guyana. These priorities remain the same, and it is worthwhile to emphasise that they are fully aligned with the regional and international aspirations and obligations to which we have subscribed. These include the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), under the United Nations Agenda 2030, to which we are firmly wedded, as well as the

CARICOM regional agenda including, on food security, the Twenty-Five by 2025 Initiative. In that regard, of course, we are providing strong leadership, having resumed lead responsibility in the Caricom/Quasi Cabinet for agriculture and food security immediately upon returning to Office.

3.59 p.m.

### B. The Low Carbon Development Strategy

Mr. Speaker, among the many signature achievements of this and successive People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Governments, has been our global and national leadership on environmental stewardship and climate action. Our 2020 manifesto committed to reinstating Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), to help achieve prosperity for our people by deploying earnings from forest climate services to diversify the economy and create more jobs and opportunities utilising a low carbon pathway. Our manifesto anticipated the possibility of earning hundreds of millions of United States of America (USA) dollars, building on what we pioneered during our previous term of office, through the Guyana Norway Bilateral Agreement. Regrettably, Sir, during the 2015 to 2019/2020 period, the LCDS was callously and unconscionably abandoned. The remaining US\$135 million of unspent resources was unutilised and the projects that were previously started were stalled, including such projects as Amerindian Land Titling on which little or no activity was observed for the entire five years. As a result, during those years, Guyana lost the opportunity to engage the global carbon market.

The challenge facing this Government on returning to office was to repair this damage, to re-establish a vision for moving forward for the benefit of Guyana, and to resume contributing to the global search for solutions. To start repairing the damage, through the last two budgets that I presented to this House, all of the outstanding US\$135 million has now been unlocked.

Mr. Speaker, to resuscitate the vision of forest climate services, we developed our second generation LCDS, LCDS 2030, that takes forward our world-leading mechanism for payment for forest climate services. Our LCDS 2030 benefited from seven months of national consultations since the launch of a version by His Excellency the President in October, 2021. Thousands of Guyanese and international partners participated in these consultations, provided feedback and offered new ideas, resulting in a revision of the document, vastly strengthened by these inputs.

At the core of LCDS 2030 is an expanded understanding of Guyana's world class natural ecosystems. The original LCDS focused on the climate services provided by our forests. The LCDS 2030 expands the focus to include biodiversity conservation, water management and the ocean economy. It opens a window of opportunities in the years ahead where Guyana can improve the management of natural ecosystems, expand protected areas, improve watershed management and establish world class research facilities, including an international centre for biodiversity research. The LCDS 2030 was endorsed by the National Toshias Council at their July, 2022 Toshias Conference, and it was presented and debated in the National Assembly with a resolution passed in this honourable House Sir, as you would recall, endorsing the strategy. All of this was achieved in 2022.

Today, I am pleased to put on record that the vision of the LCDS 2030 has moved to reality. In 2022, a major milestone was achieved for Guyana and for forest countries in the world in the achievement of that vision, when the Architecture for the Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) Transactions—The REDD+ Environmental Excellence Standard, popularly known as ART-TREES, issued the world's first... I will repeat that Sir, for emphasis and for the emphasis it so richly deserves, when the ART-TREES Secretariat issued the world's first jurisdiction-scale market-ready carbon credits to Guyana. I will go further and say that, in total, almost 33.5 million credits were issued for the period 2016–2020, one of the biggest issuances of carbon anywhere in the world. Needless to say, these credits for 2016 to 2020 relate to a period when the former Government did absolutely nothing to monetise them. Instead, they chose to brandish a Green State Development Strategy (GSDA), I would believe it was called. That was whose greenness extended only, I believe, to the dominant colour of its pages. This People's Progressive Party/Civic Government has now corrected that travesty.

A second major milestone was also achieved in 2022, through the sale of a significant percentage of our ART-TREES credits. During the period from 14<sup>th</sup> February to 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2022, an international request for proposals for the purchase of Guyana's carbon credits was issued. Resulting from this process, several proposals were submitted and Government and the Hess Corporation finalised an agreement whereby the Hess Corporation would be the first buyer of Guyana's credits, totalling approximately a third of our issuances under ART-TREES, from 2016 to 2030. The

agreement sets out that Hess will buy 2.5 million credits per year for 2016 to 2030 to a total of 37.5 million credits for a minimum payment of US\$750 million, to be paid to Guyana between 2022 and 2032. This may very well be the largest carbon transaction to have ever taken place anywhere in the world to date.

*[The students from President's College and Chase Academy left the Dome.]*

Moving forward, this will open a new revenue stream for Guyana, and the long-term significance of this should be recognised. Not only is it an example of Guyana providing leadership for the world in addressing climate change, but it is also laying the long-term foundations for the day when the global economy will value nature's contributions to that economy. In short, Guyana's mechanism for forest climate services starts finally to change that historic financial reality where the world's forests are worth, tragically, more dead than they are worth alive.

In 2023, as set out in the Budget, investments will be made across the country in national and multi-community initiatives to build our future economy. Fifteen percent of all revenues received will be invested in village sustainability plans produced by our Amerindian villages and communities. Meanwhile, efforts will be advanced to market the remaining two-thirds of Guyana's credits for which there has already been tremendous interest. Importantly, we have also wanted to provide a model for all forest countries we know are waiting to see that the promise of private capital flows can actually be realized and directed towards protecting forests.

### **C. A Diversified, Resilient and Competitive Productive Sector**

#### **a. Oil and Gas**

I now turn to our objective of maintaining and further growing a diversified resilient and competitive productive sector. First Oil and Gas.

Mr. Speaker, since taking office, and in keeping with our manifesto commitment of securing the benefits of oil and gas for all Guyanese, this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government has:

- Taken steps to strengthen the sector's legal and regulatory framework;

- Established and strengthened institutional structures required by that framework; and,
- Continued to promote accelerated exploration and production of the resources, all in the national interest.

#### Legal, Regulatory and Institutional Framework

In 2022, in the area of strengthened governance and management, Government brought into operation the new NRF Act. The NRF Board of Directors, comprising internationally eminent Guyanese of global repute, the Public Accountability and Oversight Committee and the Investment Committee – three critical entities in the sector's governance architecture – have been appointed. Furthermore, in order to ensure full transparency and accountability, since April, 2022, notifications of receipts of petroleum revenues are being published in the *Official Gazette*, and have been tabled in the National Assembly, including one that I tabled, Sir, as you would recall earlier today.

The new Local Content Act has also been brought into operation. The Local Content Secretariat (LCS) has been established and the Local Content Register has been put in place. That Register now includes over 500 Guyanese companies. The Secretariat has approved over 29 five-year local content master plans to date. Our latest information indicates that Guyanese accounted for 64% of total employment in the sector, totalling 3,153 Guyanese nationals at the end of the first half of 2022. Additionally, the Secretariat has successfully unbundled contracts and has reduced the payment period for Guyanese suppliers from 45 to 30 days, particularly benefiting small Guyanese businesses. Today, several Guyanese businesses are doing business with the oil and gas companies and their contractors, creating jobs for Guyanese nationals.

Mr. Speaker, we have announced the main elements of a new fiscal framework, which will form the basis of a draft new-model Production Sharing Agreement (PSA), to be released next month. In addition to four areas of revised fiscal terms, we will strengthen the articles related to work programme commitments by operators for each block, and we will put in place an enhanced relinquishment mechanism. The expectation is for the new model PSA to be applicable for awards by the end of the first half of this year.

4.14 p.m.

#### Exploration

On exploration, 2022 was a major year of exploration activity. Eleven exploration wells were drilled – Stabroek Block alone accounting for 10 of these and resulting in 10 new commercially viable discoveries being made offshore Guyana. This brings the total number of discoveries made in Stabroek to 35, and a total of 40 for all blocks being explored. With the new discoveries in 2022, our total estimated proven reserves now stand at over 11 billion barrels of oil-equivalent, with every likelihood of further upward revision as exploration activity continues. Additionally, we launched the 2022 Licensing Round in December of last year. This round will run until April of 2023, and successful bids are expected to be awarded by the end of the first half of this year. The round offers 14 blocks for tender in the shallow and deepwater areas of Guyana's offshore area. We anticipate with the successful completion of this round that exploration activity will be significantly and rapidly ramped up.

#### Production

On production within the sector, the Liza Unity FPSO vessel began production early last year, bringing to a total the number of deployed and operationalised FPSOs in Guyana's waters to two. Notably, it is anticipated that production will commence at a third FPSO – Liza Prosperity – by the end of 2023. With these three FPSOs, production capacity is forecasted to be in the order of 560,000 barrels per day (bpd).

The Government has also collaborated extensively with the Stabroek Block operator and its partners on the Yellowtail and Uaru projects in 2022. Stemming from this, the production licence for the former was approved in April, 2022, pushing increased development activity. These advancements are supporting a potentially earlier start-up in 2025 and will produce at a rate of 250,000 barrels per day. This will increase overall production capacity to approximately 810,000 barrels per day by 2025. Further, with an application for the fifth development block – Uaru – filed in November, 2022, and subsequently kick-starting Government's review, it is anticipated that this platform will produce another 250,000 barrels per day following start-up in 2027. Taken together, these developments will enable Guyana to produce over one million barrels per day by this time. That is to say, by 2027.

#### Harnessing our Gas Reserves

Mr. Speaker, a most important component of the oil and gas sector is our gas reserves. Harnessing these for affordable

energy has resulted in the Gas to Energy Project, which will be discussed in greater detail shortly. Moreover, our Government has commenced work on the revision of the Liza Field Development Plan and Licence, which will allow for the production of natural gas for commercial usage in Guyana. It is crucial to note that our gas reserves have expanded, with the estimated recoverable natural gas reserves moving from 16 trillion to over 17 trillion standard cubic feet. We are expected to export, at a minimum, about 50 million standard cubic feet of gas per day through Destiny and Unity, in the initial phases, and the operator, through the Yellowtail Production Licence, has submitted a Gas Utilisation Study for the remainder of our gas reserves. This submission is currently under review.

#### Promoting Value-Added Production and Securing Energy Security

Following the call for proposals to design, finance, and build an oil refinery near the mouth of the Berbice River, 9 bids were submitted and received, and will be evaluated this quarter. Following that process and on the assumption of its completion by 2025, the refinery will allow for the local production of refined fuel products to meet our domestic requirements and help strengthen the nation's, and the region's, energy security.

#### b. Other Extractives

I now turn to other extractives. Our more traditional mining and quarrying sectors continue to play a crucial role in our nation's growth and diversification, contributing not only to national production and export revenues, but also to job creation. Our Government, as promised in our manifesto, implemented a suite of measures since assuming Office, invested in critical infrastructure, and improved the regulatory and institutional architecture to support the sector.

We commenced, in 2022, the establishment of a comprehensive automated Mineral Property Management System with online capabilities.

The Guyana Mining School and Training Centre remains committed to providing qualified technicians and tradesmen for the industry. This Centre will provide extension services to miners in such areas as biodiversity mainstreaming and mercury reduction.

#### Gold

In gold specifically, the subsector continues to be a key contributor to growth in our economy. It represents 8.3% of

non-oil GDP and 58.2% of non-oil exports in 2022. Our Government's focus in the sector continues to be on promoting exploration activity that can eventually transition into production, thereby supporting growth, employment and export earnings.

In 2022, work on the development of underground mining capability in the sector progressed, with a new timeline for underground mining to come fully onstream by 2024. Investment opportunities in the sector continued with major discoveries by exploration companies in the Oko, Cuyuni area, Omai, and Marudi. Notably, the Toroparu area potential also remains hopeful, but changes in the company architecture and ownership led to some revision in the initial investment timelines. Our Government remains firmly optimistic that all these areas that show potential are brought into production in the near-term.

#### Bauxite

In the bauxite industry, we continue to encourage value-added production to accompany the raw products to secure greater value. As such, in 2022, one of the two large operators advanced investments to further refine their ore, while the other made progress in the installation of its kiln at its Linden facility. This kiln is now expected to come on stream before the end of 2023. The investment outlook for the sector is promising amid additional discoveries of world class deposits, especially at the Tarakuli deposit in Berbice, as we continue to seek additional large-scale investors for the industry. Notably, the number of persons employed in the bauxite sector increased steadily, from 438 in 2020, to 905 in 2022.

#### Sand and Stone

A construction boom is very visibly underway in Guyana. This is seen through the massive ramp up of the PSIP, with robust activity from the housing drive, the building of several hospitals, schools, roads, and bridges; private sector investment infrastructure, including hotels and business complexes; and the positive spillover effects of removing VAT on critical construction materials.

Supporting this construction boom is a rapid expansion in sand and stone production. Facilitating these activities are the 22 operators to date in the sand and loam subsector, with production almost doubling in 2022. Our Government, in 2023, will continue to promote accelerated investment in the sector and ensure that concessions are brought to production

in the shortest possible time in order to boost production and productivity.

Similarly, quarry stones reached record high levels. The currently operating quarries collectively ramped up operations in 2022 to produce a record 1,021,000 tonnes – the highest in over a decade. An additional six quarries were recently licensed and are expected to contribute a further 400,000 tonnes in 2023. These additions reflect our Government's efforts to ensure construction materials rise to match demand from housing and the other infrastructure works across the country.

#### Manganese

The sole operator in the area commenced production in 2022 and remains on track to deliver on their US\$75 million investment over the next three years. Despite logistical challenges, the company still managed to make two shipments last year, totalling over 100,000 metric tonnes. This was the first time in over five decades, as I mentioned earlier, since Guyana exported manganese. In 2023, manganese output is projected at 500,000 metric tonnes.

#### Other Minerals

Mr. Speaker, beyond the traditional minerals, Guyana has placed and will continue to place emphasis on the diversification of our mining industry. Since assuming Office in 2020, five prospecting licenses were issued for non-traditional minerals, and it is anticipated that exploration of rare earth elements, including scandium, lithium, columbite/tantalite, will continue into the medium term, as Government continues to push diversification in the mining sector.

#### c. Forestry

When we assumed Office in 2020, we met a forestry sector in a state of disrepair and despair, with the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) unable to pay salaries and cover its operational costs. We committed to repair this devastation, and to put the sector on a path to prosperity. In *Budget 2020*, consistent with our promise to improve the ease of doing business in Guyana, the forestry sector benefitted from an adjustment to the National Log Export Policy and the removal of several restrictive VAT and tax hindrances. In particular, the former was instrumental in enhancing the competitiveness of the sector through enhanced market access for saw millers without concessions. These measures materialised into a strong recovery for the forestry sector in 2021 and an even stronger estimated performance in 2022.

Looking ahead, Government anticipates issuing 15 new small concessions to enhance the sector's output. Loggers will also be supported through Government's rehabilitation of key hinterland roads including the Linden to Mabura road, the Puruni road, and others.

4.29 p.m.

Efforts are also expected to continue with the Guyana Forestry Commission's (GFC) implementation of our Timber Legality Assurance System – a requirement for the Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) under the European Union (EU) Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Programme.

The sector received the tremendous boost and fillip by the announcement made by His Excellency, the President, last year on the establishment of a \$900 million revolving fund in partnership with the private sector which aimed at boosting production and value-added. This arrangement involved the participation of one of our leading commercial banks, Demerara Bank Limited. In line with our Government's strengthened focus on small, medium and community loggers, as well as value-added producers, this \$900 million revolving fund will provide more accessible and low-cost financing for these operators. I turn now to Agriculture and Food Security, the anchor of our non-oil economy.

#### d. Agriculture and Food Security

When we took Office in 2020, the agriculture sector was in a state of complete collapse as it had become a target for political vindictiveness and it was starved of financial support and subjected to particularly poor planning. This took on ethically tragic proportions because agriculture has always been an important pillar in our economy and has been the base of economic activity, especially in our rural communities for decades, indeed for centuries.

Since returning to office our Government has resumed giving the sector the attention it deserves, focusing on its restoration and enhancement with strong, decisive leadership, both by His Excellency, the President, and my distinguished Colleague, the Minister of Agriculture. That leadership has manifested itself, both at the regional and national levels, and it aims to mould a robust agriculture sector that will transform lives, livelihoods and landscapes.

We remain committed to increasing production and productivity, through expansion in acreages and use of technology; diversifying into new crops and varieties;

promoting high-value and value-added and crops, including through agro-processing; and easing the access for farmers and consumers to markets, both domestic and export.

In the interest of advancing the food security and agribusiness agenda, we will, in partnership with the private sector and with the Guyanese communities across the length and breadth of our country, pursue an agriculture strategy built around three major initiatives. The first is the establishment of a regional food hub incorporating critical elements of the production and supply chain, such as cold storage, manufacturing and processing capabilities, in order to promote improved access to markets, as I said early, both export and domestic; second, establish and further strengthen the capability to harness greater use of science, technology and research and development to promote scientifically based innovation and product development; and third promote hinterland agriculture for food security and self-sufficiency within the producing communities, as well as to meet the needs of markets beyond the producing community.

An amount of \$2 billion is allocated in *Budget 2023* for these initiatives.

#### i. Sugar

As has already been said, we met a sugar industry that was deliberately, callously, and unconscionably neglected and deliberately decimated. Fields and factories were left abandoned, billions of dollars in machinery and equipment were left to the elements and over \$2.5 billion in valuable standing canes were left to rot in the fields. As has often been said and as it is most worthy of reputation that we never forget over 7,000 workers were severed, and their extended families left without a livelihood. We remain committed to the revitalisation and restructuring of the sugar industry to support a diversified and modernised sector, ensuring its sustainability and economic viability.

Since returning to Office, we have invested over \$10 billion in plant and equipment. We have rehabilitated sugar cane fields at all factory locations. We have fostered private sector partnerships through lending support to cane farmers to expand land under cultivation. Moreover, we have sought to reenergise local economies through the re-hiring of 1,479 workers... [**Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible*)], that is correct. ...who were unconscionably dismissed by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) and we have delivered a cash grant, as mentioned earlier, to all workers who were severed. In 2022, we advanced the recapitalisation of the Albion, Uitvlugt and

Blairmont Estates, and remodelled the marketing and sales mix to move away from bulk sugar to packaged, higher value-added sugars.

This year, in support of the sugar industry and those who work in that industry, our Government has allocated in *Budget 2023* \$4 billion for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), out of which we will see the commencement of construction of the Albion Packaging Plant and the expansion of the capacity of the Blairmont Packaging Plant. We have also targeted the acquisition of a drying machine to improve the quality of our packaged sugar, and the acquisition and deployment of a stick packaging machine to offer a smaller sachet packet of sugar to meet the needs of premium markets. Additionally, it is anticipated that grinding operations at the Rose Hall Estate will commence in the second crop of 2023 and smoke will once again rise from the chimneys of the Estate. I am turning my attention to rice, Sir.

#### ii. Rice

The rice industry remains a dominant contributor to agriculture overall and rice is, of course, a staple in our diet and in our food security agenda. Importantly, rice supports employment, and wellbeing and livelihood in rural communities throughout Guyana. We remain focused on increasing production and yields. Since assuming Office, we reversed the increases in land rent that was crippling the industry; we reverse the taxes on agricultural equipment and inputs; we invested over \$35.8 billion to repair the neglected and dilapidated drainage and irrigation structures; we secured new markets in the British Virgin Islands, Estonia, Slovenia and Lebanon; and introduced the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) 16 variety which resulted in a 40% increase on improvement in yield. Additionally, in response to popular demand by farmers, since returning to Office, we constructed eight new drying floors in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

We commissioned our National Gene Bank and soil tissue laboratory at the Burma Rice and Research Station. These facilities will improve productivity through advancements in research and innovation to improve value-added. Further, we procured a seed dryer, a mini testing mill and distributed over \$900 million in fertilizer to 5,160 farmers.

This year, we will be investing over \$300 million to promote production and productivity in the rice. This will go towards research and development to further improve yields and identify and implement alternatives to insecticides to control



the paddy bug; we will construct two new drying floors in Regions 3 and 5; we will introduce new bio-fortified rice varieties. Our work to secure new markets will continue, all with the interest of growing the industry and improving the wellbeing for those operating in and depended on that industry.

### iii. Other Crops

Aligned with the agricultural diversification agenda, the Government continues to expand non-traditional agriculture, with particular focus on research and development, and high value commodities.

#### Corn and Soya Bean

We committed to the cultivation of corn and soya bean in the intermediate savannahs, with the aim of being self-sufficient by 2025. To support the growth of this industry, we committed over \$1.2 billion to infrastructural development in the Tacama area.

At the end of 2022, access to that area was improved having us constructed 40 kilometres (km) of road, with the remaining seven kilometres scheduled to be completed this year. Our Government invested in a drying and storage facility for which construction works will also be completed in 2023. This will constitute the establishment of the first such facility for corn and soya bean in the history of Guyana.

In 2023, we will invest \$150 million in the construction of a wharf in the Tacama area. This wharf will provide critical riverain access to the area under cultivation.

#### Coconuts

We recognise the tremendous potential of coconut as a high value crop. We have rolled out our coconut decentralisation programme. This has seen the establishment of nine coconut nurseries established in Charity, Kairuni, Wakenaam, Leguan, Canal Number Two Polder, Corentyne, Hosororo, Fort Wellington and Lethem. I invite our Colleagues to disclose how many coconut nurseries they had in operation when they were in Government.

To put things in perspective, Sir... [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** *(Inaudible)*] I hear reference to the establishment of Hope and Coconut Estates during the pre-1985 era. Those of us who are old enough to remember the imposition by the pre-1985 dictatorial Regime of the People's National Congress (PNC) which required senior public servants to do compulsory unpaid labour, where

permanent secretaries of Guyana were told that they had to go and weed trenches at Hope Estate for free or face the consequence of losing their jobs.

4.44 p.m.

That is the PNC's legacy. Hope coconut estate, while I am advice that the maximum leader fine equestrian that he was – fineequestrian that he was – patrolled the estate, astride his preferred horse of the day, looking down on his subjects as they conducted free and unpaid labour in the trenches of Hope estate. That, Sir, is the PNC's legacy and perspective on coconuts. Do not be disrespectful and besmirching of the establishment of nine coconut nurseries across this country. To put things in perspective in 2022, 45,000 coconut seedlings were produced, each of which promoted expanded cultivation. In 2023, a new high yielding and disease resistant coconut variety will be introduced for farmers with eight demonstration plots to be established in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6. I turn now to citrus and spices.

#### Citrus and Spices

In 2022, to increase the production of citrus and spices, our Government boosted cultivation with the distribution of over 25,000 kgs of ginger and turmeric, planting materials I should say and 67,997 – almost 68,000 – mixed citrus seedlings such as orange, tangerine, lime and lemon distributed to our farmers. Consider for a moment, Sir, 68,000 seedlings being distributed to our farmers.

We will continue to invest in the processing of these crops. To this end, the sum of \$153 million is budgeted to improve processing capacity at Hosororo, Parika and Linden/Soesdyke. The improved mechanisation will reduce drying time from three to five days to eight hours daily, directly increasing productivity and targeting over 300 metric tonnes of production of ginger and turmeric – high value products. To boost citrus production, in 2023, we will expand distribution of seedlings to farmers to a total exceeding 100,000 – high value crops.

#### High Value Crops

In keeping with our Manifesto's commitment to incentivise young people to pursue a career in agriculture, we launched under the leadership of no less a person than His Excellency, the President, the Agriculture and Innovation Entrepreneurship Programme (AIEP). This Programme saw over 100 students engaged in shade-house farming, growing crops such as broccoli, cauliflower, carrots and romaine and iceberg lettuce – products that previously we had to import.

Through this initiative, over 16 metric tonnes of high-valued vegetables were produced.

At the end of 2022, 120 shade houses were constructed to support the production of these unsimilar crops. We rolled out a fresh flower project which saw the production of 2,551 roses while creating employment and generating income for single parents. [Mr. Mahipaul: Drink *duh* pipe water *deh*]. Mr. Speaker, this unique blend prescribed by my medical advisor, I am proud to say, Sir, comprises good quality water – Guyanese water – and in fact, locally produced honey from a Guyanese Amerindian community. It is water and honey.

In 2023, an amount of \$200 million is budgeted for the expansion of the agriculture, innovation and entrepreneurship programme with the aim of engaging a further 100 new, young Agri- entrepreneurs and increasing the production of these high-valued crops by 50%.

#### iv. Agro-Processing

The agro-processing sector is a critical element of Government's push for enhanced food security and broad-based sustainable economic growth. Through adding value to primary production, agro-processing not only helps to improve household agriculture income, but also enhances the potential for growth in export earnings.

In 2022, agri-business incubators were established in Parika, Fort Wellington, St. Ignatius and Watooka. The procurement of equipment for the agro-processing and packaging facilities at Sophia, Parika and Mabaruma were advanced. Moreover, notable progress was made on the establishment of new processing facilities at White Water Creek and Charity, both of which are expected to be commissioned this quarter.

Our Government will invest in new agro-processing facilities in Crabwood Creek and Orealla. We will construct a new cold storage facility in Bartica and we will procure two new refrigerated trucks to support transport of inputs and agro-products. Agro-processors will also benefit from the establishment of another Guyana Shop and a marketing information centre in Bartica. Moreover, the regional food hub which is one of the major anchors of our agri and agriculture business strategy for the sector, and to which I referred to earlier, will provide strong impetus to agro-processing, value-added food production and market access.

#### v. Livestock

The livestock sector is vital to Government's plans for enhanced food security, economic growth and farm incomes. We embarked on a series of initiatives in the livestock sector including the black belly sheep programme which saw a commitment from the Government of Barbados to supply Guyana with 1,000 black belly sheep. The procurement of 65 breeding bulls and distribution of \$581.9 million in cash grants to 6,991 livestock farmers. We are encouraging private investment. [Hon. Members (Opposition): (*inaudible*)] I hear our Colleagues, on that side of the House, saying Guyana is more advanced than who and more advanced than who. It is that very arrogance of the APNU/AFC thinking that they were more superior to everybody who placed them where they are sitting today.

In 2023, we will continue to support the industry by undertaking investments to help improve the quality of milk and milk products through better sanitation and hygiene practices, improve mutton variety and production, establish a bio-secured small ruminant breeding facility, and invest in a broiler breeder facility which will reduce the dependence on importation of hatching eggs.

#### vi. Fisheries and Aquaculture

Since assuming Office, we reversed, as I said earlier, licensing fees and taxes that were crippling the fishing industry. We distributed over \$1 billion in cash grants to 7,518 fisher folks. We rolled out a \$221 million programme to improve wharfs and landing sites and to improve coordination and consultation with the sector, we facilitated the creation of a multi-stakeholder aquaculture committee. We invested in developing marine cage culture and 33 brackish water shrimp farms. We upgraded the Satyadeow Sawh Aquaculture Station and completed training for 424 persons in aquaculture. To develop marine cage fishing culture, we have established five fishing cages in Capoey and Lake Mainstay villages and an additional 53 cages will be operationalised during 2023.

To finance the expansion of brackish water shrimp farms, and to establishment of vannamei shrimp farms in 2023, an amount totally \$349.6 million is budgeted for this sector.

#### vii. Drainage and Irrigation

In 2022, we completed drainage and irrigation (D&I) works across the country at a total cost of \$19.1 billion, including areas such as Kamuni, Warimina, Troolie Island, Cane Grove, Black Bush Polder and Good Intent. We procured over 100 tractor-driven pumps, we commissioned \$125

million in machinery, we fulfilled the long-standing demand to begin dredging the Pomeroon river and we advanced works on the construction and rehabilitation of pump stations at Cottage, Black Bush Polder, Canal Number One, A-Line sluice, Charity and Cozier.

We commenced work on the design studies for replicas of the historic Hope Canal drainage system. These hope-like canals will realise at scale solutions for the drainage challenges and the flooding problems confronted by Regions 3, 5 and 6.

In 2023, this Budget provides a sum of \$19.7 billion to upgrade the D&I systems country wide. Farmers and residents of Meten-Meer-Zorg, Jimbo Grove, Belle Vue and Letter Kenny will be direct beneficiaries of new pump stations that will be constructed in these areas. [**Bishop Edghill**: Expanding agriculture]. Expanding agriculture as Minister Bishop Edghill says. Drainage and Irrigation upgrades will also benefit farmers and residents across the country, including those at Amazon, Adams Creek, Nabaclis, Golden Grove, Buxton and Bellamy Creek.

e. Sustainable Tourism

Tourism the world over was challenged by the evolving Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. We effectively navigated the sector through this hurdle, first of all, of course, protecting Guyana and the Guyanese people from the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic and marketing Guyana as a competitive world class destination with an incomparable sustainable tourism product.

4.59 p.m.

While global prospects indicate an anticipated increase or an estimated increase of 65% in arrivals, in 2022 when compared to 2021. Initial estimates for Guyana have recorded an 83.9% increase in arrivals in 2022 over 2021, well above the global average.

Airlift expansion for the sector remains a priority with demand being so strong that current service providers are unable to meet that demand. A fact that I believe many of us are well aware of and the travelling public of Guyana, and our diaspora are painfully aware of. To this end, we successfully complete to help to ameliorate this challenge, we successfully concluded arrangements to allow British Airways to commence operations in March, 2023, with twice weekly flights on a 332-seater – let me say that again, on a 332-seater – aircraft. In addition, in February of this year, Fly Always will commence twice weekly flights to Barbados

using a 70-seater aircraft, adding to its existing Guyana-Suriname and Guyana-Cuba routes. Moreover, we are expecting that an additional service will be introduced on the Guyana-Canada route before the end of the first quarter.

At the end of 2022 our room capacity stood at 3,200 rooms, even as preparations are underway, to welcome increased visitors to our shores. Construction has commenced on the AC Marriott at Ogle, a Four Points Sheraton in Houston, both of those will offer 150 rooms upon completion. An additional 140 rooms are expected to be available at the Marriott Courtyard at Timehri, 350-500 rooms at Pasha Global right here in Liliendaal and the Aiden by Best Western hotel at Robb Street will add another 101 rooms to current capacity. All private investors coming to invest in Guyana since the return to Office by the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

I invite our Colleagues, on that side of the House, to point to a single hotel – I am not asking for five or 10, a single hotel, as matter of fact we will settle for half of a hotel – that was opened during their five years of misrule and mismanagement of incompetence and ineptitude. Mr. Speaker, during the Cricket Carnival period over... [**An Hon. Member (Opposition)**: *(Inaudible)*] ...Mr. Speaker, I now hear our colleagues on that side of the House proclaiming that their crowning achievement in tourism was apparently to save a hotel that was built by the People's Progressive Party/Civic, congratulations for that crowning achievement, which is evidently the pride and joy of your five-year tenure. ...250 bed and breakfast rooms were inspected and conditionally approved for visitor use. Event-based tourism will continue to play a major role in Guyana's product offering through the hosting of such events as Caribbean Premier League (CPL) 2022 and, as you know we won the right to host the CPL finals for three years. Cricket Carnival, which featured a vast number of events and activities and provided an unprecedented fillip to the local tourism sector.

Our tourism sector would clearly benefit given how poised it is for rapid expansion from a larger pool of skilled personnel. This year or rather over the last two years we executed various hospitality and tourism related training programmes to over 3,500 persons. However, our capacity to deliver formal training and world-class certification will receive a significant fillip with the completion of the hospitality institute, this institute will have the capacity to train 2,500 persons annually, putting those 2,500 persons Sir, into gainful employment.

These and other programmes will further solidify destination Guyana as a globally recognised brand.

f. Business Process Outsourcing

In alignment with our diversification agenda and commitment to create 50,000 jobs, during this term of Office, we continue to support and foster the expansion of the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry. This industry has vast potential to create substantial employment and has already recorded tremendous success in bringing women into the workforce. It also provides important training and skills that are transferable across other areas in the economy. Regrettably, this vision was replaced by short-sightedness and deliberate callous action of the previous administration, one of many consequences of which was of course the closure of a then growing call center in Linden.

Since we returned to Office, over 1,800 new BPO jobs have been created. The shuttered call centre was reopened in Linden and it has already employed more than 100 young Lindeners. This was followed by the establishment of another call centre again by the private sector which commenced operations in Essequibo. In 2023, a total of four new call centres are targeted for Essequibo and Berbice. This intervention is expected to increase employment in this industry by 800 with the potential to scale up to 1,600. Our Government will continue to be engaged with the industry to make Guyana a preferred destination for investors operating BPOs.

g. Small Business Support,

The local small business sector in Guyana is, as it is in many places, an integral part of the national developmental thrust. Small businesses are essential to ensure a diversified and resilient economy and, of course, play an extremely important role in securing livelihoods for thousands of householders.

Over the last two years, we have supported through the Small Business Bureau, small business development including through a suite of initiatives such as grant, provision of grants, collateral guaranteed programmes, specialised training, *et cetera*. In 2023 we have allocated \$584.2 million to the Small Business Bureau and the Small Business Development Fund. This of course is in addition to the extensive range of support in place in the respective sectoral support programme such as agriculture, tourism, youth and women all supporting small businesses and young entrepreneurs countrywide. In 2023 of the amount stated, a

sum of \$300 million is budgeted for the Small Business Development Fund to continue assisting small entrepreneurs.

Recognising the constraints faced by many small businesses in relation to finding adequate and suitable space from which to operate, we have already embarked on the construction of industrial estates and business incubator centres at key locations countrywide. To this end, notwithstanding some delays in logistics in acquiring imported equipment, the business incubator centres at Lethem and Belvedere in Regions 9 and 6, respectively, are expected to be fully operationalised in 2023, these will result in the creation of over 400 jobs. They will provide direct and indirect services aimed primarily to boost agro-processing output, and they are expected to generate revenues through rental of office space, training facilities and importantly, shopfront pods for 48 small businesses to sell their goods and services. Once piloted and found to be successful, this model will be replicated countrywide.

To this end, in a bit to further expand available land for industrial and business development, a sum of \$327.8 million has been allocated in 2023 to continue development works in Amelia's Ward and commence works for the establishment of a new industrial estate in Region 2.

#### D. Transformational Infrastructure

[**Mr. Mahipaul:** *(Inaudible)*] It is just to avoid the scandalous comments that are coming from that side of the House. I am pleased to announce that it is over-the-counter cough syrup prescribed in very strict measure by a properly licensed medical practitioner.

a. Energy Expansion and Diversification,

The strides that we are making to catapult Guyana into the 21<sup>st</sup> century are seriously constrained by the lack of reliable, affordable and environmentally sustainable energy. For decades, ordinary consumers and businesses alike have been complaining about the state of our aged and ailing power supply system and the inability of the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated's (GPL) power generation, transmission and distribution capacity to meet present and worse yet future needs. Industrial and business activities have been affected and constrained. Our Government has crafted... Had the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project (AFHP) not been maliciously derailed by the APNU/AFC this problem would have been solved five years ago and today Guyana would have been harvesting 156 megawatts of power from the Amaila Falls Hydropower. Every night when the Guyanese

people face a blackout, they are reminded that Amaila Falls Hydropower could have been generating power today if the APNU/AFC had not colluded to frustrate and derail that project. We have crafted an energy matrix that looks well beyond today's needs and which will cater for strong forecasted future demand. More importantly, our energy matrix is a careful study that addresses immediate short-term interventions and transformational medium to long-term initiatives.

Guyana Power and Light Incorporated is examining options for boosting its short-term generation needs through the acquisition of an additional 50 megawatts of firm generating capacity. Additionally, 413 kilometres of new distribution lines and feeders, a new 69 kilovolt (kV) transmission line from Kingston to Sophia and from Edinburgh to Hydronie; new and rehabilitated substations at Hydronie, Sophia, Columbia, Canefield and Number 53 Village; and the replacement of 320 inefficient transformers, will all be realised in 2023.

5.14 p.m.

Looking at our medium and long-term needs, Sir, and in keeping with our manifesto's promise to produce more than 200 megawatts (MW) of electricity from natural gas, our Government has signed a contract for the construction of the integrated natural gas liquids plant and the 300 megawatts combined cycle gas turbine power plant within the Wales Development Zone (WDZ). This represents the single largest investment made in the electricity sector, and the single largest engineering, procurement, and construction contract ever undertaken. This project will directly cut emissions by 70% as well as trigger a series of major economic development initiatives in Guyana, as energy costs will be significantly reduced and are expected indeed to be halved. In 2022, \$24.6 billion was paid to meet start-up costs associated with this transformative project. To advance the construction of this plant and its associated facilities, *Budget 2023* includes an allocation of \$43.3 billion.

In the area of hydropower, I have already referred to the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project (AFHP). We will relaunch a request for proposals for this Project with a view of restarting it and ultimately realising it. Still in pursuit of our renewables' objectives, works are being initiated for the construction of a 1.5 megawatts hydropower facility at Kumu and the rehabilitation and upgrade of the 700 megawatts Mocomoco Hydropower Plant. Both of those are expected to be completed in 2024.

We commissioned the one-megawatt solar farm in Lethem. In 2022, work advanced on another 1.5 megawatts solar farm in Bartica and 0.75 megawatts in Wakenaam. Looking ahead, we have launched the tender for the completion of a total of 33 megawatts solar photovoltaic (PV) system to be connected to the Guyana Power and Light (GPL) power system and at Linden comprising: five megawatts at Onderneeming; three megawatts at Charity; four megawatts at Trafalgar; three megawatts at Prospect; three megawatts at Hampshire; four megawatts at Block 37 Millie's Hideout; eight megawatts at Retrieve; and three megawatts at Dakoura. These interventions will displace the use of fossil fuels. They will contribute to climate change mitigation through the reduction of Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions. Very importantly – very importantly, Sir – they are financed by resources earned by Guyana under the original Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) piloted through the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF) and funds which were parked and abandoned for five years, left sitting idly for five years by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC).

In keeping with the vision to reduce our carbon footprint, we installed 36,520 light-emitting diode (LED) lights for residents and businesses in Linden, Wakenaam, Leguan and Bartica. In preparation for the major investments that we are making in power generation, and in particular, to prepare the GPL to be the off-taker of the gas-to-power project and the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, we are investing heavily in resilient transmission and distribution (T&D) infrastructure in order to be able to distribute and deliver this electricity. I turn now to transport infrastructure.

#### b. Transport Infrastructure

There are few aspects of contemporary life in which Guyana's ongoing transformation is more visible than in the area of transport infrastructure. To put it mildly, our transport infrastructure is being expanded and upgraded at a pace that has never been seen before in the entire history of this country. The results are visible changes to the physical landscape and, in particular, to our transport networks. Several projects are either at an advanced stage of implementation or are poised for take-off this year.

#### i. Roads and Bridges

In 2022 an amount of \$67.9 billion was expended to further improve our road connectivity across the 10 regions. Of this, \$39.8 billion was expended under the miscellaneous, urban and hinterland roads programme for the construction,

upgrading and rehabilitation of roads in our coastal and hinterland communities and \$27.8 billion was spent on the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of bridges.

Allow me to list some of the key road and bridge projects that are either underway or will soon be underway, primarily for the purpose of illustrating the vastness of what is being undertaken in the sector.

In pursuit of the objective of linking and integrating with our hemispheric neighbours to the East and the South – Suriname and Brazil – which will open up new economic opportunities and improve the ease and reduce the cost of moving people and goods, we have: one, engaged with our Surinamese counterparts on the construction of the Corentyne River Bridge. We are forging ahead with the construction of the access road on the Guyana side. One would have seen announcements made by Minister Bishop Edghill just – I believe a day or two ago in relation to the haste with which we wish to proceed to get that project completed. In relation to the bridge across the river, a contract was signed to undertake preliminary studies. Six international companies have been invited to submit pre-qualification documentation, and five have been shortlisted for the construction of the bridge.

Moving southwards, we have commenced construction of the Linden to Mabura Hill Road. In fact, it was a project that was languishing. One of the first things that we did when we returned to the Office was to secure its approval from the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and proceeded to secure its implementation. We have commenced construction of the Linden to Mabura Hill Road. Works are already ongoing on the first phase of the highway to link Linden to Lethem, as well as the construction of 45 concrete bridges along the route, with planned acceleration in 2023. An amount of \$11.9 billion is budgeted in 2023 to advance this historic project.

We are also committed to linking our major urban, rural, and hinterland communities to provide easy, safe, and reliable access. To this end, we are engaged in the following: the upgrading and widening of the Corentyne Highway from Palmyra to Crabwood Creek to a full four-lane highway. Contracts have already been awarded for the widening of the structures along the carriageway to accommodate a four-lane highway and to relocate the utilities. An amount of \$27.7 billion is allocated in *Budget 2023* to advance this project.

There is the upgrade of the East Coast railway embankment road into a four-lane highway from Sheriff Street to Orange

Nassau, continuing to the Mahaica River Bridge. There is the continuation of the existing East Coast Highway from Belfield to Orange Nassau and the construction of a second high-capacity bridge across the Hope Canal. Financing has already been secured, procurement has been advanced, surveys have commenced, and construction will intensify in 2023. An amount of \$16.6 billion is allocated for this project in *Budget 2023*.

There is the upgrade of the East Bank Highway from Prospect to Timehri. Preparatory works have started including the clearing of the right of way between Diamond and Good Success and the construction of an alternate bypass road through Diamond and Grove. Here again, financing has been secured and construction works will commence in 2023. *Budget 2023* allocates \$4.1 billion for this critical project.

There is the construction of the East Coast – East Bank Road linkage from Ogle to Eccles. This will be the first phase of a four-lane highway intended ultimately to link the East Coast of Demerara and the Soesdyke/Linden Highway. Works are already ongoing and will be accelerated in 2023. *Budget 2023* provides an amount of \$10.3 billion to advance this project.

There is the rehabilitation of the Linden/Soesdyke Highway. Preparatory works have commenced, financing has been secured and construction will commence in 2023. *Budget 2023* provides an amount of \$5 billion to advance this project.

There is the construction of a four-lane highway from Meer-Zorgen to Schoonord, Phase 1 and Schoonord to Crane, Phase 2. Work has already commenced and Phase 3, Crane to Parika is currently under review and is likely to commence late in 2023 also.

There is the construction of the Wismar Bridge. This is a new bridge across the Demerara River at Wismar to replace the existing old bridge and provide synergy with the Linden/Mabura corridor and onwards to Lethem. Thereby generating economic and commercial activity in Linden. Negotiations regarding financing are already well advanced.

There is the construction of the Kurupukari Crossing Bridge. This replaces the current river crossing pontoon. Here again, negotiations on financing are well advanced.

We are advancing the network of secondary roads that link villages, communities and towns to ease congestion and create alternative routes to our primary highways. Let me

with your permission, Sir, give a few examples that are visible and there for all to see.

There was the construction of the new Mocha to Diamond interlink road. This project was completed in 2021 with the designs having been prepared and left in the Ministry of Housing and Water when we demitted Office in 2015.

5.29 p.m.

Designs that were left languishing causing commuters on the East Bank to suffer and lose tens of thousands of person hours. Immediately on our return to Office, His Excellency the President resurrected this project, initiated it, and completed it. Today the Mocha to Diamond interlink road is there for all to see.

The construction of a four-lane highway from Mandela Avenue to Eccles in a beautifully engineered roundabout. This project was completed in 2022 and facilitates the reduction of traffic congestion along the East Bank corridor.

Upgraded the Sheriff Street to Mandela Avenue Road. After re-engaging fresh negotiations with the contractor following issues that stalled the project under the previous Government, works recommenced and were substantially completed in 2022. Today, commuters traverse in much comfort and safety on this modern thoroughfare, facilitating business activity once again returning to the "street that never sleeps".

Additionally, we have invested in several farm to market access roads that open vast new lands for productive endeavours and link to markets for commercial and industrial activities. These include the Parika to Goshen Road and the Sand Hills to Makouria link. Already works are well advanced on the clearing of the alignment, coupled with other preliminary activities. Works will continue in 2023. For which purpose *Budget 2023* provides over \$500 million. The construction of the No 52 and No. 58 farm to market roads. These are intended to open in excess of 40,000 acres of arable agricultural land; and the construction of the Ituni to Tacama road in the intermediate savannahs, to which I have referred earlier to support the agricultural ventures in corn and soya bean. *Budget 2023* allocates a sum of \$218 million to move this project forward.

The list goes on. I will only mention two other major transformative projects that are worthy of a special highlight, such as the construction of the New Demerara River Bridge, the first high span, four-lane permanent hybrid concrete and cable-stayed structure. Preparatory works have commenced

with an aggressive work programme to advance construction in 2023. In 2023, \$5.2 billion is allocated.

Finally, a construction of an ocean-going vessel to ply the Georgetown to Northwest route, bringing long overdue relief to commuters on that route. The ferry has been completed, it has departed India on route to Guyana and it is expected to arrive in Port Georgetown early this year. An amount of \$675 million is allocated in *Budget 2023*.

Recognising how critical local community roads and streets are to facilitate ease of access and quality of life for our citizens, we have embarked on a major upgrade of community roads. To this end, a total of \$41.2 billion was spent in 2022. In 2023, we have budgeted a further \$38.5 billion to construct, rehabilitate and maintain community roads, particularly in underserved and previously neglected areas.

In the Hinterland, \$3.4 billion was spent in 2022 on the upgrading of critical roads, we have now budgeted an additional \$5 billion, for works in such areas as Moruca, Port Kaituma, Issano, North Pakaraimas and Butakari and elsewhere of course.

In 2023, amounts totalling \$136.1 billion have been allocated to enhance our roads and bridges network across the country, including of course the transformative projects mentioned above.

## ii. Air Transport

It goes without saying that hinterland airstrips are critical to facilitate ease of access and last year we expended \$600 million towards airstrips, in places like, Lethem, Baramita, Paramakatoi and Kaieteur. Having commence several of these projects in 2022 its anticipated in 2023 that three airstrips – Eteringbang, Karisparu and Ekereku Bottom – will be completed during the first half of this year and *Budget 2023* has allocated an amount of \$1.6 billion for their completion and at the same time, for the rehabilitation of other airstrips such as, Paruima, Imbaimadai and Matthew's Ridge and maintenance of airstrips in other locations.

## iii. River Transport

I have already referred to the new ocean-going vessel that would be plying the Georgetown to Northwest routes. Last year we invested in rehabilitating and dry docking a number of vessels, the MV Barima, MV Makouria, MV Sabanto and MV Kanawan. We commence work on the ML Thompson, ML David P Seamang and Split Barge. Is it not named after

the former Minister? [**Bishop Edghill:** Yes.] I did not realise that it looked suspiciously familiar. ML David P named after the incumbent Minister at the time. This year, a further \$2 billion is allocated to improve the operation of our sea and river transport fleet, including the dry docking of the Sandaka.

We will also be rehabilitating stellingings and in 2023, an amount of \$1.7 billion is budgeted to rehabilitate stellingings including those at Kumaka, Morawhanna, Port Kaituma, Goods Wharf at Kingston, Rosignol, New Amsterdam, and Bartica.

To support and augment our river transport fleet, a new pilot launch was acquired in 2022 at a cost of approximately \$500 million. In 2023, we will enhance our under-sea surveying and mapping activities by acquiring a multi-beam sonar with accessories and software. We will be acquiring a tug to support our navigational needs and we will construct and rehabilitate several navigational aids in the Demerara River and Mora Passage. An amount of \$1 billion is budgeted for these initiatives.

It goes without saying that we face an existential threat from coastal and riverain inundation, much has been said about this already. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** We could name the town 'Norton'] Sir, perhaps if His Excellency President Granger has seen it fit to extend the privilege of ministerial office to the now Opposition Leader, we might have also have a barge called 'The ML Aubrey N'.

#### c. Sea and River Defense

We have already undertaken interventions across various areas, I will not list all of them in the interest of time because I still have much to say. Suffice it to say that in 2023 the budget provides an amount of \$4.9 billion allocated towards the protection and preservation of our sea and river defences and the rip-rap sea defence structures will be undertaken in areas, such as: Abrams Zuil, Anna Catherina, Zeeburg, Better Hope, Belvedere, Joppa, Eversham and Speightland.

### E. Investing in Our People

#### a. Health

I turn now to our social sector. First investing in our people. This House has frequently considered and debated the state of the health sector that was inherited in 2020, a sector that was woefully ill-prepared to contain the proliferation of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) virus. Since returning to Office, we have resolve to deliver world class healthcare and

to this end, \$74.5 billion was expended for healthcare delivery in 2022. I am now pleased to announce that *Budget 2023* allocates a total of \$84.9 billion for the sector. Let me address first of all, facilities, equipment and drugs–pharmaceuticals.

#### Facilities, Equipment and Drugs

We have announced proprietary work for the construction of six modern regional hospitals and a state of the art world class paediatric and maternal hospital. In 2022, an amount of \$11.9 billion was paid as mobilisation advance, and proprietary work including site preparations. Additionally, in 2022 we completed the retrofitting of the Festival City Polyclinic. We spent \$1 billion on the upgrade of the existing infrastructure across in total 258 Health Facilities in all regions, all with the aim of improving quality of care and patient experience.

In 2023 we will witness a sharp and rapid positive transformation of infrastructure in the Healthcare system. Let me give a few examples. First, the advance infrastructural works for the paediatric and maternal hospital and six regional hospitals to which I have just referred. An amount of \$13.1 billion is allocated for those projects. Commence the rehabilitation, expansion and reconstruction of the Georgetown, New Amsterdam and Linden hospitals, as well as four telemedicine centres in regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. The former provide well known critical service to our most populated urban centres, the latter are intended to be modern facilities that will deploy ICT (Information and Communications Technology) based technology, computer based technology to facilitate real time, remote diagnosis and treatment, thereby bringing modern healthcare to remote indigenous communities and remote indigenous populations. An amount of \$1.8 billion is allocated in *Budget 2023* for that. Complete the design for and commence construction of the Bartica Regional Hospital. An amount of \$830 million is allocated in *Budget 2023* for that purpose. Retrofitting and upgrading health centres, health posts, and other facilities across the country, here again to further improve patient experience. An amount of \$1 billion is allocated in *Budget 2023* for that purpose.

5.44 p.m.

Construct and rehabilitate health science training facilities in regions 2 and 6. An amount of \$620 million is allocated for that. The upgrade of the Karasabai, Annai and Sand Creek health centres into district hospitals, providing radiology and



laboratory services. An amount of \$237 million is provided for that in *Budget 2023*.

We recognise too the importance of upgrading our stock of medical and non-medical equipment. We spent \$2.1 billion in 2022 to upgrade the equipment fleet of our public healthcare system. We will spend a further \$2.5 billion purchasing medical equipment for our medical facilities. In relation to materials management and supply management of pharmaceuticals, we are investing in increases in storage capacity, improving storage conditions for cold chain products, providing decentralised training of pharmacy assistants for more effective pharmaceutical supply management, and in 2023 Sir, we aim to fulfil over 80% of all requests made for drugs and medical supplies.

#### Human Resource Capacity

We should mention of course human resource capacity because with the building out of these facilities and in particular the development of capabilities in the hinterland regions, we want to make sure that we have the human resource (HR) capacity to meet the needs of the new and expanded system.

Let me focus in particular on the hinterland. Last year, we deployed an additional 52 doctors and 53 nurses to augment the existing complement in the hinterland regions. For the first time in recent years, I am advised that residence of White Water, Shulinab and Monkey Mountain can now visit a resident doctor in their respective villages. In addition to the investment in health sciences training facilities, over \$500 million is allocated this year for the training of healthcare professionals.

#### Non-Communicable Diseases including Mental Health

In 2022, we ramped up our screening capabilities and surpassed our target screening 27,000 persons for major non-communicable diseases. In 2023, we aim to achieve 50,000. We completed or substantially completed the Lusignan Diabetic Clinic. That clinic is going to be operationalised in the first quarter of this year, providing critical care for diabetic patients. We have expanded our public communication and education campaigns on lifestyle disease and we will be doing more of this in 2023.

In the area of mental health which also falls under this category and is managed under the same programme in the Ministry of Health, last year we successfully piloted two important pieces of legislation – the Suicide Prevention Act

and the Mental Health Protection and Promotion Act. Works advanced on the expansion of the mental health ward at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). Once completed, this will increase capacity and service delivery capabilities, and in 2023, we have budgeted additional resources for rehabilitation works at the National Psychiatric Hospital, and we are currently at an advance stage of exploring options for further expansion, modernisation and upgrading of that facility.

#### Communicable Diseases

We have budgeted a sum of \$88 million for the procurement of an additional consignment of long-lasting insecticidal bed nets to defend over 132,000 persons against malaria. In tuberculosis management, we conducted 5,275 tests in 2022 and we are going to be ramping up even further our testing activity in 2023.

#### Maternal and Child Health

I have already referred to the world class paediatric hospital. In 2022, we completed a maternal waiting home at Moruca, this is functional; a home at Kato and the maternity ward at New Amsterdam are advanced and are expected to be operationalised this year, and a maternal waiting home at Mabaruma is also expected to be completed this year.

These investments will help to reduce maternal mortality, which currently stands at an estimated 112 per 100,000 at the end of 2022, a statistic that we would like to reduce and ideally reduce and completely eliminate. Reducing this will, of course, be further aided by the training of 29 traditional birth attendants in regions 1 and 9, the purchase of over \$250 million of related equipment funded in *Budget 2023* and expanded training of health care providers in family planning. In 2023, we will launch a number of initiatives, including one that aims at expectant mothers in the hinterland having at least one ultrasound, and being visited at least once by an obstetrician during her pregnancy, and we will roll out nationwide for new mothers screening for post-partum depression, all as part of improving the quality, depth and range of services we provide in the maternal and childcare space.

#### b. Education

Turning Sir, to education. Our Government is committed of course to fulfilling our Manifesto promise of increasing access to education for all, including universal, primary and secondary education, increase access to tertiary education and technical and vocational education, and of course, in

raising quality across the entire system. This is of course for the aim of ensuring that young Guyanese are equipped with the skills that are needed in the world of today, and in the economy of today and tomorrow, and also to ensure that the new and emerging economy is able to draw from our labour market, from a pool of skilled labour, able to meet the needs of this new and emerging economy.

In 2022, we invested \$72.8 billion in the education sector. In 2023, a sum of \$94.4 billion is allocated to further improve access to and quality of education.

#### Improving Performance Across All Levels and Curricula Development

We recognise the importance of the impact that the pandemic had on the performance of our students. We of course adopted and are adopting innovative strategies to fill that learning gap.

We recognise that curriculum reform is a key component of delivering quality education. We have worked on developing new curricula for nursery and primary levels. We would be rolling these out in 2023 and providing training on their implementation.

#### Improving School Building Infrastructure

Turning now to infrastructure. In pursuit of our objective of improving access to education, we must ensure that there are sufficient schools to house all learners in all ten regions of our country. In recognition of this, a comprehensive school mapping exercise has been launched and is expected to be completed in the first half of 2023. We acknowledge that school infrastructure, particularly in the hinterland and riverain areas, poses some peculiar challenges but we are committed to providing a quality learning environment for all students, and for this reason the mapping exercise will clearly detail specific infrastructure enhancement needs for individual schools at all levels. The results of this exercise will inform immediate and long-term interventions regarding school building infrastructure.

In 2022, construction works were completed at the Jawalla and Vryheid's Lust nursery schools; the Swan and Eteringbang primary schools; and on the Annai secondary school. For 2023, we will build, upgrade, and maintain educational facilities and other facilities, including nursery, primary and secondary schools in such areas as Hosororo, Patentia, Orealla, Prospect, Good Hope, Yarrowkabra, completing in some instances schools that are already under way, North Ruimveldt and Diamond, and of course like I

said, the school mapping exercise will inform future decisions on locations of schools, both long-term and short-term intervention. We will also commence the construction of facilities to house the displaced students of St. George's and Christ Church secondary schools. Additionally, we will take actions to provide short-term accommodation where there is overcrowding, and in such places where solutions such as the shift system have been deployed to overcome the problem of overcrowding. In *Budget 2023*, an amount of \$12.4 billion is allocated to improve education expenditure.

#### Improving Access through Cash Transfers

I have already alluded to the reintroduction of the Because We Care cash grant which has provided an effective means to support families of school aged children to improve attendance. This initiative saw a total cash transfer of \$5.9 billion to the families of over 196,000 school aged children, including those attending private schools. For school feeding, we will continue the roll out of the National School Feeding Programme providing juice and biscuits, breakfast and hot meals to over 85,000 pupils and *Budget 2023* allocates a sum of \$2.1 billion for the National School Feeding Programme.

#### Textbooks

In keeping with our commitment of delivering universal education again, we have emphasised the need to ensure that each child has access to adequate learning resources. In 2022, over \$1.4 billion in textbooks were procured. *Budget 2023* I am pleased to announce, provide allocations totalling \$3.4 billion to procure textbooks for use at primary and secondary levels.

#### Reforming Teacher Training

We intend to have all teachers fully trained by 2025. The attainment of a trained teacher ratio of 100%. To this end, the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) has already started expanding intake and will continue to expand intake to accommodate approximately 2,000 trainees every year using a blended modality.

#### Tertiary Education

Over the last two years, 6,100 students graduated from the University of Guyana providing much needed skills in the work force. In 2023, an amount of \$3.7 billion is allocated for the management and expansion of operations at the University of Guyana Turkeyen and Berbice campuses. Additionally, still on tertiary education, we have seen

already the remarkable success of the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship programme which has already awarded since its introduction in 2021, nearly 14,000 scholarships. *Budget 2023* allocates a sum of \$1.8 billion for the GOAL scholarship programme, catering for 8,555 new students and 1047 continuing students. By that measure alone, in 2023, we would have already delivered a target that we had set ourselves for 2025. Promise is delivered.

5.59 p.m.

### Technical and Vocational Training

It goes without saying that Technical and Vocational Education Training (TVET) is extremely important. Technical skills are needed, particularly given the direction in which our economy is going. We have already invested heavily in TVET. We spent \$2.1 billion to increase training programmes offered by our TVET training institutions in 2022. We trained approximately 3,655 persons under these programmes. We have started work to improve the quality of the training, revising the curriculum to align the delivery with the Caribbean Vocational Qualification standards, the CVQ as it is known, and added nine courses to the Secondary Competency Certificate Programme (SCCP), including such areas that are particularly needed in the new and emerging sectors, in the sectors that require particularly specialised skills, things like crop production, mechanical engineering, electrical technology, mechanical technology, and so on. Many of these people are now employed in our emergent oil and gas sector, I mean the contractors to the operators in the oil and gas sector.

Works are progressing on the construction of Practical Instructional Centres at Beterverwagting, Fellowship, and Hopetown, and Practical Instructional Departments at Northwest Secondary, Bartica Secondary, and St. Ignatius Secondary. All of these are expected to be completed in 2023. Significantly, work will commence in 2023 for the construction of a Guyana Technical Training College at Port Mourant. That will be the premier institution offering oil and gas training. It will incorporate the existing Port Mourant Training School that has already produced generations of world class technicians who are sought after worldwide. In addition to incorporating and upgrading the existing Port Mourant Training School, the National Oil and Gas Institute will be housed there, and the Tourism and Hospitality Training Institute will also be accommodated within that mega facility.

The Board of Industrial Training (BIT) will continue its work to deliver TVET programmes countrywide. An amount of \$488.5 million is allocated for the BIT to advance its work. Importantly, because we would like to improve our capability to track the ultimate employment and career destinations of the persons we have trained under the TVET programme, tracer studies will be done to ensure that we are able to understand better the initial and ultimate career destinations and, therefore, be better informed as we customise our programme for new entrants. In total, in 2023 we have budgeted \$2.5 billion for the TVET programme.

### c. Housing

Turning now to Housing, successive People's Progressive Party/Civic Governments have earned pride of place for our housing programme. Where abandoned and neglected fields once existed, bustling and thriving communities now go about their daily existence. We are opening new lands; we are putting in place the requisite infrastructure; we are accelerating the allocation process; we are supporting those who require or prefer pre-built homes; and we are providing easier access to finances.

In 2022, we spent \$28.2 billion on the continuation of infrastructural works in new areas such as Onderneeming, Charity, Leonora, Cummings Lodge, Great Diamond, Golden Grove, Non Pariel, Enterprise, Experiment, Williamsburg, Lethem, and Linden, realising 10,430 service lots. Notably, since we assumed Office, this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government has allocated more than 20,000 house lots in new and existing housing schemes, placing us firmly on target to achieve and exceed the distribution of 50,000 house lots during our first term in Office.

We have diversified the housing solutions offered beyond house lots. To this end, housing development for young professionals is progressing with the completion of homes at Prospect. Work is ongoing on the construction of houses, like I said, in Prospect, Little Diamond, Onderneeming, Cummings Lodge, Amelia's Ward, Williamsburg, and Hampshire that I mentioned earlier, Ordnance Fortlands, and Great Diamond and Little Diamond, amongst others. In recognition of the circumstances of deserving cases, we have created an innovative home ownership mechanism.

We launched a home construction assistance programme in collaboration with financial institutions that will provide loans to persons for the construction of their houses. To date, some 194 persons were prequalified and accessed loans. We

established a cement and steel subsidy programme to provide steel and cement to home builders constructing homes. In relation to 600 allottees in Region 9, we announced the grant of \$1 million each to commence the construction of their homes in that new housing development. We will be offering loans of up to \$2 million, at a rate of 3.5%, under the Lethem Housing Support Programme in collaboration with partners. To that end, over 258 persons have already prequalified, and the list goes on.

Keeping a close eye on the future and the changing preferences of the market, we enacted the Condominium Act in 2022. It would be recalled in this very Chamber that lays the foundation for alternative building solutions, which are tried, tested and proven in other markets. For this we anticipate a new and emerging demand in Guyana, including from our rapidly returning diaspora and expatriate community looking for a single unit or smaller housing solutions. We are currently developing and will shortly be implementing, making a reality, a single window approval system for building permits to make it easier to navigate the process from land allocation to home construction. We recently signed a contract for the development of the Information Technology (IT) platform.

*Budget 2023* allocates the sum of \$54.5 billion for housing development in new and existing areas. This will include the construction of roads, drains, bridges, installation of utilities. Areas will include Mabaruma, Oronoque, Buxton, St. Joseph, Stewartville, Wakenaam, Block A and B Hope, Success, Balthyock, and Number 75. Government will also undertake infrastructural works in regularised areas such as Charity, Tuschen, Chateau Margot, Block SS Sophia, Belvedere, and Amelia's Ward. More lands will be acquired for new housing areas across the country.

#### d. Water and Sanitation

Our Government continues to deliver on its promise to the population by improving and expanding the water supply systems across the country. Improved access and enhanced quality of water has positively impacted the quality of life and overall public health. In this regard, we expended \$9.9 billion in 2022, and *Budget 2023* allocates \$17.7 billion to improve the water sector.

##### Access to Potable Water

This will advance Transmission and Distribution (T&D) networks and mains. In fact, we have already started expanding T&D networks and mains in several areas,

including Richmond, Dartmouth, Parika, Hydronie, *et cetera*. I will not list all of them here again, in the interest of time. We have already started work even in Georgetown, with the distribution networks along Church Street to provide improved service quality and delivery to over 35% of the residents of Georgetown. This is the work that is being done from Shelterbelt to East Street.

In 2023, we are going to be upgrading water transmission systems in a number of areas, including Pouderoyen, Vergenoegen, La Parfait Harmonie, Caledonia, Cummings Lodge. New wells will be constructed in Onderneeming, Lima, Central Ruimveldt, Cummings Lodge, Caledonia, and Amelia's Ward, just to name a few.

Because we want to ensure the delivery of potable water to our hinterland and riverain communities, we have already drilled 15 wells in a number of areas, and we will continue that work. In fact, the hinterland's access to potable water supply has now increased to 75%, up from 46% at the end of 2020, and we are on track to achieving 100% by 2025. In 2023, sums totalling \$1.4 billion will be spent on the further upgrade and extension of water supply systems and construction of wells in several hinterland communities.

##### Water Quality and Service

I am still on water supply, but this time on water quality and service. We target an increase in treated water coverage for the coastland, from 52% currently to 90% by 2025. With this target in mind, we have already upgraded water treatment plants. In 2022, we did work at Covent Garden, Grove, and Eccles, benefitting more than 60,000 residents. We will advance work, in 2023, on the construction of seven new water treatment plants at Onderneeming, Parika, Wales, La Parfait Harmonie, Caledonia, Cummings Lodge, and Bachelors Adventure. Further, 12 water treatment plants, located at major population centres, Vergenoegen, Fellowship, Pouderoyen, Eccles, Covent Garden, Grove, Betterhope, Mon Repos, Friendship, Cotton Tree, New Amsterdam, and Port Mourant will be rehabilitated. Water treatment plants will also be constructed at Charity to Walton Hall, Leguan, Wakenaam, Bush Lot, and Tain to Number 50 Village. These interventions will improve water quality for more than 250,000 residents at a total cost of \$13 billion provided for in *Budget 2023*.

##### Sanitation

We have aggressively pursued the implementation of a solid waste management programme that results in timely and safe

collection and disposal of garbage. We have prioritised continuous community clean up and maintenance programmes, and the operation and upgrading of Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill Site and others in various localities including Rose Hall, Belle Vue, Lethem, and Lusignan. In 2022, a total of \$1.4 billion was spent towards solid waste management.

*Budget 2023* provides an amount of \$1.9 billion to support infrastructural development, the operation of existing and additional landfill sites, and for the solid waste clean-up programme. Provision is made for the facility, the access road and bridge at Blairmont, the closure of dump sites in Charity, Lima, De Edward, further upgrades and construction of stormwater ponds and a landfill gas management system at Haags Bosch and upgrades to landfill sites at Kildonan, Bon Success, and Kara Kara.

6.14 p.m.

e. Culture and Arts

Mr. Speaker, even as our Government undertakes a physical transformation of our country, we consider it of equal importance that the moment be seized to harness and fortify our rich cultural diversity. Indeed, the preservation and promotion of our unique Guyanese cultural identity will be essential to the definition of who we are as a nation both now and in the long-term. Additionally, of course, it is important that we recognise the vast economic potential of our cultural assets and that our young people view cultural endeavours as a viable and attractive proposition.

Mr. Speaker, I referred earlier to our hosting of the Caribbean Premier League (CPL) Cricket Carnival where we partnered with the private sector, created a stage for 89 local artistes to showcase their abundant talents, and, in 2023, we will, of course, repeat this. We also launched the studio subsidy for recording which will be issued in 2023. Provisions are also made for a recording studio to aid in the promotion of creative arts. In 2023, 30 artistes will receive Cultural and Creative Industry grants of \$1 million each to support their creative venture, expanding our national cultural inventory.

We have budgeted \$1.4 billion to directly support culture and arts in Guyana including \$100 million towards the Endowment Fund for the Arts. Within this, \$277 million has been allocated for the preservation of our cultural heritage sites, including monuments, museums, and historic buildings, among others, which will be upgraded and

rehabilitated. Last year, also, heralded the return of the Guyana Prize for Literature, after a hiatus of six years. In addition, we have budgeted within culture, a sum of \$100 million in *Budget 2023* to support activities associated with the observance of the International Decade for People of African Descent.

f. Sports

Turning now to sports – on our assumption to Office, our sport and recreational facilities across the country, like so many other things, were in a state of abject neglect. It was, therefore, no secret why Guyana could not have made substantial contributions to regional and international competitions. To address this travesty, our Government gave specific commitments in our Manifesto to upgrade sporting facilities and expand access to such facilities countrywide.

Beyond the CPL 2022, we saw at the regional level, the return of the Inter-Guiana games to these shores after a five-year hiatus. We were able to upgrade in the public/private partnership, the South Dakota Circuit for motor racing. We partnered with the Guyana Football Federation (GFF) and with corporate Guyana on the ‘One Guyana’ President’s Cup, a football tournament and inter-regional football tournament, which was launched and successfully executed and witnessed the remarkable footballing talent of our country being mobilised in a single competition that led to a significant increase in national and international exposure, including the spotting of some talent by international talent scouts.

In order to promote community level sporting activity since we have assumed Office, we have upgraded a total of 54 community grounds across Regions 1 to 6, and 8 to 9. We have provided lights for grounds at 21 locations. We have conducted rehabilitation works at the Guyana National Stadium and we have completed synthetic tracks in Regions 6 and 10.

Mr. Speaker, 2023 bodes even better, more brightly than 2022, for sports investment in Guyana. Provision has been set aside for the establishment of a National Cricket Academy, with the construction of the state-of-the-art stadium at Palmyra also slated for this year. Additionally, provision is made for other sports infrastructure and development, including the construction of multipurpose sporting facilities in the hinterland, rehabilitation works at the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall, construction of stands and grass mounds in Regions 2 and 6, extension of the squash court at the National Racquet Centre, and the procurement of

sports gear. In addition, the sum of \$250 million is budgeted for the continued improvement of community grounds across the country. Overall, the sum of \$4.3 billion has been allocated in *Budget 2023* for the further development of sports.

g. Youth

Needless to say, our young people are the future of our country, and we are resolutely committed to investing in them to mould even better, even sharper and more creative young minds.

In 2022, the President's Youth Advisory Council was launched to coincide with the International Day of the Youth. This body is tasked with sharing Government's youth perspectives on matters such as education, mental health, constitutional reform and primary health care and agriculture. In this way, we are able to ensure that the views of our young people are heard and carefully considered by Government's policymaking architecture.

In 2022, we made tremendous efforts to develop our youth through the Youth Entrepreneur and Skills Training (YEST) programme. Tools and equipment were acquired, grants were distributed, an inaugural National Youth Science Fair was held, and more than 3,500 young Guyanese participated. More than 1,300 young people from Regions 2, 3, 4 and 5 participated in robotics training, as a result of which 12 robotics hubs have been established.

We will continue to procure tools and equipment for welding and fabrication. We will expand our YEST centres and our President's Youth Award Republic of Guyana (PYARG) programme to all 10 administrative regions. We will continue to provide robotics training and establish more robotics hubs across the country.

To this end, a sum of \$960.2 million has been budgeted for youth development.

h. Children

A child's wellbeing is at the heart and soul of the sustainable development of a nation. We recognise that addressing, apart from investing in education, early childhood education or the education of our young people, pressing social issues, such as the scourge of child abuse, requires a whole-of-society approach. To this end, we will strengthen partnerships with non-state actors in the area of childcare and development, and the prevention of child abuse, including through an allocation of \$103.9 million to partner with child advocacy

centres to ensure we reach vulnerable children in all 10 regions.

We will also provide support to establishing additional day care centres, day and night care centres and training for childcare providers and protectors. We have the duty to ensure that a healthy, safe and stimulating environment is cultivated for our children. In 2023, the sum of \$100 million is allocated for establishment of these centres.

i. Senior Citizens

We remain steadfast and committed to the health, well-being and welfare of our senior citizens. In keeping with our Manifesto promises, in just two years we have increased old age pensions, reinstated water subsidies, reduced taxes on basic food and other household items and improved access to Government services, including health care, *et cetera*.

In just two years, old age pensions have increased by 40%, benefitting over 69,000 senior citizens. Our pensioners have also benefitted from a one-off cash-grant. Twenty-eight thousand, four hundred and fifty of our pensioners benefit from subsidised water charges.

Our senior citizens will continue to benefit from Government's improved care services. To this end, 6,300 elderly persons benefitted from home-based care in Regions 2, 3, 5, 6 and 9. Five hundred and ninety persons were trained in elderly care in 2022 and another 750 are targeted in 2023. *Budget 2023* provides an amount of \$100 million to commence the construction of a new care home for senior citizens.

j. Women and Gender

In keeping with our promise of empowering our citizens, several initiatives were implemented across all sectors to ensure that women and girls, as well as men and boys, are able to participate fully in the development of our country.

We expanded the Women Innovation and Investment Network (WIIN) programme from 2,170 beneficiaries in 2021 to 6,193 beneficiaries in 2022. Those beneficiaries would have gained employable skills through this programme and 3,000 WIIN graduates received a one-off \$50,000 cash grant to help them use their skills to start a small business. Provision is made in 2023 for the continuation of this programme, targeting an additional 6,000 persons.

I referred earlier to the importance of provision of childcare services. We have provided 444 essential workers with a stipend of three months for childcare. We have disbursed one-off grants to day care facilities. In 2023, as I just mentioned, we will be constructing day and night care centres to benefit women and men in need of those services.

We cannot speak to issues of gender without also addressing the boys and men of our society. In 2022, the launch of the Men on Mission (MoM) programme by His Excellency the President invited our nation's menfolk, to provide coaching, mentoring and direction. MoM, as it is abbreviated, is geared towards creating a new movement that fosters greater appreciation among men for the way they take individual and collective action and model responsible behaviour. Building role models for boys to emulate so that they enter adult life as responsible and respectful citizens will bode well for gender relations and development as a whole.

k. Persons with Disabilities

Turning to persons with disabilities - In 2022, persons 18 years and older living with permanent disabilities started to benefit from Public Assistance support of \$14,000 per month for life. In addition, parents of children living with disabilities received a one off-cash grant of \$100,000 per child. Over 205 persons received assistive aids, including wheelchairs, folding canes and walkers. Over 170 persons living with disabilities were trained in such areas of garment construction, social media marketing, audio/video editing and computer skills.

6.29 p.m.

We have been proactively improving access to services for persons with disabilities. In this regard, in 2022, construction of the Mahaica Disability Complex was completed to provide skills training for employment opportunities and empowerment of persons. We began constructing a new care centre for children living with disabilities at the Mahaica Hospital, along with a state-of-the-art business centre in Region 6 to promote entrepreneurial opportunities. Furthermore, two wheelchair buses were acquired to provide transportation for residents of the Mahaica Hospital and Training Complex. We intend to ensure that transportation is available at all institutions representing persons living with disabilities in 2023.

l. Victims of Domestic Violence

We are steadfast on no-tolerance for domestic violence or, indeed, any form of violence. We have focused on numerous interventions to curb gender-based violence in our country.

Key interventions to date include the 914 hotline and the iMatter applications for immediate reporting of violence, the Survivors' Advocates Programme which expanded counselling services, and the COPSQUAD2000 Initiative which saw over 1,476 police officers trained to deal with domestic violence matters.

Later this year, we will open two domestic violence shelters which will provide much needed refuge for women and children fleeing violence. We will also continue to partner with Help and Shelter... [Ms. Manickchand: *(Inaudible)*] Yes, Hon. Minister Manickchand, I took note of the question. Nevertheless... Furthermore, we will continue to support Help and Shelter given the services they provide to women and families fleeing domestic violence. The sum of \$56 million is allocated for 2023.

Notably, we have maintained our Tier 1 ranking in the 2022 United States of America (USA) State Department Human Trafficking Report, and we have completed a draft of the Combating of Trafficking in Persons Bill which is currently being reviewed by stakeholders. Furthermore, I mentioned the COPSQUAD2000 Initiative earlier and we are also investing in complementary initiatives such as domestic violence rooms at the police stations and courts, and domestic violence shelters.

In 2022, support to legal aid services saw 7,597 persons benefiting from such services. We will continue to partner with the legal aid clinics to ensure that vulnerable persons are able to access that much needed service.

In pursuit of the implementation of all of these initiatives which fall under the auspices of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Protection, that Ministry spent \$30.3 billion in 2022 and, in 2023, the sum of \$40.4 billion is allocated to advance all these initiatives.

m. Amerindian and Hinterland Development

When we returned to Office, we were greeted with an array of issues facing our Amerindian brothers and sisters. We committed to reprioritising our first people's education, health, housing, infrastructure, social well-being, employment, youth development and development of the village economy. We resuscitated the Community Service Officers' (CSO) Programme, we improved agricultural support by distributing tractors, boats, engines and all-terrain

vehicles (ATVs), we reinvigorated the Amerindian Land Titling (ALT) Programme, and we invested heavily in hinterland agriculture.

In 2023, an amount of \$500 million has been budgeted to advance Amerindian Land Titling activities.

The National Toshaos' Council (NTC) Conference was reconvened in 2022, following a hiatus occasioned by the onset of the Coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19). We will continue to support the National Toshaos' Council, including by providing financial support to complete the construction of the NTC Secretariat building, which started in 2022. I am pleased to announce that *Budget 2023* provides financing to complete and furnish the NTC headquarters in the amount \$69.7 million.

To further develop Amerindian communities, a sum of \$2.7 billion is budgeted for the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF), which includes training in hospitality and tourism, business development and other areas, and Presidential grants to over 200 communities. Several commercial, eco-tourism, agricultural and infrastructural projects are also catered for. Let me emphasise that, in addition to the investments I referred to earlier in relation to hinterland airstrips, we are also investing in hinterland roads which will improve access to Amerindian communities.

On internet connectivity, we have deployed very small aperture terminal (VSAT) equipment which is now serving over 60,000 residents in 161 communities with internet service. Ninety-three hinterland communities have benefitted from grants to prepare spaces to host Information and Communications Technology (ICT) hubs. It would be recalled that this was another project financed under the original Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) through the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF) for which financing was already secured and mobilised and the project was already designed. This was one of the projects that was left languishing.

In fact, on our return to Office, IT equipment had been purchased but was sitting parked in a sealed and padlocked warehouse while the Amerindian communities were left waiting for that equipment. We have resuscitated that programme and are now rolling out its implementation. Work has also commenced... In total, I should say a sum of \$500 million is budgeted to advance ICT initiatives in hinterland communities.

As I said earlier, we have resumed the CSO programme. We have provided training to 372 Amerindian leaders and 254 CSOs have been trained in various areas.

An additional \$93.3 million is budgeted to support students under the Hinterland Scholarship Programme, allowing our boys and girls from hinterland communities to be able to attend educational institutions.

It would be remiss of me not to reiterate at this point that our Indigenous brothers and sisters will be at the forefront of our Government's efforts to mobilise and utilise our climate financing with, like I indicated earlier, 15% from the revenue received from the sale of our carbon credits going towards supporting village sustainability plans in our Amerindian villages and communities.

A total of \$4.7 billion is allocated for Amerindian development programmes and initiatives.

## **F. Improved Governance and Institutional Reforms**

### **a. Governance**

We reaffirm the pledges contained in our 2020 Manifesto committing our Government to constitutional rule of law, separation of powers of the Executive, the Legislature, and the Judiciary, transparency and accountability, independence of the constitutional bodies, continuous reform and accountability of the criminal justice system, equitable access and distribution of goods and services provided by the State, specific and targeted programmes to reduce poverty and support the poor and vulnerable, and reducing disparities between urban, rural and hinterland communities all aimed at ensuring that 'no one is left behind'.

On this occasion, I will not enumerate in detail all of our remarkable achievements in this regard. Suffice to say that key and critical constitutional bodies that are already a part of the architecture of constitutional governance are already appointed and functioning. Consultative processes with civil society for nominations to various commissions have been reactivated. Indeed, there are nominations pending for several constitutional commissions that will be brought shortly to this National Assembly. I am advised that immediately after this Budget would have been considered, these nominations will feature foremost amongst the priorities for the Parliamentary agenda.

Issues surrounding the appointment of the long-overdue Judicial Service Commission are on public record. I believe



this matter was addressed only recently by my distinguished Colleague, the Attorney General and we anticipate that this matter will be brought to a timely and early conclusion, as he announced.

Our focus continues to be on building our anti-corruption institutional capacity. We are due for mutual evaluation by the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF) and the United Nations (UN) Convention Against Corruption in 2023. We are also a member of the Commonwealth Caribbean Association of Integrity Commissions and Anti-Corruption Bodies and we will have the honour of hosting their annual Conference in 2023 which will provide an excellent forum for us to showcase our achievements and also to compare experiences with our colleagues across the region.

#### b. Justice Sector Strengthening

The preservation of public trust and the safety of our citizens can only be attained, needless to say, when justice prevails for all Guyanese. Our manifesto is *crystal clear* on the reform and accountability of the criminal justice system to ensure that justice is delivered in a timely manner. To this end, in 2022, Government spent \$4.4 billion for the enhancement of the justice sector and in 2023, has allocated \$6.2 billion.

With respect to modernising access to justice, the Kwakwani Magistrate's Court was commissioned in 2022. A most commendable achievement. I do not want to discourage the Attorney General from his applause. Hon. Attorney General, I would be happy to pause to allow you to respond in the appropriate manner to this excellent achievement. As I said, the Kwakwani Magistrate's Court was commissioned and, significantly, an additional eight courts are scheduled for completion in 2023. The Court of Appeal, Mabaruma, Port Kaituma, Vigilance, Cove and John, Mahaicony, Bartica, and Mahdia – are all slated for completion this year.

Information and Communications Technology is being deployed to improve the efficiency of the court system with SMART courts amongst the new projects intended to accelerate the provision of justice. An E-Litigation Programme, the deployment of technology to facilitate electronic litigation (e-litigation) for the Court of Appeal and the Georgetown High Court, as well as a Case Management System for the Magistrates' Courts are all intended to go live in 2023. Towards these and other initiatives, *Budget 2023* provides \$1.5 billion.

Investments are also being made to strengthen technical capacity. In particular, training such as the successfully completed Prosecutorial Programme at the University of Guyana (UG), increasing the number of court prosecutors countrywide, with the aim of reducing the need for pre-trial detention, is one example of an initiative being implemented in pursuit of this objective.

6.44 p.m.

Other initiatives include legislative interventions; the enactment of the Restorative Justice Act, paving the way for the use of alternative sentencing for specific categories of offences; the approval of amendments to the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (Control) Act; and removing custodial sentences for persons in possession of less than the specified threshold of cannabis. All of these measures would contribute to reducing the burden on the justice system.

In 2023, a number of other very important and special initiatives are targeted to advance the constitutional and law reform processes. These include the operationalising of the Constitutional Reform Commission; the work of the Law Reform Commission; the completion of the Revised Laws of Guyana; and the preparation and printing of the Law Reports of Guyana. I am sure the Attorney General will elaborate in due course, but I am pleased to announce – if you would forgive me for pre-empting him a little – that the new Laws of Guyana, the Laws of Guyana volumes that adorn our desk, the purple volumes as they are popularly known...we anticipate new law volumes being available by June of this year – consolidating and updating the full corpus of our statute. To support these initiatives, an amount of \$600 million has been provided.

Additionally, in the interest of expanding capacity of the justice sector, work will advance to improve the ease of access to legal education. In particular, having received the green light through the efforts of this Government, as represented so ably by the distinguished Attorney General, having had to retrieve and repair the damage done by his predecessor in relation to this very matter and having now obtained the green light from the Council of Legal Education (CLE), a feasibility study will be prepared in 2023 for the establishment of a regional law school in Guyana, within the framework of the CLE. This will cater for local, regional and, indeed, extra-regional students seeking to practice the law in the Caribbean, given the growing need for legal education and improved capacity in the legal profession in

Guyana and the region. I turn now to strengthening local government.

c. Strengthening Local Government

Here again, we inherited a lethargic system encouraged by the former Government and perpetuated by some Local Democratic Organs (LDOs). We have long recognised that robust local government architecture and systems support more sustainable communities. We improved infrastructure in communities. We preserved our history and culture, including providing support to the Georgetown municipality, finally to salvage and save the historic City Hall. We allocated funds to start constructing markets. We introduced the National Pathway Workers Project and others. In 2023, works will continue to upgrade existing structures at Charity, Parika, Leonora and Mon Repos.

We also successfully launched the National Pathway Workers Project and maintained the Community Enhancement Workers Programme, employing over 12,000 persons between these two programmes and helping to improve infrastructure, sanitary and environmental conditions in communities. In 2023, we will continue to commit to these programmes and the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) Programme with a total of \$13.5 billion budgeted.

Importantly, the upcoming Local Government Elections (LGEs) will serve as an important reminder of our commitment to good governance and transparency at the local level and will provide much needed renewal to the local government system.

d. Financial Sector Reform and Capital Market Development

An effective financial sector is a vital underpinning for our resilient transformation. Recognising the importance of this, we have embarked on developing a National Financial Inclusion Strategy, which aims to guarantee easy and equitable access to advantageous, safe and affordable financial products and services. Focus will also be placed on facilitating financial literacy as well as consumer empowerment and protection.

To emphasise the Government's commitment to making financial services readily accessible to citizens, we have launched, recently, an initiative designed to simplify the process of opening a bank account for low-risk customers. This is expected to ease the hassle that these customers

typically encounter, promote deeper financial intermediation and facilitate greater financial inclusion.

Similarly, we recognise that affordable and easy access to financing is critical for private sector growth and development. In this regard, and in the interest of promoting easier access to financing, we are committed to ensuring that movable collateral and financial receivables can be pledged as security for financing. In this regard, the necessary legal amendments will be enacted this year.

We also consider an efficient, deep and vibrant capital market to be an essential aspect of a modern financial system. Investors in the productive sector should be able to consider, as a viable option, the possibility of raising financing on the capital market. In order to advance this objective, we will be convening stakeholders, including the regulator, self-regulatory organisations, and the private sector, to identify practical actions that can be taken to promote capital market development.

e. Payment Systems

Similarly, we seek to implement a modern payment system. In keeping with our vision to modernise the payment architecture, the Real Time Gross Settlement System (RTGS) and Central Securities Depository Systems (CSDS) were fully integrated with an Automated Clearing House in 2021, forming the core of the National Payment System in 2022. With the operationalisation of the enhanced system in 2022, a total of 579,000 transactions were processed in the system, including, significantly, all Government pensions and salaries, except for those persons working in far, remote communities who do not have access to the banking system.

f. Public Administration and Public Financial Management

i. Revenue Management

Amongst other areas in which we will continue work to strengthen public administration and public financial management is revenue management – strengthening the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) with various measures which are elaborated in the printed version of my speech and which I will now refer to the House for a matter of placing it into the public record, but will not, again, in the interest of time, elaborate in my oral presentation today.

ii. Digital Solutions in Government

Similarly, the digital solutions in Government will deploy Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to improve the ease with which citizens are able to access government services. I mentioned the payment of salaries into bank accounts. We have deployed the Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) capability, strengthening the efficiency of the internal payment management system, paying, like I stated, almost all public servants directly into their bank accounts. We have the capability to disburse old age pensions directly into pensioners' bank accounts, obviating pensioners the need to line up and to visit the post offices or visit another location to collect their pensions. We have the capability. We have deployed the capability to do that. We have established the capability for online submission of the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) contributions. There is the digitalisation of house lot applications. The Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHPA) now accepts house lot applications online. There is the utilisation of online portals and mobile money applications for the payment of utilities, National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and taxes. Now, every public utility accepts online payment and payment by Mobile Money Guyana (MMG). Here, again, obviating the need for our citizens to join a line or to go out and take transportation and join a line to pay their bills.

We will continue to rollout additional digital solutions in every aspect of public services to ensure that we get to a point, ultimately, where simple Information Technology (IT) solutions are deployed so that our citizens do not have to physically get up to go to a government office to pick up an application form or to make a simple enquiry that could be answered on the internet.

### iii. National Insurance Scheme

Much has already been said of this and has been said on other occasions. We have significantly reduced the backlog of claims that are outstanding. We have significantly reduced the number of suspense and invalid numbers and suspense accounts in its database. We have rolled out an agenda of outreaches all aimed at resolving long outstanding problems. We are working with the Scheme to resolve also some of the internal and operational inefficiencies by which it is beset. Meanwhile, of course, as indicated last year, we recognise the challenges the Scheme faces in relation to its long-term viability and options to address this problem continue to be considered.

### iv Procurement

Similarly, our public procurement architecture is being overhauled, here again, having inherited a public procurement mechanism in disarray. We have increased the frequency of National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) meetings and board opens. We have started streaming these openings live. We have prepared and gazetted regulations bringing into operation the bidder's register. We have reintroduced and revised the standard bidding documents. We have designed a comprehensive range of Government training programmes on public procurement, and we are working on a management information system for NPTAB.

Additionally, of course, His Excellency the President has appointed a new Public Procurement Commission (PPC) and that Commission has already started its work and is in the discharges of its very important constitutionally assigned functions.

### v Data Systems Strengthening

Similarly, there is the strengthening data systems, in particular, that work is being led so ably by the Bureau of Statistics. I will, this evening, highlight only one issue in relation to the wide range of work that it is doing, in particular, the advancement of Census 2022. Here, I thank and compliment all who participated and expressed their public support for the census. Indeed, I know the distinguished Leader of the Opposition himself participated in a published census taking activity, as did His Excellency the President and the Hon. Prime Minister. The census is ongoing. The enumeration exercise is ongoing. We would like to urge continued support for this enumeration exercise because we want to make sure that every single house and every single person is counted.

### vi. Reducing Bureaucracy and Red Tape

I mentioned earlier the deployment of digital solutions. This comprises a small part of a larger suite of initiatives that we are implementing to reduce bureaucracy and red tape, not only using IT solutions but also reviewing some of the processes and systems in government with a view to identifying inefficiencies and eliminating them. That work has already started, and recommendations were identified. We anticipate this year that we will be implementing some of those recommendations.

## G. Foreign Relations and the Diaspora

### a. Foreign Relations

We continue, of course, to be completely committed to advancing our interest and priorities through a range of engagements with the international community, maintaining closer relations with all of our neighbours, and preserving and protecting, of course, our sovereignty and territorial integrity.

6.59 p.m.

It is widely known, of course, that the matter before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) regarding the Arbitral Award of 1899 is currently on the way. We will continue to advocate that issue vigorously, as we should. We continue to be fully committed to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) integration project. Early, we signed on to the enhanced cooperation protocol amending the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas and enabling groups of at least three Member States to seek enhanced cooperation amongst themselves, where deemed necessary and appropriate. It is also known, I believe, that we are seeking a non-permanent membership on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the 2024-2025 term. That work will continue.

b. The Diaspora

The diaspora comprises, of course, a vast body of talented human resources who have remained closely committed to their homeland. We created a unit in 2020 to facilitate effective implementation of diaspora projects. We hosted the first virtual diaspora conference which was a resounding success. We had several outreaches and engagements. In 2023, we will continue to place emphasis on the promotion of closer relations with the diaspora – initiatives to enhance diaspora diplomacy – facilitate where appropriate more direct diaspora investments, encouraging more overseas Guyanese to take up new and emerging opportunities. In this regard, we plan diaspora conferences and outreaches in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Canada, and the Caribbean.

**H. Public Safety and Security**

We recognise that delivering safety and security to citizens and businesses is a prerequisite for them to grow, prosper and contribute to the development of the State. To this end, in the public safety and security sector, we spent \$51.5 billion in 2022. In 2023, we have allocated sums totalling \$58.6 billion towards the fulfilment of this vision of a strengthened security sector.

a. Guyana Police Force

In the Guyana Police Force (GPF), a sum of \$2 billion is provided in *Budget 2023* to expand the safe city initiative – safe country initiative – to Regions 3 and 6 in order to advance this programme that bolsters Guyana Police Force crime fighting capabilities through the provision of intelligent video surveillance sites, regional command centres, and a 911 emergency response capability.

Additionally, we will strengthen forensic crime fighting capabilities with the acquisition of a Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) analysis workflow system. We will initiate the preparation and acquisition of an electronic identification system to introduce a single electronic identifier by which each citizen will be assigned a unique national registration number to be used by all private and public sector agencies. Here again, strengthened human resources is essential for good policing. In 2022, over 3,000 ranks were trained in several areas, both locally and regionally.

In 2023, a total of \$140 million is allocated towards improving the investigative and forensic capabilities of a further 3,000 security personnel.

b. Guyana Prison Service

In 2022, we spent \$2.4 billion to commence sweeping upgrades to our custodial and correctional facilities. We have budgeted a further \$2.2 billion in 2023 to advance prisons being constructed and/or completed at Mazaruni and Lusignan and to commence work for the reconstruction of the New Amsterdam Prison. We are also very heavily investing in ensuring training of prisoners to ensure that they are giving life skills to facilitate a seamless reintegration into society upon completion of their sentence. In this regard, we are investing \$50 million to ensure that trade shops at these facilities are fully equipped to facilitate training in such areas as carpentry, joinery, masonry, block making, *et cetera*. In total, a sum of \$5.5 billion is earmarked for the Guyana Prison Service (GPS).

c. Guyana Fire Service

In the Guyana Fire Service (GFS), we spent, in 2022, \$2.7 billion to initiate critical work to boost firefighting capabilities. We spent \$557 million to advance works on critical facilities, including initiating the move of the central fire service, the fire service headquarters, from Stabroek to Durban Park, enabling the service to be located in a less congested area that allows easy ingress and egress. We have advanced construction of fire stations of Leonora, Wales and Ogle. *Budget 2023* makes a provision of over \$545 million

to advance these and other initiatives. In 2022, we spent \$400 million to acquire several pieces of firefighting equipment, including water bowsers, All-Terrain Vehicle (ATV) firefighting vehicles, ambulances, hydraulic platforms, *et cetera*. In 2023, we will spend another \$489 million to further augment the equipment stock of the fire service.

Similarly and right on que, we recognise the importance of a ready availability of water. We inherited a network of fire hydrants, most of which were in a non-functioning state. We embarked on a massive rehabilitation and replacement programme of all non-working fire hydrants across the country. We received 188 fire hydrants in July 2022. Some 47 new installations and 27 replacements were done. The remainder will be installed during this quarter. A further 148 fire hydrants will be received in 2023 for installation. We will also be investing in the training of our fire officers. My colleagues will no doubt elaborate further on the various initiatives that we are implementing in their respective sectors. I wish now to turn to our macro-economic targets and projections for 2023.

## Targets for 2023

### A. Real Gross Domestic Product

With continued interventions and policies geared at building a resilient economy, real GDP is projected to grow by 25.1% in 2023. At that rate of growth, Guyana will rank amongst the top five fastest growing economies. This position can, of course, be largely attributed to the ramping up of oil production, particularly in the Stabroek Block.

It is important to emphasise that growth in the non-oil economy is projected, in 2023, at 7.9%, at a time when, as I indicated earlier, the rest of the world is facing significant recessionary pressures. This growth is underpinned by expansion in several sectors. I will mention some of them.

#### a. Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing

The agriculture, forestry and fishing sector is expected to expand by 7.2% in 2023. Based on investments that are being made in sugar, we anticipate a recovery in sugar and an expansion by 29.3%, as Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) anticipates higher performance from the existing estates combined with forecasted production from the reopened Rose Hall Estate. The Corporation anticipates production of 61,000 tonnes this year.

Growth in the rice sector is projected at 8.3% with total production of 652,103 metric tonnes. The other crops sub-sector is also expected to expand in 2023 at a rate of 5.8%. Livestock, forestry and fishing are projected to grow at 12.1%, 4% and 8.4% respectively.

#### b. Extractive Industries

In the extractive industries, the mining and quarrying sector is projected to grow by 34.1% in 2023, with expansions projected for all four sub-sectors: oil and gas, gold, bauxite and other mining and quarrying.

The Stabroek Block is forecasted to produce crude oil at an average rate of about 374,000 barrels per day. Consequently, the subsector is estimated to grow by 35.6% in 2023. In addition, a turnaround is anticipated for the gold mining subsector, which is projected to grow by 12.7%.

The bauxite subsector's recovery in 2022 is expected to be maintained and that momentum is anticipated to result in growth in the bauxite sector by 9.8%. Other mining and quarrying, comprising sand, stones and diamonds, is also forecasted to expand this year by 7.3%. This, of course, as was the case with the growth in the subsector in 2022, is supported by and closely correlated with the strong growth observed in construction.

#### c. Manufacturing

Manufacturing is anticipated to recover on the strength of sugar manufacturing and rice manufacturing as well as other manufacturing.

#### d. Construction

The construction sector is expected to continue to grow in 2023 by 17%.

#### e. Services

Driven by continued activity in the construction, financial, and agriculture sectors, the services sector is estimated to grow by 5.6%. Underlying this is strong growth in tourism, wholesale and retail trade, tourism and storage, administrative and support services and real estate activities.

### B. Monetary Policy and Inflation

Monetary policy in 2023 will remain focused on keeping prices and exchange rates stable while ensuring the economy is conducive for a sustainable expansion in lending to the private sector, and growth in economic output. Our inflation

rate is expected to slow to 3.8%, underlined, of course, by global development with some evidence that some markets are witnessing a slowing of inflation largely as a result of the monetary policy response to inflation. Additionally, we will continue to maintain a suitable policy stance, supportive of containment of inflation.

### C. Balance of Payments

The overall balance of payments is expected to record a surplus of \$150 million this year, supported by the current account maintaining its surplus amidst continued growth in export earnings and a lower deficit on the capital account. I should mention, within the balance of payments, that export earnings are estimated to increase by 13.8% to US\$12,977,000,000.

### D. Targets for the Non-Financial Public Sector

7.14 p.m.

I turn now Sir to the fiscal operations of Government, targets for the Non-Financial Public Sector.

#### a. Central Government Operations

Central Government's current revenue, net of the Guyana Redd-Plus Investment Fund (GRIF) inflows, Carbon Credit inflows and the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) withdrawals, is projected to increase by 11% in 2023 to reach \$335.3 billion, consistent with the continued dynamism and growth in the economy. Within this, tax collections will account for \$320.1 billion or 95%. Internal revenue collections are projected to increase to \$197.9 billion. Customs and trade taxes are anticipated to reach \$33.6 billion and value-added tax (VAT) collections are anticipated to meet \$65.3 billion, while excise tax collections, significantly, are anticipated to fall to \$23.4 billion. Non-tax revenues are estimated to grow to \$15.2 billion, mainly on account of higher forecasted collections of royalties and special transfers from Bank of Guyana profits and dividends.

Alongside a transfer of \$208.9 billion from the NRF to the Consolidated Fund this year, calculated in accordance with the provisions of the NRF Act 2021, *Budget 2023* will benefit, for the first time, from the proceeds of the sale of our carbon credits, pursuant to the provisions of our Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) and consistent with the resolve clauses of the resolution that emerged from this House, endorsing the Low Carbon Development Strategy.

In 2023, it is estimated that \$31.3 billion of carbon credit sale proceeds will be transferred to the Consolidated Fund. Total expenditure of the Central Government is expected to grow by 27.5% in 2023, to reach \$756 billion. This largely represents the continued ramp up of the PSIP to support Government's transformation agenda and includes key projects, a number of which have already been identified.

The PSIP is projected to grow, and it is important to emphasise that the Public Sector Investment Programme represents Government's investment in public capital assets, typically infrastructure, public facilities, roads, bridges, hospitals – the public capital stock, if you like. The PSIP is projected to expand, meaning that our Government will increase our investment in public capital assets by 50.3% to reach \$387.8 billion in 2023.

Meanwhile, non-interest current expenditure is projected to grow at a much more modest rate of 8.6% to total \$354.2 billion. Against this background, the overall deficit, after grants, of the Central Government is projected at 11.5 % of GDP or \$167.6 billion.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce that *Budget 2023* is 41.4% larger than *Budget 2022*, amounting to \$781.9 billion, the largest budget ever in the history of Guyana, and, once again, is fully financed with the imposition of absolutely no new taxes. I turn now to the Summary Operations of the Public Enterprises.

#### b. Summary Operations of the Public Enterprises

Total receipts of the public enterprises are projected to grow by \$3 billion in 2023 to \$180.2 billion. Total expenditure for the enterprises is anticipated to grow by 5.8% to \$184.4 billion. Capital expenditure of the public enterprises is projected to reach \$7.9 billion. As a result, the operations of the non-financial public sector, comprising the Central Government and the public enterprises, are projected to record a deficit equivalent to 11.8% of GDP.

### E. Natural Resource Fund

It is anticipated that there will be 136 lifts of profit oil from the Stabroek Block in 2023. Within this, Government is projected to have 17 lifts of profit oil from the producing FPSOs, earning an estimated US\$1,406,600,000 in profit oil and a projected US\$225.2 million in royalties. As highlighted previously, based on 2022 deposits, an estimated \$208.9 billion, equivalent to an estimated US\$1,002,100,000 can be withdrawn from the NRF in accordance with the

provisions of the NRF Act and transferred to the Consolidated Fund to support national development priorities this year. Mr. Speaker, I turn now to Measures.

## Measures

In addition to the multitude of initiatives, projects and programmes already announced, *Budget 2023* also reflects a number of measures that are geared towards providing further stimulus to economic activity and the productive sectors as well as to bring relief to households, individuals and, in particular, the vulnerable in our society. These interventions are targeted towards continuing to increase the disposable income of our citizens, while facilitating and promoting job creation and income generation, coupled with an institutional framework that will reduce the cost of doing business, all with the aim of improving the lives of all Guyanese under the umbrella of His Excellency's philosophy of 'One Guyana'.

Mr. Speaker, on the subject of increasing disposable income, there is salary adjustment.

### a. Increasing Disposable Income

#### i. Salary Adjustments

Government continues to work to resolve anomalies and disparities across comparable positions in the public service. As previously announced, the first phase of salary adjustment will take place this month. In fact, many of the beneficiaries should have started receiving their adjusted salaries starting this week, if I am not mistaken. In the first phase of salary adjustments announced recently by His Excellency the President, over 5,000 healthcare workers and almost 9,000 members of the disciplined services will benefit from adjustments that result in an additional \$3 billion of disposable income being placed in the hands of these workers, provision for which is made in *Budget 2023*.

#### ii. Income Tax Threshold

Mr. Speaker, it would be recalled in *Budget 2022* that the income tax threshold was increased from \$65,000 to \$75,000 monthly. I am pleased to announce, on behalf of this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, that *Budget 2023* proposes a further increase in the income tax threshold from \$75,000 monthly to \$85,000 monthly, with effect from year of income 2023. Importantly Sir, as a result of this adjustment, over 12,000 persons will be removed from the tax net and every single income taxpayer will benefit. In fact, Sir, for illustrative purposes, for a taxpayer who is

currently earning \$100,000 per month, this adjustment alone translates to additional disposable income of \$33,600 annually for that taxpayer. It will result in total to an additional \$3.3 billion of additional disposable income being placed in the hands of the beneficiaries.

#### iii. Because We Care Cash Grant

Our People's Progressive Party/Civic manifesto 2020 committed to reverse that abominable act inflicted upon the people of Guyana by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) when they removed the 'Because We Care' cash grant. We committed to restore that cash grant and, indeed, we committed to increasing it. It would be recalled that we restored it in 2021 at \$15,000 and we increased it in 2022 to \$25,000 per child. We also extended it in 2021 to students attending private schools. Mr. Speaker, I now wish to announce that *Budget 2023* caters for a further increase to the 'Because We Care' cash grant from \$25,000 to \$35,000. This will benefit over 214,000 school children in public and private schools, and will place an additional \$2.1 billion in the hands of their parents.

It is worthwhile to point out that the newly increased grant of \$35,000 together with the uniform grant of \$5,000 per child will see parents receiving 40,000 per child in total.

Mr. Speaker, I hear the APNU/AFC attempting, in their customary manner, to heckle this Government on a cash grant that we restored when they committed the vulgarity of taking it away from the people of Guyana. Why do you not say what you gave the people of Guyana? You gave them zero. We have restored it and increased it. Mr. Speaker, do you know what they replaced it with? They replaced it with something about buses and boats. All of the buses and boats were labelled 'David G' and the book bags were labelled 'David G' with a picture of one 'David G'. Have you ever seen any boat or bus marked 'Bharrat J' or 'Irfaan A'? That alone says all that needs to be said.

Having restored the cash grant that was callously and cruelly removed by the APNU/AFC...this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government has restored it and has increased it.

7.29 p.m.

In 2023, the parents of school-going children at public and private schools will receive Because We Care and Uniform Cash Grants totalling \$40,000 per child. In total, that will deliver to the parents of school-going children, \$8.6 billion.

**b. Easing the Cost of Living**

**i. Containing the Cost of Fuel**

In *Budget 2022*, one of the key measures to mitigate price increases was the reduction of excise tax on petroleum products from 20% to 10%. In March of that year – last year, that is – we reduced this tax further from 10% to zero – a measure that has resulted in tax revenue losses of over \$17 billion. We remain committed to absorbing the impact of volatile fuel prices and will continue to monitor the developments in global oil prices going forward. The zero excise taxes on fuel will be maintained as long as fuel prices remain elevated.

**ii. Reduction in Freight Charges**

In August, 2021, we adjusted freight charges to the pre-pandemic levels to combat the escalation in shipping costs which were passed on to consumers by importers. This relief measure was initially implemented for a six-month period. In *Budget 2022* it was further extended to December, 2022. I now wish to announce an extension of this measure for a further 12-month period from January, 2023 to December, 2023. We estimate that the extension of this measure for an additional year will cost the public treasury an estimated \$6 billion. Put differently, it will represent \$6 billion worth of cushion being provided to the consumers of imported goods and items that would be subject to increased taxation as a result of increased cost, insurance and freight (CIF) costs.

**iii. Expansion of Part-time Job Programme**

In 2022, Government launched the part-time job programme among the suite of measures implemented to cushion the rising cost of living. The job programme has allowed for one person per household to work in public offices in proximity to their homes for 10 days per month and earn \$40,000. Over 11,000 persons were employed through the programme in Regions 2, 3, 5, 6, 9 and 10, injecting \$2.5 billion into these households since the programme started in the second half of the year. In 2023, this programme will continue and will be expanded with \$10 billion allocated. The beneficiaries of this programme are encouraged to upskill themselves so they can eventually take up full-time employment as the labour market is confronted with evolving demands for skills in some areas. For emphasis I will repeat, this programme will see an injection of a total of \$10 billion of disposal income to participants.

**iv. Other Cost of Living Measures**

Recognising the continued impact of the cost of living challenges due to global developments which, of course, we will, as I said earlier, continue to monitor, our Government continues to remain closely engaged with stakeholders across the country on the development, implementation and identification of interventions to alleviate the impact of increases in prices. In this regard, a total of \$5 billion is allocated for additional cost of living measures to be determined from the ongoing community engagements.

**c. Supporting the Vulnerable**

**i. Increase in Old Age Pension**

Since returning to the Office, our Government has increased monthly Old Age Pensions from \$20,500 in 2020 to \$28,000 last year. As we continue to improve the country's social safety net, I am pleased to announce with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2023, Old Age Pension will now be increased to \$33,000 per month. As a result of this increase, the cumulative increase granted since we returned to Office in 2020 now exceeds 60%.

This measure will benefit approximately 73,000 pensioners, each of whom will now receive an additional \$60,000 per annum, thereby placing an additional \$4.4 billion of disposable income in their hands. With this latest increase, our total Old Age Pension pay-out to our senior citizens now amount in the aggregate to \$28.9 billion.

**ii. Public Assistance**

*Budget 2022* included an increase to \$14,000 monthly to public assistance beneficiaries, up from \$9,000 in 2020. In addition, in 2022, we announced that all persons with a disability will be registered automatically to receive monthly public assistance. I now wish to announce a further increase in public assistance with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2023, from \$14,000 monthly to \$16,000. This is over a 75% increase since the People's Progressive Party/Civic resumed Office. This will benefit 29,000 persons and will provide in excess of \$700 million in additional disposable income to these individuals.

**d. Other Measures**

**i. Increase in Low-Income Mortgage Ceiling**

Since resuming Office in 2020, we have implemented a whole suite of measures, and many of them I have already addressed in support of housing development, including access to financing and the affordability of access to



financing. All of this, of course, is consistent with our commitment to providing 50,000 house lots by the end of this term. Given the importance of home ownership, and of affordable access to financing for home ownership, I now wish to announce an increase in the low-income mortgage ceiling – a ceiling that is implemented through <sup>(a)</sup> our partnership with the commercial banks – to \$20 million, up from \$15 million. This is helping further to reduce the cost of borrowing within this range and making home ownership even more affordable.

ii. Removal of VAT on Residential Properties <sup>(b)</sup>

In support of the Government's aggressive housing drive and to reduce the cost of home ownership, we propose the removal of the 14% VAT with respect to the sale of residential properties. This will, of course, further reduce the cost of home ownership, bearing in mind that we have already reduced and eliminated VAT on construction materials.

iii. All-Electric Motor Vehicles

In advancement of our low carbon agenda, and to incentivise the transition to lower emission vehicles, I wish on the subject of all-electric motor vehicles – that is to say, motor vehicles that are driven entirely by electricity – to announce the following:

In relation to all-electric motor vehicles – I emphasise all-electric to distinguish from hybrid vehicles which are partially electric – of any power rating... New, for the purposes of this paragraph, refers to vehicles less than four years old. This is a convention enshrined in the law regarding the taxation of motor vehicles. In relation to these new all-electric vehicles, we are proposing to remove the currently applicable 14% VAT.

In support of businesses making an investment decision to switch their fleet to more environmentally friendly vehicles, in relation to all-electric motor vehicles, we are proposing to increase the writing down or depreciation allowance on those vehicles to 50% annually. As I said earlier, we expect this to incentivise a migration to lower-emission vehicles.

iv. Vehicle Ownership

More broadly, beyond all-electric vehicles and looking at motor vehicles more generally, we recognise that in today's modern age, the ownership of a motor vehicle is no longer considered a luxury, with vehicle ownership improving the ease of access to and from the places of home, work, and

learning, *et cetera*. In this regard, I have the honour to announce, on behalf of this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, the following measures to reduce the cost of motor vehicle ownership:

In relation to the importation of new motor vehicles, that is to say, motor vehicles that are less than four years old, below the engine capacity 1,500 cubic centimetres (cc), we are proposing to reduce the duty on those vehicles from 45% to 35%. This translates to a reduction in the cost of importing such a vehicle by approximately \$200,000.

In relation to used vehicles below 1,500cc, that is to say, vehicles 4 years and older, we are proposing to replace the current tax rate, which is determined by a formula written into the law, with a flat rate of tax of \$800,000. This will reduce the cost of importing such a vehicle, on average, by \$300,000.

An aggregation of these measures I have just outlined will place over \$50 billion in the hands of citizens. It will ease the cost of living pressures and incentivise the expansion of economic activity and job creation.

### Conclusion

As I conclude, I would say the following: In keeping with its theme – *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow* – *Budget 2023* strikes a balance between addressing, as I said from the start, the pressing needs of today and the critical investments needed for tomorrow, ensuring that neither is neglected and indeed both are attended to.

As I just announced, it delivers \$3 billion worth of special salary adjustments to our healthcare workers and uniformed servicemen and servicewomen. It delivers \$3.3 billion in tax relief to those paying income taxes; it removes 12,000 of them immediately from the tax net. It provides \$2.1 billion in additional cash grants to parents of school-age children. It provides \$4.4 billion in additional Old Age Pension payments to our senior citizens. These are just to name a few of the immediate impacts.

7.44 p.m.

At the same time, it allocates \$136.1 billion for the upgrade of thousands of roads and bridges countrywide – at the local level community roads and at the macrolevel the bridge across the Demerara River. It allocates \$43.3 billion to advance construction of the gas to energy project which will reduce the cost of electricity by a half. It allocates \$84.9

billion for enhanced healthcare delivery, and a \$94.4 billion for the education sector to ensure our young people are prepared for the future that beckons them.

I reiterate this really to make the point that this is a budget for all Guyanese; it is a budget for now and it is a budget for the future. *Budget 2023* delivers on its promise, and it delivers on our People's Progressive Party/Civic Government's promise and our unwavering commitment to improve the lives of every single Guyanese family and every single Guyanese national, and to improve the opportunities they enjoy, not only to improve their lives today but to improve the opportunities they enjoy for the future.

I hasten to add that it is also a responsible budget, cast within the context of a macroeconomic framework that recognizes, not only the opportunities that lie before us but the risks also that we face including from the global economy as well as from the realities that confront a new and emerging resource-based economy. On these bases, given the vastness of measures that the Budget covers the comprehensive nature of its investments both to achieve short- and medium- and longer-term objectives, we on this side of the House expect that it will enjoy the smooth passage and unanimous support when the vote is put to this House; nothing less would be expected of responsible legislatures.

Before I resume my seat, I have, of course, the honor of presenting this Budget on behalf of this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government led, of course, by visionary leadership provided by our President, His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. I wish in that regard to acknowledge the outstanding leadership, policy leadership, that has been provided by His Excellency the President and the Vice President, the Honorable Dr. Bharat Jagdeo, Honorable Prime Minister Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Phillips, the rest of my Cabinet colleagues and their respective staff. I wish also to acknowledge the many comments and suggestions that have been made by stakeholders from civil society and, also, by members of the public with whom we, as the Cabinet, remain very closely engaged including from ongoing outreaches and community engagements throughout the length and breadth of the country.

Of course, I reserve, as I usually do, the last word to salute the unstintingly hard work done that has been done and continues to be done by my very own team at the Ministry of Finance, who were at it throughout last night and until mid- and indeed late morning, this morning, ensuring completion of the product that I now have the honor to present as *Budget 2023*. I thank them for their efforts; many of them are here.

Those efforts of course do not end today. We move swiftly into the process of first navigating this Budget through the National Assembly and then executing it in order to realise its ambitious but very eminently achievable objectives. I wish at this moment to thank my own team, my Ministry of Finance family, for the hard work that they did in getting us to this point and, of course, I know that I do not need to enlist their support but simply to say that I look forward to their continued support as we move straight into implementation and execution of *Budget 2023*.

It is now my honor on behalf of this Government and my Colleagues on this side of the House to commend *Budget 2023* to the National Assembly of Guyana, and I urge, as I said earlier, a smooth, swift and unanimous passage. Thank you very much, Sir. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. Hon. Members, the Motion for The Approval of the Estimates of the Public Sector and the Budget for Financial Year 2023 is proposed. Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would just like to add congratulations to my colleague, Minister Ashni Singh. He always amazes me every year with his ability to speak for five hours or five and a half hours.

## ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2023.”

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

I would like to now move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10.00 a.m. on 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2023, Monday coming, right here at the Conference Centre. As per norm, people would be given one week to prepare for the Budget Debate.

I would ask, as I am on my feet, I do not know where the Chief Whip is from the Opposition, but we will need to meet, as per norm, to work out the schedule. Thank you very much.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, the Assembly now stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m. on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2023.

*Adjourned accordingly at 7.51 p.m.*