



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

54TH Sitting

Monday, 23RD January, 2023

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.44 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

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

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

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

Prime Minister (1)

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

[Absent]

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., *[Absent – Performing the functions of the Office of the President]*
(Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni),
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,
Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.
Government Chief Whip,
Office of the Presidency,
New Garden Street,
Georgetown.
- + Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation,
Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
Lot 254 South Road,
Georgetown.
- +*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,
Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance
Ministry of Finance,
Main & Urquhart Streets,
Georgetown.
- + Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,
Minister of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight's Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.
- + Hon. Dr. Frank C. S. Anthony, M.P.,
Minister of Health,
Ministry of Health,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.
- + Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P.,
(Region No. 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),
Minister of Education,
Ministry of Education,
Lot 26 Brickdam,
Georgetown.
- + *Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P.,
Minister of Home Affairs,
Ministry of Home Affairs,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

+ **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,
164 Waterloo Street,
North Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.*

Junior Ministers (4)

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

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

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

Other Members (14)

Hon. Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj, M.P.,

Lot 71 BB Eccles,

East Bank Demerara.

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

(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),

148 Lethem,

Central Rupununi,

c/o Freedom House,

41 Robb Street,

Georgetown.

Hon. Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P.,

Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),

Lot 4 Public Road,

No. 66 Village,

Corentyne,

Berbice.

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

Lot 60 Section 'K',

John Street,

Campbellville,

Georgetown.

Hon. Mr. Seepaul Narine, M.P.,

Lot 321 BB Seventh Street,

Eccles,

East Bank Demerara.

Mrs. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.,

Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,

Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,

c/o Freedom House,

41 Robb Street,

Georgetown.

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

Lot 340 East Street,

South Cummingsburg,

c/o Freedom House,

41 Robb Street,

Georgetown.

Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.,

55 AA Victoria Avenue,

Eccles,

East Bank Demerara.

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

(Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice),

Lot 16-30 New Street,

New Amsterdam.

c/o Freedom House,

Robb Street,

Georgetown.

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

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

* 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)

(i) A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) (31)

Hon. Mr. Aubrey Norton, M.P.,
Leader of the Opposition

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

Hon. Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, S.C., M.P.,
Lot 410 Caneview Avenue,
South Ruimveldt,
Georgetown.

[Absent]

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

* Non-Elected Minister

Hon. Ms. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P.,
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Lot 13 A, New Providence,
East Bank Demerara.*

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

Hon. Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.,
*Lot 590 Good Hope,
East Coast Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence, M.P.,
*Lot 7 Freeman Street,
Castello Housing Scheme,
La-Penitence,
Georgetown.*

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

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

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

[Suspended]

Hon. Ms. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P.,
*Lot 1285 EE Eccles Sugarcane Field,
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Ms. Coretta A. McDonald, A.A., M.P.,
*Lot 202 N, Fourth Street,
Alexander Village,
Georgetown.*

[Virtual Participation]

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

Hon. Mr. Vincent P. Henry, M.P.,
(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),
Shulidnab Village,
South Central,
Rupununi.
(Culvert City Lethem)

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

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

[Suspended]

Hon. Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.,
Lot 1110 Plot 'B',
Herstelling,
East Bank Demerara.

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

[Suspended]

Hon. Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P.,
Lot 1282 Block EE,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.

Hon. Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P.,
Lot 151 Durbana Square,
Lamaha Gardens,
Georgetown.

Hon. Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P.,
(Region No. 1 – Barima Waini),
Mabaruma Compound.

Hon. Mr. Jermaine A. Figueira, M.P.,
(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),
Lot 136 2nd Street,
Silvertown,
Wismar, Linden.

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

Hon. Mr. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P.,
Lot 18 Public Road,
Johanna Cecilia,
(Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).

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

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

Hon. Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P.,
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Lot 17 Block 1, Section F,
Plantation Belfield,
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,
Stewartville,
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,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

Hansard Division Officers (19)

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Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,
Senior Editor
Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
Senior Editor
Ms. Carol Bess,
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Ms. Shevona Telford,
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Reporter
Ms. Somna Karen-Muridall,
Reporter

Ms. Lushonn Bess,
Reporter
Ms. Bianca Cummings,
Reporter
Mr. Rohan Ramjas,
Reporter
Ms. Eyoka Gibson,
Reporter
Ms. Celisa DeFlorimonte,
Reporter (a.g.)
Mr. Tafari David,
Reporter (a.g.)
Ms. Shabana Chiraunjie,
Reporter (a.g.)
Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician
Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician
Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Invitation to the gallery

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, join me in welcoming to the gallery, the person who is performing duties of President, the Hon. Member, Mdm. Gail Teixeira. Mdm. President, thanks for joining us today.

Late commencement of Sitting

Hon. Members, a few announcements before we start. First, our apologies for an untimely start this morning. I think the session that we had will help as we go through the debate for the next few days. Let me thank the Hon. Chief Whip for the Opposition, Mr. Jones, and the acting Chief Whip for the Government, Hon. Minister, Ms. Parag for the session earlier this morning, so that we could have an agreed list of speakers and timings. Thank you very much. Mdm. President had also joined to assist with her institutional knowledge in these matters.

Congratulatory message

My congratulations to the Hon. Member, Ms. Hastings-Williams on her appointment as General-Secretary of the People's National Congress/Reform. Congratulations Mdm. General-Secretary on all of our behalf.

Other pleasantries

Today, two Hon. Members of the House celebrate birthdays. They are none other than the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, Mr. Charles Ramson Jr.; happy birthday, Mr. Ramson and the Hon. Vice-President, Mr. Jagdeo. Happy birthday, Mr. Vice-President.

Death of a former Member of Parliament (MP)

On a sadder note, we announce the passing of former Member of Parliament, Ms. Rajcoomarie Bancroft who sat in the House, I think, on two different Sessions in this Parliament. Our condolences to her relations.

10.49 a.m.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[For Oral Replies]

Hon. Members, there are four questions on today's Order Paper. Questions one, two, three are for oral replies and question four is for written reply. The three questions that we have are in the name of the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira. Mr. Figueira, you may ask your first question.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me join you in congratulating the Hon. Mdm. Gail Teixeira, Her Excellency... [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Acting.] Acting. I trust that you would use your powers to amend the budget to bring some relief to the ordinary citizens who are struggling from the hardships of extremely high cost of living.

Also, I would like to extend birthday greetings to the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, the Hon. Charles Ramson and Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo. I trust that your years will bring you greater wisdom to continue to serve the people of Guyana.

The consistency of not having consistent sittings of the National Assembly makes these questions that I am about to pose lose its potency from the time they were presented. With that said:

1. Health Facilities in Region 10

Could the Hon. Minister of Health, my goodly friend, inform this House of how many health facilities are in Region 10 and how many are located in Linden?

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I am sure the Member is aware that in Region 10, there are 29 health facilities and in Linden, *per se*, there are nine facilities. For the Member's information, in 2022, the Ministry of Health invested in 25 of these health centres doing repairs to them. In some cases, they were very extensive repairs and, in other cases, they needed minor repairs. One may rest assured that 25 of those health centres were upgraded in last year alone. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Figueira: A follow up: Could the Hon. Minister inform this House of the 16 Amerindian settlements in Region 10, how many of these health facilities are there? We are very happy with the upgrade but are those upgrades accompanied with the appropriate drugs?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I must say to the Hon. Member that in Region 10, all the outlined health centres and health posts have been upgraded. If the Member wishes, I could list all of those that we have upgraded and how much money we have spent on each. In addition to fixing the health centre, we have also added equipment to the various health centres. As one may know, we have a package of services that we want to deliver at health posts and health centres and we are working to ensure that that could be delivered. One way of ensuring that is to ensure that they have adequate equipment.

In the case of medicines, we have ensured that they have ample supply of medicines for the types of interventions that they need to do. Again, we put medicines based on the competence of the people and the level of facilities that we have. This is nothing new. The health posts and health centres would attract a specific list of medications. When we go to district hospitals and regional hospitals, it is another set of medication that is allowed at those facilities. Yes, in Region 10, there is an adequate supply of medicines.

Mr. Figueira: My next question is for the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport.

2. Caribbean Premiere League (CPL) in Guyana

- (a) Could the Minister inform this House how much was paid to secure the Caribbean Premiere League (CPL) semifinals and finals for the years 2022, 2023 and 2024, which are to be played in Guyana?

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]: Forgive me, Mr. Speaker. I had not paid attention to the fact that those questions were for today. I am happy to answer since I have the knowledge. There was no money paid securing the CPL finals. There has been no cost to the Treasury for the hosting of the CPL finals and semi-finals in Guyana.

Mr. Figueira: If I understood the Hon. Minister clearly, is he saying that no cost was attributed for the procuring of these games to Guyana?

Mr. Ramson: It is not procurement. When it comes to securing tournaments, games, *et cetera*, countries have to bid. They also have a negotiation process. What we have negotiated has come at no cost to the Treasury. We have made no payments to the CPL for securing the finals and semi-finals. Thank you very much.

Mr. Figueira: Would Guyana be the beneficiary of the television rights given the fact that the semi-finals and the finals will be hosted here? Were those a part of the negotiation?

Mr. Ramson: The answer is, no.

3. National Cultural Centre

Mr. Figueira: Could the Minister inform this House what was the cost for the rental of the use of the National Cultural Centre (NCC) for a day or night at December, 2019, and March, 2022, for a theatre performance?

Mr. Ramson: I am happy to share with the Hon. Member that all of the rates that the Ministry inherited from the previous Administration – I am advised that the surcharge had been increased – all of the rates have been maintained. The position, while there was consideration for increasing those rates, Cabinet was of the view that the rates for the National Cultural Centre should be maintained.

Mr. Figueira: Did your consideration for increases not impact the cost for rehearsals? There are two different pricing situations. Are you saying that it remained the same?

Mr. Ramson: All rates remain the same.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. All rates remain the same, Hon. Member.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[For Written Replies]

Thank you, Hon. Members. The fourth question 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. The answer to this question has been received. In accordance with our practice and Standing Orders, the answer has been circulated.

4. Status of Guyana's High Commissioner to India

Ms. Walton-Desir:

1. Can the Hon. Minister advise whether Mr. Charrandas Persaud has ceased to function as Guyana's High Commissioner to India and if so, as of what date?
2. Can the Hon. Minister advise whether the Government of Guyana has sent a Letter of Recall to the Government of India, recalling Mr. Charrandas Persaud as High Commissioner of Guyana to India, and, if so, on what date was the letter sent?

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation [Mr. Todd]:

1. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation can confirm that Mr. Charrandas Persaud ceased to function as Guyana's High Commissioner to India with effect from November 10, 2022.

2. The Government of India was notified on November 10, 2022, of Mr. Charrandas Persaud's recall as High Commissioner in accordance with diplomatic practice.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

Motions

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 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]

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly will now resume the debate on the motion for the approval of the estimates and expenditure of the financial year 2023. The

first speaker today is the Hon. Member, Ms. Nima Flue-Bess. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Ms. Flue-Bess:

“Born in the land of the mighty Roraima,
Land of great rivers and far stretching sea.
So like the mountain, the sea and the river
Great, wide and deep in our lives would we be;
Onward, upward, may we ever go
Day by day in strength and beauty grow,
Till at length we each of us will show,
What Guyana’s sons and daughters can be.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker and a pleasant good morning. I would like to extend birthday wishes to the birthday fellas in the House. Thank you. I must say that after listening to the Budget presentation, some adjectives came to mind – uninspiring, hopeless, misleading, troubled. Adjectives which crossed my mind along with the many unparliamentary terms as I listened to the laborious presentation by the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh. At the end of his presentation, I had to try to navigate all the history jargons and untruths so I can educate my fellow Guyanese on what they should be bracing for. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible*)] It is amazing when you are dealing with uneducated people.

On the matter of history, since the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government was placed into Office in 2020, their first Budget, *A Plan For Prosperity*, resulted in the destruction of the people at Success, East Coast, Demerara. Their second Budget, in 2021, was set on *A Path To Recovery With Economic Dynamism And Resilience*. We saw was the average Guyanese being resilient with the economic doom. When we thought those on the other side of the House were in recovery after being out of Office for the five years and had learnt something about serving people, 2022 proved no different. With the largest Budget, the Guyanese populace got a good feel of what it meant to be *Steadfast Against All Challenges – Steadfast Against All Challenges*. Challenges of the high cost of living with prices climbing. Eschalot from \$100 to \$500; sugar from \$300 to \$500; oil from \$360 to \$800. All of these challenges, the Guyanese populace had to deal with. The grants – static, but the prices keep climbing and the people are clinging to survival. The businesses are enjoying all the removal of

taxes but, what can they say? Were the customers benefitting from the tax reduction?

11.04 a.m.

I ask those on the other side of the House, could you tell us if the customers were benefitting from all of the tax reductions given and what measures were in place to ensure that customers benefited from the tax reduction? From my investigations... [**An Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible*)] We have not...these challenges were further complicated by the 7.2 *per cent* inflation rate as stated in the 2023 budget speech that lash Guyanese in every possible way. As an ordinary citizen, I went through the budget and wondered what is this 7.2 *per cent* inflation. Then, I called all the people I know because those on the other side said they know all the mathematics, and so I called. Pension is \$28,000. If one calculates the 7.2 *per cent* increase, one will find it is \$2,016 less, so the pensioners actually got \$25,984. That is all that they could benefit from when they go to the shop.

When we talk about grants, for example, \$25,000, if one minus the 7.2 *per cent* from it, he/she will actually benefit with \$23,200. The Hon. Minister spoke about the \$40,000 and the part-time jobs for the \$40,000 per month when you had a 7.2 *per cent* inflation rate, one would take out \$2,880 from his/her \$40,000 and he/she will receive \$37,120. When one calculates the 7.2 *per cent* inflation rate from a sum of \$150,000, what does he/she gets? He/she gets \$139,200. This is the reality on the ground. This is what we, the Guyanese people, have to deal with every single day when we go out to the shops, markets, minibuses, and all of that. All the hype.

When one talks about inflation and a person simply buy a pack of flour which costs \$500, with inflation, he/she will actually spend \$536 for the pack of flour. Then again, there is static income but all the time the prices are going up. For example, if the person at the shop goes to a minibus and the minibus increases its fare when that person comes back, he/she will state \$536 plus \$2 for the transportation, so the ordinary Guyanese will have to pay \$538 for the flour. If he/she goes to the market and has to get a cart man to push the products to the minibus and the cart man increases his fee, that price will go right back to the customers. This is the reality, and this is what our Guyanese populists have been dealing with, and when we examine *Budget 2023*, we do not see any additional measures to bring ease to it. So, the question is, did the Government actually do any evaluation

to come up with new measures that could bring relief to the people?

It spoke about the increase of pension to \$33,000, but now one has to wonder how will the inflation rate affect this increase and what will be the inflation rate that would affect what will take place this year. Even though the seniors will be happy to have \$33,000, it is the responsibility of the Government to find additional measures to help the seniors and all those who are getting these little pitons for increases so that they can survive. What happened? Why is it that the pensioners cannot turn up at the pension office and collect a bag of basic groceries with an additional \$33,000? That could bring some proper relief to the people. These are things that we look at. The wellbeing of Guyanese is at risk. All of these things are adding to the stress of people trying to survive. That is what we are dealing with. Therefore, we are creating an unhealthier population because people have to figure out how they will manage their money and how they will deal with this issue of providing for their families because their income remains static.

One of the amazing things about the preparation of the budget, when one sits and goes through it, is that the military got an increase and they were all excited. However, when I sit and calculate, after the 8 *per cent*, it got a particular money, then when I calculated the one-month bonus that it actually got, and then divide it and take away all this inflation from it, the people actually only got \$14,000 bonus money that they could talk about. So, if one sit and do the calculation, he/she would see. It is just \$14,000. When we talk about a bonus, we mean it is something extra from which one could get something, but again, we want to fool our people with words.

As I continue, the Government demonstrated what it meant about being resolute in building the '*One Guyana*'. It seized the opportunity while we were still in the festive season to *bruk-up* the homes; all the personal belongings of persons, bury the animals, kill fully laden fruit trees and hence destroy the main economic source of income for nine families in seven households at Cane View, Mocha. We talked about a budget that is supposed to protect and provide for the people but what we have seen is not that. When we speak of Cane View, Cane View had homes, and people spent years building lands, farming, and providing for their children. The actions of the Government destroyed an entire culture. It sent in the weapons of mass destruction. The Central Housing and Planning Authority (CHPA) workers, the police, and the bulldozers were all used to destroy the livelihood of the families at Cane View.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

The budget ought to give hope, but where is the hope when we have seen this Administration that we are dealing with continues to take action that destroys the lives of our people? It causes me and many others to wonder what really is going on in this country. How much of the allotted sum to the Guyana Sugar Incorporation (GuySuCo) in the 2022 Budget was used to flood the people at Success? What percentage of the Ministry of Housing and Water and Ministry of Home Affairs budgeted sum of 2022 was used to *bruk-up* the lives of 32 Guyanese at Cane View, Mocha? There is no justifiable reason, none, that persons on that side of the House could give for the inhumane and brutish action they have taken against the people of Cane View, Mocha. There is none. Do you see this picture, Mr. Speaker? They broke a house and leave a single mother under there with her child to live. When the woman went on the street, then she was given a home. These are things that we deal with.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

When we talk about destruction... These people were farmers. This is just one example of a cow that lived in that area. They were told to sell it and move to an area where they could not continue farming.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

Here is another example where a farmer with 17 large pigs and... We are talking about finance, and the Government is talking about the livelihood of people, but it is destroying the lives of people. This farmer had to sell everything he had here to go and stay with a relative and struggle to get up. These are the produce that it has destroyed, bearing trees. This is the evidence. I have the evidence here.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

When it finished all the destruction, this was what was left. One family saved a table with a piece of black cake, so it tells you it was a festive season, and this container was all that was left from a family of five. This is all that they save, and we are talking about *Budget 2023*.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

Why do we have to use the resources of this country to destroy the lives of our people when there are methods and mechanisms that could be used to deal with these issues? They were not employed. The Government talk about all of these things that happened. This, at the end of the exercise, was found on the road. It said it did not use live bullets, but this is the evidence.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, for you to continue to conclude, you will get five more minutes but someone has to move that motion.

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

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Chief Whip.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, just before you continue. We do have a Standing Order rule with respect to displays and we also have a Standing Order with respect to quoting and citing sources. If you want to produce all those pictures, we will have to get the date, time and who shot it so that we could lodge all that you have displayed so far with the records. You may proceed, Hon. Member.

Ms. Flu-Bess: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank God I was the photographer, so I could produce my evidence to you. This is the evidence of the ending of Cane View after the moneys budgeted last year was spent to destroy the lives of people. There you have where Cane View was, and this is where the road will be.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

It is alarming to note that we sit in this House and pass budgets. Budgets ought to bring hope to people. It is not to destroy the lives of people. Several actions of marginalisation, disrespect, and injustice continue through my constituency. The Government of the day does not engage people in any proper discussion. It is all about bully. It is all pushing. It is all about doing these things to let people believe we have a *Massa* of the day. May I remind this honourable House that slavery was abolished in 1838, and at this time in 2023, why should we be dealing with such erratic behaviour? We should not be dealing with such erratic behaviour. Anybody should not be faced with this. When we speak about prosperity, it means that people must live in peace and people's rights and liberty must be protected. If the actions of the Government are truly sincere about the budget theme and truly sincere about improving the lives today and building prosperity for tomorrow, what we would expect to see is that our Local Democratic Council (LDC) be given the opportunity to serve the people in the right way, not political operatives going and distribute grants, distributing flood reliefs, doing this and that and not meaningfully engaging our people. If we speak of prosperity,

it means, therefore, that every Guyanese will be treated equally and be respected when the Government is distributing its resources and dealing with the people.

Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for listening to my presentation, and I trust that the Hon. Members on the other side of the House will take the opportunity to serve as they have read and took in the oath of office to serve without fair and favour, affection, or ill will and will serve the people of Guyana truly and justly. I thank you. [*Applause*]

11.19 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Our next speaker will be the Hon. Minister of Labour; Mr. Joseph Hamilton. Ministers and shadows will get 30 minutes and a five minutes extension.

Minister of Labour [Mr. Hamilton]: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. On 16th January, 2023, Minister Ashni Singh presented a budget to the people of Guyana. The theme is *Improving Lives today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*. Our policies, programmes, and measures were articulated in the budget presented by Minister Ashni Singh. How we will execute these programmes, how we will pay for the programmes to be executed, the benefits it will bring to the Guyanese people, and who the beneficiaries would be.

For the next five days, the citizens of this country and the nation at large will be treated to expositions, like we just had not so long ago, of profanities, banalities and all sorts of vulgarities. But what I could assure this House and the people of this country, the permanent Opposition will not bring to this National Assembly any programme, any plan and any policy that is comparable to that we have in the budget. Nothing productive, nothing constructive and nothing developmental it would bring. The basic tenant of a debate is when you oppose, you propose, but for the next five days, all one would hear from that side of the House the permanent Opposition... [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** (*Inaudible*)] And that is why it would be the permanent Opposition. It is incapable of presenting any programme and policies to the Guyanese people towards their development and wellbeing. We left programmes for it to execute when it was in Government, and it failed miserably, even though the money was available for it to do it.

What will we have? We will have the permanent Opposition which will denigrate, chastise, criticise and even demonise the budget. As I said earlier, it will put nothing comparable. [**Mr. Duncan:** Well, you put forward something *nah.*] We

have already put forward. Take your time. Nothing in any sector. In not one of the sectors, it will bring to the Guyanese people any plans and programmes that is comparable. It is because it is politically and intellectually incapable of doing that. It has no capacity to think. It has no capacity to put a vision before the Guyanese people and you will get for the next five years just what we have by the speaker before me.

Ineptitude and incompetence rain on the benches of the permanent Opposition. I want to give you, some examples of how incompetent it is. I want to start with the little lilliputian little Party there headed by one Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan. It issued a press release on 14th January for immediate release to all the press. Hear what the proposal is; a monthly electric city subsidy for all categories of consumers, \$5,000 for domestic consumers, \$10,000 for commercial consumers, and \$15,000 for industry consumers. What the Guyanese people must take note of is that when this Opposition was in Government, it removed the subsidies from the pensioners and it added value-added tax (VAT) to electricity and water charges. Do you think the Guyanese people can be fooled? Most importantly, another measure Mr. Ramjattan is proposing is to provide duty free concessions and VAT exemption on equipment and machinery for businesses involved in agriculture private sector proposal.

The incompetency I am trying to point out. The Alliance For Change (AFC) is proposing a measure that was already executed since 2020. Oh my God. All you had to do was go on the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) webpage and check it out. Let me read for you: An article posted on 7th September 2020 states:

“The Peoples’ Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) Government has made good on its promise on the removal of Value Added Tax (VAT) in several sectors to ease the burden of Guyanese. This was disclosed by His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, during a press conference today at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre.”

It continues to state:

“The President said that the measure will bring relief, stimulate economic activity, increase the country’s productive capacity, reduce the cost of doing business and facilitate the growth and development of businesses. The measures, President Ali said will have an immense impact on people’s welfare and well-being and improve living standards.”

Topping the list is the removal of VAT immediately on water and electricity which was introduced by the previous administration. The President said this will help every aspect of life and “put more money in people’s pocket.”

Removal of VAT and duties on machinery and equipment to allow for the recapitalization of key sectors which includes mining, forestry, agriculture and manufacturing. This is coupled with the granting of tax concessions for mining, forestry, manufacturing and agriculture.”

Mr. Speaker, do you see the incompetence? That is why it could not have accomplished anything in Government. Mr. Ramjattan’s Party is asking for something that was already effected two and a half years ago. We come to the Opposition Leader. The Opposition Leader reasoned that while it is good to put resources towards agriculture, the issue is that there is little or no emphasis on manufacturing, and therefore resources should have been put to the sector as well as each of the non-oil sectors in a profound manner.

The other thing is the Opposition Leader is talking about manufacturing and its expansion, and it killed the Amaila Falls project. The Opposition Leader, now in 2023, speaks about the expansion of manufacturing, yet it had the Guyana REDD Plus Investment Fund (GRIF) money for five years to improve and to invest in alternate energy, and it failed miserably. This Gentleman comes, and he now talks about what will you do in manufacturing. He, too, said that the excess focus on infrastructure according to him, is because this is where corruption occurs. The Leader of the Opposition said the Government seems to like calling big figures. How much money in this and that? What is missing is what impact it will have on the lives of the people, and when it comes to the impact on the lives of the people, this budget is deadly. If you are incapable to understanding what the positive impact will be on citizens by building a bridge across the Demerara River, then you are lost. If you are incapable of understanding what the positive would be of allowing tens of thousands of Guyanese to own their own homes, then you are lost. If you are incapable of understanding what the impact is of making available thousands of scholarships to young people so that they can elevate themselves, then you are lost. That is the reason why I started off by saying, you are the permanent Opposition. [Mr. Duncan: Labour now Joe.] Labour, you are in labour. [Mr. Duncan: You are arrogant.] I am arrogant. [Mr. Duncan: Yes. You are.] You are talking about arrogance. Further, the Opposition Leader went on to say poverty

reduction and poverty alleviation are absent from the 2023 budget. This seems to be a budget for the rich. Is building tens of thousands houses and giving out house lots for ordinary people a policy or the rich? Making available scholarship for the young man that lives in Aishalton. Making scholarship available for young teacher living at Paramakatoi or in the Moraikobai. Is that for the rich?

Then we come to the Hon. Gentleman. [**Mr. Duncan:** (*Inaudible*)] I will get to you in a moment. You do not dictate how I present. You will have your opportunity. Then we come Senior Counsel Hon. Roysdale Forde. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] He is the *wanna* be to be Opposition Leader. He says there is every reason for Guyanese to feel this budget, the largest ever in the country's history, could create possibilities for an increase in corruption if President Ali does not return to the anti-corruption policies of the Coalition Government. One cannot make this up.

11.34 a.m.

Imagine this Hon. Gentleman, who brought in a fuel boat and was hustling to have the fuel boat pass the Demerara Harbour Bridge (DHB), failing to pay \$36 million to the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA). This Hon. Gentleman who was the Chairman of the Guyana Gaming Authority established a scheme to have a businessman qualified to get a casino license to pay a third-party US\$2 million. We are returning to Mr. Granger anti-corruption policies and imagine that. Imagine that and now we come to... [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*Inaudible*)] ...what do you all want me to speak about? Do you want me to speak about labour? I will speak about labour [**Mr. Duncan:** When?] You are in a hurry. Take your time. [**Mr. Duncan:** You are running out of time.] I have enough time.

First, I have to deal with incompetence and ineptitude. Secondly, I have to deal with little league Mr. Norton. Thirdly, I have to deal with the fuel smuggler who is telling us about corruption. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*Inaudible*) outside.] What do you want to do? Do you want to fight now? Oh, my God. Mr. Speaker, I seek your protection here, Mr. Ramjattan wants to fight. He wants to fight now. He wants to go outside. He wants to put on the boxing gloves.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, going outside, maybe it is for something else, it does not necessarily mean to fight.

Mr. Hamilton: The Ministry of Labour was re-established by the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government when we came into Office, a promise, and a

commitment we made to the Guyanese people. I will speak to some of the programmes. The A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) in five years, dealing with the Board of Industrial Training, it care so much for young people and their development... In 2019, we started oil production. It was indicated to this nation in 2015 that we found oil offshore. However, the Government of the time did nothing regarding the development of the necessary skillset needed for Guyana's development. The average number of persons trained under APNU/AFC via the Board of Industrial Training, is between 1300 to 1500 persons. Nowhere outside of the coast, it made any attempt to include riverain and hinterland communities within its training programme. To report, we came into Office in August, 2020, and by the end of the year, we already trained 2,000 persons. In 2021, we trained 3,086 persons and in 2022, we trained 4,500 persons. The fact is the numbers can be validated and the Members could go and check it.

Between the period 2020 to now, under our Government, we trained 7,500 persons under the hand of the Board of Industrial Training. *Budget 2023* provides for us to train about 7,000 persons. We are moving from where first you had no Labour Ministry, so it could not even talk about anything regarding labour. The Opposition comes here; it talks about labour, but why did it not talk about labour when it was in Government? It had no Labour Ministry. What is important to note also is under the apprenticeship programme that was dead under APNU/AFC, we were able to place 173 apprentices in 2022 and 144 males at the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) Training Centre, and seven females totalling 151 persons, who were trained as apprentices at GuySuCo Training Centre under the ostracise of the Board of Industrial Training. Bosai Minerals Group (Guyana) Inc, a total of 17 persons were trained as apprentices, so we are moving from zero. We are moving from zeros to 173 persons trained as apprentices in technical areas. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** (*Inaudible*)] You have no understanding that apprentices and training programmes are two different things. Oh, my God.

Again, I repeat, in two and a half years, the Board of Industrial Training trained 7,500 persons via the programmes that we executed, and secondly, we made available 173 persons to be trained as apprentices in three different companies. This is so that the people over there understand. Coming out of training, what we do is tracking. Thus far, we have successfully tracked from the 2021 trainees 715 beneficiaries, and that programme continues. I can report that 75.1% of those persons trained are gainfully employed, and four *per cent* of those persons continue to

study. The programme will continue. We have expanded this programme. We have already started collaboration with companies that are in the oil and gas industry, and we have signed several Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) with companies. We are about to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Aeronautical School in Ogle. We have just signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the Government Electrical Inspectorate of the Ministry of Public Works to ensure all persons who we train as electrical installation personnel can be certified.

We come now to the work of the labour department. In 2022, via 913 complaints from walk-in employees the Ministry resolved 85% of those complaints and we recovered on behalf of employees a sum of \$40 million from employers. A sum of \$40 million on behalf of ordinary men and women. In 2022, the Ministry countersigned 23 collective labour agreements between labour unions and employers. Some employers and labour unions, refused in five years under APNU/AFC stewardship to even sit at the same table to have a conversation, we were able to bring them together via mediation and we are able to countersign 23 collective labour agreements.

In 2022, we conducted 13 conciliations. The Ministry also provided advisory services for foreign companies such as SBM Offshore Management Guyana, Guyana Shore Base Inc., ExxonMobil, Schlumberger (SLB) Guyana Inc, and Newcrest Guyana. These engagements continue, and the labour landscape is changing. We have just made available for the public two studies that consultants did, one by the International Labour Organization (ILO) that speaks to the deficit of technical capacity to service the oil and gas industry and one done by Dr. Vishnu Doerga, Action Coach in the construction sector that as indicated, what is the present state regarding the deficit in skillset. Perhaps, we would not have been at this dismal place in Guyana if the APNU/AFC did some work in this regard. We have to play catch up now because they did nothing to deal with the matter.

We have been doing awareness and sensitization programmes around the country. Last year, I said that we have moved from no Labour Ministry to establishing labour ministries in all the regions across the length and breadth of Guyana. In some instances, we have Labour Ministry established, that is... [**Mr. Duncan:** (*Inaudible*) Labour Ministry.] You have no understanding of anything. In Region 6, we have two offices of the Labour Ministry we established in the last period across the length and breadth of An. Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*] He said the Labour

Ministry was always there. I just said, Mr. Speaker, the evidence is, in five years under the APNU/AFC, there existed no Labour Ministry. It had a labour department in the Ministry of Human Services. That is clarity. [**Mr. Duncan:** (*Inaudible*)] Oh, my God, I would not even respond to that.

We have moved the Central Recruitment and Manpower Agency (CRMA), from a place where only walk-ins to people who have an interest in seeking employment. In March of 2022, we established a job bank to make it easy for people... [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Somebody said that it is an old time thing. Ms. Volda Lawrence, you were at the Ministry. Did you have a job bank? We established in March 2022, a job bank where a total of 3300 job seekers sought employment and 239 employers were registered. The job bank continues to expand to reach Guyanese across the country. We also continued the walk-ins, and 837 persons came to CRMA as job seekers.

11.49 a.m.

So, even though we established a job bank, we still continue to utilise the premises at Lot 82 Brickdam. Of the persons who sought our help, 146 of those persons were placed. The Occupational Safety and Health Department – when we took Government in 2020, workplace deaths in 2020 were 32 persons. In 2022, based on the programmes and our policies, that decreased by 16%.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, for me to bring you back to conclude, I would have to get an extension of five minutes for you.

Minister of Public Service [Ms. Parag]: Mr. Speaker, may I ask that the Hon. Member be given an extra 10 minutes to conclude?

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, Minister of Labour, you may continue.

Mr. Hamilton: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2022, the number of workplace deaths decreased again by 20%. So, in two years we moved from a place where in 2020, 32 persons lost their lives in workplaces. [**Mr. Duncan:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes. We have moved. In 2022, that has decreased to 21 and the work continues. For me, the specific matter of workplace deaths is not statistics. Every time someone is killed at their workplace, they are the family of some person – the husband, child, or friend of some person. We will continue to engage both the public and

private sectors. We will continue to establish workplace health and safety committees. We will continue to help resuscitate those in the private and public sectors.

The Department of Co-operatives – regarding co-operative societies in this country, we will have to resolve or dissolve. The nation must be told and informed that co-operative societies in this land of ours have in their possession tens of thousands of acres of land, most of them non-productive. Let me repeat. Co-operative societies have in their hands lands that belong to the State – tens of thousands of acres that are unproductive. Most of them, in many instances, are run by some family or some one-man who took them over. That with... [**Mr. Duncan:** (*Inaudible*) unproductive?] They took it over and it is unproductive. Let me clarify. Whether it is the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission (GLSC), the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) or the Mahaica Mahaicony Abary Agriculture Development Authority (MMA/ADA), we will have to make those lands productive. As we continue to speak about food security and agricultural expansion, we cannot afford it. The nation cannot afford that the tens of thousands of acres that are in the hands of co-operative societies continue to be unproductive. I have tasked the Department of Co-operatives and we have just concluded an integrity audit of co-operative societies so that we could understand the state of play.

As we go forward, and I make no apologies for this, I have asked the Guyana Lands and Survey Commission, I have asked the Guyana Forestry Commission, and I have asked the MMA/ADA to make the information available to us, as to the amount of lands co-operative societies may have in their possession. For those who want to work for development, we will work with them, but what we will not continue to have happen is people utilising the farcical umbrella of co-operative societies when they have Government land in their possessions, and I have no apologies to make. The action, as I said, is either they resolve these matters, or they will be dissolved.

Let me say that...[*Interruption*] As I said, when I started, I will end. The permanent Opposition over there, I contend that in five days they will chastise and criticise our budget, but I am confident that they will not be capable of bringing any comparable programme to put before the Guyanese people to challenge what is in this document. They will not be able to do that. The nation will be the witness in the next five days. You will see the display. The display with the first speaker, that is the same display you will have with all the other speakers on that side of the House. Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, we are going to take the lunch break after this. But before, let me acknowledge in our presence this midday, the Hon. Member from Suriname, Dr. Asiskumar Gajadien. The Hon. Member is the leader of the Progressive Reform Party in Suriname and leader of the Coalition in parliament. He has been elected the President of the Standing Committee on Democracy and Human Rights of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). Several of our Hon. Members here are very familiar with the Hon. Member, Dr. Asiskumar Gajadien. So, thank you, Dr. Asiskumar Gajadien, for joining us for this sitting. Hon. Members, we will now take the suspension for one hour.

Sitting suspended at 11.58 a.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.14 p.m.

Our next Speaker is the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Before I commence my submissions to this debate on the 2023 Budget, I would like to ask for us to, as is the custom of the House, stand and observe one moment of silence on the passing of our Colleague, Ms. Rajcoomarie Bancroft. I know it is a long-standing custom of the House, but it appears as though we missed it this morning.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I have no problem with observing a moment of silence in recognition of the late Hon. Member, but I want to differ a bit with you on the long-standing custom of the House. We do have a long-standing custom which relates to the House paying tribute to fallen Members, but we will observe a moment of silence.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will say when it begins.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Starting now.

[A moment of silence was observed.]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Member, I will start your time running at 1.17 p.m.

Ms. Walton-Desir: You are most kind, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. I rise, as I said, to make my contribution to the 2023 Budget debate. I have to, however, as a matter of record, address some of the utterances of my Colleague on the other side who went before me. I sat and listened – you know – in amazement because it continues to...I should not be

surprised but somehow, they manage to keep surprising me with the ease with which they engage in misleading the House and the people of Guyana. First of all, we heard ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, that is imputing. How you said it with confidence, is that you know it is a fact. I want to believe that you could do better so let us observe the Standing Orders.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, I want to attempt to correct then, if I may put it that way, several misconceptions that might have been conveyed to the people of Guyana by my Colleague on the other side. The first one being that it was the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government that scuttled the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. We all know that the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) adjudged this project as being environmentally not feasible. That is a matter of public record. I want to say to us as well, that I sat here and heard the Hon. Member speaking about us having all the money. Every Guyanese who is paying attention knows exactly when the oil money became available to the Republic of Guyana. So, for the Hon. Member to stand there and say we did nothing with all the money is misleading the people of Guyana. We have to set these things straight, Sir. The ease with which we say these things to the House... I heard the Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, stand in this House and tell us that they have completed synthetic tracks in Regions 6 and 10. Well, as a Lindener I had to go and check for myself.

1.20 p.m.

The tracks are incomplete. For misleading this House, he ought to be brought before the Committee of Privileges or better yet, he ought to be made to don his track suit, with Department of Public Information (DPI) in tow and made to run those tracks that he said have been completed. We have to, we owe a duty to the people of Guyana to be honest with them. When one stands and hears the Colleagues on the other side of the House just say these things with ease, it really boggles the mind. So, I wanted to clear up, very early, those misconceptions.

The other issue that I have and which I believe is cause for alarm is the Minister's utterances that they will be going after co-op lands. He said in his address that they will be going after those co-ops with lands that are idle. I believe that is an indication that this Government intends to dispossess Guyanese of cooperative lands, lands which, by law, they have vested proprietary interest. If we are to look at this Government's track record, we will see that they simply do not care. They bulldozed the residences at Mocha,

displaced the people, destroyed their belongings, killed their animals and now they are going after the co-ops. I will say that it is not passing strange that a pattern is developing of dispossessing people of a certain ethnicity who have land. It is known all throughout Guyana that Afro-Guyanese are heavily involved in cooperatives and in cooperative lands.

I know that the chief apologist for the other side was on his usual soapbox saying that Amanza will speak to racism, as if his reverse psychology could prevent me from pointing out that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Administration is a clear and present danger to the Constitutional Rights and freedoms of Guyanese. They are coming after our property; they are coming after our freedom of speech; they are coming after our way of life. They are a clear and present danger. Let the Vice-President know that his reverse psychology will not work with me. It is amazing to me that a Government that has all of this oil money invests so much time in minding this Opposition's business. They have everything to say. They are up in our business. They talk about Oh, they are ineffective; they are inefficient but instead of getting... In fact, the General Secretary, their Public Relations (PR) machinery has already said that she has resign. I have never seen a Government so invested in what they have deemed a weak and ineffective Opposition.

The Hon. Member before me took 15 minutes out of his speech to go member by member to belittle and malign the character of the gentleman on the honourable side. It is amazing that, with all of this oil money, the Government is spending more time on what is happening in the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) and on who did not resign and on who did what than on adumbrating a clear developmental path and a clear vision for this country. We on the other side, we are good here. You all need to run the country and do it in an inclusive and in an equitable manner. I just thought I had to set the record straight on those matters.

Do you know, when I was preparing my presentation for this budget, I had a 'Yogi Berra moment'. It felt like it was *déjà vu* all over again. I realised that I could take my last year's presentation and, word for word, regurgitate it here and it would be just as appropriate. Last year, I stood here, and said to the people of Guyana let us see where this Government spends their money and that will tell you what they value and what their values are. We saw it last year in 2022. We saw how much they value the hard-working public servants of this country who turn up every day, rain or shine, to keep the wheels of this country turning. Do you know what they rewarded them with? A measly taxable 8% increase. That is

how much they value the public servants. We saw how much they value the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). Thirteen billion dollars poured into an industry that they themselves have said is dying. The Vice-President is on record as telling sugarcane workers you all have to find jobs in other sectors. But here they are pouring \$13 billion and they have the audacity to say to the people of Guyana that it was the APNU/AFC that killed the sugar industry, when the truth is that it was under their Government that most of the sugarcane factories were closed. Those are the facts, but they have this *penchant* of lying to....

Mr. Speaker: *Inaudible*

Ms. Walton-Desir: Sorry Mr. Speaker. I withdraw. They lack fidelity to the truth, so we have to continue to set the record straight. They have allocated \$4 billion to GuySuCo already for this year. Mr. Ramjattan, I think you know they are going to come for more. This is just the first. We will have at least three more supplementals, I am sure, for GuySuCo. Under the Coalition, we continued to adumbrate rightsizing this industry. When you look at the way in which this budget is couched, I want to show you how this Government values the people. We know where sugar is going. They have admitted it. It has gone with the wind; they have said it. But, yet, and I want to quote the Hon. Member Ashni Singh, he said, Government is resolutely committed to invest heavily to mould better, sharper and more creative young minds. He said this when he was talking about Youth Development. Gussed what he allocated? A whopping \$960 million to Youth Development.... [**Mr. Ramsaroop:** How much?] Nine hundred and sixty million dollars. Not even \$1 billion. When you look at it, Mr. Speaker, it means that the Government of Guyana has allocated US\$35 to every youth for their youth development, but they want to talk about robust investment?

Let me say this, the issue about free education at university continues to be a fleeting illusion. I heard their chief apologist saying to us that, oh, we did not say it in the first year, you know we have five years, so we could still do it, insulting the intelligence of the Guyanese people. I suspect that they want to use it as an election gimmick. Closer to elections, they will come and announce free university education as if they are the champions of free university education. When the truth is that, from the 1976 to 1994, Guyanese enjoyed free education from nursery to the university, as enshrined in our Constitution. So, when they come and make this big announcement, we will simply remind them that they are not doing us a favour, they are

simply righting a historical wrong that they committed against us, the people of Guyana.

That is the thread that is common throughout this entire budget. The ability of this Government to do more for the people of Guyana is present, but their willingness is absent. It is woefully absent, and you see it through the way they apportion and what they allocate to. As a result of this, in the midst of plenty, there is poverty. Forty-eight per cent of Guyanese are living below the poverty line and this is not the APNU/AFC Coalition stats. These are the stats by the reputable organisations from which we get the statistics. Forty-eight per cent according to the World Bank. Just in case I am not clear, they said that 43% of the Guyanese are living under the poverty line. They have said that the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) in 2023 stated that 43% of Guyanese cannot afford a healthy diet and that 5% of Guyanese are malnourished. That is what the FAO Report states, so they can heckle all they want. They like to say the numbers do not lie. Well, the numbers are not lying now.

I will quote from the World Economic Forum *Global Risks Report*, you all need to pull it down and read it. The World Economic Forum *Global Risks Report* states that the cost of living crisis is the number one risk the world will face in the short term over the next two years and in the long term for the next 10 years. That is what the World Economic Forum Report states. Yet, with all of this empirical data showing that we are suffering, this Government allocated a measly 0.5% of this budget to address cost of living and the cost of living crisis – 0.5 of a per cent not 1%, 0.5%. And, we have a head of this Government who has the gall to say, oh the people of Guyana are his friends and family. With friends and family like these may God protect us from our enemies.

This is serious. More can be done for the people of Guyana who are suffering. That sweeper/cleaner who earns \$85,000 a month – \$50,000 on rent, another \$15,000 on transport and she has to spend \$10,000 a week to feed herself and her two children. That is the end of her salary. She still has not paid Guyana Water Inc. (GWI), she still has not paid Guyana Power and Light (GPL) and the Head of this State and his Government have the temerity to put in the budget that they are studying cost of living measures. For the last two years they have been studying and consulting and the people of Guyana are starving. *Whilst Rome is burning Nero is fiddling his thumbs.*

We will say that we are happy that the ‘Because We Care’ grant has been increased. That is a good thing, and we commend the Government for that. We commend them also

for continuing the feeding programme that the Coalition Government started because we appreciate the connection among nutrition, cognition, and learning. This is good, but more is possible because we have more at our disposal. For example, why can we not work together to devise a scheme to subsidise transportation for school children? They have allowed the buses to rot. Why can we not? We have the funds and with 0.5% of this budget allocated, it will mean that parents will no longer have to carry the burden of paying for transportation, freeing of money in their pockets and allowing them to have more disposable income.

My Colleague, Ms. Flu-Bess, earlier gave us the price of commodities of basic food items in the shop. Why can we not, as this Government so cares about people, have a programme to subsidise the basic food items such as, eggs, rice, sugar, milk and potatoes so that single parents, the most vulnerable amongst us, can go to the store and be able to have these items that they depend upon for their survival. It is possible for us to do with a mere 1.5% allocation from this budget, the ability is present the willingness is absent and that is unacceptable.

1.35 p.m.

We want to say that we are happy that programmes such as the Women's Innovation and Investment Network (WINN) are continuing. We are happy about that, Sir. We agree that it is important for women to be able to participate meaningfully in our economy. The most recently published Guyana Labour Force Survey (GLFS) shows that the labour participation rate of women is 40% less than that of men. Despite less women participating in the market... Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: When you quote [*Inaudible*].

Ms. Walton-Desir: I will be happy to do that, Sir. Our last labour force survey shows that despite less women participating in the labour market, the unemployment rate of women is 50% higher. We cannot have inclusive growth if our women are not gainfully employed or able to meaningfully participate in this oil and gas economy. While we commend the WINN programme, the statistics I just cited suggest to us that these interventions are not enough. To this end, I want to encourage the Government, that empowering women economically is not just a moral imperative, but it is an economic strategy. It is the smart thing to do. When our women thrive, so does the economy.

I want to urge us to invest more in partnering with the private sector women's organisations. There is the Women in Oil and Gas Guyana (WIOGGY), the Women's Chamber

of Commerce and Industry (WCCIG) and the WeLead organisations. Those organisations would be able to establish training programmes, and train and mentor our women in business and set up business incubators for women. The initiatives are present, but my point is we need to do more because more is possible. For the first time in our post-colonial history and our post-independence history, we have the resources to do all of these things and we can do it today. The time is now for bold and visionary investments in our human capital. We must understand and we must know that our human capital is by far our most important asset. It is the most important for our long-term economic development.

Let us look at the investment as it relates to the capital projects. Since assuming Office, this Government has increased spending on roads, bridges and buildings by 600%. The capital investment (CAPEX) has outstripped employment spending by 5%. Despite receiving about \$335 billion from the Natural Resources Fund within the last two years, this Government's binge spending has produced a deficit of 12%. This is alarming. We euphorically boast about being the fastest growing economy in this part or in the world period, but I will say that the cautionary tale of Ghana is there to tell us that unless we are prudent, we could end up there. Mr. Speaker, as you know, Ghana was declared as having the fastest growing economy in the world in 2019. Today, they are facing their worse debt crisis. The time is now more than ever for sober and temperate spending.

Let me make this clear because the chief apologist on the other side likes to say that we do not understand the big picture and we do not support infrastructure. We are not against infrastructure, and I wish to make that very, very clear. I wish to disabuse the minds of my Colleagues on the other side that we are against infrastructure. We understand on this side of the House that infrastructure is one of the subsets of the component that would drive our long-term economic growth, but what we are against is the reckless spending. That is what we are against. What we are against is the recklessness with which this Government is spending the people of Guyana's money.

Last year this Government allocated \$218 billion to capital expenditure projects. We warned then that neither the Government nor the private sector collectively had the capacity to execute that size of a project. We warned that our efficiency gap was so severe that about 41% of the allocated sum would be wasted, and exactly what we have warned about, has happened. You only have to look in the newspapers and on *Facebook* to see the roads that they are building and are cutting ribbons for – nothing but glorified

footpaths. Where there are wider roads, they are already sliding into the canals – go to Burma, Mr. Speaker. Contractors are receiving tens of millions to start the work and six months later, there is nothing.

This year CAPEX stands at \$388 billion and, of course, barring the supplementals that they will come for. Mr. Speaker, do you know what is the funniest thing? That is not the part that befuddles me in all of this. What befuddles me is that we are investing hundreds of billions of our money by building all kinds of roads and bridges, and all kinds of things and the most critical piece of infrastructure we are neglecting, the seawalls. Our sea and river defence is the most critical infrastructure for a low-lying coastal state like Guyana. Every country in the world is fortifying itself against rising sea levels and against the effects of climate change, but guess what? We are doing the opposite. In fact, in this budget we decreased our allocation to sea and river defences. We allocated \$5.5 billion last year and this year we have allocated \$4.9 billion. Is this the economic dynamism that we are talking about?

Every country in the world is fortifying itself. Every country with the resources is doing the projects necessary to fortify themselves against climate change and rising sea levels, but we here in Guyana are doing the opposite. The science is clear. The sea levels are rising, and the science is telling us that, by 2030, it is entirely possible that Georgetown will be under water. The science is clear. It is telling us that we are more prone now to tsunamis and tidal waves than we have ever been, and this Government is running around this country building roads, bridges, hotel rooms, golf courses, synthetic tracks, and failing to do the most important thing, that is, to protect us from flooding and from the sea coming in on us. It appears as though if it is left up to this PPP/C Government, all of us are going to be washed away. To hear these good men and women on the other side pontificate and the one piece of critical infrastructure they have neglected.

I want to turn to foreign affairs. I usually leave my good Colleague on the other side for last. I want to be clear at the outset, as we have said continuously, on the issue of our territorial integrity and of our sovereignty, we stand resolutely. We stand as resolutely as the Pakaraimas, and we are saying that we will support all of the endeavours of this Government that is geared towards preserving our territorial integrity. I want to put on record our gratitude to the bipartisan team who late last year made some excellent submissions to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Their submissions were, in my view, impenetrable. We look

forward to a victory, not only for international law, but for the people of Guyana.

Having said that, while we stand against those who would want to alter the shape of Guyana, it would be remiss of me not to draw our attention to a matter that threatens not to undermine us from without but from within, and that is the unchecked migration across our porous borders, particularly in the Essequibo and the establishment of settlements there. This Government appears either unable or unwilling to appreciate that this is an existential threat to us as Guyanese and to our sovereign team. They have this attitude of *burying their heads in the sand*. That, coupled with the politically expedient decision that they took to alter and water down the requirements for the obtaining of a Guyanese birth certificate, places us in clear jeopardy of being undermined from within. We must demand that this Government pays attention to this matter. The time is now for a clear and comprehensive immigration policy.

We are not against immigration. For decades Guyanese have migrated in search of a better life for themselves and families and so, we are not against migration. What we are asking for and what we are demanding is that this Government expound a clear immigration policy, so that we understand where we stand, and we understand what the future course of actions would look like. This *ad hoc* transactional approach to our foreign relations has to stop. You cannot be going all the way to the *Asiatic* regions to talk about labour shortage, when you have failed to look right in the Caribbean first for a labour force. There is a level of inconsistency in this Government's approach. Let us say that at the epicentre of our foreign affairs lies the issue of our foreign policy, which entails the general objective of our State and its interaction with foreign actors. Of course, it is formulated on the basis of our domestic policies and other international considerations. Diplomacy is that vehicle through which our foreign policy is carried to its destination.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, an extension is the vehicle you will need to conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you may continue to conclude.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For decades, our foreign policy has been informed by clear discernible principles, “friends of all, satellites on none”, et cetera. Now,

we have no clue as to what we are doing. We have embarked upon this path of transactionalism that will redound to our detriment later on. There is no clear adumbrated foreign policy. Where is the 'Todd Doctrine'? Where is the 'Jagdeo Doctrine'? There is nothing because they have no vision for the foreign affairs sector. We have now been victims of a carnival of inconsistencies. One day Taiwan is opening an office, the next day it is closed. What are we doing? We have departed from longstanding positions. We have derecognised the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) and it seems as though we are blown with every wind of doctrine. But Mr. Speaker, I will tell you what the trouble is.

1.50 p.m.

The trouble is that this Government is unable to discern between its private interests and the interests of the State, and so the state's interests are subjected to their private interests and their deals and their kickbacks. That is what the problem is. We are now viewed as day traders, and so nobody takes us seriously anymore. Professional diplomats were the hallmark of our diplomacy. We were able to *punch above our weight* in the diplomatic arena. Now, we are saddled with the likes of Charrandass Persaud.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the rule is that you cannot raise the name of someone who cannot defend him or herself in here.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I am guided, Sir. The former High Commissioner of Guyana to India was seen on video tape, in the vilest manner, abusing an Indian national. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? Again, there is this propensity to mislead the people of Guyana. We had the Head of State on television saying that Charrandass Persaud would be recalled. That is a matter of public record. I wrote to this House and asked the Hon. Minister when it was that Mr. Charrandass Persaud was recalled as the High Commissioner of Guyana to India. Do you know what the Hon. Minister told us? Let me quote him correctly. He said it was 10th November, 2022, when the Head of State appeared on television in this country and said to the people of Guyana, in October, that Mr. Charrandass Persaud was returning home. That is the difficulty I have – the ease with which this Government would mislead the people of Guyana.

Years on, we are still yet to appoint ambassadors to Venezuela and Brazil, two of our most consequential interactions. It appears that this Government is only able to or concerned with putting people who they consider as loyalists in positions. So, they would prefer to go for years without appointing an ambassador rather than give it to a

discerning professional diplomat. I have to conclude. There is so much to say but so little time. In concluding, I want to say to us all that the oil production offers this country a glorious opportunity to boost inclusive growth and to diversify the economy by addressing our human capital and our infrastructure gaps. It is clear to me that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) cannot get out of its own way to govern this country in a fair and equitable and inclusive manner. Even the projects that are intended to be transformative are either geographically misplaced or woefully underfunded. The logic behind putting a tourism and hospitality industry in Port Mourant, in the agricultural belt of this country, when 90% of the hotels are located in the capital city is beyond me.

The failure to put a robust sea defence programme into effect is tantamount to us abandoning our coast to the sea. This budget is high on dollars but seriously wanting in common sense, and big on concrete but short on care and compassion. Once again, we are faced with a budget that does nothing for the poor and working class in comparison to what is being done for big businesses. While I thank the Ministry of Finance and its hardworking staff for putting together this budget, I am afraid that, in its current iteration, I cannot support it. Thank you, Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Now for the Hon. Minister, Mr. Kwame McCoy.

Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister [Mr. McCoy]: Mr. Speaker and colleagues on the Government side...The two presentations by the Opposition so far in this debate were basically about theatrics and drama. I know that one of your Members of Parliament (MP), the one who started off the debate, was looking for artificial tears last night in three drug stores on the East Bank. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Well, perhaps it would have been more helpful to make sure that the Hon. Member had access to that tube of artificial tears. It is not about how much you could dramatis e and it is not about how much theatrics you possess that would make a difference in terms of the debate. It is about people being able to understand the reality of any given situation that you wish to present to them. A lot of what has been said here today is really far away from the reality – farfetched. So much so that one of your MPs said that sugar [**An Hon. Member:** Who?] It was MP Nima Flue-Bess. She said that a pound of sugar now is \$400. I sent to Mocha for and a five-pound pack of sugar just a short while ago. It is \$800.

[The Hon. Member displayed a five-pound pack of sugar.]

The Hon. Member said that one pound is \$400. One pound of sugar is \$160.

[The Hon. Member displayed one pound of sugar.]

I thought it would be best to buy it from Mocha because the Hon. Member lives there. This is straight out of Mocha. The oil that the Hon. Member said is \$800 is \$400. If we could go with issues like these with the intention of misleading people, ordinary people...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have to use a better word than “misleading”. It is imputing.

Mr. McCoy: I apologise, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I will give you back your time. Let me apologise to the Hon. Prime Minister (ag), Mr. Anil Nandlall, for not recognising him this morning.

Mr. McCoy: We cannot come here and tell stories that do not represent the reality, and we cannot come here and pretend that something is what it is not. This is how you have succeeded and survived for many years. Thankfully, these days are much more enlightened days. We are being watched all across the world on social media and other platforms. Anyone sitting here and not knowing what happens in Guyana would go away with the impression that the cost-of-living issue is so damning and that the most horrible situations exist in Guyana and only Guyana. This is a worldwide phenomenon. We, as a Government, have owned this issue. We have been speaking about it. We have addressed these issues. That is why you have seen us all over this country over and over. Do you think it is just for the purpose of the cameras? It is because we want to be in touch with people. We want to feel what people are feeling. We want to know what they are feeling. It is through those many engagements that hundreds upon hundreds... By now, each Minister in this room has been on more than 200 outreaches across this country. That is because we are available to the people and to work with the people to find solutions for the people, whether it be cost of living or climate change, or whether it be any issue that affects any part of our society or our country. We move around. That is how we know who on that side owes Courts (Guyana) Inc. We move around. That is why we know who on that side *beats up* her husband. We move around. That is why we are familiar with the issues. It is because people meet us and they tell us and they keep us informed, up to date and engaged on all of these issues.

More of it is coming, more of the theatrics. There is Cathy Hughes and all of the others who will come with their fancy sounding language, “*Oh my God. Wow.*” You will tend to believe the nice half-British, half-Guyanese accent. But they are coming here to kerfuffle you with a lot of *ooohhhs* and *ahhssss*. That is who they are. That is what makes them who they are, and they have survived with that type of language for many, many years. But we know where the Guyana Telephone and Telegraph Company (GT&T) money went and into whose bank account. We will tell you more; that is not so much for the budget. These are crucial issues. [**Ms. Hughes:** Tell me more.] Yes, a lot more. [**Ms. Hughes:** (*inaudible*) Julius right in here.] Julius is right here. He is here. Julius is here. [**Ms. Hughes:** Mr. McCoy, you are pathetic.] You and Nigel are the same thing.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) never ruled that the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project was not feasible. I do not recall that, and I do not know that to be true. They voted against the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. Then, they had an extortion scheme with ‘Fip’ Motilall. [**Mr. Duncan:** We voted against ‘Fip’ Motilall.] Do you remember who was ‘Fip’ Motilall’s person who was doing the public relations? It was those people over there, the woman with the English accent. Where are the animals that were killed in Mocha? I would like to see them. Let us go there and exhume them now. I saw this thing on *Facebook* one Saturday, and I became concerned that this might have actually been happening. I enquired, and we proceeded to the point of finding out that none of it existed. None of it was true. Why are you doing this? To be an Opposition does not mean you have to distort the facts. It does not mean that you have to misrepresent people. You do not have to spread misinformation.

2.05 p.m.

You must come here on the basis of facts. I can tell you that some people come here, and they pretend that they have all the love for certain people. When they had the opportunity, they never demonstrated that love. They never did for one moment. If you love the people of Mocha, you will not run them with cutlass when they are not in favour of you. If you love the people who you claim you love, you would have given them house lots many years ago. You had five years. Imagine, the Government is trying to add value to lives and the Opposition is telling the people not to move. One cannot go to the bank with two pigs and two black fowls and get a mortgage. One cannot go there with two pigs and two black fowls. [**Ms. Flue-Bess:** (*Inaudible*)] You have two houses in Mocha.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you should speak to the Speaker.

Mr. McCoy: They are coming here to dramatise and to give this impression that it is only them who care about the people. Everything is so bad, things are bad, this is bad, and that is bad. This must stop now. It must stop now. We are busy building a country for every Guyanese. We are busy building a country in which all of its people would benefit.

[**Ms. Flue-Bess:** Why do you not jump into the ocean?] I will soon. I will grab you and jump with you. We will have a swim together. Let us be fair. We have never had in this country a more responsive Government than the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. We have never had in this country a Government that has been moving things for people like the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. What there was in five years was a group of people. If you take those eight persons who they granted lands to in those five years...Eight persons got lands which was three or four times the size of Barbados and the ordinary man got no house lot. They had nothing. They were always about wanting to develop people, that they love, and they love Black people, and they love everyone. Even among yourselves, you never collectively demonstrated true love for the Guyanese people. Moneys that were supposed to go poor people under the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) Programme were misplaced. [**Mr.**

Dharamlall: It was Mr. Jones.] Up to now you cannot see this barber shop. I am waiting *fu*h cut my hair and up to now I cannot get a chance to. I want to go into this fancy barber shop.

Nine hundred and sixty million dollars is allocated to youths. It just shows that you have no clue of how a budget programme operates. A line item that identifies a sum of money for youth development is not the end of it all. It is part, and it is a small part, of what goes in as the investment in young people across the country. When you take into consideration development of grounds and other facilities, scholarships and so many other initiatives under the Government, education, *et cetera*, it outweighs, by far, any \$960 million. My friend, Amanza Walton-Desir came here, the Hon. Member ... [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Amanza Walton-Desir is not your friend.] You need to speak for yourself. She may not be your friend. She came here and gave the impression as though it was the sum total of the investment in youth. We are investing way beyond \$960 million in our young people. Yes, the one thing you can rest assured with a People's Progressive Party/Civic Government is what we say we will do, we will do. You do not have to second guess us.

Guess what? Free university education will be a reality in this country before our five years are up. [**An Hon. Member:** They increased it.] You increased the tuition when you were in government. [**An Hon. Member:** You increased the money.] I do not understand what you are talking about. We put the tuition. All right. Fair enough. We put it there, right? Alright; good. Let us take your argument. You love the University of Guyana (UG) students. Why did you not remove it? On top of that, you added 35%. What is the rationale behind your criticism of this, that "you put it"? You love the UG students, do you not? You love them, right? The Hon. Member said the ability is present, but the willingness is absent. The ability is indeed present. There is no absence of willingness on this side of the House in getting anything that will make Guyanese lives better. There is no unwillingness. I can tell you we may be unwilling to go into any direction that will take our country downward. We will make the best choices and the best decisions in keeping with the realities. If I give all of you over there the oil money now, you will pay off Courts (Guyana) Inc., you will buy a wig and the other one will buy a car. That is how it will go on. You will spend it on the fanciful things and not on the things that matter to people because that is how you operate all the time. You cannot manage for people.

Mr. Speaker: Again, Hon. Minister, remember that you are speaking to the Speaker. You imputed a lot.

Mr. McCoy: I am sorry. You cannot manage. You are incapable of managing for people. It is not about how much money we have. The bulk of the money has not even started to come. Do you think we are that irresponsible to just be spending like wild and all over the place, *helter-skelter*? We have to do this. I am warning you. It is not about just about having money and spending it. We have to be prudent in our management and this is what you can get and expect from this side of the House. There is the subsidy for transportation that as the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, spoke about. I get the impression that you were so distant from each other when you were in Government that you did not offer this suggestion of the transportation subsidy to the Granger Administration. You had a Five 'Bs' programme that really touched just about 4,000 children across this country. I am being very generous by saying 4,000. It was 'Boots, Bicycles, Breakfast' or whatever it was. It was all the 'Bs' [**An Hon. Member:** Bangles and bracelets.] It was bangles and bracelets, perhaps. [**An Hon. Member:** Bedsheets.] Bedsheets. [**An Hon. Member:** Barber shop.] That was their philosophy in terms of a transportation subsidy. [**Mr. Bharrat:** Brown rum.] Brown rum. How could that be anything superior to a 'Because We Care' cash grant where

every child across this country gets the opportunity for a grant.

When we talk, we must not only come here and try to sound nice and try to use our... [Mr. Dharamlall: Accent.] ...accent and all of the different things to fool people, kerfuffle... [An. Hon. Member: Give us the 'Cathy' accent.] *The British accent and so forth.* Do you know what I mean? We may be the fastest growing economy, but we have to manage not only for today, Mr. Speaker. We have to manage for today and the future of this country. We are not doing this for today only. You would imagine that we have probably another 55 years here. We cannot just manage anyhow. I am not saying this to say that 55 years more of the PPP/Civic Government is because of some magic that will happen. We are working hard for 55 more years because it is going to be a five, another five, a five and it will go on.

We are the Government that will be there for all Guyanese at all times, and we make sure that our people all progress together. If we talk about reckless spending, I do not know the moneys allocated to pension increase is reckless; that the money allocated to school grant programme is reckless, to education and health are reckless spending, moneys allocated to roads and bridges are reckless,... [Mr. Ramson: The gas to power project.] There is the gas to power project. [Mr. Ramson: The bridge.] There is the Harbour Bridge. How could these be truthfully described as reckless spendings? It really bothers me when I hear the Members on the other side speak these things and expect that all of Guyana will accept all of the nonsense or nonsensical arguments and reasonings. Really? I just want you to know that our people are becoming more and more educated. That is why you would not be able to succeed with this type of utterances. Mr. Speaker, listening to the budget presentation, at least we had hoped that the marathon Shakespearean eloquence and oratory genius of the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, which was on glorious display here on 16th January, would have instantly permeated the vacuous minds of the street bullies on that side and stupefy their infantile retort to their cliches and rabbleroising jargons with which they are best familiar.

2.20 p.m.

Unsurprisingly, in the very moment Guyanese of every class, colour and creed began celebrating the rewards of yet another people-focused masterpiece of a budget, we heard the woeful cries of the pompous puff of the person we have come to know as the new Leader of the Opposition,

whimpering cluelessly and hopelessly about friends, family and favourites. Our proud, intelligent and ambitious citizenry, who are fully in sync with our 'One Guyana' programme, who are excitedly engaged with the national transformation process and who are already positioning and empowering themselves for a most rewarding future, sadly, all they will be hearing over the next few days from the Opposition benches are the unintelligible utterances such as growth does not reflect development and they are not sharing the oil money like we want them to, of course. We cannot get the treasurer to sign blank cheques for our gold bangles and Courts (Guyana) Inc shopping. We will hear the infantile cliches about friends and families, and the tired, out of touch race-baiting rants of people who have already fortified their legitimacy of meaningful representation in the National Assembly in the just two short years of being here. That is all they will bring to this august House over the next few days – a cacophony of opaque and poisonous spews.

Luckily, conversely, on this side of the House – from the governing People's Progressive Party/Civic Government – Guyanese will definitely hear from us comprehensive analysis of the macroeconomic parameters of *Budget 2023*. They will hear pellucid explanations of the fiscal programmes and measures of the budget. Those that have been intelligently choreographed to construct and fortify a multidimensional economy that is deliberately and intentionally designed to leverage the economic growth spurt from the oil and gas sector to catalyse the traditional sectors and forge emergence of new frontier sectors, all of which will coalesce to create an undergird – a sustainable development paradigm for 2030 and beyond.

At the same time, Guyanese will hear from this side of the House layman reasoning, simple breakdowns of the nitty-gritty of what every little allocation of resource means for a country and its citizens. In other words, we will tell them what is in it for them and what is in it for the country as a whole. Over the next few days, we will explain to our citizens how consecutive double digit annual growth in our economy translates to real time development; how it allowed us to abolish more than 200 new taxes by the APNU/AFC Government that were placed like an albatross around the people's necks; how it allowed us to reintroduce and rapidly increase the school children's cash grant which the wicked APNU/AFC Government took away from our children; and how it allowed us to reemploy hundreds of sugar workers who the APNU/AFC Government unceremoniously sent packing into a wilderness of sure poverty. We will explain how after five years and only a few dozen house lots and contracts, only for the husband of the APNU/AFC Minister,

we are able to issue thousands of lots in every region of this country, build thousands of low income and young professional homes all across Guyana, remove value-added tax (VAT) on building materials, reduce mortgage interest rates, increase the low interest mortgage ceiling, provide stone, cement and steel, and assist with construction management for qualified home builders.

We will demonstrate to Guyanese how economic growth is allowing us to create brand new four-lane highways from Mandela Avenue to Diamond, from Ogle to Eccles and on to Soesdyke/Timehri, a four-lane highway from Schoonord to Crane and a new road linkage from Parika to Goshen. Since the Leader of the Opposition is incapable of explaining how growth is development – and it is not hard to imagine – we will tell the people how growth is allowing us to fully rehabilitate the entire Linden/Soesdyke Highway, commence the first leg of the Pan-American highway from Linden to Mabura Hill and then all the way to Lethem, how we are able to open up a four-lane passage across the city from Conversation Tree, complete and extend... [Mr. Duncan: Please do not drink the oil.] I was (*inaudible*).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you will need an extension to extend this presentation.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Speaker, I am really tempted to ask for 15 minutes but I will ask for 5 minutes.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Minister McCoy, you may continue to conclude.

Mr. McCoy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We will explain to all the people of this country, since the Opposition is incapable of doing that. We will tell them how economic growth is allowing us to build a four-lane bridge across the Demerara River and the East to West Bank, and new bridges from Mackenzie to Wismar and from Guyana to Suriname. We will articulate how growth is allowing us to transform the energy sector of our country with unprecedented investment in gas to energy plants, largescale solar and wind farms and hydroelectric power. We will explain to the Opposition and the people of this country all the measures in the budget that are geared towards advancing and improving the lives of our Guyanese brothers and sisters. These and many other measures are real development felt directly in the pockets of people, as well as the transformative types of development impacting the macroeconomic outlook of our country. The Leader of the Opposition is incapable of comprehending how growth translates into development. We

will enlighten him of the catalytic impact of the brackish water shrimp farms developed in Berbice, the mega soya bean plantation at Tacama, the rice plantation expansion in the Rupununi, the coconut and livestock improvement programmes, and the hemp and millet plantations in the pipeline.

Our budget – the people's budget – is about agriculture, agro-processing, manufacturing, commerce, tourism, infrastructural development in Essequibo, Demerara, Berbice, right across our country, putting moneys into the pockets of people, making sure that all across our country, our people can get by and get by steadily. It cannot be a programme that addresses everything all at once. It is not a one-shot programme. It is a continuous programme since coming into Government in August, 2020. We have been building on all the initiatives. We have been fulfilling our manifesto promises. We have been increasing the stock of our public infrastructure. We have been improving the assets of people every year right across this country. Those who did not have, now have. Those who do not have all that they want, will have it at some time in the future because our country and our economy is working for all the people and will be a steady movement towards the improvement of people's lives.

For those race-baiting naysayers on the Opposition benches, it will be difficult for you to cloud the reality that thousands of Guyanese are able to educate themselves through thousands of academic scholarships from the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) and how thousands of young men and women from Sophia, West Ruimveldt, Linden and every other part of our country are benefitting from technical vocational skills training programmes. The APNU/AFC may not have heard and may not have been able to make the connection between growth and development that has allowed Guyana to, once again, create history in the global climate change arena, by becoming the first country to gain the status of certified carbon credit trader and earn millions of US dollars from the first sale that will directly benefit the development of Amerindian villages and other parts of our country. They may have missed this development, but their apathetic belligerence does not change these facts. They may have also missed the transformative educational reform agenda currently underway or the world class health sector that is emerging and, of course, they missed the unprecedented nationwide investment in our sporting and recreational facilities, our cultural heritage, and our young people all together.

Speaking of young people, last year, the President established the National Youth Advisory Council (NYAC). He also brought our menfolk together to champion and aid grassroot development, support youth and community development and support restorative justice across this country. While these initiatives may be part of the qualitative growth paradigm of the country, they are apparently not development at all, if one is to take the Opposition seriously. Who in their right mind would argue that the commencement of the proprietary works for a new high ground, smart and carbon neutral city for Guyana is not growth and development? Are the new bridges in Buxton and Sophia not part of the development of those communities? How about the concrete footpaths all over Berbice and in the Victory Valley in Linden, the family recreational promenades and real green parks – without any green paint, of course – being constructed all across this country?

Mr. Speaker: You will need to wrap up now.

Mr. McCoy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I can go on and on about the developments which are so numerous, but time would not permit me. We have had... [**Mr. Henry:** You used your time stupidly.] We have had... No. I think I have used my time well. Very, very well. Very well. I wish I could have some more time to use it even more to do a much better job. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I did not sing here, today. The department for which I have responsibility, the department of public affairs, has focused on expansive training opportunities for our young journalists and our young people in general in the media and communications spheres. I will close because of time constraints. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I know you would love for me to go from here. I could only imagine how stinging my presentation was, but I will be back at sometime soon in the future. We will be back in other speakers. Look at all the giants here yet to come.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, you need to look at me because you are really testing patience now.

Mr. McCoy: They are getting me so excited. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thank you very much, Guyana, for the attention and understanding our reasoning and arguments around *Budget 2023*. You can look forward to a budget that will bring betterment to your lives. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, thank you, thank you, Hon. Minister McCoy. Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy.

2.35 p.m.

Hon. Members, let me welcome the next speaker, the Hon. Member, Mr. Cox. While he goes to the podium, join me in recognising the presence of the Regional Chairman (RC) for Region 4, Mr. Seeram. Thank you, RC. Before you start, Hon. Member, I also want to thank the Regional Chairman for Region 7 for joining us. Hon. Member, remember you have 15 minutes and can get a five-minute extension. You are starting at 2.36 p.m.

Mr. Cox: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, as I rise to make my contribution to the debates for *Budget 2023*, permit me, first of all, to express best wishes to the Guyanese people for the year 2023, to express birthday greetings to those celebrating their birthdays and anyone who may be celebrating an event, or in the case of the loss of a loved one, I express my sincere condolences to such a person.

I just have two comments on the previous speaker's contribution. As a matter of fact, it is a question. This is from the Guyanese point of view. It would be useful to find out from the Hon. Kwame McCoy where exactly did he get such a cheap oil from? Secondly, forgive me if I did not hear the Hon. Member correctly, but did he just confirm to the people of Guyana that all the Ministers of the Government are a bunch of tourists? An active outreach calendar by this Government with a slush fund of \$5 billion has not enhanced the relevance of local authorities.

I also want to say thanks to the staff of the Ministry of Finance for their continuous work in preparation for *Budget 2023*. I also want to thank the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance for standing for more than five hours to read *Budget 2023*. However, I wish to remind the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance that the people of Guyana are not impressed and would not judge *Budget 2023* by how long he can stand and read, rather, they will judge the budget by how appreciable and preeminent the measures included will be. I am also reminded of a statement made by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance while on a programme with the *News Room*. A large portion or a large part of the budget will be about addressing main irritants, the things that affect people in their day-to-day lives. It begs the question, does the Minister really understand what the day-to-day lives of the ordinary Guyanese are like?

If nothing else, the people of Guyana eagerly were looking forward to *Budget 2023* since it included a substantial amount of the oil revenues for the first time. As a matter of

fact, this Budget is more than 40%, an increase from the previous budget, so the people were eagerly looking forward to this Budget with patience and much enthusiasm. It is sad to say that their enthusiasm has died suddenly. I wish to turn to the issue of agriculture. The Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance stated:

“... the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector is estimated to have expanded by 11.9 percent in 2022.”

I question the performance of this sector specific to the Barima-Waini region. I am not doubting the performance of these sectors. What I am doubting is the performance within my region which I have responsibility for. Expansion and good performance of a sector cannot be done in a bubble. It has not been impacting the lives of all Guyanese, and the Government must accept its areas of weakness. Any good government will highlight their areas of weakness and address them in front of the Guyanese people, and that is to say here in the National Assembly. I wish to turn your attention to an editorial on *Budget 2023* in the *Stabroek Newspaper* dated Monday, 23rd January, 2023, and I quote:

“The man and woman in the street continue to be at the mercy of the market forces that have pumped up the cost of living particularly since oil production began. Increased demand in the food sector associated with the oil and gas industry has driven up prices for basic items and nothing that the government has done since its terms began has had a lasting effect on easing this burden.”

It continues:

“The impact of the rising cost of living on those who can least afford it must be evaluated, understood and acted upon. It is intolerable that with US\$1b earned from oil in 2022 that there are deep pockets of poverty with some households struggling to afford...”

Basic...

“...food.”

We must not come to the National Assembly and boast about performance for a few elites while the largest mass of the Guyanese people continues to struggle. That is my question. That is the issue I have with a government that continues to boast of performances, yet there are still persons struggling, yet there are still persons in poverty, and this is extreme

poverty. This expectation that there would have been a light at the end of the tunnel instead allowed the Guyanese people to be trusted into further darkness and despair by a so-called caring government that seems to be on the offensive against the Guyanese people. I am moved out of necessity to ask, and in the interest of the Guyanese people, the following fundamental questions: Is this Government serious about Indigenous progress? Is this Government serious about equitable development? Even more fundamental, is this the ‘One Guyana’ the Government boasts about? We on the Opposition question the Government’s performance in hinterland communities.

I wish to turn my attention to education. It must be recognised that quality education is not only about access, but it requires a reorientation of the entire system that provides skills training so that persons could respond to global needs and expectations. With that being said, I question the policies of the present Government with respect to several programmes as it relates to the hinterland and Indigenous communities. One of them is the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship. I have a few questions for the Hon. Minister. Is the Minister aware that persons who have enrolled on the GOAL scholarship programme from the hinterland have dropped out because of a number of factors, inclusive of internet access or no internet access that is? Is the Minister even aware that persons who have enrolled on the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) training programme since 2022 are yet to begin their first class? Is the Government aware that for teachers who have to travel far distances in the interior, their travel expenses surpass \$5,000 on a daily basis and they were even refused assistance from the relevant regional authorities? What I am saying here is that the Government must ensure that when it is on these touring trips it engages with the ordinary people on the streets rather than meeting with the elites of the Regional Democratic Council (RDC), the Regional Chairman and those in high offices. They will tell a person what he/she needs to hear. We want you to meet the Guyanese people and allow them to tell you what you should be hearing. That is our concern. As a matter of fact, whenever Ministers visited Mabaruma, they had meetings with 20 persons or 40 persons, and out of the 40 persons, 35 of them were staff of the RDC – drivers, handymen, temporary workers. You have to meet the ordinary Guyanese people and listen to the people.

Public Works: Several months ago, the Hon. Minister of Public Works visited Mabaruma and promised the people of Barabina that they will be having a new road. We do not doubt the Minister, but has the work started? Then he went

further to Wauna and initiated, in their own words ‘an emergency contract’ for the Wauna road works. Besides slush mud being spread across this road, it has become worse, with no sign of major work in progress – ‘an emergency work’ that is. As a matter of fact, it was only after several posts on *Facebook* and being bombarded by the RDC, and I was told by a minister through a phone call, only then the contractor decided that he will start moving some of the equipment to this emergency location. What I want to highlight here is that this is the issue: one person is being awarded several contracts; as a matter of fact, 95% of contracts in Region 1. The contractor is the common-law husband of the Regional Vice Chairperson. Then there is a brother of the said contractor living in Mabaruma who controls part of the contracts there. If that is not enough, another brother, a third brother, is a staff with responsibility at the RDC for works. If this is what His Excellency rebutted by saying, yes, they are working for friends, families and cronies, then this must not be. This cannot be. One person being awarded several contracts cannot implement the contracts on time, so there will be works being rolled over and rolled over. We are yet to see any major works commence in Mabaruma since 2020. From 2015 to 2018, while the Coalition was in Government, roads could be named that were done under the Coalition. If you come here to tell the Guyanese people that the Coalition did nothing, then that is untruth. I said earlier, you must come to the National Assembly to tell the people what the Opposition did while in Government, and what you are doing better.

2.50 p.m.

You will not do that, because in some places across Guyana, like where I came from, it is not being done better. I want to applaud the Government for continuing one thing and that is the Coalition’s vision for better roads in the hinterland communities. Communities in Mabaruma witnessed, for the first time after 1992 – 28 years later; twenty-odd years later – better roads. While they were in campaign mode, they were telling the people ‘you cannot eat road’. Yet, now they come to tell the people that concrete road is the best thing in the hinterland communities. The very road that they go there and they walk on. I could remember the Hon. Mr. Benn walking in Kumaka in slush mud when he was the Minister of Works. I think he fell one time in the mud. You could go there now, you will not fall, thanks to the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government.

Indigenous Development: It is a known fact that Guyana is poised for economic take off, and that the extent to which we

could do so is dependent on the choices we make and our ability to collectively harness the skills and talents of our people in a bid to achieve progress and development. The allocation for development in the hinterland and in the Indigenous communities seems to be a well regurgitated script from a previous budget. That is not an issue. The issue is, have the policies, have the programmes, largely benefited the people? Has it actually become a reality in many cases? We question the Government to provide the answers. I am sure the Hon. Minister coming after me, the Hon. Sonia Parag, would try to bring some clarity or answers to some of the questions. The preeminent focus of the Government on information and communication technology (ICT), Indigenous land titling, solar energy, sustainable land management, are all very important.

Mr. Speaker: It is very important for you to get an extension to conclude.

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

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Hon. Member, you may continue to conclude.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to turn my attention a little bit to the part-time job programme through which we see the good in its conception. However, this project is, in some views of the Guyanese populace, counterproductive. It would be far more effective if those persons receive training to enhance their skills and employment prospects, rather than simply being paid a bribe for votes, as it may be described. I am sure the Hon. Member, Mr. Charlie, could help me to understand when his time comes to speak. I am saying that emphasis must be placed on training for these youths. It is too often that these youths are not aware of their mandate, they are not being trained, they are not being exposed... I question when this programme comes to an end, what next? Is it that they will be continuing to pay these persons as a bribe for their votes?

Like every other Guyanese, I am entitled, I have applied, I have met the criteria and I was awarded. I want to say one thing, unlike many of the other Guyanese Indigenous people, they do not have the privilege like me to call the Hon. Minister on her phone to help facilitate a scholarship, so they will not be getting any if they cannot do that. Is that what we have to get at? I could recall bringing this topic in the National Assembly and then, the following year, the Hon. Minister met me to say that she did not know I was speaking

about myself, and she did not know that it was me who applied, but now that she knows, now I can get it. Is that how things must go in this country? Those who are listening [**Mr. Dharamlall:** You are still on the GOAL scholarship.] Thank you, Hon. Member Mr. Dharamlall, for raising the issue. Every young person in Guyana does not have that privilege.

I just want to touch a little bit on the carbon credits as I close. The Indigenous people, as it relates to the HESS Corporation signing of carbon credits as is largely related to the Indigenous people of Guyana, we would like to see what we call a governing board established by the National Toshaos Council, one with an oversight committee that will monitor the execution of this fund. It must not be directly managed by the Minister or simply by Central Government. Again, we propose that the Toshaos of the various villages across Guyana must have a say, that is why we are including the National Toshaos Council. [**An Opposition Member: Inaudible.**] Obviously, they are, and they represent a large percentage of the populace, which is 10% of all of Guyana – the Indigenous populace. As I close, the budget speech reported inflation at 7.2% for 2022. I want to quote Ram and McRae in their analysis which is titled, *Focus on Guyana's National Budget 2023*. It states:

“It is the highest rate of reported inflation in the past twenty years.”

In a recent editorial as well, which shows significantly higher prices of the actual expense that a Guyanese will pay when they visit the market, the question here is, what exactly has the Government done to alleviate the hardship of these Guyanese persons. Old age pension should have been increased to \$40,000, public assistant should have been increased to \$25,000, public servants should have received an increase ranging from 10–20% on an average annual income basis. A budget for the people must be one which directly strengthens their efforts to combat poverty, be able to have reliable access to sufficient quantity of affordable nutritious food, while meeting their other daily needs. If this Budget is one that allows that, then I commend it. However, my colleagues have already said that the Budget has some loopholes, and until those can be addressed, we cannot support this *Budget 2023*. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Minister of Public Service [Ms. Parag]: Mr. Speaker, allow me on behalf of the Government Members of Parliament to wish our Vice President a very happy birthday, as well as our sitting Member of Parliament Minister Ramson – that is being celebrated today.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to genuinely and wholeheartedly thank the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, and his dedicated team at the Ministry of Finance, for presenting us with yet another excellent fiscal plan, *Budget 2023*. Even before I start this, Mr. Speaker, I know that my friend, the Hon. Sherod Duncan, has been out of the House for over a year, but if we could control the flatulence that keeps coming out of his mouth, that would be very helpful.

Budget 2023 is comprehensive, it is brilliant, and even though the private sector and many other sections, I want the Hon. Member who spoke just before me to hear this, that the National Toshaos Council recognised as the legal authority to deal with the Amerindian/Indigenous peoples of this country, commended this Budget. Many other sections of society have lauded its contents. We know that the main Opposition has nothing but criticisms to offer. It is what they do; smear everything good because they are incapable of doing it themselves. Instead of attempting to make any meaningful contributions to national development, they have and will come to this House heavily armed with their untruths and misinformation to mislead the Guyanese people. The arguments that we will hear from the APNU/AFC Members of Parliament throughout these debates will be nothing but laughable, mediocre and very much predictable because, quite frankly, they keep clutching at the same exhausted straws. I want to address the speaker just before me, and then I will address the other speakers who came for the day. The Hon. Member Mr. Cox said that he was told by me that I did not know that he was the one who applied for a scholarship. That is in fact so, because in 2021 when the Ministry of Public Service selected those persons for the GOAL scholarship, every single person who applied from Region 1 was given a GOAL scholarship. If he was not there, I cannot do anything about it.

Secondly, my cell phone number is on my *Facebook* page, available to all Guyanese. It is not just that Mr. Cox can call me and get through, any Guyanese can call me and get through. That is how our Government has operated from 2nd August to now, and we will continue to do so. What the Hon. Member may or may not know is that there is another Hon. Member sitting on the Opposition side of this House who is also granted a GOAL scholarship, whom I did not have contact with. That is how inclusive this Government is. [**Ms. Hastings-Williams:** No. They are entitled.] Whether they are entitled or not, you do not come here and use it as a weapon against the Government. I will turn my attention to another issue raised about the Budget being increased by 40%. Yes. The budget was increased by 40%. Mr. Speaker,

like every single year and the last three budgets that we have passed, they never looked at it; they never bothered to understand it. The two major projects are what caused the increase in the Budget, that is the gas-to-shore project and the Demerara Harbour Bridge. When those projects are off the ground and completed, the budget will reduce. They do not understand that because they have not taken the time to look at it properly. The largest allocation in this Budget is given to the Ministry of Education that takes care of national training and development in this country for students, for people going for tertiary education. That is our human capital, oh yes, our most valued asset.

3.05 p.m.

The Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Housing and Water, the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, those have the largest allocations, and they are all people-centred. They know that, but because they cannot come back with anything better, they are going to come with discrimination, racism, lack of inclusion. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] There is a difference between passion and Bourda Market. Opposition Leader, I like the fact that you are smiling so much, because I see you looking around at your own Members and wondering if they are going to stab you in the back with a seriousness. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Let us get it out because the Hon. Amanza Walton-Desir came and said govern the country, we on this side of the House, we are good, we have our house in order, but you do not have your house in order because, probably, you are looked at suspiciously too by the Leader of the Opposition.

The first speaker for the Opposition, the Hon. Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, is a resident of Mocha Arcadia (Mocha), and I am responsible on the Government side for Mocha, and I visit Mocha every week. I would like to say this publicly: every single time that I have entered Mocha, I have had a very warm welcome from all of the residents of Mocha; they are beautiful people. And I do believe that the kind of welcome that His Excellency had on his outreaches is causing so much ruckus in the Opposition's side of things that they have to run around erratic as ever.

This morning the Hon. Member said words like 'erratic' and so on, but by the Hon. Member's conduct inside Mocha and inside this House is the very definition of erratic because she said, 'who saw me with a cutlass?' There is a video of the Hon. Member wielding a cutlass in there. What is more, Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member went on social media and cried, put down tears and so on, just for political gimmicks. The

Hon. Member on a post made on the 3rd December, 2022, her *Facebook* post, said that she put on notice the 'dunce tug crew' that is running around the Mocha Arcadia community, keeping meetings and sending out threats; no dunce will control their village; no needy people that can be bought for a few *chillings*, instead of shillings, will control their village; every square inch of resources that belong to the community will be inherited by the people of Mocha Arcadia. I was at a meeting there, but this was not referring to me, this was referring to residents of Mocha and they reacted. So the Hon. Member wants to come here and feign concern and compassion for people in Mocha. On one of my visits down at the squatting area with the Ministry of Housing staff to look at the squatting area and whether it could be regularised – this is different from Caneview – the very/same Honourable Member and the Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) Chairman came running there. They were trying to get those people, who have been living there for years, out of Mocha. So they feign concern and compassion for people...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I trust that is dated too, so you can leave a copy of your display with us.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Speaker, the issue with the squatters at Caneview was dealt with in depth by the Ministry of Housing and all measures were taken. The majority of the persons were given a home; they were given compensation. The persons who refused to move were offered a home by the Government. This was an opportunity that the Opposition decided they could milk for all that they can get for political gimmicks because they cannot take the progress of this Government; they cannot take it. Mr. Speaker, this is an area that is Government reserve, it is an illegal area; it is an area that one is squatting on, one does not own it. The offer was made by the Ministry of Housing – and that is a fact – to have legal ownership of a home. I have no doubt that they were elements in this room, on the other side, that told people that they should not take it because it is ancestral lands. Mr. Speaker, I do my homework too when I have to work in a community, and it is not for politics; it is to ensure that there is development in that community as we intend from this Government. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] As a matter of fact, no, as a lawyer I entered Mocha several times, and I had clients in Mocha, but you would not know about that.

The first speaker was talking about unfeeling and... [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** (*Inaudible*)] You love my name, do you not? You like my name clearly. Keep calling my name, it is okay. Mr. Speaker, they talked about the love

for public servants, but they unfeelingly and unapologetically removed the tax-free bonus from the Disciplined Services and called it a bribe; removed the 'Because We Care' cash grant, and then the Hon. Member stands there and says that she commends the 'Because We Care' cash grant moving to \$40,000 but we need to do more. They took it away all together. How can you believe people who discredit themselves by standing and their own words discredit them? How can you believe that? As a matter of fact, this document here, the APNU/AFC's 2015 manifesto, from beginning to end their vision discredits them completely because nothing was done; no promise was honoured in this manifesto. [Ms. Walton-Desir: (Inaudible)] Just as you talked about your competency as a shadow Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and they could not even use you when they went overseas. Just as well, Hon. Member Ms. Walton-Desir, when you stand here, you talked about discrimination, for 25 minutes, and lack of inclusion and racism, but purportedly and allegedly, you practiced domestic violence.

Mr. Speaker, the Government since assuming Office on 2nd August, 2020, have all... As a matter of fact, even before we have had a track record of caring for the well-being of all Guyanese, the public servants inclusive because every year an increase of salary was given no matter the state of finances. We did not always have oil money, but an increase was always given.

In 2020, a one-off cash grant was given of \$25,000 to each public servant. In 2021, a salary increase of 7% was given. [Ms. Walton-Desir: (Inaudible)] If you do not like it, give it up. In 2022, an 8% increase was given to public servants, but what the Opposition does not understand, and I think they will never understand it because they do not know how to manage economically the purse of the country, is that when giving a salary increase for thousands of persons – over 60,000 people in the public sector – there has to be talk about sustainability so it will gradually increase. They may have given increases and, yes, public servants are entitled to that because they work, but what else have they done in terms of putting money in the pockets of public servants? They removed the cash grant. Every public servant who has a child benefits from that 'Because We Care' cash grant. That is money going directly into their pockets. Every public servant benefitted from the COVID-19 per household cash grant; every public servant benefitted from the programmes – housing, public servants benefitted. I know, personally, three disciplinary services persons who called to thank me because they applied between 2015–2020 and were never given a house lot, but they were given by the Ministry of

Housing and Water in 2022. They cried because basic home ownership is necessary. [Hon. Members and Mr. Ramjattan: (Inaudible)] Is it like the 'Livan' that had the flash drive during the rigging of the elections that the elements over there might have orchestrated, some who wanted to put their names on the declaration as well?

Mr. Speaker, the Vice President gave a 'live' and clearly the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, clearly listened to the 'live' because she came here and said the Vice President wanted to work reverse psychology on her, and I guess it worked. But her brain is so wired to talk racism and discrimination [Ms. Walton-Desir: (Inaudible)] I will talk about the Ministry of Public Service (PSM) right now. Mr. Speaker, I believe the issue of racism and discrimination should be dealt with as we have always done, transparently, and it should be dealt with publicly. The total number of GOAL scholarships awarded in 2021 is 6,000. The total number of GOAL scholarships awarded to Afro-Guyanese is 2,558, that is 42.6%. The total number of GOAL scholarships awarded in 2022 is 7,410, and total number of GOAL scholarships awarded to Afro-Guyanese is 3,430, that is 46.3%. The Ministry of Public Service's percentage of Afro-Guyanese working there is 69.5%, and this is replicated across the entire public service. All the programmes and policies of this Government will reflect and, if not, even better the percentages to show our inclusiveness of all Guyanese.

3.20 p.m.

The Hon. Member – Well, Mr. Cox – said that if he does not call me, he does not know how other persons in the region will get to me. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, when I was able to speak with Mr. Cox? It was at an outreach in Region 1 where ordinary Guyanese from Region 1 were at that outreach. He was one of them sitting there and I spoke with him as well. That is public; the Department of Public Information (DPI) was there. It covered that. As expected, they will come to this House professing their deep concern, profound love and care for the public servants. They will criticise the Government for not giving public servants 50% to 100% salary increases if they could. Believe it or not, these are the same people who blatantly disregarded their promises to public servants by giving themselves first – giving themselves first – after entering Office, a 50% increase in their salaries and then they turned to the Guyanese people. That is the love that they had for public servants. That is the love that they had for public servants. We are not a Government who comes to the people with false promises and froths in our mouths. For now, in addition

to the gradual salary increases year after year, we will also support other means of giving disposal income.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, there was a promise made or a commitment made rather, by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance in the 2022 Budget, to look at disparities in salaries in certain categories of workers in the public service. That commenced at the end of 2022 with the Disciplinary Services and the healthcare workers. His Excellency made an announcement and the percentages were given. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation is being looked at right now and it will go across the public sector gradually as we go along. That was a vision that was never had by the people who said that they care so much about public servants.

An additional \$2.1 billion to fund the National School Feeding Programme is given. [An Hon. Member (Opposition): *(Inaudible)*] That is to give the children warm meals. We have also invested billions in an attempt to cushion the rising cost of living which is not unique to Guyana. I want to address this matter of the cost of living. This is an imported cost of living; the rest of the world is facing this. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? In 2015, it was a deliberate act of inflation when they put on the backs of all ordinary Guyanese more than 200 taxes – more than 200 taxes. They deliberately did that. While this is imported and out of our control, they deliberately did that and they profess their love for all Guyanese. When we commit to developing the lives of our people, we do not mean that this will be done in a vacuum and in a manner that is singular and short-sighted. I believe that it is as early as primary school that we are taught not to *put all our eggs in one basket*. That is why when this Government speaks of the development of public servants for the advancement of all Guyanese, we do not do that in a myopic and visionless way. While we are continuing to raise salaries incrementally, we are also focusing on making the lives easier for all Guyanese across every sector, be it by providing improved access to housing and water or by delivering increased opportunities for academic and skills development.

When we act, we act in a manner that will comprehensively and holistically improve the lives of every man, woman, and child across every region and within every community. Despite all the national accomplishments, our beloved A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Members, will still come to this House and shamelessly try to criticise us for anything and everything, including the disparity in public servants' salaries and the

waiting time for new public servants to receive their salaries. As has become predictable, the APNU/AFC MPs will come to this House, complain about everything and offer no sensible solution to any of the problems that the Guyanese will face. My realisation is that the main Opposition is truly barefaced and conscienceless and came after they started hurling criticisms at our scholarship policies, including the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) which continues to see thousands of Guyanese.... With the \$1.8 billion allocated in this year's Budget, we will surpass the target of 20,000 scholarships in 2023. This would be two years early, so that by 2025 we would have substantially increased the number from 20,000 to another – promise delivered.

The Ministry of the Public Service's scholarship – the largest scholarship grant – is given to the University of Guyana (UG). The largest scholarship grant is given to the University of Guyana. It is boggling to me that somebody would come here and say, *oh you come to say that you promised to give UG free and you ain't do it yet*. Our plan is a five-year plan. It is not a no-plan like what they had. The University of Guyana will be free to Guyanese. It will become free before 2025. In the meanwhile, scholarships are offered to ordinary Guyanese to have the opportunity to go to the University of Guyana so that they may enhance their skills to fill the gaps that are so needed in the public sector. That is what the Ministry of Public Service would do for human capacity building. [Mr. Norton: *(Inaudible)*] Could you act like a leader and not be like a little league man?

There is some noise emanating from the Leader of the Opposition's seat, but I find it... You know, Mr. Speaker, I am not even making this up. You know that I am not even making this up. This is the Gentleman who finds that a handshake is a problem. This is the Gentleman who finds shaking the President's hand a problem. Our Government believes unwaveringly in the concept of, *One Guyana*. This is why His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, was so keen on literally extending a hand of friendship to the likes of the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Aubrey Norton. While we were disappointed, we were in no way surprised by the APNU/AFC's reaction to our olive branch. We cannot expect a Party who is so severely fractured from within to heal a nation that it actively tried to break.

Let us not forget that these are people who have deep-seated beliefs and biases that more than 40% of our entire population are people who are mentally lazy. As we would recall, the interview held with the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, who called, whom she presumed to be the

supporters of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) ... Since we democratically won the elections, we have the majority. Since that means that it includes all ethnicities in Guyana, it is most ludicrous that you can possibly call these people mentally lazy – possibly – and stand there assuming a feigned demeanour of care and compassion for Guyanese. She then tried, tried and tried through many statements which was a very bland statement and there were so many others coming out to say, that is not what I meant and it is being misconstrued. Mr. Speaker, it was an insult; it was a total insult to our people. It was a total insult to our Guyanese people.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you will need an extension to continue so you can conclude.

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance [Dr. Singh]: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh. Minister, you may continue towards your conclusion.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. For 2022, a total of.... Let us hear of the awardees of the GOAL scholarship as we go along. There were 167 awardees from Region 1 in 2022; 558 from Region 2; 1429 from Region 3; 3090 from Region 4; 635 from Region 5; 894 from Region 6; 191 from Region 7; 46 from Region 8; 143 from Region 9; and 527 from Region 10. The PPP/C Government does not just preach about inclusivity. Being a *One Guyana*, our talks are accompanied by genuine actions. We are not afraid to come here with our evidence because these numbers are free from prejudice and bias, so much so, that we have many well-known Members of the Opposition who are furthering their educations through the GOAL. This includes, of course, two Members of the Opposition and Mr. Darren Wade who continues to shoot, again, flatulence.

Even though they come here and criticise everything that we do, they too benefit from our programmes and policies. I do wish the hypocrisy would end. I wish my Colleagues in the Opposition would realise that sometimes it is okay to hit the pause on negativity and consciously support the initiatives that truly benefit our people. Instead, many of them will come here to predictably complain about everything. Let me make it pellucid, Guyana is developing at a rapid pace and to satisfy the growing needs of the labour market, we need to

act fast to produce the professionals who are required to take advantage of the growing opportunities.

Moreover, the University of Guyana is centralised and it does not offer online programmes. It merely adapted to *Zoom* classes as a response to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. While the University of Guyana is an excellent institution run by brilliant minds, we acknowledge that it has a far way to go and the Government is committed to providing the requisite support for its advance. That is why three points ... **[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** More than \$3 billion has been allocated to the University of Guyana for its enhancement in the 2023 Budget – \$3.7 billion. It was conceptualised even before the 2020 General and Regional Elections – that is the GOAL scholarship. In addition to the GOAL scholarship, we continue to invest heavily in the provision of the Ministry of the Public Service scholarships. For 2022, 420 persons were completing their scholarship programmes at a number of local institutions, including the University of Guyana and the Carnegie School of Home Economics (CSHE). Similarly, 1221 persons will be continuing their scholarship studies beyond 2022.

The training department: As Guyana continues to prepare itself for the many opportunities that will come, it is important that we modernise, train and retrain our public servants to be as effective as possible. This responsibility lies with the Training Department of the Ministry of the Public Service, which was recently revamped and has been functioning effectively to meet the needs of the public service. As a matter of fact, this year we have reintroduced the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system which will, of course, assist all ministries and public sector agencies with their budgets and management of their spending. We have the Centre for Excellence in Information Technology (CEIT) which continues to roll out its Information Technology (IT) programmes across Government agencies, as well as to now take it into the communities. Mocha Arcadia was one of those communities that benefitted from the Centre for Excellence in Information Technology. Sixteen persons graduated, gained a certificate and were offered jobs with Qualfon Guyana Incorporated. So, it was not just... **[Mr. Norton: Qualfon Guyana Incorporated?] Yes. [Mr. Norton: That is (inaudible).]** Well, it is more than you have ever done, Mr. Norton. We not only committed to train, but we committed to providing an income after training. That is what we have done – put moneys into the pockets of our ordinary Guyanese.

3.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, with the budgetary allocation that we all have, you will see job creation across the country, as we have promised. With this and so much more in the days to come as we will hear, I commend this Budget. I fully support this Budget. I believe that it is what this nation needs to grow. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister for your presentation. Now, our seventh speaker for today's Budget, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul. You have 30 minutes plus five minutes.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. I have noticed that the Hon. Dr. Jennifer Westford took her leave but I wanted to say that after listening to my good friend, the Hon. Member, Ms. Sonia Parag, and knowing that the Hon. Dr. Jennifer Westford is a current Member of Parliament, I believe it is in the best interest and the PPP/C and the people of Guyana to bring back Dr. Westford and let Ms. Parag take a back seat.

Cde. Speaker, I rise before you today, as a proud representative of the people standing on the righteous side of this honourable Assembly and it is my privilege to make my humble contribution to *Budget 2023*. I would like to begin by offering my congratulations to the competent staff at the Ministry of Finance for their hard work in preparing this Budget. However, as I listened to the Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance presentation, it became clear that the utopian rhetoric and clever use of statistics do not mask the reality of the dire state of our nation's people under the current PPP/C Government.

We are now entering the third full year of this current regime's tenure, *albeit* installed and by the end of 2023, our country will expend a staggering \$1.8 trillion. This is an unprecedented amount of money for such a short period of time. Yet, the question remains, what is the quality of life for our citizens? This Budget gives the true meaning of the quote, *Don't judge a book by its cover*, read the pages and know the real story. I implore the Members of this regime to set aside politics for a moment and consider the plight of the ordinary citizens. Look at the vendors who were forced out of their livelihoods *in the dead of night*, while you slept comfortably in your beds with security at your homes. Look at the deplorable state of the roads in the housing schemes where people with small vehicles are forced to bear the expense of maintenance, while you parade around in luxury vehicles paid for by taxpayers. Look at the people of Mocha

and speak to the ordinary man and woman on the street and ask them, how they are coping under your regime.

As political leaders, it is crucial that they leave the comfort of their airconditioned offices and truly immerse themselves in the struggles of their constituents. They must hear firsthand the tales of inadequate healthcare delivery, the scarcity of essential medicines and the lengthy wait times for medical attention. They must listen to the grievances of political appointees in the regional health system and how their actions are making the lives of career public servants unbearable. They must learn about the challenges facing the University of Guyana and how lecturers are seeking to flee from this broken education system. They must hear the concerns of teachers who are lacking adequate classroom facilities. They must listen to the thousands of people who have already paid the Ministry of Housing and Water for plots of land but remain in the dark about their location due to a lack of demarcation and infrastructure. They must hear about the trucks that have been distributing baby chicks and chicken feed to PPP/C members from the \$300 million Small Business Development Fund and listen to the complaints of the Ministry's staff members about the lack of structure in place for spending that money. They must hear the concerns of the people on the street who have dubbed the Hon. Member, Ms. Susan Rodrigues, as the wealthiest Minister in Government and her ties to contractors and companies. They must hear the complaints of Region 8's Regional Democratic Council (RDC) about the Hon. Member, Ms. Pauline Sukhai's presence at every RDC meeting in the Pakaraimas, instructing the council on what to do and what not to do. They must hear the voices of staff members at the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security who no longer wish for the Hon. Member, Dr. Vindhya Persaud's, presence.

I urge all of you to listen to the voices of the ordinary citizens and to ask yourself a simple question: will there be a place in heaven for you when your time in this world is done, when the people you were entrusted to serve and make life easier for are suffering under the weight of this punishing cost of living? Will God be pleased to know that you are living a life of luxury on the backs of taxpayers who are struggling to make ends meet? The PPP/C regime's tyrannical behavior in their deliberate exclusion of the main political Opposition in the Budget creation process is a blatant violation of the principles of good governance and democratic consultation as outlined in Article 13 of our Constitution. Their actions are a blatant disregard for the voices and opinions of the more than half of the population who continue to support the Opposition. This tyrannical behavior is not only a violation of our democratic principles

but it is also a squandering of taxpayers hard earned dollars, instead of fostering an inclusive democracy that truly represents the will of the people.

This regime, since the year of 2020, is defined by mismanagement, corruption and is leading our country to the brink of a class crisis that threatens our future prosperity as *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*. The discovery of significant oil reserves presents an incredible opportunity for Guyana to secure its future, but this Government's inability to manage our resources responsibly means that the benefits of this economic boom are not being felt by the absolute majority of Guyanese people. It is a travesty that, under the PPP/C, the people of Guyana have not seen the fruits of their own labor and resources. The widening wealth gap and increased poverty in our nation is a dire result of this Government's failure to prioritise the welfare of its citizens. As we stand on the cusp of this economic boom, it is crucial that we demand accountability and transparency from the squatters in Government, in the management of these resources. The future of Guyana depends on it. We need a legal government who prioritise the needs of all its citizens, regardless of race, ethnicity or socio-economic status and uses this economic opportunity to spur inclusive growth, reduce poverty and create jobs for all. Together, we must demand a government who works for the people and not just for the selective few.

It is clear that the PPP/C Government's rhetoric of *One Guyana* is nothing but a shallow political ploy. Their actions reveal the harsh reality that we are in fact seven distinct Guyanas, each with its own set of struggles and injustices. The Amerindians have their own Guyana, the Europeans have theirs, the Africans have the worst, the Portuguese have their own, the East Indians have the best, the Chinese have their own and the mixed race is struggling to find theirs. The recent treatment of the African community at Mocha Cane View on the East Bank of Demerara is a prime example of this Government's disregard for the rights and wellbeing of certain groups in our society. The sight of children crying, mothers weeping and families being forcibly removed from their homes by government's bulldozers and excavators is nothing short of a human rights violation. I saw with my own eyes the ruthless and indiscriminate destruction of the homes and livelihoods of innocent people by the operator of the excavation equipment. The operator, with no regard for the lives and wellbeing of the people, demolished homes and cruelly crushed everything in its path. In some cases, it even dug a hole and buried the personal belongings of the affected families. The sight was truly heart wrenching, as I watched helplessly that a hardworking businesswoman, who

is also a mother lost her home and her business in a matter of minutes. The destruction of a large number of Banks DIH beverage products was also witnessed – a loss that was totally unnecessary.

This is not the sort of society we should be building. We cannot allow this sort of inhumanity and disregard for the rights of the people to continue. It is a sobering reminder of the urgent need for real change and a government who truly represents the interests of the people, but not the interests of the powerful and the elite. We must work together to create a society where everyone has the opportunity to live a dignified life, free from the fear of losing their home or their livelihood. Our children deserve better. Let it be known that the PPP/C regime is not immune to the power of the people. They are squatting in Office and it is only a matter of time before they are removed from power by the will of the Guyanese people. The excavators and bulldozers that were used to displace the Mocha Cane View community will one day be turned against this regime and they will finally understand the true meaning of *One Guyana*, a Guyana where all of its people are treated with dignity and respect.

Before I go further in my discourse on the continued betrayal of the people of Guyana by the corrupt and irresponsible PPP/C regime, let me take a moment to recognise the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh. Honorable Minister, I applaud your belated recognition of the importance of paying the Regional Chairmen and Regional Vice-Chairmen their salary increases for the years 2021 and 2022 in December, 2022. However, it is a testament to the failure of this Government that such basic responsibilities have not been fulfilled until now. The continued neglect of the Mayors and Deputy Mayors is a glaring example of the Government's misplaced agenda and lack of empathy for the people they were elected to serve. I trust the Hon. Minister will see the wisdom in paying the salary increases to our Mayors and Deputy Mayors soonest, for they, like Regional Chairmen and Regional Vice-Chairmen are also fulltime servants of the people elected by the people, for the people.

Before addressing the issues at the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, it is imperative that I bring attention to the deplorable behavior of this PPP/C regime within the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of Guyana. As we all know, the Public Accounts committee is a crucial mechanism for holding the Government accountable and ensuring transparency in their actions. For decades, the Committee has met statutorily every Monday, with a quorum of any three of the Members. However, in their typical dictatorial fashion, the PPP/C regime has maliciously altered

the quorum, which requires two Members from the Government, two from the Opposition and the Chairman. This change has resulted in the cancellation of six meetings due to the Government's absence, stifling the Committee's ability to function. The Irfaan Ali's PAC, the Carl Greenidge's PAC...

Mr. Speaker: The references to the President.

3.50 p.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I am referring to the PAC that he chaired.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, but you are creative enough to say the PAC of this particular Parliament.

Mr. Mahipaul: The PAC that was chaired by His Excellency, President Irfaan Ali, Mr. Carl Greenidge's PAC and the Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence's PAC, have all worked tirelessly to complete the examination of the Report of the Auditor General and to ensure that the PAC was up-to-date. This current PAC, with the Hon. Bishop Edghill and the Hon. Teixeira who would always say that they have the number on their side, is *moving at snail's pace*. The only logical conclusion is that the PPP/C regime does not want the people of Guyana to know about the numerous financial irregularities and abnormalities documented in the Reports of the Auditor General for the years 2020, 2021 and soon to come 2022. Rest assured, the people will know. We, on this side of the House, will continue to expose the wicked, stinking and dirty actions of the PPP/C's regime and hold it accountable for its misdeeds.

The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development is a crucial aspect of our governance structure, with a direct impact on all 10 of the administrative regions of our country. It is imperative that this Ministry is led by competent, professional and empathetic ministers. However, instead, we have two ruthless, radical and political hacks who are hell-bent on causing chaos and confusion within the Ministry, and at all levels of local government. They are actively undermining the structure and system at Fort Street, Kingston and Camp Street and wreaking havoc at the Regional Democratic Councils, municipalities and all of the 70 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs). Their actions are clear indication of their lack of qualification, integrity and utter disregard for the wellbeing of our citizens. Their leadership is a disgrace to our country and they must be held accountable for their actions.

The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, in 2022, received a staggering \$10 billion in

funding and after the supplementary funds spent \$11.5 billion. Despite this significant allocation of resources, the Ministry failed to meet key objectives and deliver on vital projects. In 2022, the Ministry was supposed to train 665 staff in specific areas but only 155 were trained. Additionally, the local government sector strategy and sanitation sector plan were not completed and no monitoring and evaluation framework were established. The Ministry also fell short on infrastructure development, with 14 new projects planned, but only nine completed and 29 existing infrastructure projects planned for improvement but only seven improved. Furthermore, none of the Local Democratic Organs (LDOs) saw the implementation of the International Safety Management (ISM) technical standards for waste management, and none of the six regions completed their regional strategic plan. This is a clear indication of financial mismanagement and raises serious questions about the Ministry's ability to effectively use the funds allocated to them. Now, in 2023, this Ministry is requesting approval for a staggering \$19 billion in funds.

The people of Guyana deserve transparency and accountability for the Ministry's underperformance in 2022 and must be provided with answers as to how the funds allocated in 2022 were spent. It is clear that the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, the Hon. Member, Mr. Nigel Dharamlall, should take responsibility for this failure and resign. It is time for a change and new leadership to take the reins and effectively manage the Ministry's resources and deliver on the key project that positively impacts our society. The role of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development is to provide guidance and oversight to ensure accountability and transparency in the work of all Regional Democratic Councils, Municipalities and NDCs. However, what we are currently seeing is a dictatorial approach by the Ministers in the Ministry who are issuing instructions to the administrative heads of these elected councils. This is unacceptable and these councils are elected by the people and are meant to serve the people.

The Ministers should instead be providing guidance and support for the councils to function effectively, rather than undermining their autonomy and authority. It is crucial that the administrative heads of these councils take guidance from their elected councils, as they are the ones who have been mandated by the people to govern. The current state of affairs is a violation of democratic principles and an affront to the sovereignty of our citizens. I am in contact with all 10 Regional Democratic Councils, 10 Municipalities and 70 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils, as well as established

Community Development Councils. I could confidently say that none of them were consulted on the creation of this Budget, despite the Government's rhetoric of 'One Guyana'. I have received numerous complaints from the Regional Executive Officers (REOs), who are politically aligned with the People's Progressive Party/Civic about being instructed to include certain projects in this Budget without their input or consent.

I have been told by a Regional Executive Officer that he can no longer handle the pressure of being dictated to by phone calls and *WhatsApp* messages from the Hon. Members, Mr. Anand Persaud and Mr. Nigel Dharamlall. Their time in Office is coming to a fast end. The least I could advise right now is for them to be more respectful and humane in their treatment of their fellow citizens. To the Hon. Members, Mr. Nigel Dharamlall and Mr. Anand Persaud, treat others as you wish them to treat you. As recent as the other day, Minister Dharamlall shamelessly attempted to arrogate powers that he does not possess when he issued Order 40 of 2022, later amended to Order 50 of 2022, engaging in the reprehensible and undemocratic act of gerrymandering. Nineteen Local Authority Areas have been affected by the nefarious changes he made to the boundaries and seat allocations of municipalities and NDCs. It was never his duty to demarcate the constituency's boundaries, yet he went ahead and did it, nonetheless, flagrantly disregarding the rule of law and the democratic process.

The demarcation of constituency boundaries is the sole responsibility of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). However, interference in the work of GECOM is nothing new to the PPP/C. His illegal gerrymandering was rightfully nipped in the bud, but it is now up to GECOM to dissociate themselves from this illegal Order 50 of 2022. GECOM must go into the affected areas and mark the boundaries clearly with the cooperation and able assistance of the residents of the respective areas. The PPP/C's continuous attempt to manipulate and subvert democracy will not be tolerated any longer. The Fiscal Transfers Act 16 of 2013 clearly states:

“The annual subvention or fiscal transfers, from central government to local authorities, shall be based primarily on a set of conditions and stipulated performance indicators...”

...with half of the allocation being distributed equally among all the local authorities and the remaining half being allocated based on factors such as population size, geographical area, and tax collection rate. However, under

the current PPP/C regime, it appears that Georgetown is being disproportionately affected, and the Mayor is being targeted for not engaging in malpractices with this Regime. Even when we look at flooding, when the Bishop fails, they want to blame the pandit. The PPP/C's interest seems to lie in favouring friends, families and favourites, rather than fulfilling their responsibility in providing financial resources to local authorities to assist them in discharging their functions and responsibilities as outlined in the Bill. This is a clear violation of the Fiscal Transfers Act and a disregard for the well-being of Georgetown and its citizens.

Like last year, I call again on the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, Mr. Anil Nandlall and ask, do you not believe that it is time for you to resign? Do you not believe you have failed the people of this country? Do you not believe that you have not satisfied your job as Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs? Sir, like last year, it is him who I must blame because it is he who must guide or is it just that they do not take guidance from Cde. Nandlall? Is it that the Ministers of Local Government and Regional Development are intellectually circumcised to the point where they do not understand your guidance or is it you, Hon. Attorney General who does not have the testicular fortitude and intellectual aptitude to boldly speak out and speak up at cabinet meetings? Is that how dunce all of them are and not listening to you, Hon. Attorney General?

Cde. Speaker, I bring to your attention the issue of regional development. Last year, I highlighted the decrease in funds allocated to the Region 4's RDCs, line item 6211, which is specifically designated to assist elected councillors in carrying out their functions and provide meaningful representation in what should be a true democratic process. This year, the same happened and now Regions 10 and 7 are also facing similar injustice. As you may recall, last year, Region 10 received \$40.5 million under line item 6211. However, this year, the region is slated to receive \$47 million, an increase of only \$6.5 million. While this may seem as a significant increase, it is important to note the hypocrisy in this allocation. Last year, when the allocation was \$40.5 million, the statutory expenses for stipends for Toshaos and Councillors amounted to \$7.56 million. This left the Chairman and Councillors with only \$32.94 million to work with. In 2023, despite the cost of living increasing, the allocation is \$47 million, but the statutory expense for stipends has also increased to \$14.76 million. When that is subtracted – the statutory increase for the 2023 allocation – there is a significant decrease in what remains and what the Councillors and Chairman have to work with.

Regions 4 and 7 are faced with similar issues. For Region 4, we see an overall increase from \$18 million to \$26 million but when the statutory stipend is subtracted for Councillors, Toshias and Deputy Toshias, the remainder is \$13 million, which is a reduction again from last year. The same applies for Region 7. When the subtraction is done for the statutory expenses for Region 7, there is a significant decrease again for the Chairman and Councillors. We have a Budget that is beautiful on its cover but the pages inside, when we read them, tells a different story. The regions that were won by the APNU/AFC continues to suffer with a decrease of resources, but the PPP/C controlled regions all have significant increases.

4.05 p.m.

Yet this double standard, dictatorial, devious, diabolical, dangerous, and because they 'don't care' regime wants us to believe it is committed to equity and democracy. It is clear that there has been no real increase in the allocations for regions 4, 7, and 10 Regional Democratic Council (RDC) – line item 6211. I urge this Government to re-evaluate its allocation of funds to ensure that our elected officials have the resources they need to effectively represent their communities. For those who are listening to these debates and may not know what is a slush fund, let me define the term for them. A slush fund is a reserve of money used for illicit purposes, especially political bribery. When I read the pages of this budget, it is my firm position that over \$15 billion is in various line items as slush funds.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will need an extension. Before you do that, thanks for the definition of slush fund, because I am circulating once again all the unparliamentary language. The meaning you just ascribed there, a lot of it is included in these. We need an extension so that the Hon. Member could complete cleaning up this presentation to conclusion.

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Member, you have five minutes from 4:06.23.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. When I read the pages of this budget, it is my firm position that over \$15 billion is in various line items as slush funds. This was found with the naked eye, so just imagine how high that sum will be when we examine the estimates next week.

Time, unfortunately, will not allow me to deal with all the line items, but let me touch on a couple. First, there is \$300 million for a Small Business Development Fund (SBDF). I challenge Minister Oneidge Waldron—honourable, of course—to provide to this house the beneficiaries, legal framework, and acceptable financial practices that was used last year to spend this same amount that was approved last year. I am certain there is none, and if there is, nowhere does it require calling PPP/C party card-bearing members at 5 o'clock in the morning to some secluded location and give them chicken and chicken feed and say to go do business, to rear chicken and sell. This is a slush fund.

Secondly, the *Men on Mission* (MOM) programme that Hon. Kwame McCoy is a part of, a total of \$500 million is allocated there. This entire country thought that this was an initiative announced by President Ali with co-operation from co-operate Guyana contributing to the uplifting of people, but now \$500 million of taxpayers' money is towards it. I challenge the Government to table in this House the criteria for assistance and how this sum will be disbursed in keeping with the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) of 2003.

There is the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) programme also, and we know that there are no established criteria for disbursement. I see another line item dubbed Safety Nets for Vulnerable Populations and some Rural Enterprise and Agricultural Development (READ), all with huge sums of moneys but with no established criteria and proper accountability measures to show transparency and inclusivity. These funds are for families, friends, and favorites of the PPP/C cabal. Guyana is in serious trouble, and our children and grandchildren will suffer. Guyanese, if we want Guyana to grow, the People's Progressive Party/Civic must go. Thank you. [Applause]

Minister within the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for the opportunity to present some remarks in support of *Budget 2023*.

I am a little disappointed the Hon. Member who just spoke, the Hon. Mr. Mahipaul, has left, because I intend to answer every aspect of his speech and those speakers that came before him on the Opposition's side. I will also ask Hon. Amanza Walton-Desir if the Hon. Member could remain because I would like to answer some of her utterances. Do not run; we are at a fight here. In my studies, when I was in economics class, I came across a term they call "hero

syndrome". I want to address the issue of Mocha to start with. That particular issue, the notices, the meetings, the offers, everything was communicated to the people that were squatting on the alignment. The Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Aubrey Norton went there and told the people not to leave and to carry up their offers to figures that do not resemble any reality. Hero syndrome is this: it is like a fireman trying to start a fire, stoke the fire, and then when the house burns down, comes with the hose, tries to save it, and calls himself a hero in the process. That is what the Hon. Leader of the Opposition did with a team...

Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, if I may?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Holder, proceed.

Mr. Holder: The Hon. Minister is imputing the Leader of the Opposition, who is not here.

Mr. Indar: Who told him to get up?

Mr. Holder: For some of the Hon. Member's sentiments, he clearly has no evidence. If he could provide the evidence of what he is saying then go right ahead.

Mr. Holder: Who told him to get up?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I am listening to him and then I will... Hon. Minister, you may continue.

Mr. Indar: Did I impugn the Leader of the Opposition?

Mr. Speaker: You have not infringed on any Standing Order. Go ahead.

Mr. Indar: Please do not disturb me, I did not disturb Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul just now. I am telling you, Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what they did. They tried to play heroes, and they are the ones who told those people to stay there. That is the first thing about Mocha.

The second thing I want to talk about is this diatribe that I just heard from Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul about the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). Let me tell you what it is doing. It has concocted in its minds the most evil thing that it wants to do for the years that the APNU/AFC were in government—the financials for those years from the Auditor General's Report were tabled—they want to rush the thing. It does not want a timely examination of all the corruption under its Government, so what it wants to do...

Mr. Speaker: Minister, I am going to take a firm stand on some of these words. "Corruption" is one we do not use. I just said that I am circulating all of the words again.

Mr. Indar: I am happy that the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee is here because that is what it is doing. It is rushing the examination so that we cannot examine it. I came from a finance background; all my life, I spent in finance. When one goes through the Auditor's Report, one will see it in there. It is plain as day. The Auditor General's Report is one that is published and handed to you, Mr. Speaker. The Auditor General's Report is handed to the Speaker of this House. It is posted on the website, and it is there for public distribution. So, who is hiding what? There is nothing to hide. It is out there for the world to see. The Hon. Mr. Mahipaul called two of my Colleagues disgraces, the Hon. Mr. Anand Persaud and Minister Dharamlall. The APNU/AFC, that bunch was a disgrace when it tried to steal a whole country. That is the disgrace that we face. It disgraced this country and have tarnished the image of it, and we are building it back now. Do not come here and lecture us about how to run a country or run a ministry. If we did not know how, the people in this country would not have put us in Government, but they voted for us and put us in Government.

The Hon. Member was talking about accountability. Imagine the APNU, a People's National Congress (PNC) Member, is talking about accountability. When we asked the former Minister of Finance what happened with the \$18 million that he had to disclose, he said that it was a gift. He never disclosed it until somebody leaked a report. It was leaked, and they are talking about accountability. Where did it hide the \$92 billion overdraft that it had in the Bank of Guyana? It hid it in the financial statements under "receivables". It had a creditor stashed away in receivables. Let me explain to you the evil concoction in that arrangement. Anytime one owes, the Central Government is to be paid by the Bank of Guyana for current overdraft; it is supposed to be in creditors. It is a credit balance. It took the creditor and put it under receivable, which is a debit balance, reducing the net assets of the Bank. That is what they have done. You are talking about accountability.

I am sorry that the Mayor is not here; I saw the Region 4 Chairman here. They are talking about how we are not allowing the Mayor to do his job. I am sorry he is not here, but if the Mayor was doing his job, we would not have been, myself and Minister Edghill, patching all of the streets in Georgetown and fixing all the drains—his function. We are fixing everything, all of the holes. We have teams everywhere. Right now, go down to Sandy Babb Street, where we are fixing this street, this corner, this drain. We are doing the work. We are spending billions of dollars at the Ministry of Public Works to do what the Mayor is supposed

to function as. I do not understand that we are not allowing him to function. We will be glad if he could function, but he does not.

I want to touch on this thing I heard throughout from all speakers on the Opposition side about racial discrimination. Every time you find an opposition that is bankrupt for strategy, it raises the *Boogeyman* about racism, every time. The only strategy they have is racism. That cannot be. How long are you all going to ride that scooter? I can tell you by testament, I am on the ground, that when we go on the ground, the love for the Ministers, the love for the President and the Vice President is shown when people run to them to take pictures, to hug them and to kiss them in all of the communities across this country. I do not understand that Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul painted this mosaic of things that are breaking down. That is totally untrue, misleading. The Hon. Member should be ashamed of himself.

I want to go back to two other speakers that spoke, the Hon. Nima Flue-Bess about Mocha. I am going back to Mocha, and the reason I am going back to Mocha is because we built Burnham Boulevard. The People's Progressive Party/ Civic Government built Burnham Boulevard. It was promised by their government, which was there to build it, and it was never done, just like many other things, promises never kept by the APNU/AFC. We also built the Barnwell Road and another road, and we will continue to build more roads in the community. When we find statements like this coming out from the Leader of the Opposition—I will lay these over—who called it a “dead meat” budget. This is the statement he put out. He is misplaced. He does not understand economics. He does not understand managing a country. He does not understand that when you set a template for industrialisation, you have to spend and build it up. He does not understand that, and I am not in the mood to explain it to him. The problem is that it does not understand.

4.20 p.m.

Most of the Opposition Members of Parliament (MP) treat the oil and gas sector like a stepchild. It cannot be. It is a major part of the structure of the economy. It is a major part. It is driving the economy a lot. The non-oil sector is performing well, not only the job creating sectors like agriculture, like health, like education and like all the other sectors that are creating jobs, like construction and so on. The oil and gas sector has now come and penetrated all those sectors in a cascading effect. You have to take it into consideration, and you have to. We cannot treat it as a stepchild. He is saying that a lot of money has been placed

into infrastructure...the Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, former Minister of Public Infrastructure, he has gone too. It seems to me like they do not like when I speak, but the Hon. Member came to this House a few moons ago and spoke like if he fixed all the roads in the country. Where is all these money going to be spent? For the record, the Public Works Ministry alone in 2022 built over 1,100 roads. [**Ms. Flue-Bess:** In all the communities?] That is broken dilapidated infrastructure in all the communities. We built it, including where you live. Where do you live? If you tell me where you live, I will tell you about the road I built there.

If the Leader of the Opposition was here...We are building his street. Is that right, Minister Edghill? [**An Hon. Member:** Plaisance.] Prince William Street. In Victory Valley we are building, in Albouystown we are building, in Den Amstel we are building, in Sophia we are building and in Belladrum we are building. In every African Guyanese community that is densely populated there are works going on now. There is no disparity in distribution of resources. That is a total mistruth. It is misleading and is designed to do enthusiastic corruption of public good. That is what it is doing. I also saw the Alliance For Change (AFC) put out a statement about this budget and mishaps I do not know what to say about the statement, but I will just read two points it has inside. One of them is free education at the University of Guyana. That is what they want to see. This is the very Party that was in Government when it increased the tuition for the students at the University by 35% in 2019. I have also dispatched that news article to the Clerk, to pass the records over.

It increased the fees and is now coming here to talk about free education. They have another one here – increase in old age pension. Those are the ones who put the tax on water and removed the subsidies from water and electricity for the old-aged people. Is it coming here and talking about that? This is the statement that it put out. There is another one it put here – monthly electricity subsidy. They are the ones who put VAT on electricity. They put it and they are asking. They now come like if they now break out of some tomb, crawled out and is seeing a new reality. This matter is duplicitous of the highest order. It went on to state to reduce VAT to 12%. I used to lecture, and I used to do consultations for the Guyana Revenue Authority in a previous life. I used to train their people. When the tax law went in for VAT, a number of items were on the standard rate, a list which you had to pay a percentage – 16% or whatever it is or 14%. Then, there is the zero-rated list. What the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government did was to take a whole host of things people

used in their daily lives, like kitchen table items and put all of them on the standard rated list. It created a massive sweep in tax revenue.

They are talking about tax, and they are talking about inflation? I am telling you, Mr. Speaker, in 2014, when the People's Progressive Party (PPP) Government left Office, it left with the revenue base of \$135 billion. When the APNU Government took over in 2015 to 2020, at the end of 2020, it was \$226 billion, a \$91 billion increase in taxes. They were asking you to name the tax. Do not name the tax. Look how much money was collected extra from people and businesses. That is like \$125,000 more that it taxed people. It is asking for the 200 taxes. It is showing up in the numbers and in the budget that it brought to this House. If anyone out there or here, just picks up any budget in their time and look at the revenue structure they will see what I am talking about.

I would really like to respond to a statement one Mr. Forde put out, but I know that I will be pressed for time. I will go into some of the other things that I would like to speak about. I now found the statement from Mr. Forde. Hon. Member, shadow Attorney General, statement belongs to the Haags Bosch dumpsite. He is talking that education has fallen. His Government took away the school grant. They are the ones and they are putting out statements like if they now show up on the scene. Mr. Forde also talked about corruption. Mr. Speaker, you said not to talk about corruption, but how am I to explain myself when the entire Caribbean said Guyana was one of the most corrupt places during the period of the APNU/AFC Government?

This budget here, and I have brought it with me. I do not write speeches. They are saying in it that it has slush funds. If the Hon. Member can point to the page; I will be happy. I will show the whole country or the whole world. There is nothing like that in here. It is there for people to read. [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*] He called it slush fund. There is no slush fund in here. These are actionable items or programmes to deliver to the people of this country. I heard the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir spoke of sea and river defence, something that she has absolutely no idea about. When we came into Government... What is the name of the place in Mahaicony? [**An Hon. Member:** Dantzig.] Dantzig. My first day in Government I was in Dantzig as a Minister, washing away.

The Opposition was in Government and it allowed the sea defences to be breached, destroying thousands of acres of farms, that people cannot even plant up to today because of

the salt water destroyed the soil. We have put billions of dollars from 2020, 2021 and 2022, now 2023 which is \$4.9 billion. I want to say that the entire Coastland, all the islands – Leguan, Wakenaam, Andrews, Zeeburg, Anna Catherina, Uitvlugt, on the Mahaicony stretch, in Berbice and everywhere, we are doing sea defence work. We do not need her to come here and lecture us about sea defence. She is out of her league. Just to clarify, the local tax from the local treasury for sea defence has increased in the 2023 Budget. It is the foreign element that went down. I just want to make that clear.

I also want to talk about what the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir said about 'truth to Guyanese people'. 'Truth to Guyanese people'? I was not a politician. I was a private citizen. I watched for five long months in 2020, mistruth after mistruth peddled by the APNU/AFC on how it won the elections. This issue about the co-op lands, I want to answer that. How does the Hon. Member know that it is only Afro Guyanese will be displaced. Are the Indians, the Portuguese and the Mixed races not part of those co-ops too? How is that something that a Member of Parliament could come here and talk that only Afro Guyanese will be displaced? Everybody from all different races, all walks of this land are part of this. Everything is the Boogeyman of racism. There is nothing else in terms of ideas. The Opposition Members spoke that 'we does mind them business and we know everything about them'. The Bible, one of the oldest texts, tells us that one must know one's enemy as a good Commander. One has to know one's Opposition. One has to study them. Any good commander will understand that. If anybody minding anybody business, that is the game. That is the life because everybody over that side minds my business because they would put up my house on *Facebook* and so on.

I want to talk a little about infrastructure. Infrastructure in this budget is \$149.5 billion of capital expense for the Ministry of Public Works. For the Ministry of Public Works, that is the allocation. It deals with a massive number of roads, bridges, and so on. I heard a statement from the Hon. Leader of the Opposition and Ms. Walton-Desir how it is for the 'boys'. The Demerara Harbour Bridge carries a price tag of about US\$261 million. We are building that bridge. It is already contracted, and construction has begun. A total of 4.2 million trips happened last year across the bridge. That is just going over the west side. People come back, too, so you have to double that. Are you telling me that those people do not deserve the bridge, that it is a waste of money? Is that what I am hearing from the Opposition Members?

The roads programme – we have about \$38.5 billion in miscellaneous roads, which are the community roads that we are building. This year, all those schemes that it was talking about, it never did any work in those schemes. When we came into Government, we went to Tuschen, Zeelugt, No. 77, Farm, where we did work. We did all of the housing schemes – La Parfaite Harmonie. We went in all and started building roads, and there is much more to be done. This year, under that figure you will see a massive amount of road programmes to build out this country. It rightly said that we are an oil and gas economy and that we have about \$208 billion in terms of oil funds in this budget to support it. It is going into the community. That is why His Excellency is leading that by going into the communities, seeing what is happening, and putting in interventions. This year we will build more roads than last year. Over 1,200 roads we will be built throughout this country. Every community will see development. For the Opposition to come here and say it is big on infrastructure, what else does it has to do? It is building a country. How is it built, which brings me to the other thing?

The economic philosophy of APNU/AFC is what is troubling me. It prefers to put the money in the current side of the budget, which it was doing from 2015 to 2020. It had been bloating the current side of the budget, and they have a minuscule amount of capital expenditure. The capital expenditure is for the roads, bridges, hospitals, and schools. This year alone, we have \$387.5 billion as capital expenditure in this budget estimate here. That is equivalent to more than the whole five years put together in a single year. We are not shying away from spending. One has to spend.

I want to talk about poverty. I keep hearing all the Opposition members talk about the poor and poor people. Whenever we go, and... The *Men on Mission* Programme they talked about just now, most of those things go to elderly people who cannot afford a house, who do not have a roof, people who are downtrodden, and the poorest of our class. That programme is for helping people like that in our society – the forgotten, that it did not do anything for. That is what that money will be addressing. I want to talk about poverty. The report that it keeps quoting is a 2019 Report under its Government about the 48% people on the poverty line. It is in the 2019 Report. I do not know how they come here and are foreign to this idea.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, could you just give us the title, page and the note because it has been often quoted. I would like it for the record.

Mr. Indar: I want to talk a little about inflation in cost of living. It seems these days that is what everybody is talking like if it is Guyana alone and it is the Government's doing. There is a 186-page report that will send it to the Parliament office.

[*The Hon. Minister displayed document.*]

This is the World Economic Outlook. The title of this document is *Countering the Cost-of-Living Crisis*.

4.35 p.m.

It is a document done by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)... Every page in this document speaks about inflation. Every page. In every country. Guyana had a 7.2% inflation at the end of 2022. Our neighbour, right next door to Moleson Creek, Suriname, had a 35% inflation rate. Next door, who are fighting us for Essequibo, Venezuela, is at 220% inflation. I do not understand what they are telling us. It seems that Guyana is *an island of excellence in a sea of mediocrity*. We are connected. Eighty percent of the global trade goes through marine traffic. Eighty percent is goods moving *via* a ship that we import. If there is inflation in the countries that manufactures the goods, obviously, it will impact us. Jamaica, 9.5% inflation. Barbados, 10% inflation. The Netherlands has 12.8% inflation. The United Kingdom (UK), 11.3%. The United States of America (USA), 6.4%. Last year the US saw inflation rates reaching the highest in four decades. This is not an isolated problem. It is a global issue. I wanted to make that point because it seems that it is only us in Guyana who are suffering from inflation.

The World Bank publishes a document called 'The Pink Sheet'. I will send this to your office as well. It is called The Pink Sheet. I want to read a couple of them from this Pink Sheet, to let the House understand and to let those who are viewing understand what is happening with commodities. Crude was US\$61.40 per barrel in 2019. At the end of 2022, it was US\$90.3 per barrel. An increase of 40%. During the year 2022, between April and June, crude prices went to US\$110 per barrel. That was a 79% increase. When energy costs increase and when prices for oil increase, it is a cascading effect throughout markets. All financial markets. It affects stocks. It affects everything. This is not me saying it; it is the World Bank's Pink Sheet that is saying it. Not me.

I want to also talk about natural gas. In 2019, the US index Henry Hub Natural Gas Spot Price in Louisiana was US\$2.57 per Metric Million British Thermal Unit MMBtu. That is how they measure it. At the end of 2022, that went up to US\$5.62 per MMBtu. That is a 118% increase. It is worse

in Europe. In Europe, the natural gas index had US\$4.80 for 2019, and it closed in 2022 at US\$39 – a 712% increase. Natural gas is used for many things, including the manufacture of fertiliser. Fertiliser also went up. That is what farmers use. Phosphate went up, phosphate rock went up, and urea went up. Palm oil that is used in Guyana to manufacture so many things. We make shortening, and we use it to bake bread, pastry. We have butter, and we do all types of things, cakes, *et cetera*. From \$601 in 2019, at the end of 2022, it was \$1,634 – a 173% increase. You tell me, how is that going to factor into the price of the good when it is selling in the shops? It must take the price up. Do we plant palm oil in Guyana? Do we refine it? No. The same goes for soya bean oil. Soya bean oil was US\$765 per metric tonne in 2019. It has gone up at the end of October of last year to US\$1,576 per metric tonne – a 106% increase. That is what is happening to the commodities market. Again, it is not me. This is a World Bank report that I am calculating the percentages on. It issued The Pink Sheet. Urea went up by 159% from 2019 to the end of last year. Phosphate rock went up by 260% from 2019 to 2022-year end. That is the sort of increase we are seeing globally. It does not just affect Guyanese.

I wanted to talk about this inflation issue because they kept talking about the cost of living. Yes. The cost of living has gone up, but it is not just here. It is everywhere. There are countries that are facing famine. The intervention that we have done in this budget is not a mere \$5 billion. Allow me, Mr. Speaker. Allow me.

I just spoke about the fuel. Do you know that all the fuel that we use at the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) to power this country, all of it we have to... The money is completely used up. We have not transferred that cost to the electricity bill. It is costing our Government \$17 billion because we removed the excise tax from the import cost. The expansion of the part-time jobs programme is direct employment for people. That is \$10 billion—other cost of living measures which is the \$5 billion the Hon. Member was talking about it, but it is not only that. We also have the extension of the freight cost adjustment that we normally...

Mr. Speaker: As we are on extensions, you will need one to conclude.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Speaker, may I ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude?

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister Parag. Hon. Minister Indar, you may proceed.

Mr. Indar: Thank you very much. I was talking about the extension of the freight cost adjustment. Whenever one imports something, the cost, insurance, and freight figure that is at the bottom that is used on an invoice to calculate taxes are assessed by the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and customs, we have adjusted that freight element as freight had gone up seven times across the globe. Seven times what it was at the pre-pandemic levels. What we have done is adjusted that freight to the pre-pandemic levels, so it reduces the amount of money that the tax is assessed at. That means that the amount of tax that a person pays to import something is reduced. The landed cost in Guyana for any goods that are imported is reduced. That also costs us a lot of money too. The Government is not getting anything from that. That is another \$6 billion gone there. The adjustment in total is about \$38 billion to deal with the effects of inflation. Thirty-eight billion dollars. Not \$5 billion. That is for persons who do not read the budget. They come and mumble, pontificate on the podium, talk things, and run off and get away out of the House. They do not want to hear the defence because every time they say something, it is the wrong thing they are saying. The wrong thing.

I want to talk a little about this gloom and doom that the Hon. Mahipaul painted about the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. This gloom and doom that he painted with all the Regional Democratic Councils (RDC) *et cetera* and the 70 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDC).

I have known Minister Nigel Dharamlall and Minister Anand Persaud. They are workhorses. They are on the ground. They go to places where I have never seen Ministers under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government. Never. They go to places everywhere in the interior to meet with our Amerindian folk. To bring intervention throughout the Ministry. The Hon. Member cannot speak about my Colleagues in that manner because it is not true. It is not true. He also asked if we felt good in our air-conditioned cars, *et cetera*, and with our security guards. The same goes for him and the APNU/AFC Government when it fired the 7000 workers from the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). The same goes for it. Were they nice in their cars and houses with security guards when those workers struggled? When some of them commit suicide because they cannot go home and take salaries to their wives and take care of their children.

The Hon. Member spoke about this budget having mismanagement and corruption. I do not know how he could come to a conclusion like that. When one does any analysis, a conclusion is based on a finding. There is no finding in here of that. His conclusion is misplaced. It is totally misplaced. He also spoke about roads and housing schemes. He spoke about Farm. I think he must be living close to Farm. We are awarding contracts to do the roads in Farm. In Herstelling, in La Parfaite Harmonie, in Number 76 and Number 77, Berbice. Every housing scheme will see work starting within the next week. Manchester also. Everyone will see work starting in the next week. We are on the ground meeting with our people since the year started to roll out that roads programme. For him to come here and talk about... They did not do anything. The reason we have to do it now is because it did not do anything in the five years it was in Government, and it comes here to lecture us.

I want to conclude my remarks, and I want to thank you. I want to also say thanks to the Ministry of Finance and the hardworking staff there that put this budget together. This budget is a little above three quarters of a trillion dollars – \$781.9 billion. It will see rapid implementation in 2023. We will put the work out. We will spend this money. We will get the programmes to the people. We will help everyone. This budget is breaking barriers. All the racial barriers, the economic barriers, the social barriers – it is designed to do that. To break down all these barriers. It is designed to help every man, woman, and child. That is what this budget is designed to do. Anyone that comes here and throws cold water on it is just making mischief. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. Due to time constraints, I will get right into the presentation.

I will start on governance. Good governance is the process by which an administration allows or creates public institutions to function freely and effectively in the interest of all the people in a given society. Effective public institutions enable an administration to govern effectively, especially as it relates to the conduct of public affairs, the management of public resources, the protection of human rights, and, more particularly, ethnic harmony. In the specific case of Guyana, it is in the interest of the administration to guarantee the human rights of the citizens, to protect them from abuse, and ensure equal protection under the law. Effective good governance would ensure that corruption is tamed and the activities of the state are conducted within the framework of the law. The true test of good governance is the degree to which it delivers on the

promise of human rights – civil, cultural, economic, political, and social rights.

My aim is to prove that we do not have good governance in Guyana. Corruption flourishes, and too many Guyanese do not enjoy the protection of the law. Often our security forces seem to believe that they are a law unto themselves. At a time when the framework of the law must apply to the entire society, especially as it relates to the oil and gas sector, we seem to be retrogressing into lawlessness and maladministration.

On the failures of the PPP/C Administration regarding governance, one, Parliament – there is a clear need to make it stronger and more effective. The opposite is the case. This is illustrated in the following developments: (a) irregular holding of Parliamentary Committees. The Parliamentary Oversight Committee on the Security Sector, which is chaired by the Hon. Prime Minister of Guyana has never met, the Standing Orders Committee, the Assembly Committee, and the Statutory Instruments Committee have all never met, and the scarcity of sittings of the National Assembly. (b) Emphasis...

Mr. Speaker: Let me correct you. I know you have a lot of ‘never met’, but you included a ‘never met’ – the Assembly Committee. You, as Chief Whip should at least have those records accurately.

Mr. Jones: I noted your correction, Cde. Speaker. (b) Emphasis here, the changing in the need for a quorum of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). This development has forced the PAC not to meet on several occasions. (c) Unfair rulings on matters brought to the house by the Opposition. (d) Questions, motions, bills and petitions brought to this House have never seen the *light of day* or never made it on to the order paper. After months and after being so degouted that the spirit and intent are lost.

4.50 p.m.

For example, a petition brought to this House by the Hon. Deputy Speaker on the 29th December, 2021, on behalf of the citizens, asking this House to defer the passage of the Natural Resources Fund (NRF) Bill was never read. This House was told that it would be read at another sitting. It is now one year since and, to date, that petition has not seen the light of day. Democracy in Parliament is weakened.

Two – relationship between the Government and Opposition – There cannot be good governance unless there is the productive relationship between the Opposition and the Government. This is not the case for the following reasons:

(a) refusal to engage the Opposition on the identification of nominees for State boards; (b) none adherence to the constitutional procedures on the appointment of key constitutional bodies. *Demerara Waves* on the 10th January, 2023, attributed the following to the Chancellor – Chancellor is calling for the appointment of the Judicial Service Commission for judges to be appointed since the judiciary is working without its full complement of judges. Currently, nine judges serve the entire Guyana.

“We’re fed up of hearing that a Judicial Service Commission will be appointed”

(c) There was no provision for the ongoing dialogue with the Opposition which represents 50% of the population. In most countries where good governance is an operating principle, there are constitutional and other provisions for an engagement with the Opposition; (d) engagement with the Opposition is in the best interest of the country. It can promote stability at a time when it is needed, given the investment the country is attracting as a result of the oil and gas sector and the ongoing infrastructural development; and (e) non-consultation of the main Opposition on budget preparation and other important matters of national significance.

Under the heading Communication with citizens of Guyana – effective good governance could only be obtained with an informed citizenry. This is hardly the case with the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government. There is the non-hosting of weekly press conferences by the President or Cabinet Secretary to inform Guyanese of key decisions by the Cabinet.

Four, discrimination – There is no place for discrimination in any regime of good governance, as there has been no good governance under the PPP/C. Discrimination is widespread. (a) There is continuous unlawful prosecution of professional and ordinary Guyanese. For example, the removal of Dr. Vincent Adams from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); (b) *Kaieteur News* on the 23rd January, 2023 stated, lack of transparency and accountability on the awarding of contracts. Most contracts are given to PPP supporters and one ethnic group. It is time that the Government publish the figures to show how many contracts are awarded. (c) There is continuous discrimination and victimisation of ordinary Guyanese. My Colleagues before me mentioned the Mocha residents, but to add insult to injury, one resident, in particular, Ms. Ellis, after witnessing the destruction of her home and standing in defence of same, she was arrested and taken to the Providence Station. Two days after she returned

to her place of work it was only to receive a termination letter from the Ministry of Home Affairs. This is a single parent.

The PPP/C and good governance – Good governance is difficult for the PPP/C for the following reasons: (a) it is by its own constitution a Marxist/Leninist party. Years of democratic centralism have bred bad habits. The PPP/C always seeks to control all institutions in the society; (b) it only negotiates when it can win. It is, therefore, a difficult partner for the Opposition; (c) because the PPP/C is protective of its own constituents to the detriment of the society as a whole, it cannot engage in policies which are designed to help all sectors of the Guyanese society; and (d) in its decade of existence, the PPP/C has not succeeded in governing on the basis of good governance.

I turn my attention to sports. The Hon. Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance in his presentation stated and I quote:

“... on our assumption to office, our sport and recreational facilities across the country were in a state of neglect. It was therefore no secret as to why Guyana could not have made substantial contributions to regional and international competitions.”

The facts that I am about to lay or share here in this House, I will ask the Hon. Minister to make, what he said, make sense. It was under the APNU/AFC Government that sports facilities across the country were upgraded. The Cliff Anderson Sports Hall, for example, received a multimillion-dollar injection which saw the basketball court being completely refurbished after 23 years of neglect by the PPP/C. It was under the APNU/AFC Administration that the *Fédération Internationale de Basketball* (FIBA) basketball goals and state-of-the-art shot clocks were purchased, making the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall a FIBA approved facility. Cde. Speaker, ask the Minister to make it make sense. It was under the APNU/AFC Government, which invested \$20 million in 2016 and worked along with the Guyana Basketball Federation, for the first time in Guyana’s history, hosting the Caribbean Basketball Confederation (CBC) under-16 Championships which saw 10 male and even female teams from across the Caribbean competing here in Guyana. Minister, make it make sense.

In 2018, it was the APNU/AFC Government that purchased to the tune of US\$160,000 or \$32 million Guyana dollars, the replay screen at the Providence Stadium. This made it possible for Guyana to now host any Twenty20 (T20) and 50

overs international games at the National Stadium with real-time replays for spectators and officials alike. In that same year, Guyana hosted, for the first time in the country's history, the International Cricket Council (ICC) 2018 Women's T20 World Cup. Also, it was under the Coalition Government cricketers participated and won the under-19 Regional Tournament on multiple occasions, whilst the senior men team continued their dominance in the Senior Regional Cricket Tournament. Minister, make it make sense. I was taken aback when Hon. Minister stated:

“...sport and recreational facilities across the country were in a state of neglect.”

It was under the APNU/AFC Government in which the 'Light It Up' Project started, where for the first time in Guyana's history more than 30 community grounds and basketball courts received lights which allowed for the athletes to train beyond sunset. Those noteworthy to mention are in the Upper Mazaruni, in Region 7. Communities such as Kamarang, Jawalla, Waramadong and Kako were all lit. In Lethem, Region 9, it was the Guyana National Sports Commission (GNSC) that partnered with the municipality and all of the grounds in the municipality were also lit. Minister to make it make sense.

It was under the APNU/AFC Government that the Community Ground Enhancement Fund was increased from a paltry \$1 million per ground to \$2 million, \$3 million, \$5 million, \$7 million, \$10 and \$14 million, respectively. This amount was allocated to ensure that those playing spaces were properly fenced and playing surfaces became playable to avoid injuries. Take for example, the No. 53 Community Centre Ground in Region 6, where, for the first time, residents and athletes alike had access to a fully fenced ground, washroom facilities, lights, *et cetera*. Others are the Paradise Ball Field and Cotton Tree and Bath Community Centre Grounds in Region 5. Cde. Speaker, ask the Minister to make it make sense.

It was under the APNU/AFC Government that the National Sports Commission (NSC) commenced and every year after, hosted the Janet Jagan Memorial games in which schools across Regions 3 and 4 competed in games at the Guyana National Gymnasium. Minister, make it make sense. The Guyana National Sports Commission also hosted the Arthur Chung, Desmond Hoyte, Forbes Burnham, and every year fully supported the Dr. Cheddi Jagan Cycling Race in New Amsterdam with cash donations and other forms of support. Minister, make it make sense.

It was the APNU/AFC Government that partnered with the Guyana Hockey Board, Guyana Squash Association and Guyana Table Tennis Association which allowed them to successfully host their respective international tournaments right here. It was the Coalition Government that made it possible for the Squash Court to be upgraded which allowed Guyana to host the Caribbean Area Squash Association tournament which was funded from funds from the Government of Guyana in 2017. I must mention that, in 2016, Guyana hosted the Caribbean Junior Table Tennis tournament and, also, in 2019, Guyana hosted the Caribbean Senior Tournament which saw 11 countries participating in that tournament right here in Guyana. It was the Coalition Government that purchased equipment and gave much-needed financial support to all those associations to catapult their work. Minister, make it make sense.

Recognising the accomplishments and supporting the aspirations of those athletes who firmly placed Guyana on the world stage, such as Ms. Aliann Pompey, who won Gold at the Commonwealth Games 2002 in Manchester and Silver in New Delhi in 2010, the Guyana National Sports Commission sponsored the Aliann Pompey International Invitational Track and Field meet. The inaugural meet saw 50 athletes from across the globe vying for top spots in 17 track and field events. The meet was sanctioned by the International Amateur Athletic Federation/International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF), now World Athletics, the international governing body for the sport. This meant that all results were used as qualifiers for regional competitions, world championships and even the Olympics, for the first time in Guyana's history. Minister, make it make sense.

Cde. Speaker, because the Coalition Government recognised the value and importance of supporting persons living with disabilities, the inaugural special needs sports was held, which saw for the first time, students with special needs competing in a number of disciplines. As the years went on, the number of participants and schools grew, requiring the event to be spread over a three-day period and at multiple locations, including the Lenora Track and Field...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Chief Whip, at this time we will require an extension.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask that the Hon. Chief Whip be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson. Hon. Chief Whip, you have five minutes to conclude.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. ...the National Gymnasium and Colgrain Pool. This was the first in Guyana's history. Cde. Speaker, because of the National Sports Commission's advocacy, the National Paralympic Committee Guyana was given recognition by the International Paralympic Committee. This was a first for Guyanese with disabilities and in the areas of sports development which enabled them to compete internationally and compete they did. With all necessary funding from the GNSC, in 2015, athletes with disabilities participated in the Special Olympic World Games in Los Angeles and Special Olympic Summer Games in the United Arab Emirates in 2019, for the first time in Guyana's history. Minister, make it make sense.

It was the same Coalition Government in 2015, for the first time in Guyana's history, that supported the Guyana Blind Cricket Association's participation in the Regional Blind Cricket Tournament in St. Lucia. It is important to note that, in 2018, five blind Guyanese cricketers were afforded the opportunity to represent the West Indies National Blind Cricket team, and all performed exceptionally well. Cde. Speaker, ask the Minister to make it make sense.

I could go on and on to list the many achievements of the APNU/AFC Government, but time will not permit me. What is important to note is that all of this was done without funding from the oil and gas sector. What is even more noteworthy is that, even with all of the resources that the current Administration has, some federations and associations are stating the same thing that it was better under the APNU/AFC. Sir, just last October, all of us in this House read in shock the letter by Guyanese Olympian boxer, Mr. Kevin Allicock, detailing the lack of support for our international athletes representing Guyana, ultimately, having a negative impact on our athletes' performance. You ask yourself, but how is this possible in the PPP/C oil-rich economy? Minister, make that make sense.

5.05 p.m.

There is an allocation here for a pavilion for the athletic tracks in Regions 6 and 10. These tracks were built by the APNU/AFC. To right the historical wrong meted out to the athletes of track and field by the People's Progressive Party/Civic who constructed the Leonora Track and Field in Leonora knowing full well that the bulk of the athletes come from Regions 4 and 10. Minister, make that make sense. Three years on of the PPP/C, with four budgets almost

amounting to \$2 trillion and, to date, this country does not have a national sports policy. Minister, make that make sense. I would like to thank the staff at the Ministry of Finance.

In closing, *Budget 2023* was presented on Monday, 16th January. Coincidentally, Dr. Martin Luther King Day is observed by the people of the United States of America (USA) as one of its influential, if not the most influential civil rights leader of all time. One would have believed that the PPP/C was turning a corner, and was about to make a reality of what Dr. Martin Luther King dreamt of when he stated:

“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

Dr. King also stated:

“The time is always right to do what is right.”

Budget 2023, has not done yet, has again, not done what is right by the Guyanese people. It was the former President Dr. Cheddi Jagan who said you cannot live a Cadillac lifestyle in a donkey-cart economy. Guyana is now an oil producing nation with the biggest budget ever of \$781.9 billion, almost \$1 trillion and only 1.7% is going to the Guyanese people. It is pellucid. Guyana now has a Cadillac economy, but it is the People's Progressive Party/Civic who has the Guyanese people living a donkey-cart lifestyle.

As a result of what I have articulated above, the theme of this Budget: *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*, just like the 'One Guyana' mantra, they will remain but a fleeting illusion to be pursued, but never obtained. I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Chief Whip. Hon. Chief Whip, I was trying to make sense of your attack on the performance of Parliament. I would like to set some of the records with respect to the operations of Parliament, because you did mention a number of issues with the Parliament. This is the 2022 record: 26 Bills were presented to the National Assembly, 26 Acts of Parliament were assented to, 23 motions were published on Notice Papers, 20 Resolutions were passed in the National Assembly, 54 questions were published on Notice Papers, 43 questions were answered and there were 19 sittings held. This is the record which I stand proud on. Hon. Members, I think this is a good opportunity to take the suspension on for one hour.

Sitting suspended at 5.08 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.20 p.m.

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise in support of *Budget 2023: Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*. However, before I focus on the budget and the good things it will provide for the Guyanese nation, I wish to make some comments. At the beginning of the session today, the Hon. Member Nima Flu-Bess started out very good with a most patriotic Guyanese song: *Born in the land of the mighty Roraima*, I almost got fooled. *Onward, upward, may we every go*, that is good. *Day by day in strength and beauty grow*, that is correct. This *Budget 2023: Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow* would see us go onward, upward. Guyana will grow in strength and beauty. Guyanese children will benefit from the budget; everyone will benefit in every region.

I felt hurt when she continued her presentation, the Hon. Member. When she referred to us on this side of the House as uneducated people. I take that as a personal insult to me. I remember my father who has passed. He said, when I say education, I do not mean necessarily Mathematics and English Language. I mean you must have good understanding, understand life, understand where you came from, where you want to go, and understand everything. What I find is that the Hon. Members on that side of the House, excepting Mr. Shuman that is, do not have the capacity to understand the 2023 Budget. They cannot comprehend it and they are educated, I guess, because they are referring to us as uneducated. In all my *uneducatedness*, I understand the budget and the benefits that it would bring for the Guyanese people.

As I listened to the presentations from Members of the other side of the House, the racial twist, racial discrimination... You know there is a saying that says *the drowning rat clutches at a straw*. They are drowning and the only thing left for them to hold on to is racial discrimination – racialism. Everything is twisted. Their agenda is clear. They are out to create disturbance, mischief, destruction, you name it, division... We on this side of the House would not allow them to go down that way. Guyanese people understand. Many of our Guyanese brother and sister may not have Mathematics and English Language, but they have good understanding, and they understand what *Budget 2023* will deliver. We promised the Guyanese people. We made many promises. Today, we are happy. We say thank God that we could deliver, unlike the Members on the other side of the House. Mr. Shuman in my language I would say

banthe wajali yahabo Babalta. Meaning come and sit over here because I will have to excuse you a lot.

I would want to sing all the songs about discrimination... How many times have you heard, over the past five years, we the Indigenous people singing the discrimination song at every turn? We have faced discrimination before 1992 and we could write history about that – discrimination of Guyana's first people - Guyana's Indigenous people, under the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR). After 1992, we were included. What happened in 2015? Even our children were discriminated against, and I have evidence. We were discriminated against. What happened? More than 1900 young people were sent home. You did not see us picketing. You did not see us with plaque cards saying we were discriminated against. The sugar workers were sent home. What happened? Now you are saying discrimination. No. It is your last straw, and you are trying to fool the Guyanese people but no, they will not be fooled. We will promote our motto. The motto of Guyana says One People, One Nation, with one Destiny and 'One Guyana'. *Budget 2023* is all about 'One Guyana'. As I said before, it is difficult for you to understand.

We talk about disrespect. I heard the word disrespect – we are disrespectful. What is more disrespectful than the APNU/AFC Government disrespecting the Guyanese population? We had to wait more than one year before we had general elections. What is more disrespectful than that? To the Guyanese population, the entire population of Guyana, that is disrespectful. Not forgetting, even though we had the elections, we had to still wait. How many months? The agony of waiting to know what will happen to our country. Were we going upward? No. We were going downward. That is where we were heading and the Guyanese population knew, they saw and they cannot be fooled. Hon. Member Flu-Bess, this budget will surely take us upward – *Onward, upward, may we ever go*. We would not allow the APNU/AFC or the AFC alone or the APNU alone, I really cannot say what it is right now. We would not allow the Hon. Members to take us back to the stone age. No. We will continue to work together to further development for Guyanese people. The 2023 Budget will help us to do that.

I heard the word of reckless spending. Wow. *Budget 2023*, reckless spending. What is reckless spending? Let me refresh your memory, the Durban Park Monument – reckless spending. Ministers going out with a plane load of baggage boys and baggage girls and whatever, going out to Region 1 and Region 9 and wherever, a whole barrage. Is that not

reckless spending? What spending did you call that? Our funds are allocated for development purposes and you call it reckless spending. I will explain a little later as I look at the budget. I listened to the Hon. Member, Mr. Ronald Cox, and talks about Indigenous progress and the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarships and whatever.

6.30 p.m.

It is the first time in the history of our country that our Indigenous peoples, our youths, are given the opportunity to study at the university level in their own villages. I do not think anyone handpicked anyone. No, Sir. The GOAL scholarship, I would want to say and on behalf of the people, you know why I can say this, it is because I walk among the villages. I live in my village. I live in my region. I talk to the people, the ordinary people. *My head is not buried in the sand* like the Members of the Opposition's side, their *heads are buried in the sand*, and I urge them to raise up their heads and take them out the sand and see or if, I do not know... I know many years ago, donkeys used to wear blinders, I do not know if you are wearing that. Take it off and see what progress is, real progress and look at *Budget 2023* and see what it will bring for the ordinary people in the villages and communities.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Cox, talked about the carbon credit, the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). I wish to inform the Hon. Member that the National Toshi Council from 2007, right in this building here, we passed a resolution supporting the then President Dr. Jagdeo to go and discuss forest. We were part of that discussion right here in this very building. In 2009, when the memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed, we were there, we had many discussions. We said what we would like to see. Hon. Member, perhaps you were too little to remember these things, or you were not around. I do not know if you live in your village. I do not know if you communicate with your leader.

We were always part – the National Toshi Council – Toshaos were always part of the discussion. We will continue to be part of all the discussions with forest and anything that has to do with the development of Indigenous peoples. I say this because talking to my Indigenous brothers and sisters, they said this is one of the best budgets that they have heard so far. I want to say thanks to the Hon. Minister Dr. Ashni Singh and his staff for the hours they spent working on this budget. I want to remind the House that when Dr. Ashni Singh came back, the ordinary people said that is the man for the job, yes. The ordinary people, the man in the street, the people who I talk with, grassroot people,

they appreciate the hard work that the Government Ministers, Dr. Ashni Singh, and the vision of His Excellency, they understand. I do not think they have Mathematics and English.

I heard the words 'doom and gloom'. It is so... I do not know what word to use, sad, to hear the people, the presenter, the Hon. Member from the other side of the House saying that there is 'doom and gloom' now under the Peoples Progressive Party/Civic Government. No Sir, that is not true. That is trying to mislead the population, that is trying to mislead people, but people are not foolish. We faced 2015 to 2018, no confidence motion 'doom' and 'gloom'. In 2019, 2020, waiting for the results – 'doom and gloom'. During those years, I am not sure where the Members of the opposite side lived or who they were talking to, but people found it difficult to put three meals on the table for their children. Is that not 'doom' and 'gloom'? So how do you now come to tell us that now is 'doom and gloom'. Do you not understand what is 'doom and gloom'? Come on.

It was difficult for people to put meals on the table for their children. That is what we went through. People were wondering where the next meal was coming from but no longer do they have to worry about that. This is because this is a caring Government. I know you do not like to hear the word 'caring' but we are a caring Government, because we care. We are demonstrating how we care. So, all the issues about 'doom and gloom, disrespect and discrimination, your agenda, the Opposition's agenda is to create division to destroy, to pass disturbance. That is the Opposition's agenda. It is clear as day. I never visited Mocha, but I read everything that is happening. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? I remember seeing a video where the former Minister of Housing said to the people in Sophia, you all better move peacefully or else we will do what we have to do. That was not discrimination; that was not 'doom and gloom'; that was not destruction. What was that? Then they did dismantle the people's buildings. It was because they were illegally occupying lands. So, in like manner now, the people are illegally occupying lands. There was a lot of communication, back and forth, Minister talking, everyone trying to move the people peacefully and now you are bringing it. You are preaching that we discriminated against them.

What is your agenda? To create division, to create disturbance, to create destruction but we will not allow that to happen. No. Guyana will move forward, *onward, upward, may we ever go*, we will go. The development train is

moving ahead. We have a vision and under the leadership of His Excellency Dr. Irfaan Ali, we are promoting. We will work towards a 'One Guyana'. I think the Opposition do not like that. They do not like oneness, they do not like unity, they do not like harmony.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you continue, I took my eyes off the clock and you are actually two minutes over the initial 15 minutes but that is not your fault. Could someone move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Speaker, I respectfully ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks: Thank you Mr. Speaker. I would like to make a few points on the 2023 Budget, the budget that will take us forward, onward and upward. I would like to point out \$12.4 billion to improve education infrastructure across the country and when we say across the country, we are also talking about the hinterland communities. Education and infrastructure will develop and enhance our various communities and villages. I would also like to say \$3.4 billion to procure textbooks for use in primary and secondary schools, that includes our hinterland schools, unlike what happened under the APNU/AFC when there were no exercise books in our schools. This will not happen under our Government. Here is where the 2023 Budget has catered to address these issues. *Onward, upward, may we ever go, in strength and beauty we will grow.*

Youth – I am sorry I do not have time to go through all, but this is catered for. Youth and Indigenous youths will not be left out. Our facilities – we will have sporting facilities constructed in our villages, we will have better playfields and facilities in our villages. It has started already and the 2023 Budget will see the continuation of all these things. I just want to point out hinterland development.

“...indigenous people will be at the forefront to directly benefit from the Government’s efforts on climate finance, with 15 percent of the revenue received from the sale of our carbon credits going toward investment in Village Sustainability Plans produced by villages and communities”

We are involved in development programmes and projects. I wish to point out that we have our village plans. Many of our

plans have to do with agriculture and so we are seeing a shifting from subsistence agriculture to commercial agriculture. We are talking about processing, food security, commercial agriculture, livestock rearing, I can go on and on. *Budget 2023*, if we look at it and if we have the capacity to understand it, we will see how much it will bring to our hinterland people and so we will move onward and upward.

The Government, the Peoples Progressive Party/Civic Government, under the leadership of His Excellency Dr. Irfaan Ali, we have a responsibility to the people of Guyana and we are honoured to discharge our responsibility. It is our duty to do that because we went out there and we talked with the people and you know what they said to us? I remember very well. When we were out there they said, you all take back this country because we are punishing. And so, that is why we are here today. We have a responsibility to deliver on our promises and that is what we are doing. In the field of education, health, water and sanitation, housing, agriculture, Amerindian development, yes Mr. Speaker, we are delivering and we will do this with transparency and accountability. That is what we will do. We will manage this country with transparency and accountability. It is our responsibility to talk to the population of Guyana as we promote One People, One Nation, One Destiny – ‘One Guyana’. We must live in peace and harmony unlike what is being promoted by the opposite side of the House, excepting Mr. Shuman, destruction, disturbance and division.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Indigenous peoples of this country, we fully support *Budget 2023, Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*. I thank you, Sir, and God bless Guyana. [Applause]

6.45 p.m.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Mr. Speaker, as I rise to make my contribution to *Budget 2023*, I would like to take this opportunity to wish all a happy new year. Before I continue, I would like to thank the Hon. Member who just spoke for reminding us that our motto is, *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*. Thank you very much for that.

I also want to make a comment on what the Hon. Member, Ms. Parag, said in relation to the two major projects that will contribute towards the 2023 Budget being the Demerara Harbour Bridge and the gas-to-shore project and when those are finished, the budget will go down. I fully agree with her, but I want to remind her of the records. What guarantee do we have that the budget will go down? I want to remind the House that the fibre-optic cable project was a white elephant. I want to remind the House that the specialty hospital was a

white elephant. I want to remind the House that the Skeldon Sugar Factory was a white elephant. I want to remind the House that the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project is still there, and they cannot get it off the ground. What guarantee do we have as Guyanese that the budget will come down and they will not set another project in line?

I want to also congratulate all those hard-working public servants and the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance who spent the wee hours preparing *Budget 2023*. I thought this budget would have reached a trillion dollars this year as compared to last year's with the number of supplementals we have had to approve. If it had, it would not have mattered because the people of Guyana are not benefitting directly from this budget. There is no excitement about the 2023 Budget. They found themselves promoting a budget. Imagine that. Nevertheless, I would like to turn your attention to the environment, what it means to the Guyanese people and what can happen in the blink of an eye.

Thanks to the APNU/AFC Government for signing the oil deal in 2016 that now rescues Guyana's economy and makes it the fifth fastest-growing economy in the world. We have brought this new revenue stream that is now placed in the hands of the PPP/C. They seem clueless on how to spend this revenue, despite early warnings about the Dutch disease. What was mentioned in the budget speech by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance is really contrary to what I heard in the Al Jazeera's interview, where efforts were made to redefine the Dutch disease. Many of you know that. In the Al Jazeera interview, efforts were made to redefine the Dutch disease. The guard rail was destroyed and the PPP/C, in this very House, removed the 22-member Public Accountability and Oversight Committee which comprised of various members of societies and covered the entire spectrum of our country. It was reduced to a five-member committee and two Members from the Opposition were to be selected by the Opposition. Due to the dictatorial approach of the Government, it selected whom it wanted – a breach of its own law.

Things will get worse than this Dutch disease. As I look into the budget, I did not see any major spending for the Environmental and Protection Agency (EPA) to build upon what the Coalition handed over with respect to its human capacity and infrastructural development. When the Coalition Government took over after 23 years of destruction to the EPA, it was dysfunctional. It had only two vehicles for inspection and monitoring, which meant that no field

monitoring or inspections occurred. There was no filing system of records to even know how many permits and operations existed. Unbelievable. The Coalition found that the Agency did not even have records of the numerous operations and there were 600 expired permits over some 15 years.

Within less than three years, the EPA discovered that over 2000 projects existed; brought all permits and operations into compliance; and got eight brand new vehicles without a dime from the treasury. It was funded by the collection of over \$150 million in fees owed from the expired permits and back fees. The EPA built a state-of-art registry and filing system to manage these projects; increased staff by 20% with engineers and scientists which the agency was severely lacking; tripled the number of EPA offices from one to three by adding offices in Corentyne and Linden to ease the financial burden and the inconvenience of business people having to travel to Georgetown only to conduct business; established a 24/7 complaint hotline with a 24-hour response time; and developed a culture of transparency with free access to the media and public, which is absent today. That is what we did to the EPA. Instead of them building upon the strong foundation which we handed to them, they have now reverted to the old, destructive ways of the PPP/C. Staff are now being directed to issue permits without inspections. Most disturbingly, we learned that ExxonMobil's files have been moved directly to the Executive Director's office. The questions are – what is so special about this company? Why has it moved there? What is there to hide? Why is the company being treated differently from even our local businesses?

Capacity building: the EPA had no one with a petroleum background in the oil and gas sector when we took over. In order to quickly build capacity to perform adequate monitoring and oversight of the oil and gas operations, with US\$1 million from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), we had the World Bank develop a plan to build a 36-member oil & gas unit with highly specialised skills and experience for 24/7 on-site presence on the drill ships and floating production storage and offloading (FPSO) vessels in order to obtain credible and real-time information. When the Government took Office, it abandoned that plan and denied that it ever existed until the plan surfaced in the newspapers and *caught them with their pants down*. This forced the Minister to defer questions to the EPA's Director, whose excuse was that he did not know the plan existed when he was there. To suggest that they did not know that such an important and critical World Bank plan existed confirms their incompetence and incapability to manage this important

sector and their continued wasting of the World Bank's money. Even though they were caught red-handed about one year ago, they still have not done anything to implement the plan to ensure there is a 24/7 on-site presence.

Additionally, the Coalition established a study leave programme to build capacity, where the EPA was to sponsor students to go to universities, train, and sign a four-year contract to serve afterward, but all these were abandoned. They told those students, who had already applied to universities and were prepared to go, that the programme was abandoned, and they were on their own. Every major project or business development must go through this institution. It is shocking to learn that they do not have money to pay staff for this month. It is very shocking. This institution is very important to the newly discovered oil resources. With the upscale of production in the Stabroek Block and many others to come, Guyana must guard against environmental hazards such as oil spills, flaring, and the dumping of toxic water into the ocean. These are the three major issues that Guyanese should be concerned with. The EPA should equip itself to manage these.

Let us turn our attention to the flaring. Lisa Phase 1 in 2021 flared over one billion cubic feet of gas from a faulty compressor which they said was fixed. Flaring continues with no direct penalty. We must understand that flaring releases over 250 identified toxins, including carcinogens such as benzene (C₆H₆), carbon disulphide (CS₂), and toluene (C₇H₈); and metals such as mercury (Hg), arsenic (As), chromium (Cr) and hydrogen sulphide (H₂S). These are all toxins. We learned that US\$10 million was paid to the EPA. This is a green light to flare. What we now have is a Government also known as (aka) *pay to pollute* or *no EIA* Government. That is what we have now.

For the Demerara Harbour Bridge, there was no Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) required. The EPA published a notice, in late 2020, that the bridge would require an EIA, only to have it overturned by the politicians in early 2021. This was against the EPA's decision for an EIA to be done. As soon as the Coalition Government was out of power, a close associate of the Government cleared a huge plantation of mangrove forest at Vreed-en-Hoop – you were there Mr. Ramjattan – with no EIA. There was not even an application to the EPA, and they cut down the mangroves. I recall senior Government officials making statements that polluting Guyana is the cost of developing Guyana. This is callous and irresponsible. They know themselves. This is the disregard for the law by the Government. Why are they losing these lawsuits, such as the one just recently lost, when

they did not do an EIA for the radioactive storage on the East Bank of Demerara? It shows clearly that the Government values money over our people's health, safety, and the environment. As I said, this is a *no EIA* and *pay to pollute* Government.

Dumping of toxic water waste into the ocean: As I speak about the three important aspects, the dumping of produced water is strictly prohibited in all parts of the world as prescribed by the World Bank. This has to do with highly toxic heavy metals, radioactive materials, and water three times hotter than the ocean's water. This produced water also contains oil. If we continue to dump produced water, with the rapid pace of oil production, then we will be dumping hundreds of thousands of barrels of pure oil into the ocean. There was a popular video circulating by a fisherman that showed the oil floating on the water. That (*inaudible*). The World Bank report states that dumping this produced water is prohibited unless it is not financially or technically feasible. In this case, it is easily feasible, both financially and technically, since normal international best practices call for it to be reinjected into the reservoir with standard technologies to maintain the reservoir's pressure. In Guyana, they are injecting clean water from the ocean, while dumping the toxins into the water. How could that make any godly sense, except if it is only for greed and to put money above people's health and the environment? Only the *no EIA* and *pay to pollute PPP/C* Government would allow this.

After the election, they brought a highly controversial consultant from Canada to expedite the issuing of the permit for the Payara Field Development Project. The team, which was led by Ms. Redford, and comprised of the EPA, the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) and the Department of Energy, unanimously arrived at a decision that there should be no dumping of produced water nor the flaring of gas. The team met with ExxonMobil and so directed that it installs the equipment to do so. However, the PPPC Government discarded that decision and now allows the unlimited dumping of the produced toxic water and the unlimited flaring of the toxic gases as long as they could pay for it. That is right. Pollute as much as you want, as long as you can pay for it. The *pay to pollute* Government is what we have. There have been outcries from the media and public for the Government to release the Alison Redford report. We now ask again, where is the Allison Redford report and why are they hiding it?

7.00 p.m.

The only conclusion could be that they do not want the public to know that they went against their own foreign consultant and government agencies to the health and environmental detriment of our people and the nation that they are supposed to be protecting. Show us the Allison Redford report. Show us where it is.

Oil spill: With the rapid rate of development in the oil and gas sector, one has to prepare for any mishap that we see in other parts of the world. All the moneys earned now can be gone in a split second. We can further plunge the country into bankruptcy and more heavy debts for which the current and future generations will pay a hefty price, and that is poverty.

Mr. Speaker: You will need an extension, Hon. Member, to conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you may continue towards your conclusion.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Worldwide offshore oil production operations like Guyana's show a high likelihood of an oil spill occurring offshore and that such likelihood of a spill increases exponentially with the rapid increase of offshore production activities and the reckless conduct of ExxonMobil with approval from the Government to produce at a rate of 25% above the safe operating limit defined in the EIA. That is what they are doing. It is 25% above the limit, putting the country at high risk for a spill. If we look at the emergency response and clean-up of the British Petroleum Macondo oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, it cost them US\$145 billion. I am coming to the figure just now, Mr. Speaker.

The Government is now talking about being able to see oil spill remotely, when, more importantly, we should have 24/7 on board oversight to prevent the spill. It is useless and too late when you see the spill. We call on the Government to implement the World Bank's 36-member programme of highly personnel to provide the capacity to prevent a spill in the first place by on-site rigorous oversight.

Full coverage liability insurance: This is where the issue is. This topic seems to be a secret from the Guyanese people at large. If by chance any of the disaster which I previously mentioned occurs, Guyana and the rest of the Caribbean are

doomed, and that is the doom, Hon. Member. It will forever remain as it is.

The Coalition demanded and got ExxonMobil to agree to have full liability coverage to cover any size of spill. Full liability coverage consists of insurance plus a parent company guarantee. There is a difference. The parent company is running. Full liability coverage consists of insurance plus a parent company guarantee that covers all costs above the insurance. It is a simple formula. Full coverage is equal to insurance plus parent company guarantee. It is not halfway. That is what is enshrined in the permits and that is what is being negligibly allowed to be violated by this Government. But like everything else, it is the *modus operandi* of the Government to not follow the rule of law like other civilised and democratic countries would do. Sadly, we now live in an autocracy.

In last year's debate, we heard some Ministers say that parent company guarantee would be too costly. Please give me the honour of educating my honourable colleagues on the other side. A parent company guarantee costs nothing. *Nada*. It is just a document that has to be signed by ExxonMobil, not the Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited (EEPGL). This language of full liability coverage, which was created by the Coalition, was put into a Liza 2 permit by the Coalition and was copied by the PPP/C Government into all of the other permits issued by the PPP/C. The Vice President (VP) himself verified this on the Glen Lall show. I am not sure if you remember. He went on his phone and quoted this section with the language. However, the Government is allowing ExxonMobil to operate without this parent company guarantee and with only \$600 million in insurance. Where is the parent company guarantee that costs nothing? The \$600 million is useless.

The Macondo spill, which I referred to earlier, cost US\$145 billion. So, if there is a Macondo-type spill here, who will cover the \$144.4 billion? That is above the \$600 million insurance, which is merely 0.4% of that. That is just a typical example. To put it another way, the Macondo spill cost close to 250 times the \$600 million that they were talking about here and 50 times the entire budget that we are talking about. You can understand the devastation of what can happen here. Therefore, there is a mystery to anyone in this Assembly as to why Guyana and many of its neighbours would be financially bankrupt with the destruction of our fishing industry, tourism, and ecology. I am not making this up. It is all in the EIAs. It will wipe out the Caribbean, tourism and many others. Further, even though the guarantee is zero cost, the Government is now appeasing EEPGL with

talking about cutting the legal requirement of full, unlimited guarantee of \$2 billion. Again, who will cover the US\$143 billion above the insurance amount with a parent company guarantee of only \$2 billion if we are to have a Macondo-type spill here?

Let me ask my learned colleagues on the other side, since I know that they all have some common sense. Here is my simple question: why would ExxonMobil not want to sign a legally required guarantee that costs nothing, especially since they pledged that they will never walk away from any such responsibility? A simple question brings a simple answer, and the first simple answer is the fact that they are being allowed to get away with this lawlessness and callousness by our reckless Government that does not respect our own laws. The real reason is that ExxonMobil would have no liability above the \$600 million insurance and would walk away if it gets too costly. Think about it. How else would it be explained if they pledged that they would not walk away? Why can they not put the pledge in writing if it costs nothing? I know my time is running out and I am going. Let me talk about the gas-to-shore project.

Mr. Speaker: Unfortunately, we are already a minute over the extension.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Permit me to conclude, Mr. Speaker. My expectation for the development of our environment in Guyana. Implement the World Bank plan, which I spoke about, providing for the 36-member unit of highly specialised oil and gas personnel at the Environmental Protection Agency for robust oversight and monitoring, including 24/7 presence on the ship. They talk about now being able to see oil spill remotely, when, more importantly, we should have 24/7 onboard oversight to prevent the spill. It is too late when you see the spill. It is better you do it before. Prevention is always better than.... I know my time is up and I really wish I could have continued in this regard. I have spoken so much about the environmental issues that we have in Guyana and they were not mentioned in the budget. Therefore, I am unable to support such a budget that does not have the input for this very important agency and institute in Guyana. I thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Now for the Hon. Member, Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo.

Dr. Mahadeo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me start by saying, first of all, congratulations to the Vice President and to Minister Ramson on their birthdays. A particular congratulation to the Vice President because he played a major role in getting us where we are today, over the dark

period of the five years that we all know about and that books have already been written about. He played a major role in the time when the no-confidence motion was passed, the one year that the people of Guyana were suffering every day in the field. I take this opportunity to thank the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, for his presentation on the 2023 Budget. It was a marathon presentation, but every minute of that presentation said something of worth to the Guyanese people. I wholeheartedly support this budget, as I was asked by my constituents in Region 6 to do so.

I thank the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government of Guyana for once again preparing and presenting a people's budget, reflective of the consultations that were done with the citizens of Guyana. Sir, please permit me to also thank the staff of the Ministry of Finance for their hard work that they have done. The staff of the Ministry of Finance do not have a break. They work from budget to budget, one cycle to the next. So, I take this opportunity to thank the Minister of Finance and his staff for their continuous hard work and presentations of timely and people centred budgets.

I stand here as the representatives of the residents of Region 6 as one of the two geographic Members of Parliament (MPs) on this side of the House. It is easy to break and destroy and that can be done in a short time. The People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R)/APNU/AFC, in a few short years, destroyed the good work that the PPP/C did over 23 years. Even to the end of their term, they decided to *throw caution to the wind* and tried to steal the elections. The Commission of Inquiry (COI) is revealing some truths. Even those who pretended to be silent...even silence speaks volume in that case. This PPP/C Government has, over the last couple of years, been building, constructing and facilitating a growing Guyana. Like my colleague, the Hon. Member Yvonne Pearson-Frederick said, quoting the song and giving it the correct interpretation, onward and upward we are going. The hardships created by the PNC, AFC/APNU are known to everyone in and out of Guyana. The people of Region 6 were particularly aimed at, and they felt the destructive force of this PNC/APNU/AFC Government in every facet of life, whether it be agriculture, drainage and irrigation (D&I), healthcare, education delivery, or employment. In every facet of life, the full force of the destructive nature of the APNU/AFC was felt. Some examples are loss of thousands of jobs, closure of estates without any plan for alternative employment or source of income for families, destruction of the drainage and irrigation system in Region 6 and non-functioning of the National Ophthalmology Hospital.

Democracy was salvaged in the year 2020, thanks to the resilience of the PPP/C leadership and all the freedom loving citizens of Guyana and our friends from overseas. Books have already been written about that dark chapter of our and I have sure more will be written as more truths are revealed. In the year 2022.... [Mr. Mahipaul: *(inaudible)*] You wish. The year 2022 was a good year for Guyana and for my region. There is now an air of expectancy, expectation of good things happening and better things to come. Residents of Region 6 see their leaders coming to their villages and towns, walking the streets, visiting their communities, from the Chairman to the Vice Chairman. They see the President, the Vice President, the Prime Minister or Ministers, MPs and they can share their concerns and suggestions directly with them and they could actually get live photographs with live people and not cardboard men. We all remember the cardboard man.

7.15 p.m.

For the year 2022, from the Regional Democratic Council's (RDC) budget, \$42 million was spent on drainage and irrigation, \$54.4 million for bridges; \$273 million on roadworks done in every single Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) in Region 6 and every Municipality; \$69 million was spent on buildings for education; and in health \$891 million was spent on buildings and \$74 million on furniture and equipment.

The Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) did retrofitting and equipping of an agro-processing facility at Black Bush Polder for approximately \$150 million. In 2023, it would be doing construction and equipping of an agro-processing facility at Crabwood Creek for \$25 million and retrofitting and equipping of an agro-processing facility at Orealla for \$25 million. The Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) constructed a drying floor at Adventure for \$15 million. There was rehabilitation work done to the Lesbeholden seed paddy facility. A dryer would be purchased for the seed paddy facility at Lesbeholden. A total of 788 farmers benefitted from flood relief assistance to the tune of \$833 plus million. Biofortified and other research projects, valuing approximately \$6.5 million, is ongoing at the GRDB substation at Lesbeholden. A low yielding farmers project was initiated where the GRDB extension officers were required to provide and support 10 farmers who experienced low yields. The list is long.

The National Agriculture Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) also played a part, in 2022, in Region 6, by providing coconut seedlings, fertiliser, limestone, vegetable

seedlings, insecticides, treatment for Acoushi ants, knapsack pumps and shade houses. Mr. Speaker, I have the list here if anybody is interested. Farmers were also trained, and 460 farmers benefitted from it. There was distribution of beneficiary packages for the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) emergency response and 130 small holder farmers benefitted from it in Region 6. The National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) also spent moneys on a total of 93 projects that dealt with drainage and irrigation and that dealt with the livelihoods of farmers in Region 6.

For 2023, the region has budgeted \$71.5 million for D&I, \$54 million for bridges, \$300 million for roads, \$289 million for education delivery and \$294.8 million for the health services. Again, these moneys would be spent across the entire region. To help persons who were unemployed, 4,000 parttime jobs were made available and 4,000 persons in Region 6 are now getting employment as parttime workers, but more, these parttime workers, whilst they are earning, also have the possibility of studying. I know of a relatively large number of young persons in my region who are doing the parttime job and who have also gotten the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarships. They are working and studying, and that is also a possibility in Guyana. Minister Parag spoke about the GOAL scholarship and how it is being given. This people-centred Government will not tell our young people that the Government does not provide jobs. We will empower our young people. We will provide opportunities for them to grow, to study and to earn.

I heard comments about the budget. I heard comments about the figures, the language and whatever. I am not surprised, unlike my colleague, the Hon. Member, Ms. Pearson-Fredericks. I am not surprised. We all know that those sitting on the opposite side of this House, and again I would say except the Hon. Deputy Speaker, have a problem with Mathematics. Do you remember the figure of 32 and a half? They also have a problem with English and this budget is all about figures and English. If they have a problem with that, then how could they understand the direction in which the budget is going? How could they understand the help that people would be getting? How could they understand the impact that this budget is going to have on every life and on every single person living in Guyana?

It is not only about how much money the pensioners would get; it is also about what we have done before. They put value-added tax (VAT) and they removed the subsidies. We removed VAT and we gave back the subsidies. The school

children...all of this goes into the pockets of the people of Guyana across the entire country.

Health in Region 6 – Outreaches were done in Orealla, Siparuta, Baracara, Mara and specialist outreaches were done in the health centres on the East Bank and other health centres along the coast. Specialists visited, on a rostered basis, all three district hospitals at Skeldon, Mibicuri and Port Mourant and provided their services. Geriatric homes were visited regularly, along with the orphanages that are in the region. The home base care programme that we had started in 2009 and which was going very well, and which was stopped by the APNU/AFC Government in 2015, has restarted. The elderly care programme that helped over a 1,000 persons in Region 6, which was also stopped, has again started, and in excess of 1,000 persons in Region 6 benefitted from it in 2022. I will speak about that a bit later.

Let us talk about the National Ophthalmology Hospital. Talking about the National Ophthalmology Hospital will take me to the work of the Ministry of Health, and I am a part of the staff at the Ministry of Health under the leadership of the Hon. Minister, Dr. Frank Anthony. The leadership of the Ministry of Health has taken charge. We are bringing healthcare out from where it was into where it is now and into a brighter future. The management has improved and continues to improve. Confidence is growing in the healthcare system. Here, I want to say thank you to the President, the Government of Guyana and the Ministry of Finance for the moneys that they have allotted to the healthcare workers and the increase in salaries that have made a revolutionary change in their lives. In my region, the National Ophthalmology Hospital has been reopened and is functioning once again, after not functioning under the APNU/AFC. It took a large investment to bring it to a state of readiness to be able to do surgeries. The equipment was not working, and fungus was on the walls of the theatre. Anybody who has a modicum of knowledge of surgery knows that is critical. It had infrastructure issues. The roof was leaking. Once again, that facility is fully functional.

Surgery started on 14th February. They started doing laser for the retina of [*inaudible*] patients. They started screening in the primary and secondary schools. Cataract patients were operated on. Retina patients with bleeding now have access to laser therapy. There is ultrasound for patients with bleeding at the back of the eye. These patients use to be referred overseas. Bleeding secondary to trauma is now available. Outreaches were done to all the remote areas in Region 6 by the ophthalmology staff while refers to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) are

limited. In 2022, a total of 1,769 surgeries were done at the National Ophthalmology Hospital, a hospital which did not do surgeries in the years prior to that.

I want to touch on the health services in the hinterland, but before I go there, I will talk about the elderly care programme that started in 2009. Like I said, it was stopped. For last year, 2022, it was expanded. Now, it is in Regions 2, 3, 5, 6 and 9 and a total of 6,300 odd persons and geriatric patients benefitted from that programme across these regions.

I heard the Hon. Member from Region 1 talking about Region 1, and the only thing I heard him mention was Mabaruma. I just want to advise the Hon. Member that Region 1 is a lot more than Mabaruma. I heard him say that the Hon. Member, Minister Collin Croal, spoke about visiting only Mabaruma and talking to the people of Mabaruma. That was the impression he was giving. I personally visited, out of the 50 primary healthcare facilities that we have there, 44 in those communities. I could tell you that in each one of those communities that I went to people were speaking about Minister Croal's visits. He would have visited over 90% of those facilities.

Mr. Speaker: Before you could get to the 10% more, you will have to get an extension.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Speaker, may the Hon. Member have five minutes to conclude?

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Dr. Mahadeo: The major achievements in Region 1: For the first time, Nursing Assistants are being trained there. Across the country, we have nearly doubled the number of community health workers. Some six dormant, non-functional facilities that were reactivated, including the Black Water Savannah, Barbina, Five Star, Kokerite, Tasawini and Saint Ansem. I invite the Members to visit these facilities. Some 10 facilities that never had community health workers and were there but non-functional because they did not have the staff, now have two community health workers each. Screening for eye problems is being done, and as we speak, patients from Region 1 are getting surgeries at the National Ophthalmology Hospital. This is the same hospital that was non-functional under the APNU/AFC.

The Moruca hospital: The Moruca hospital now has a functioning theatre and over 60 patients have already had surgeries in the operating theatre at Moruca. It also has

ultrasound facilities and x-ray. One hundred percent of those primary healthcare facilities have better services and provide more diagnostics.

If you look at Region 9, it also had decentralised training. It also had, for the first-time, training being done in the region for Nursing Assistants and for Pharmacy Assistants. It would start training for Medical Technicians and Scrub Technicians. We are building Guyana one day at a time. They did specialist outreaches in every single health facility in Region 9. In most of these facilities, there were two specialist outreaches. They provided obstetrics, gynaecology care and ultrasound in the villages. For the first time, all pregnant women had at least one, and in most cases two and three ultrasounds, during the course of their pregnancy. It has never happened before. We screened 60 patients from Region 9 and we brought them out. We got their surgeries done at the National Ophthalmology Hospital and we took them back, including Members from the Opposition and relatives.

We also have another project, the snap on spectacle project, which is the brainchild of the Minister of Health. I am sure that the Minister will speak about it, but I need to say that when he told me about that project, I had my doubts. However, when I saw the school children benefitting from these spectacles...They would come, get their eyes tested and leave with the prescription glasses. It was a sight to behold. That is going to continue. [Mr. Norton: When the Coalition *deh tek care of you*, why didn't you mention that?] The Coalition never took care of me. The Coalition kicked me out of my job. Do you remember that? There is improved diagnostics in radiology. There are more vehicles that have been distributed. A theatre at Region 7, Kamarang, is soon to be functional. Within next month, we will start doing surgeries there. At Aishalton, in the first week of next month, surgeries will be starting there for those residents. The theatre in Mahdia is soon going to be functional. The theatre in Mahaicony, which never worked, has been doing surgeries since last year. There are rehabilitation therapists in all of the regions of Guyana now. Previously, there were not in all of the regions.

7.30 p.m.

In wrapping up, I want to say that betrayal of trust is never a good thing. When an individual is betrayed, the individual loses his trust and faith in the person who betrayed the individual. Our nation was betrayed when it put its trust in the APNU/AFC. The 'good life' was promised but only a few in the hierarchy benefitted, living the 'good life' with

gifts and other perks. The nation was betrayed and will not trust this group again. You will not only be there for a long time, Mr. Mahipaul, but your numbers will also dwindle come the next elections. Maybe this is why you are afraid to go to the Local Government Elections. Your numbers will dwindle, and as your numbers decrease over there, our numbers will increase over here. So, learn to be a good Opposition, you are there for a long, long time.

As His Excellency said, this is a transformative Budget. It will take long to build, to cultivate, to mould, and to develop an individual, and even longer to develop a country and a nation. It is achieved with a lot of hard work, effort, discipline, trust and, of course, the necessary financing. The Budget is providing us with the financing. The Government has to stay rooted with its people. The President, Vice President, Prime Minister, Ministers, and MPs must walk with the people, meet with the people and listen to them, and that is what this Government is doing. This Budget provides the financing and the framework to further develop Guyana, to further transition this dear land of ours to its true potential. This Budget indeed has something for everyone. This Budget is taking one more step towards the bright future Guyana deserves. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I am now calling on the Hon. Sonia Parag to move the motion so that we can continue until the business of today and the rest of the budget debates and estimates are concluded.

Suspension of Standing Orders Nos. 10(1) and 10(4)

BE IT RESOLVED:

"That Standing Orders Nos. 10(1) and 10(4) be suspended and the resolution of the Twelfth Parliament to allow the sittings of the National Assembly to proceed during the debate and consideration of the estimates beyond 8 p.m. every day, until the business of each day is completed."

[Minister of Public Service]

Ms. Parag: Mr. Speaker, I respectfully rise to move the suspension of Standing Orders 10(1) and 10(4) and this resolution of the Twelfth Parliament to allow us to proceed during the debate and consideration of the estimates to go beyond 8.00 p.m. every day until the business of each day is completed.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Mr. Speaker: We will continue everyday until the debates and the estimates are concluded beyond 8 o'clock to complete the business of that particular day. Hon. Members, I now invite Hon. Member Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis to make her contribution.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I cannot believe some of the things I heard from Hon. Member Mahadeo just now. I wish to state that he has actually said to us, in not so many words, what 'One Guyana' means. The Members of the Opposition and their families are not entitled to be taken care of by the health system of Guyana. That is what the Hon. Member said. He even took care of the Members of the Opposition and their families in this National Assembly. How lower can we get? I had expected some level of maturity from that Member. He is a doctor, he has been in this House for a while, and he has been in the political arena for a while. I am so disappointed. **[Dr. Anthony: (Inaudible)]** Dr. Anthony, do not get involved. Mr. Speaker, *not my clown, not my circus.*

I rise today to add my contribution to the 2023 Budget by thanking God Almighty for life and his mercies. Gratefulness is an innate behaviour of mankind, all of us. While I thank Him for strength and mental wellness to serve the people of our dear land, I also want to thank the many public servants who have spent a lot of time and energy in preparing this Budget. It is disappointing to come here again, for the fourth time in less than two and a half years, to talk about the biggest budget in the history of our country while the poor people are suffering, while poor people's homes are being bulldozed right in front the eyes of our innocent children, while children in the Rupununi are sleeping on bare sponge on the ground in their dormitories (dorms), and while parents can hardly feed their children, but the Ministers of Government are taking home more than \$1.3 million every single month. It is a sad day for all of us in Guyana when we have to come here just for due process to be observed so that the PPP/C can continue to fill the pockets of their friends, families and favourites.

The actions of this debate are so routine and mundane that the only important aspect for us is to ensure that our contributions in the form of recommendations from these speeches are captured in the *Hansard*, and that they will be part of our history. I am fearful that history will judge us as a country harshly, because the manner in which the business of this country is being done is horrifying. This Budget lacks any discernible strategy to eliminate poverty. It lacks both hope and a model that promises development of our human capital. I am definitely very disappointed. This PPP/C

installed Administration can only be described as heartless. The percentage of people living under poverty is getting higher, and there is little or no priority and supporting programmes to highlight the village economy or create work for the unemployed. Please do not tell me about the parttime jobs for \$40,000 per month. Is that the PPP/C's employment mechanism? That is a demonstration of the level of disrespect they have for our Guyanese people. That is a handout without thinking about the future of our people. Our people are the ones who will determine where we go. Is this how we are improving the lives of our people today, with parttime jobs? Is that how we are going to improve the lives of our people, with \$40,000 per month parttime jobs? Our prosperity for tomorrow is doomed under this installed Government.

There are people in Region 6 who benefitted from the \$40,000 temporary jobs. I have been going to Region 6 a lot. One day we were midway on the Corentyne and we stopped at Liverpool, and I met Charmaine. Charmaine is a single parent from Liverpool who has four children. Unfortunately, she was employed and placed to do gardening at the health centre in the village. Sir, \$40,000 cannot feed her and her four children, so I took the opportunity to recommend to Charmaine... I encouraged her to go and apply to the Region for public assistance for the four children since they are all in nursery and primary schools. During the Christmas time of 2022, Charmaine was notified that because she was employed, she cannot receive public assistance. That is the prosperity of our people. Now we understand why the people in the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security do not want the current Minister that they have. That is the kind of policy that is in place.

This Budget is disappointing and serves as a signal of doom for the working class, the poor, and all of Guyana, except the friends, families, and favourites. These people sit in Government on stolen votes; fraud is all they know. So, looking at measures to reduce poverty will be a difficult task for them. Nevertheless, I am an optimist. Days leading up to the budget presentation, I was thinking that we would see more money because of the access of oil revenue. I honestly believed that. I was so naïve to believe that I would have seen a vision that would translate to the promotion of equal access to education, creating real employment opportunities for our people and, at this point, a real policy for the reduction of policy in this country.

After two years and four budgets, people are poorer in this country. Cost of living is beyond what people can afford to survive. Giving people cash grants is a good thing and giving

them the uniform allowance and so on is a good thing, but it is not sufficient. It is not sufficient. Giving people cash grants is a good thing, and I do believe that, given our reality of COVID-19. The worrisome thing about cash grants is the discriminatory manner in which it was distributed. Whether it was the COVID-19 cash grant or the flood relief for the farmers or the cash grant for the fisherfolks, only the people who are covered by the 'One Guyana' slogan can benefit. Is that how we are improving the lives of our people today?

A matter was reported to me while I was in my constituency, West Berbice, and I investigated it. A Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) employee received the fisherfolk cash grant. How is that possible? What was the criteria for the fisherfolk cash grant, and how did a GuySuCo employee end up with a fisherfolk cash grant? [Mr. Nandlall: *(Inaudible)*] Yes, Mr. Nandlall. I am awaiting the full report, and I shall make public the details of that report. Cash grants, like I said, are a good thing. It is a good thing as a short-term relief measure, but it is not an indication of a long-term solution for poverty. It is not a long-term solution for poverty reduction. I thought I would have seen by now some of the more concrete measures and the relevant indicators for reduction of inequality in this country. None was forthcoming, and that is me just being naïve. More important than all of that, I was looking forward for any strategy or policy that aimed at promoting political inclusion. These are the parameters to a safe and prosperous Guyana: Political inclusion, reduction of inequalities and poverty reduction among others.

7.45 p.m.

This Budget, I must say, is visionless. What are the indicators in this Budget that suggests that, at some point while being an oil producing nation, we will be a unified Guyana where all of our diversities, given that we are a multiethnic/multicultural society, are embraced, where equity is promoted and decision-making processes at all levels, including the political level, results in equal opportunities and benefits for all of Guyana. Let me repeat so that we can visualise what prosperity means.

Sir, let me state what vision means for a prosperous Guyana: a unified Guyana where all of our diversities are embraced, where equity is promoted and decision-making processes at all levels, including the political level results in equal opportunities for all Guyanese. The people who are promoting 'One Guyana' can use that as a vision for Guyana, instead of their current slogan. You can actually take out action points from that vision and achieve tolerance

and cohesion in this country. We on this side of the House have been articulating to the international community and the world at large what we are expecting and what we are experiencing as 'One Guyana'. What are we actually experiencing, Mr. Speaker? Divide and rule, allocate the resources to friends, family and favourites while lawlessness returns, and crime is spiraling out of control. Every week women are being killed. The number of children suffering are not being reached by the current system, and in each region the cases are overwhelming.

In Regions 3 and 6, for example, the cases of school-aged girls who have been sexually assaulted and raped has increased significantly. Is this how we are improving the lives of our people? How could we use words such as prosperous to describe this Budget? How, Mr. Speaker? I know. The 10% who are friends, family and favorites, will become prosperous, and the 90% of us will remain in poverty. That is so unfair. Mr. Speaker, in all of this, it is the children who suffer the most when things like this happen.

I am deeply concerned about the state of our education system and its impact on the future of our children. The policy shift in the direction does not position us well as a country at this time, especially since we are still battling the effects of COVID-19 on us all, particularly our students, teachers in the classroom and, of course, the educators, in the departments in the regions, standing strong to hold the system together. I really want to pause to thank those Education Officers in all of the regions, whom I have noticed, in the public domain, have been under attack by teachers, whether it is justified or not. I have worked with some of them and I know how difficult it is to hold it together in the department when things are escalating in the schools. We in this House must hold this installed Government accountable for the direction in which this sector is heading. There are too many heads, and the education train is speeding away, downward spiralling and out of control, in its own direction, while very little is being done to salvage the situation. Let me explain.

In this House a few days ago, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, who presented the Budget, said that an education system that delivers a modern, model, and adaptive learning experience is an imperative to realising His Excellency's vision of a world class education for all. Improved access, quality and relevance are essential to raising Guyana's human capital to the levels needed to advance and sustain the imminent transformative economic and social development. That is excellent. I think that is an excellent goal on paper, but hear me out because I want to demonstrate what I have stated

earlier, and that is, “I am deeply concerned about the state of our education” and its vision going forward. The differing views on the long-term goals pose great problems for Guyana because of the weak leadership that cannot transform this sector or this nation. While Dr. Singh mentioned the President’s vision for world class education, he did not give us the full statement of His Excellency. He omitted, deleted, and lied to us when he did that.

Mr. Speaker: Are you saying the Hon. Minister lied to us? Hon. Members, for the first day of the debate with all of these words, we have to stop it or I will interject time and time again. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Sir. I do not mind you interjecting, Sir. I do not mind.

Mr. Speaker: If you continue to abuse the Standing Order, I will stop you.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: That is all right.

Mr. Speaker: Okay.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: The differing views and the long-term goals pose great problems. The Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance was being untruthful to this House when he made that statement.

I recall that while the President was at the 77th United Nations General Assembly last year he made that statement. Let me tell you what a Department of Public Information (DPI) report, dated September, 2022, stated. While President Ali delivered remarks as the Chair of the Transforming Education Summit, the Head of State stated that as part of Guyana’s efforts to strengthen the education system, his Government plans to increase its expenditure by 20%. This, he said, was necessary due to the implications of the pandemic on the education system. That was September, 2022, just around the time when they would have completed the half year review of the sector and about the same time *Budget 2023* preparations were being done. Lo and behold, we are here today faced with a budget for the sector that is only \$94.4 billion, which is approximately only 12%, when His Excellency promised the United Nations 20%. Mr. Speaker, is this incompetence, blatant untruths, disrespect...

Mr. Speaker: Disrespect is one we have here on the... The continued reference to His Excellency allows your making comment with respect to what was quoted, that was fair. Now you are interpreting and giving an opinion of the President to influence it. I will not allow that. I was waiting

to hear the timeframe of this 20% increase – if it was promised within...

Ms. Singh-Lewis: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Yes, go ahead now.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I am sorry. His statement did not give a timeframe.

Mr. Speaker: So it is hard to call it untruth, disrespectful and things, like that. Go ahead.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, I will just say that this is the level of incompetence that we have here. My own thought of the statement that was made at the UN Assembly, the fact that we have a budget which is 8% less of what was promised or stated, for me that is a reflection of the infighting that is not recorded, that is not placed on *Facebook*, but it is the PPP/C’s power struggle and the infighting manifesting itself into Government’s business. Twelve percent of this Budget begs the question, what exactly is the vision for education when you can allocate that miserly sum to the sector that is the main vein in our country?

At this point in time, I would like to remind the Minister of Education of her own words in this House, in her last Budget presentation. Please guide me here, Sir, because this is a quote from the *Hansard* of 2nd February, 2022, of what the Minister of Education said.

“Do not hoodwink, mislead and be dishonest with people who are looking to you for leadership.”

Today, I wish to return those same sentiments to this installed Government and to advise them to be truthful and tell the people that the Government has no clue on how to transform education and that nepotism is one of the gears swaying the education train out of control. Sir, all of us in this House should be held accountable and must never seek to deceive the nation. Mr. Speaker, I concur that the 2023 education budget allocation should have been 20% of the national budget, so as to create the change necessary to continue the transformation of education in this country. What is the vision of this country? I keep going back to the vision because we have only been hearing about ‘One Guyana’. We have not heard what that translates to. So I keep asking, what is the vision for this country? What should we expect as a nation by 2025? We did not have to go very far to research economic development for this sector or for our country. If only we had done a little bit of research, we would have found the Caribbean Community’s Strategic Plan recognises that the human resource development is vital

for our social and economic prosperity, regional integration, building resilience and sustainable development. This Plan could have contributed to sincerely addressing our human resource development in this country. It is available for all of us to have.

The unwillingness of this Government to go above and beyond to address, sincerely, the development of our human resources should be a crime. Mr. Speaker, allow me to focus on what is happening across the education sector. Let me tell you what their own budget said to us in the last two years. One, the 2022 goal for students scoring 50% or more at the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA) was not met. In fact, the percentage of students scoring 50% or more at NGSA fell from 30% in 2021 to 28% in 2022, even though they were aiming for 50% in 2022. Where is the value for money? In almost every area of performance in primary education and to some extent secondary education, the percentage fell. They did not meet their targets. Similarly, the percentage of students with passes from Grades 1 to 3 for five subjects, including Mathematics and English, only grew by 2%, from 30% to 32%, when the target was 52%.

8.00 p.m.

This Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) reality, is clouded and hidden by just a few students who managed to write 20 and more subjects at the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examination. This is so because the media debate is then taken over by how many subjects students should write when the real issue is the hundreds of students not passing Mathematics and English at Grades 1 to 3. In my opinion, that should have been the debate, rather than people who are writing 20 subjects and more.

Let us note that the budget was a large one last year, but the change in results was minimal. That is cause for concern. If we look at the metrics on our performance in 2019, that is, the APNU/AFC in the years 2018 and 2019 – if we can go back to those years – we can see that this Government is spending more money now than what we spent in 2018 and 2019, and the results are woefully unacceptable at this time. So, we ask the question, what is different? We have more money; we should see better results. That is our expectation. What are we seeing? The sum of \$43.1 billion for education for the year 2017. The worse pass rate in Mathematics in 2017 was 39% versus 34% in 2022. If we had less money in 2017 and we gave a 39% pass rate, we have more money in 2022 and the pass rate is 34%, something is not adding up; something is not right. The education sector performed much

better in terms of delivering results under the APNU/AFC with far less resources given to the sector.

When I looked at the Budget, I looked for the measures in places that will provide an ease for the poor people, and not only the poor people but the disadvantaged people too. There is a particular unit in the sector that is dedicated to serving our children with special education needs and disabilities. When I looked at the indicators in 2023, 2022 and 2021, I noticed that the performance has dropped significantly. Outside of the numbers given in the Budget documents I decided to do an investigation; I decided to speak to people. What I found were some serious challenges. To date, only the Sophia Special School has a practical instructional centre in this country. There is a breakdown in testing and diagnosis of learners and time taken to process the results. This impacts the preparation of the Individualised Education Plan (IEP). How does one cater for the needs of learners with cerebral palsy in the mainstream schools as well as the special needs schools? I believe that extensive training is needed, and it appears that we are losing our trained teachers and practitioners in this area.

Currently, the non-academic standard does not cater for all categories of special education needs (SEN) learners. Will this year's Budget address these deficiencies? I am hoping that when the Minister of Education speaks tomorrow, she would spend some time to tell us about the challenges and what the education system intends to do because we want to create equal opportunity for our children in our education sector. There is a need for more skill-based programmes for learners with SEN. We should move in the direction of employing medical personnel for each SEN school or centre. More SEN teachers are needed, as well as officers, to better impact Guyana's special education programme. More training is needed to equip SEN teachers to better cater for the needs of our learners. When we commissioned the SEN centre in Region 3, we thought that was one step in the right direction. It is important for us to understand that we have children with disabilities across the length and breadth of this country, so one or two centres is not good enough. I am saying this at this point in time because this is the kind of infrastructure that we can put in place as an oil producing nation. I am saying again, that the 12% is insufficient, particularly for this kind of special needs infrastructure that is needed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, at this time, you will need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I recognise that a lot has to be done in the education sector for us to talk about education transformation. Could we not afford to give our teachers better salaries? Could we not afford to give our teachers better working conditions instead of having them in the rain under a shed or in a tent to deliver the curriculum. Could we not treat them with a little respect and understand that the law provides for them to have good working conditions? Could we not afford to ensure all our teachers are technologically empowered with updated electronic devices?

I believe that at this moment in our country we should write off – and hear me, Sir – we should write off all the student loan debts of every Guyanese who attended the University of Guyana (UG). It takes nothing out of us to do that, but it would be a great respect for the people of this country to do that. This is how we will create economic dynamism for our young people, and moreover, for all Guyanese. Why is it that after four budgets our poor Guyanese students still have to pay huge sums of money per year to attend the Guyana School of Agriculture (GSA)? That should be free, Sir. We have, as a nation, one premier national university. That is, the University of Guyana. I am proud of that institution. Education should be free; we can afford it. This is how we will develop our human resources in this country. I believe that the Ministry of Education should embark on establishing a sports academy for our boys and girls who are so talented and should be trained. Could we not incentivise post-secondary education, especially technical and vocational education? Could we not afford to give our students in the technical and vocational field a stipend to allow them to stay and matriculate in their fields of study?

I believe every secondary school in every region should be equipped with audio/visual and virtual classroom interconnected hubs. Every school was equipped with wireless fidelity (Wi-Fi) under the APNU/AFC. I want to put on record: 158 primary schools, 105 secondary schools, 30 technical and vocational institutions, internet for the three university campuses and 72 hinterland communities. These are things that we have done as a Coalition while in Government, and all the Ministry had to do was to continue with the infrastructure. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** Without oil money.] We did all of that without oil money. I believe we can maintain them, and we can do a lot more.

My colleagues, earlier in the day, mentioned that transportation to school for students is an economic burden for our parents. While the Government disregarded the ‘David G’ Five B’s programme at a cost to our people, a reliable and cost-effective school transportation service is necessary to ease the financial burden of every parent. I want to pause at this moment to ask the Minister of Education if she can find the buses that are still working and assign them to the students of the Christ Church Secondary School so that may ease the transportation burden since she did a very good job in placing them so quickly at the CPCE. But we recognise that the CPCE is so far out of Georgetown it creates an economic burden on the parents. Could we not at this time engage professionals to develop local media content designed to shape civic-mindedness? I believe that is a *low hanging fruit* for the Ministry. As it is now, a campaign like that will lend to greater understanding, greater tolerance and acceptance, as we are One People, One Nation with One Destiny.

Mr. Speaker, you may notice that I have spent much time on the recommendations... [**Mr. Jones: Proposals.**] ...and proposals because I want it to be noted that we do not come and highlight only the challenges, we come with the solutions too because we have a plan and we know what development should be.

I want to highlight some specific negative behavioural issues and challenges that we have seen in the press. Let me wrap-up by saying that we have seen a cycle of parents beating teachers, teachers beating students, headteachers beating teachers, and parents beating teachers. It is a lot of beating in that cycle of stakeholders in our education sector. I do believe that the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) unit of the Ministry of Education can do a lot more. I do believe that the Parent Teachers Association (PTA) can come out and do some work and not just sit there because we employ them as family and friends.

Sir, in this current form of the Budget, I really cannot support *Budget 2023*. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me this opportunity, at this hour, to make my presentation on *Budget 2023* as presented by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. Like so many of my colleagues, from the onset, I wish to acknowledge the hard, dedicated work that went into the preparation of a document that is preparing to improve our lives today whilst laying a solid foundation for prosperity tomorrow and way ahead in the future.

This Budget is following a trend that is long established by this Government – the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. It has measures in place that are totally unrelated to election cycles. I say this because sometimes in planning budgets, politicians would look at what to do to make one's party the most popular party at the time of elections. On this side of the House, the PPP/Civic Government is concentrating on building a solid foundation for generations to come. If one looks at the Budget, especially in the big projects – the transformational projects – some of them have started, some will start this year, some will start next year, many of them will be finished long after 2025, and their impact will not be felt by our voting population. But that is not of concern for us. What is of concern for us is that we are putting and laying a solid foundation for prosperity of all our people.

8.15 p.m.

In 2020, the Budget theme was *Our Plan For Prosperity; Protecting Our People in a COVID-19 Environment; Strengthening Democracy and the Rule Of Law, Incentivising Growth; And Job Creation, Enhancing Welfare*. That Budget was \$29.9 billion and, indeed, that period was very challenging.

The 2021 Budget of \$383.1 billion spoke to *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism ad Resilience*, again, recognising the challenges that the global community had faced in a post Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic era and then we saw a continuation of different strains of the COVID, so the challenge is still there.

In 2022 the theme was *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute in Building Our One Guyana*; a budget of \$553 billion.

This year, 2023, the theme is *Improving lives today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*. I just bring this to our attention so that we could appreciate the continuation of our policies and programmes towards bringing about a better life for all of our people.

It would be remiss of me if I do not address some of the issues raised by Members of Parliament on the other side. First of all, I would like to clarify what the Hon. Member, Dr. Mahadeo, said because it was definitely interpreted wrongly by the Hon. Member who spoke before me. Dr. Mahadeo was talking about the increase in the eyecare treatment for our people in the hinterland communities. He said that citizens benefited, Members of the Opposition and their families benefited and rightfully so. Nowhere did Dr.

Mahadeo even said that Members of the Opposition should not be catered for. He would be highly responsible to say that. He said that because in the context there has been claims of discrimination by Members of the Opposition with the Government rolling out different programmes. The Hon. Member, Mr. Cox, spoke about the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) programme and the way he was speaking was as if this Government has deliberately set about to discriminate against Members of the Opposition. [Mr. Mahipaul: It is true.] Mr. Mahipaul, is heckling and saying that it is true and that is why Dr. Mahadeo had to be clear in saying what he said to get that over with.

A number of speakers have spoken about the issue at Mocha and they failed to bring to light the measures that were taken into consideration in addressing this issue of developing a four-lane highway along the East Bank corridor. For the record, I have family friends in Mocha. I have been in Mocha since the late 1980s. I go there and visit people; the Blairs, the Clarkes, [An Hon. Member (Opposition): (Inaudible)], family friends from Cane Grove and they migrated there. Some of the people who are now talking about Mocha were probably not residing there when I started going to Mocha a long time ago. In 1999/2000, I was actively engaged in providing enhanced drainage and irrigation services to the people of Mocha and working closely with residents there to provide services. The point here is that our development agenda, as we seek to provide better roadways, better water services and better telecommunication, will have an impact on existing communities. Mocha is not the first and it definitely will not be the last. Take, for example, the development of the bridge across the Berbice river, Cotton Tree residents... Those properties were transported properties in those areas. People were called in by the Government and they were engaged by the Government. They moved and they were provided with accommodation. Nobody would not have been bulldozed if the Opposition did not go in there and put the wrong things in the peoples' heads. It was all politics. When the Government went to Cotton Tree and move the people...

I was personally engaged in the La Parfaite Harmonie access road when His Excellency, the President, was the Minister of Housing and Water. I engaged on his advice a rice miller or rice farmer by name of Madhu who had lands across the area there. I asked him if he could donate the lands to the Government and I argued with him that putting a roadway through his lands will increase the value of his lands. These are transported properties. Mr. Madhu came up with an arrangement with the Ministry of Housing and Water, at that time, and now we have the busiest access to La Parfaite

Harmonie through lands that were once owned by Mr. Madhu.

Currently, I think, the Attorney General is engaged in an advanced way with people who own lands where this four-lane highway from Schoonord to Crane is going to come out and also where the Gas-to-Shore Project is going to pass through, lease and transported lands. People will give up their lands in recognition of the developmental trust of the Government to address the issues of transportation congestion; to address issues of drainage and irrigation; to address issues of energy; communication and all of that. The people of Mocha who had to be moved were doing so in a peaceful manner. The Ministry of Housing and Water laid out a number of measures by giving them transported property, helping them with building and all of that and then the politics step in; politics to stymie development. It is all in the little league mentality. If we were thinking big, we would have a better and greater appreciation of what needs to be done.

We heard about this issue of poverty getting higher. Where is it coming from and where is the study? Poverty, of course, was mentioned at 42% but the way it was mentioned by one of the Hon. Members was as if it was last year or this year. That was in 2019. The issue of healthy food, the study was done in 2020 and it was also done in 2018. The issues of poverty and access to good food are all indicators moving in the right direction because of the investments that are being put in by the People's Progressive Party/Civic's Administration.

An eight per cent increase for public servants – The record must show that in three budgets post-2020, the People's Progressive Party/Civic increased public servants' salaries by \$38 billion. Juxtapose that against five years in the People's National Congress when they increased public servants' salaries by \$27 billion. Seventy-eight per cent on a small amount does not mean much. If one increases 78% on a dollar it is a small amount. That is why I call numbers so that we could have an appreciation. In three budgets, we increase it by \$38 billion. The PNC took five years to increase it by \$27 billion. Next year is going to be better. The people could rest assured about that.

I spoke about this issue of a healthy diet. This was a study done by the United Nations (UN). The report was called *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022*. This is not now.

The issue of cooperative societies. The Hon. Member, Mdm. Walton-Desir, put it over as if the Hon. Minister, Mr. Joseph

Hamilton, was going after cooperative societies for the dissolution of cooperative societies. He merely said that there are cooperative societies existing who are not functioning, and they have acres of lands tied up either in a one-man show or in a family operation depriving the genuine members of these different cooperative societies the right to earn or beneficially occupy these lands. There is nothing racial about that. There is a number of cooperative societies in this country that are very mixed, some of them dominated by one race over the other. A very good cooperative society is the Vergenoegen Rice Cooperative Society. That Cooperative society is functioning and sometimes it needs help along the way. I think the Minister raised this issue primarily from the position that this Government is prepared to make budgetary allocations to assist in providing better services for cooperative societies. **[An Hon. Member (Opposition): (Inaudible)]** This is what was said.

Another issue we have to address is the matter that was raised by a number of speakers including a Member of the Public Accounts Committee, Mr. Mahipaul. I think the Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, also raised this matter of the Public Accounts Committee. What they stated about the Public Accounts Committee was that we changed the quorum. In this National Assembly, every year we change laws; we update laws; and we bring legislation to make our legal agenda modern and to address new issues. A lot of these laws are old, outdated and need updating. We even had a recent discussion on the Hemp legislation. Democracy must not be for the Opposition; democracy has to be for the Government also. There must be a democracy for all of us. If there is a change in the quorum... The Members of the Opposition are complaining about something that they perceived to benefit the Government and then they are stating that they will be the Government. They should lie low if they will be in Government because it will benefit them. The issue of the change in the quorum has nothing to do with any ulterior motive by the Government. It has nothing to do with that.

Members argue about this issue of scrutiny, which is exactly the point that I want to make – scrutiny. Members of the Opposition want to avoid scrutiny of that period post December, 2018. We want to ensure that the people of this country and the people in the Opposition camp understand fully what happened in that period from December, 2018, to the period December, 2020. This is why we are going to examine the Auditor General's account year-after-year so that we could bring to the attention of our people what transpired during that period. The point was made that the Report of the Auditor General is laid in the National

Assembly by September of the preceding year. Members of the Opposition do not need the Public Accounts Committee to bring what is in the Report of the Auditor General to the attention of the public. From day one, they could go out there and say what is stated in the Report of the Auditor General.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let me state here that you need an extension.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, Government Chief Whip, President (ag) [Ms. Teixeira]: I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given another five minutes to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, you have five minutes to conclude.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Mdm. Chief Whip. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I listened attentively to the Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, when he made his presentation. Mr. Jones sought to lecture to this Government here about issues of good governance and he sound very good like a born-again person. I was taken in by his presentation. I started to think about what Mr. Jones was saying and I realised that Mr. Jones has his own agenda because, in this issue of good governance, he raised the issue of Region 3 Synthetic Track and Field Facility, for example, and he put it over to this House as if the establishment of the Synthetic Track and Field Facility in Region 3 is an act of discrimination.

8.30 p.m.

What is wrong with people of Region 3? Mr. Jones went on to say that most athletes come from Regions 4 and 10 and why did the PPP/C put it in Region 3? Should we not have athletes in Region 3? Region 4 is blessed with a lot of sports infrastructure. There is the Guyana National Stadium right here. There is the National Gymnasium. We have the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall. There is the National Aquatic Center right across here. There is a National Racket Centre that provides for squash and lawn tennis. All of these facilities are in Region 4. I would tell the Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, that good governance is about diversifying one's facilities to all the Regions and not to concentrate them in one region which will be discriminatory. [**Mr. Jones:** *(Inaudible)* gas-to-shore in Lethem *deh.*] Mr. Jones should have practiced good governance when he was in the Government. I remember issues that were clearly not demonstrating aspects of good governance associated with ownership of a piece of land next to a health centre where it was... [**Mr. Nandlall:**

(Inaudible)] That is right. I do not think the President at that time was aware that Mr. Jones received the title. Good governance would have dictated that he goes through the proper process, do the survey and ensure that boundaries do not take over half of the health centre and the Guyana Lands and Surveys. [**Mr. Jones:** Is it not the Guyana Lands and Surveys that give it to me?] Yes but it did not give you the health centre.

Then, there were issues of good governance over the allocation of funds from the Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development Initiative fund. I think this Initiative was supposed to be funding community-based projects in areas of agriculture, aquaculture, value-added, information communications technology (ICT) and tourism targeting the vulnerable and the disadvantage. No one is being used. I can tell you, with all assurance, that is exactly what it is being used now for the proper purposes. When we talk about good governance, we must not forget the past and what we use to practice. If we want to make recommendations, we must make recommendations, take into consideration what we did and apologise to our people for the wrongs that we did whether they were willingly, knowingly or unknowingly; then move on, come and make recommendation to the Government on how we could move forward.

The issue on what the President said: the President when he spoke, the Hon. Member raised this issue about 20%. The Hon. Member was not clear whether the President spoke about a timeframe, whether the President was speaking about a 20% on the current allocation or whether the President was speaking about the 20% of the Budget. All of these things were very unclear in the Hon. Member's presentation. What we are certain about is that year-after-year, more and more money will be going towards education. Right now, education is \$94.4 billion, just over \$700 billion allocation. That is a huge chunk of the Budget. I will be the first to admit it is now enough. It is a work in progress. Wages and salaries is \$107 billion of a \$781 billion Budget. It is not a small chunk of the overall Budget by any means.

Disposable income – I want to touch briefly on that before I yield the floor with your permission, just to say that salary adjustment alone will see the realisation of \$3 billion more disposable income for people.

Income tax threshold would be moving from \$75,000 to \$85,000. That will be releasing a total of \$3.3 billion to taxpayers and taking 12,000 people out of the tax paying bracket. The Because We Care programme is geared towards

helping our people in terms of disposable income. The sum of \$8.6 billion will be going towards parents and the school age children.

It sounds prematurely but I do not want to go beyond my time. I want to close this evening to say that *Budget 2023* is visionary; well-constructed; takes into consideration the interests of every single Guyanese; it is addressing our immediate problems; and it is building a platform for tomorrow, for prosperity for every single Guyanese as we seek to make the *One Guyana* a reality. I have no hesitation in commending this Budget to all Members. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Next is the Hon. Member, Mr. Haimraj Rajkumar.

Mr. Rajkumar: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have listened to the Budget Speech presented to this August House by the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, on 16th January, 2023, under the theme: *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*. The 2023 budget is touted to be the budget that addresses immediate needs of our citizens, while at the same time investing in the future.

The 2023 national Budget amounting to \$781.9 billion is the largest budget in our history. This is no surprise. We expect that this year's Budget would be larger than last year's since we are accustomed to have budgets larger than the preceding year and, of course, we have the revenue from the oil amounting to \$28.9 billion and also the sum of \$31.3 billion from the sale of carbon credits to help finance our spending in 2023. We are told that Guyana's economy is the fastest growing economy in the world with the contribution from oil. The Guyanese people had great expectations. They wanted a comfortable and happy lives for themselves and family. People were optimistic; they were hopeful, believing that we would all enjoy in some significant way the bounty of our vast resources. *Budget 2023* is a far cry from what our people expected. It has no realistic plan to improve the lives of ordinary citizens. It discloses Government's uncaring and unconscionable attitude towards poor and vulnerable. The ordinary Guyanese are disappointed.

The year 2022 was challenging. The citizens of Guyana were faced with an increasingly high cost of living. By the end of 2022, the cost of food, both imported and locally produced, have more than doubled. Transportation cost, in some cases, were increased by more than 50%. To counter this steep increase in cost of living, the Government in November, 2022, announced an unconscionable and miserly eight per cent increase in salaries for public servants to be paid

retroactively in December. This is one year after the passing of the 2022 Budget in a country with the fastest growing economy and a country which will receive billions in oil revenue. Our workers were made to endure the sufferings for one whole year before given a meagrely increase in salary. This is how our Government demonstrates its care for our hardworking people.

As I examined the presentation of *Budget 2023* by the Hon. Minister, I found that this Budget is far from what it purported to be. There is no realistic plan to improve the lives of our citizens and building prosperity for tomorrow. I found that there is hardly anything substantial for the ordinary Guyanese citizen to help improve their livelihood and to help create wealth for themselves. It has more emphasis on promoting private sector investment. This Budget like the previous Budgets is again a private sector oriented with the little support for the poor and the vulnerable in this time of rising living expenses. The inevitable increase in cost of living is expected to continue in 2023. The Government has recognised this and has made provisions in *Budget 2023* under the head 'easing cost of living'.

Government intends to reduce excise tax on petroleum products from 10 % to zero to help reduce the cost of living. This measure will surely reduce the price of fuel, but will this measure benefit the consumers? Will the ordinary man pay less for transportation? As we saw in 2022, the reduction of the excise tax on fuel did not prevent the increase in the cost of public transportation. Government must find ways to ensure that the reduction of excise tax on fuel benefits the ordinary citizens.

The reduction in freight charges is another measure which Government intends to use in 2023 to ease the cost of living, as was done in 2022. However, despite subsidising the freight charges on imported goods, there were hardly any reduction in the price paid by consumers. What is also noted and what I strongly recommend is that Government should reduce or subsidise the cost of freight for vehicles transporting local produce across the Berbice and Demerara bridges as well as on the transport & harbour ferries. This will surely reduce the cost reaching the consumers.

To cushion the rise in cost of living, Government intends to continue with the part-time job programme which it started in 2022. Persons would work for 10 days per month and receive \$40,000 for their job. This year \$10 billion dollars were allocated in the Budget to support this programme with the intention of employing more persons. Is this how

Government intends to create jobs for our citizens or is it a way of rewarding their supporters? I did some investigation into these workers. There is no job description and most of the time they have nothing to do. They make no contribution to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). I have no doubt this is an ingenious way of using state resources to reward the supporters of this Government. More than 90% of the persons employed under this programme are supporters of the PPP/C. I have no issue with Government spending to provide jobs for the poor and vulnerable in an attempt to create better living condition but it must be inclusive. No one should be marginalised because of his political persuasion or ethnicity.

In 2023, let us see the *One Guyana* principle being applied. With the \$10 billion allocated under this programme, I call on Government to select persons because they are citizens of Guyana and are equally entitled to the benefits from all Government programmes. They must not be rejected because of their political alliance.

The Hon. Minister announced that the Government, again, this year, set aside the sum of \$5 billion for additional cost of living measures to be determined from the ongoing community engagements. There are no clear indications, again, as to what this sum would be used for. This is another source of State funds available to the Government to gift their supporters under the guise of grants; \$5 billion in the hands of Government to do as they please and no questions ask.

The Hon. Minister has announced that this year the monthly public assistance will be increased from \$14,000 to \$16,000, an increase of \$2,000. The Old Age Pension will be increased from \$28,000 to \$33,000 an increase of \$5,000 and a far cry from the \$50,000 that was promised by this Government in their campaign. The aged and the vulnerable will accept the crumbs thrown to them by this Government because they have no alternative but, in a country with the fastest growing economy and with billions received from oil, is this the way we show gratitude to the elderly and care for the vulnerable? An increase of \$5,000 in these times of high cost of living will have little or no impact on the lives of these persons. Government should have considered giving the elderly and the vulnerable much more than was announced.

8.45 p.m.

We ought to have done better for our elderly and the poor in these times of high cost of basic food items, where the cost of basic food items has skyrocketed. We have the resources;

we can afford it, let us do it. The Hon. Minister has announced this year that the income tax threshold has been increased from \$75,000 to \$85,000 – a mere \$10,000.

The income tax threshold should have been increased to \$100,000 to have a significant impact. If my calculations are correct, the saving resulting from the present measure would be between \$2,500 to \$2,800 per month. How effective would this be to counter the rise in food prices? What about the persons earning \$225,000 per month and above? Why were they not considered for income tax relief? Government should have revised the calculation to tax chartered income at a rate of 25% on the first \$170,000 per month and thereafter 30% on the remaining sum instead of the present 28% and 40% as currently used.

With a Budget of \$781.9 billion, every single Guyanese ought to benefit from these measures. One of the effective ways of cushioning the effect of rising cost of living is the reduction of value-added tax. Citizens over the years have been calling on Government to reduce VAT. The APNU/AFC Government fulfils its promise made to the Guyanese public when VAT was reduced from 16% to 14%. At that time, the Alliance For Change Government was not fortunate enough to have the proceeds of oil to support its decision to reduce VAT but it was done knowing it will benefit our citizens today. Despite the continuing rise of cost of living and the expected exponential in earning from oil, this Government has failed to consider reducing VAT by even one per cent. Reducing VAT by two per cent would have made a significant impact in easing the burden currently faced by our citizens. With our economy growing at a very fast rate from proceeds from both oil and non-oil sector, there should have been no hesitation by this Government to reduce vat at least two per cent.

The University students and potential University students are again disappointed. They are still waiting for the promise made to them by this Government to make university education free again. University students are finding it very challenging to meet the cost of their education. The Honourable Minister has announced that in 2023, the Government will spend \$1.8 billion dollars to provide free education to students under the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship programme. Nothing is wrong with this; it is a good thing to assist students to educate themselves but, when will the honourable Minister explain to the University students why they were not considered for free education again this year? Will the Minister explain to these students why they were not considered for a reduction in the cost of their fees? Are the University of Guyana (UG)

students not equally entitled to free education as the GOAL students? Explain to us, Minister; we want answers. It is very inconsiderate for this Government for four years to deny students of our University free education. It is time to give our students what they were promised and what they deserve; we can afford it. Let us assist our young people to prepare themselves for the bright future we all anticipated. We were told that the UG students are recipients of the Public Service Ministry (PSM) scholarships by the honourable Minister, Ms. Parag. I would like to know, is it all of the University students who are receiving PSM scholarships? I know it is not so, let us consider those students who have to pay.

Last year during my Budget speech, I had raised the issue of Government providing dialysis service on the Essequibo Coast for patients in need of dialysis. Today, Suddie Regional Hospital is offering the service to patients at a cost of \$10,00 per session. This is possible through the collaboration between Government and a private firm. The patients are greater for this intervention but were hoping that Government would have provided the service free of cost. They are now calling for at least two sessions per week to be free and even if it is possible to remove the \$600,000 grant per year because \$10,000 would just give us one session per week.

It would be remiss of me not to raise some issues facing the citizens of Region 2. In my speech and budget 2022, I had raised the issue of residents living between Queenstown, Supenaam, on the Essequibo Coast are complaining bitterly of the quality of water supplied by the Guyana Water Inc. I highlighted that the water supplied to this part of the Coast is untreated and had high iron content. Nothing has been done to improve the situation to date. However, I have noted that the honourable Minister has disclosed that in 2023, advance work on the construction of a water treatment plant at Onderneeming, Charity and Wakenaam. We, in the region, anxiously await the early commissioning of these facilities and to receive improved quality of water that will be provided to us. We deserve this and it is long overdue.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. We await an extension for you. Hon. Member Mr. Jones, you may have the floor.

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. Cde. Speaker, I ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Rajkumar: In 2022, the people in Region 2 were promised the establishment of an industrial estate at Onderneeming, Essequibo Coast. Nothing was done in 2022 towards this project, however, we are now told that the work will commence in 2023 for the establishment of the industrial estate. We are awaiting the early completion of this project and anticipate the building of a business incubator to assist in the development of our small entrepreneurs in our region.

In 2022, Region 2 was promised a new modern regional hospital at Anna Regina. This year, we learned that it will be built at Lima. We hope that the construction of this facility will commence in the near future.

Last year I had indicated to this House that the main road from Charity to Supenaam had started to deteriorate and called on Government to effect remedial work. To date, little or no work has been done to correct the situation. The cracks that were seen last year have graduated into potholes. I am again calling on Government to take steps to repair our roads before it gets worse.

I cannot conclude without saying something about our rice industry. Rice, as we all know, is the background of Region 2. Many farmers suffered tremendously from the excessively heavy rainfall experienced in 2022. Many farmers along the Coast were unable to reap their crops, they suffered tremendous financial loss and are at the verge of bankruptcy. These rice farmers are calling on Government for financial help. One farmer informed me that his concerns were reported to the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) but, to date, he has not received any response. The farmers along the Coast have complained that Access Dam leading to the back lands are in a deplorable state. Dams at Maria's Lodge, Golden Fleece, Reliance, Marias Delight and Better Success, to name a few areas, needs attention. The farmers are calling on Government to repair these dams so that they can have easy access to their fields. All is not well with rice in Essequibo, because the high cost of input compared to the price received for a bag of paddy is of great concern to the farmers. Farmers appreciate the effort made to secure new markets. The farmers are faced with high cost in production and are calling for an increase in the price for a bag of paddy.

I take this opportunity to call on Government to provide some financial assistance to the farmers of Region 2. Just as the cash grants were made available to the sugar workers and

the fisherfolks, it is time to provide some financial assistance to the struggling rice farmers in Region 2. The money is available; let us use it. The Essequibo rice farmers are in need; let us support them now.

This \$781.9 billion Budget presented this year is indeed the largest budget presented in our history. It has no realistic plan of improving the wellbeing of our citizens. It has failed to bridge the gap between us the poor and the rich. Our citizens are disappointed. They expected much more than the crumbs thrown to them. The fastest growing economy and revenue received from oil, Government could have done much more to improve the lives of our citizens. This Budget may have a plan for infrastructure, development for the future but it sure lacks the capacity to create wealth and improve the lives of our ordinary people today. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Our final contributor for this evening is the Hon. Member, Dr. Tandika Smith. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Dr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I rise to give my support to *Budget 2023*, I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and his hardworking team for preparing yet another historic budget. A budget that will definitely continue to solidify the foundation of works set by the PPP/C Government when we took Office in late 2020 and one that will definitely lead us to prosperity.

Many may ask ‘what is in this budget for me?’ or ‘how would my family and I benefit?’; well, the answer is simple, because like every budget presented to this honourable House, under the PPP/C Government, growth and development of our country and its people always take precedence. If we are to do a comparison of the state of affairs of our country from the year 2015 to 2020 and August, 2020 to 2023, we would have a clear understanding of where we were; what we have accomplished so far; and where we are heading. It would be remised of me to not remind my fellow Guyanese brothers and sisters of the turmoil and neglect we face as a nation under the APNU/AFC administration, now main Opposition.

They took away the Because We Care cash grant from our schoolchildren and over 7,000 sugar workers were fired. They increased their salaries from 50% to more or less 100%. They placed VAT on water and electricity, building materials, fertilisers, on data, medical supplies and over 200 food items. They fired over 2,000 Amerindian Community

Service Officers’ (CSO) placing our Amerindian brothers and sisters on the breadline. Additionally, we saw in the *Budget 2020*, the now main Opposition also voted against \$800 million that was budgeted for Indigenous development. These are some of the clear indications that, even in Opposition, there are a group of persons who will always be against development in our country. As if this was not enough, even our very rights to elect a Government of our choice came under attack, as we witnessed the attempt to alter the course of 2nd March, 2020, General Elections. Nevertheless, we remained valiant. Our never-ending resilience will only continue to build us stronger together.

As time would not permit me to examine all we have accomplished thus far, as a Government, since we took Office in 2020, indeed, there is much to be proud of and even more to look forward to, already we have seen the Because We Care cash grant reinstated. This year, it has increase to \$35,000 per schoolchild. The School Uniform Grant has now increased to \$5,000 which will see our children in both the public and private schools receiving a total of \$40,000.

9.00 p.m.

Our senior citizens of pensionable ages can now enjoy an increase in their old age pension, along with value-added tax (VAT) free water, and electricity. We continue to see that VAT was removed from over 200 food items and Guyanese are now able to enjoy the same. So far, we have rehired a total of 1479 sugar workers and assisted several of them with a total of \$250,000 in cash grants. We have also seen the removal of VAT from building materials, mining equipment, and medical supplies, among other amenities. Of course, this has removed the heavy tax burdens placed upon the shoulders of Guyanese citizens and is now able to put more money in the pockets of our citizens.

Earlier, we heard the Hon. Member Mr. Cox mentioned that Amerindians are not offered or afforded any sort of development and are left in the struggle. If we examine the development so far that our Amerindian brothers and sisters have received and that which they will be receiving for 2023... As a result of a caring People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government, my fellow Amerindian brothers and sisters are now able to enjoy and experience true development provided by our Government in various sectors. They can now enjoy new opportunities and give back to their communities by developing new skills through the Community Service Officers’ (CSO) programme. Over 400 Indigenous youths from hinterland communities were

able to enjoy various opportunities. Our Indigenous communities will be able to benefit from the construction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) hubs. Our youths will be able to benefit from training in tourism and hospitality, business development, and garment construction, to name a few.

In the area of health, this year's budget caters for the construction of four telemedicine centres in regions 1, 7, 8, and 9. This will allow patients to be reviewed and managed in real-time and provide quality diagnosis and treatment, thus boosting our remote Indigenous communities with modern healthcare. A total of \$237 million will go towards the upgrade of the Karasabai, Annai, and Sand Creek health centres. This will see these centres equipped with radiology and laboratory services which will, of course, afford residents access to much-deserved quality and standard healthcare. Our health facilities in the hinterland were also able to benefit from the injection of human resources. For the very first time, residents in Shulinab, White Water, and Monkey Mountain will be able to have access to a Resident Doctor within their respective communities. So far, communities such as Moruca and Mabaruma will benefit from maternal waiting homes. This is something that I must say is commendable, and our Indigenous mothers will definitely benefit significantly from this. There are other initiatives, such as one that will aim to ensure expectant mothers in the hinterland regions have at least one ultrasound and be assessed at least once by an Obstetrician during their pregnancies. We will also see the training of 29 Birth Attendants in regions 1 and 9. This will also be a major contribution to these categories of patients.

As I now turn my attention to Region 3. It is clear from all indications that this Region is well on its way to becoming one of Guyana's main economic hubs. Commuters will now be able to benefit from a new four-lane bridge across the Demerara River. This will see persons saving time and be eased the heavy traffic burden experienced on a daily basis. Further, the Schoonord to Crane Highway will also be a major investment since residents will now be afforded the option of easier access to and from the Demerara Harbour Bridge. Residents of Region 3 have benefitted thus far from numerous roads built within various communities, such as Parika, Zeelugt, Tuschen, and La Parfaite Harmonie, just to name a few.

Also, in keeping with our manifesto's promise of allotting 50,000 house lots within the first term in Office, over 2000 residents are now able to enjoy access to house lots and will be able to fulfil their dreams of owning their own homes.

Residents of Wakenaam are now benefitting from potable water as just last August of 2022; a new well was commissioned by His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. This will also see other communities in Region 3 benefitting from similar development.

When we took Office in 2020, the health sector countrywide was in a state of despair. Today, as we continue to rebuild and restore quality health care to our citizens, residents of Region 3 will be beneficiaries of a new hospital that is expected to be constructed in the De Kinderen area. Already, 30 of the 36 health centres and health posts within the region have benefitted from infrastructural upgrades, which will also see and allow easier access to patient care.

In the height of the rising Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) cases in 2021, the Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department at the West Demerara Regional Hospital (WDRH) was repurposed into a COVID-19 Unit. This is the second unit of this nature in the country to the tune of \$18 million. As our Government continues on a robust COVID-19 vaccination programme, a total of 69,342 persons have so far received their first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. A total of 54,173 persons have received their second doses, while 10,655 have received their first boosters. Our healthcare givers now have access to sufficient personal protective equipment (PPEs) as compared to what we received under the Coalition Government at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As we continue on the pathway to transformative developments, our secondary school children in Region 3 are now enjoying a state-of-the-art \$1 billion secondary school in the La Parfaite Harmonie area. This being the first facility to be completed under the Guyana Secondary Education Improvement Project, which is a Government initiative aimed at achieving universal education. So far, a total of 1429 young people have benefitted from the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship. This ongoing program will see at least 20,000 persons accessing advanced tertiary education. Our children will continue to benefit from the school feeding programmes and will also be able to access new and improved infrastructures in various communities such as Tuschen and Wakenaam.

As time may be against me and I may not be able to further dissect the 2023 Budget, I can assure my fellow Guyanese that your future and your children's and grandchildren's future will continue to be safe and secure under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government. I, therefore,

commend *Budget 2023* to be passed in this honourable House. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. It is a good time to take the adjournment until 10.00 a.m. tomorrow. Hon. Member Mr. Nandlall, acting Prime Minister, please proceed.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED

“That the Assembly be adjourned until 24th January at 10.00 a.m.”

[*Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs and Prime Minister (a.g.) [Mr. Nandlall]: I ask that we adjourn, Sir, the Assembly until tomorrow at 10.00 a.m.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Members, the Assembly stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10.00 a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 9.10 p.m.