



**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

55TH Sitting

Tuesday, 24TH January, 2023

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.26 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,
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Georgetown.*

[Absent – on leave]

Vice-President (1)

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

[Absent]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

Senior Ministers (17)

+ Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,
(Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni),
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,
Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.
Government Chief Whip,
Office of the Presidency,
New Garden Street,
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+ Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P.,
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+*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,
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Ministry of Finance,
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+ Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,
Minister of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight's Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

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

* **Non-Elected Minister**

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Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
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South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

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

+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
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Ministry of Natural Resources,
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+*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,
Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
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+ Hon. Nigel D. Dharamlall, M.P.,
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+ Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P.,
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* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,
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Hon. Deodat Indar, M.P.,
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Ministry of Public Works,
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Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P.,
*Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
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Hon. Warren Kwame E. McCoy, M.P.,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

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No. 66 Village,

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41 Robb Street,

Georgetown.

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

Lot 340 East Street,

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41 Robb Street,

Georgetown.

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

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Parliamentary Secretary,
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[Absent – on leave]

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Hon. Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, S.C., M.P.,
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Georgetown.

[Absent]

Hon. Mr. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P.,
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* Non-Elected Minister

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Hon. Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.,
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Hon. Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.,
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Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence, M.P.,
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Cove & John,
East Coast Demerara.*

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South Central,
Rupununi.
(Culvert City Lethem)

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Hon. Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P.,
Lot 1282 Block EE,
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Hon. Mr. Ganesh A. Mahipaul, M.P.,
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[Virtual Participation]

Hon. Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P.,
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Hon. Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,
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Church Street Mahdia.
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Hon. Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P.,
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Wismar, Linden.

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

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St. Cuthbert’s Mission,
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Clerk of the National Assembly,
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Brickdam,
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Ms. Hermina Gilgeours,
Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly,
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Reporter (a.g.)
Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician
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Audio Technician
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Audio Technician

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

55TH Sitting

Tuesday, 24TH January, 2023

Announcements by the Speaker	8095
Public Business – Government’s Business	8096-8222
Estimates of Expenditure 2023 - Budget Speech	8099-8224
Adjournment -	8225-8226

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Temperature within the Dome

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I want to make an observation with respect to the temperature inside the Dome. There has been a problem perennial with the thermostat, and so we have had to use a *hantomatic* system. In that system, I use four persons in the National Assembly as a barometer. When it gets too cold, the Hon. Members Ms. Chandan-Edmond and Ms. Manickchand would cover up. So, when I look at them, I would signal the boys to cut the air conditioner (AC). Then, when I see Hon. Members, Bishop Edghill and Ms. Teixeira, start fanning; I say, well, put it on. I know the vents are aiming down at us, but there has been an issue since the system was designed. If we shut it off too early, we are going to damage the relays and would not have AC at all. So, bear with us in the Dome.

Return to Public Buildings

Some people asked if there is any thought of going back to the original place. The Clerk of the National Assembly and I looked at that last year, and as of October, we were ready. We have one issue with the Public Address (PA) system; there is some amount of interference. It is an old entry-level system with a frequency easily disturbed by other wireless systems passing. So, we will have someone within a week or two to look at that system and rectify that. Yes, preparations are being made. Persons like the Hon. Members, Mr. Ramson and Mr. Benn, always complain about getting their knees hit every time they come in and out. We are in a fabulous place, and the general public loves us to be here because of the traffic congestion downtown. So, please bear with us. Again, our great appreciation to Minister Ms. Walrond and the staff at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC) for the accommodation, especially over the past two and a half years.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[For Oral Replies]

Hon. Members, there are three questions on today's Order Paper. These questions are for oral replies. These questions are in the name of the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira and he is here. Hon. Member, you may now proceed and ask your first question.

10.31 a.m.

1. Persons in the Performing Arts

Mr. Figueira: Thank you Mr. Speaker. In recognition of the fact that the Minister who is supposed to be answering this question is not here, do I proceed?

Mr. Speaker: Let me check online to see if the Minister is online. Could someone check? He is not online. Could we then hold these until tomorrow, Mr Isaacs? We will hold them until the Minister is here or we will defer them for tomorrow's oral questions without reply.

Questions deferred.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

Motion

BUDGET SPEECH 2023 - MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 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*]

Hon. Members, we will now proceed with the consideration of *Budget 2023* and our first speaker today is the Hon. Member Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan.

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and for saving time all protocols observed. There is a new paradigm in Guyana in relation to revenue streams. Revenue streams today include the moneys from that oil and gas contract that we signed in the year of 2016 and also from the credit carbons as a result of our forest being in a pristine state. Carbon credits are what you call the moneys from that project, and Guyana, as a result of especially that petroleum agreement, is today, per capita, probably the richest country in the Americas. It is very important, too, that we understand the multiplier effect of that project, namely all the businesses, all the other operators, and so many other nuclear impacts, as it were, from that one sector that today now brings in so much money. That is why, when I heard some of the Government benchers yesterday talking and trying to make comparisons with what we did as a coalition Government, I want to indicate that it is rather unfair, if not dubious, because of the fact that the revenue streams today is far superior from anything we have ever had, that is why although it was called a rotten agreement and in the recent newspaper I saw the 'S' word being used by the existing Vice-President, we feel that we must not compare the two.

Yesterday, Mr. Mahipaul and Mr. Jones, the Hon. Members from this side explained what and what we did, especially in Sports and Culture and in Local Government, to show that with the little that we had then, what we did. So, this sort of analysis whereby the People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) would want to say 'we in do nothing, we in one thing' must be understood. We have to now make sure that the comparisons are comparable, as it were. We must not compare this context with what happened before. What we must insist on is the comparison as to what is being done now with that large revenue stream by the People's Progressive Party Civic as against what ought to be done, and that is why in this Budget, just before it sorry, we had indicated that we would like to have some 'Haves' in relation to what this Budget must state.

Yesterday, my good friend Mr. Joseph Hamilton was giving the impression that we did not propose anything. Well, I want to say that we did propose a number of things in a

release called ‘*Budget 2023 Must Haves*’, and we indicated that we wanted an increase in the minimum wage of \$150,000 with corresponding adjustments to personal income tax. We proposed an increase in Old Age Pension to \$50,000. We proposed an increase in Disability Benefits to \$40,000, a reduction of value-added tax (VAT) to 12%, and new shelters around the Administrative Regions for women being abused. These shelters will support the victims of domestic violence along with the two others that Mr. Joseph Hamilton mentioned. We understand that in every budget cycle, you will have more and more being spent, but it is not good enough to say that ‘we have done this’ and exclude it from what ought to be done.

In the context of a Guyana in which as the Kaieteur Newspaper mentioned 43% of Guyanese cannot afford a healthy diet, 5% undernourished and this is a Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) Report.... [An. Hon. Member (Government): When?] It happens today and one can argue on whatever one wants but the whole point of it, is that it is not intellectual dishonesty. Look at them, we are saying that it is important to understand.... Mr. Speaker, the give and take in a normal democracy is absent with that sort of attitude.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member the give and take in the House, though, is when you are going to quote, quote the report and lay over for us, and quote the source.

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Ramjattan: That had an important editorial as to our cost of living, everything has gone up. I am not being intellectually dishonest here, the *Stabroek Newspaper* in an editorial indicated.... [An Hon. Member (Government): What year (*inaudible*).] Please do not get so fired up Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. I am saying that in today’s context we are having a hard time and that hard time is as a result of the tremendously high cost of living and in that reality, we must ensure that we do the comparatives as to what we could do now with the oil and gas and credit carbons revenue stream as against what we are doing, and there is every righteousness about that. [An Hon. Member (Government): (*Inaudible*)] You have at least the attitude of indicating that we must not go there. I am going to go there.

It is very important, then, that we do an analysis as to why it is not being done. The analysis is simple, this a working class suppose Government, it forgot about all of that, a good

time now and it is going on and on in relation to what is called ‘certain schemes’, very clever in which a certain set of people in Guyana are going to be the beneficiaries. I want to indicate when you have the construction industry having so much money poured into it when you have so much money being poured into, the construction rule of thumb is a certain set of contractors who are friends and families will always be the beneficiaries. Construction industry is Mr. Speaker, the heckling started very early there this morning. However, I am telling you that the construction industry is one of the epicentres of corruption. I will lay over the report for Transparency International 2005, which indicates this is especially happening with oil resource countries. [Mr. Nandlall: Sound bites.] Sound bites. I am glad that it is at least biting you. It has all the ingredients conducive for corruption. There are so many uncertainties in the execution that it is impossible to draw what so many economists refer to as the complete contract. One cannot get a complete contract for, let us say, that Harbour Bridge as to what and what it will be as the cost. One cannot have, for some of the roads in Guyana, a complete contract as to what it will cost. That is why so many roads are being built, and the next day, literally, they are breaking apart. Do you know what the corruption, especially in the construction industry, does? It creates what is called an undermining of the political process, and it enables patronage to triumph over honest politics.

We know very well that against what we have as infrastructural spending in Guyana, a little bit of that could have been nudged away and at least be given to the working people so that the working people could have a better day than not having to literally get malnourished. I am happy that I have gotten up the bile of the Minister of Finance. It means that I am making a good point. It is all there, and we are going to come to what is happening now. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI), all of those institutions, are also today, as a result, being subverted because of what we have under the corruption and the patronage that is happening in Guyana. These transformational projects, as they call them as, Cde. Seeraj spoke about yesterday, and I regard Mr. Seeraj as a typical PPP/C person, but he also made some dubious comments. This is what is being said by him, ‘the PPP/C is not thinking about votes. That is why we have big transformational projects. Listen to me, people over there, that PPP/C leadership always thinks about that and nothing else. It is a well-oiled political machinery. Whenever it makes any decision, it thinks about the votes, and I know about that because that is the leadership. It is the reason why

they seek to dodge today a strong EPA and also a strong EITI. This resource-rich country today is having what is called 'elections without good governance'. It prefers democracy.

10.46 a.m.

The election is one component, and it is there now. It had an inheritance and *largesse* that was the greatest ever. That is why I said its inheritance that it devised, and which is so humongous, but it has to know better, Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, as to how you are going to spend that money. Do not ever say that these projects might be transformational. I remember when it said that the Skeldon Sugar Factory would be transformational. Where is the Skeldon Sugar Factory today? The fibre optic cable and Fip Motillal's road, *et cetera*. One must understand that it is not because one deems it transformational... What was transformational, however, is when we signed that agreement, that could make \$200 billion today to spend it in this budget. What was transformational was the rightsizing of the sugar industry so that you do not pour good money, billions, and billions of dollars, behind bad sectors.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I want to caution you. Remember, you are speaking to the Speaker. So, when you say, "you must," you are admonishing the Speaker to do something... If you want to refer to the other side, the Hon. Members over there, I take some of these things personally.

Mr. Ramjattan: It is not a budget that I could support. There is no planning, there is no targeting, and there are no outputs. The budget is pathetically policy poor, a PPP. They love to say that it is the biggest budget, but I want to say, as Mr. Christopher Ram indicated in his analysis, it is also one with the biggest deficit. It is the biggest budget with the biggest deficit. We have taken some severe body blows in recent times. There is Mr. Kwame McCoy. He was very slippery yesterday, and he walked with he own oil and is the wrong size bottle he walked with too.

We have to understand because of no planning, no outputs, and no targeting of the policy poor budget is why the cost of living has gone so high. That is why effectively, as compared to what the salaries and wages are, people cannot find what is called better conditions or standard of living. We could have done neutralized or neutered those with at least better incomes, notwithstanding what might be the economic reasons for inflation. [Mr. Hamilton: Tell us how.] Tell us how? Instead of spending so much on infrastructure, you could have given 5% more to the people of this country. How much are you spending on workers?

You could have even given 10% more, and you are stating today that we could not. We did not have that revenue stream that is like a gold stream today. We did not have it. That is why it is important you do not deal with poverty by cash transfers like that. What is the output of \$40,000 for a ten-day work? You are just going to buy the votes. That is all you know about over there: buying the votes. It is important...

[An. Hon. Member (Government): (*Inaudible*) do not steal the votes.] You were there. I do not know about votes being stolen. If it is any votes...

Mr. Speaker, those are some of the preliminary points I wish to make in relation to this Budget, and I think I have been rather impactful. Do you not think so, Sir? I want to make this point. The cost of living is so much. Everything has gone up. When you go to the market and see fish, ginger, dhal, and rice, everything has gone up. These people are saying with a humongous revenue stream that, it cannot do better. *Show meh, nah. Show meh.* That is its contrived histrionic and contrived theatrics. That is just like what the slippery Mr. McCoy said yesterday.

Mr. Speaker: All right, Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan. You know better. You are in here longer than I am. I do not like to interrupt people of my cohort, so I will allow you 10 times to use corruption during this speech. I have asked you to either say Cde. Kwame, regardless of reference to his oil, or Hon. Member, Kwame McCoy.

Mr. Ramjattan: To spend so much money on sugar is like pouring good money behind bad, Mr. Finance Minister. We have spent, prior to this Budget, approximately \$13 billion. We are today going to spend another \$4 billion behind sugar. They have been advertising for jobs at Rose Hall, but people are not coming. We gave them their severance benefits. If it was going to drag an economy down, we had to make the correct decision. That was transformational. We repeat and maintain that the false explanations and narratives being given by the Government, the Minister of Agriculture, and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) are all ill-advised and is a road to nowhere. The evidence is clear. The perennial shortage of labour will persist in this sector, and the new CEO and all of his arrogant attitude that caused even a board member ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, again, we have a Standing Order with respect to accusations against persons who are not in here and who cannot defend themselves. As we are on this point, let me give you an extra minute because of the interruptions, but you would need a five-minute extension so

that you could conclude. But before I ask the Hon...Sorry. It is 30 minutes. You have 10 minutes more on the first 30. I have already allocated one minute and 30 seconds of interruptions on my part. Hon. Member, you may continue.

Mr. Ramjattan: Sugar has been dying since we lost that preferential treatment. Moreover, our workforce is not trained beyond substantially a cutlass and punt mentality. That is not what the next generation in the estates have been telling me that they want. They want to get jobs in the new sectors, but you want them to have this cutlass and punt mentality so that you could always bamboozle them and kerfuffle them. We will always have, especially with climate change, problems with the sugar industry, its management, and no workforce. The Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU) is always having strikes, but you now appreciate the transformational decision that was made to rightsize that sector.

In relation to rice, I want to say that I am happy to hear that the sum of \$300 million is going to promote research and development to improve yields and to ensure alternatives for insecticides to control the paddy bug. I come from the rice industry originally, and I know a little about it. In relation to livestock and poultry, I dare say that I have seen a paradox here that I found in the statistics which Mr. Mustapha provided. We see an increase in livestock and poultry production, but we see a reduction in milk and eggs. I hope Minister there is not a reason for that or whatever the reason for it, there must be major interventions for milk and eggs.

We also have fisheries. It is now called cage fishing, brackish water shrimp farms, *et cetera*. We must also do an analysis as to why all these fish sectors have gone into a decline. A report came out recently in which it stated that it could very well be what the Hon. Member was saying yesterday about so much environmental hazardous stuff being poured into the ocean. But you do not want to do an analysis of that and speak the truth to the people in the fisherfolk community. However, you are going to take \$1 billion to give the 7,500 fisherfolk cash grants. That is not how you are going to solve the fishing industry's problem. These are what are nonstarters in relation to what is called aspects of the agriculture policy.

Forestry – You have indicated...There are lots that could be done other than just handing out cash transfers. You should have gone and taken on Dr. Vincent Adams to tell the ExxonMobil people what they must not do, and that is to not throw the water with the oil inside the ocean. That is one of the reasons, but you do not want that. You are now

proposing, but they want to dispose. What do you think about the cash grants in relation to the \$349 million for cage fishing and brackish water? Why do you not tell us who and who would be the beneficiaries of this cage fishing and the brackish water shrimp?

Mr. Speaker, you are allowing them to interrupt all of the time. When you do all sorts of cash grants like 589 to 6,991 farmers, it is not going to go well with anybody, especially against another community where you have not raised the wages and salaries, and that is of public servants. The other community...You know what I am talking about. It is important that you now understand that some moneys should be put in there.

I want to indicate that the security sector is in disarray today. With the little that we had, the security sector under which came the police, fire, prison, and the Customs Anti-Narcotic Unit (CANU), much was done.

11.01 a.m.

Under local funding, under the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme (CSSP), and under the British Security Sector Reform report, which the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) was so afraid and scared of, they did not want the British Security Sector Reform at all, we have done plenty. I am happy that, in view of this paradigm shift of lots more moneys in the revenue stream, we must see Mr. Benn and his team, the Hon. Member, continue the good works that we had started. Crime has gone up to the stratosphere. Execution style murders, almost a weekly event. Domestic violence, robbers, choke and rob, on the videos you can see it happening, and even cutlass and gun firing at the President's State House. It is terrible. Of course, there are the advisories from the various countries indicating that one has to be really careful when one comes to Guyana.

Last year, the Minister had a lot to say of what was not done by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition. The Minister will speak after me in this debate. I want to just remind him of the very many things that we did. We have strengthened patrol management and the use of data and analytics in policing. We have promoted a culture of non-violence in those years, improving and appropriating money for public spaces. We have fostered socio-economic insurgent activities for at-risk youth. We do not see that happening now. We have restructured the Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR). We had also commenced and was going ahead with the Guyana Forensic Science Laboratory, and we understand

that it is continuing. What we have now are but extreme levels of crime, and it would appear that all those consultancies that we had in relation to Mr. Russel Combe and the British Security Sector Reform have been shelved. We had continued to ensure that we had close collaboration with the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) and the various institutions, Consulate – the Regional Security System (RSS), and so many. We had done a huge set of work in relation to rehabilitating and building new police stations, and at-risk youths, as I just mentioned. The TECHVOC school education was also done with the assistance of the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme. When they come here and say that nothing was done, with the little that we had, lots were done.

Mr. Speaker: For you to do more, Hon. Member, you will have to get a five-minute extension now.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Could you define this undisturbed five minutes for me? Hon. Member, you may continue for the next five minutes towards your conclusion.

Mr. Ramjattan: One of the important aspects was also ensuring that we had scrutiny and transparency in the security sector. It is pursuant to Article 119D of the Constitution that we are supposed to have what is called the Parliamentary Oversight Committee on the Security Sector (OCSS). Since the start of this Parliament, we have not had any meetings of that Parliamentary Oversight Committee. Under our Administration – I have the *Hansard* of the meetings – all the Members of the various Disciplined Forces had been called and cross-examined by Mr. Gill, Mr. Rohee, Dr. Bheri Ramsaran, and also Mr. Hamilton. Mr. Hamilton was there. But you do not have it now. The *Hansard* will show Mr. Gentle being cross-examined, Mr. Seelall Persaud being cross-examined, and also Courtney Samuels being cross-examined. What do we have today? That is why I am saying that we have a governance structure in Guyana that wants to avoid, evade and eschew. This is called our security sector from whatever. This was 2016 and 2017. In 2018, Mr. Gill asked that we go into the interior areas. We had to find moneys from this Committee to take them to check on police stations all across the country. Today, they have made that thing dysfunctional, so we cannot ask Mr. Hicken anything. We cannot ask the Heads and the Deputy Heads anything at all. That is why today that

is a violation of our Constitution and our *Standing Orders*. Mr. Gill knows about all of that.

I just want to conclude by stating that it is important that we take cognisance of what we had done in relation to preparing and planning for what is called this security sector. We had Mr. Russel Combe and the British High Commission dealing with the work on a consultancy on maritime security and safety. It was a proprietary work for purposes of ensuring, when the oil and gas stream come on board, what it is that we have to do. They did a magnificent piece of work in relation to threat assessments and all. The current threats at that point in time, around 2019, was the Venezuelan hostile action. They were talking about present and near future. Cyber-attack targeting Government departments or agencies, significant fire, explosion or other industrial incidents at the shore bases and maritime facilities, cyber-attacks targeting poor facilities. They even mentioned here projected threats, civil protest due to perceived unfair distribution of oil and gas revenues, as we are seeing today. What we are going to have is a tremendous amount of resentment and disaffection, as they said, if this does not seem to be distributed equitably. What they did was make sure that this was done in accordance to avoid any security threats. But do you know what? They do not want to acknowledge that kind of planning and proprietary work. We now seek them today, avoiding all of that. I understand that Mr. Russel Combe had come back, and I am certain that he had given them the reports. But they have not, in this budget at least, tried to nip that kind of security projections into what is called a budgetary arrangement so that we can spend wisely for those projected threats.

With all of these that I have just spoken about, the preambular remarks on sugar and rice and all of that, it is important to understand that you really cannot support this budget. It has all the hallmarks of that which is ensuring a disproportionate distribution of our oil and gas moneys. We are waging now a serious psychological battle as to the resentments that will be coming. We are in an explosive situation. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to make these points. [*Applause*]

Acknowledgement of special guests in the gallery

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan. Before I call on the next contributor, let me take this opportunity to acknowledge a few persons in the gallery. Their Excellencies, Ambassadors Ms. Elisabeth Harper, Mr. Ivan Evelyn, and Ms. Charlene Phoenix, along with National Security Advisor, Captain Gerry Gouveia, and

the Guyana Office for Investment's (GoInvest's) Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Dr. Peter Ramsaroop, and his team.

Now, it is for the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Hon. Member Mr. Hugh Todd.

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation [Mr. Todd]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me begin by thanking my Colleague and dear Friend, Minister Ashni Singh, for articulating accurately the people's wishes, promises made, promises delivered, and a continuous path to prosperity. This budget, *Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute In Building Our One Guyana*, provides a clear direction of His Excellency's vision and a full representation of the people, being focused, centred, and led by the citizens of this great nation of ours.

It is very difficult for me to respond to Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan. Everything that the Hon. Member proffered clearly shows the disconnect between the Opposition and the people. I daresay that they are a resting Opposition; they are at rest. We believe in honesty and integrity, we believe in going to the people, and we believe in an Administration based on having the people involved. Remember that slogan that you carried, 'Honesty and Integrity', let me enlighten you. For us, we believe in interaction. We believe in meeting directly with the people and connecting with regions and communities across Guyana. We have committed to taking Government to the people, and we have been doing that consistently since we took Office back in 1992 and when we were returned to Office in 2020. I have made many visits to Linden and Region 10. We like to always show the rest of the world and the diaspora that this country is really being led by the people. That is why we do not only speak to you from our position, but we let you know what the people are saying.

Mr. Speaker, if you would allow me, let me share with you, the Hon. Members on the other side, and the people of Guyana and within the diaspora, some of the responses we got from the people of Linden in Region 10. This was November, 2022, very recent. Ms. Esther Benjamin:

"We are getting somewhere. At least they're trying to lift the standard and give people opportunities... I like what the Government is doing, it is good for the Guyanese people,"

Pauline Thom:

"...I must say this Government is sticking to their words and they are working towards everything they say..."

11.16 a.m.

This is not us; this is the people. The people responding to us when we go on outreaches. Mr. Troy Duncan... Pay careful attention, Hon. Members, this refers to you.

"For the past five years, we haven't seen anything what the previous government did."

I am referring to the previous Government – the APNU/AFC:

"...for the past couple of months this government in power, it really improve... I... regret... I did not play a better part... trust me, in the future, you will have my support 100,000 per cent."

This is not me, this is Troy Duncan, a resident of Linden who is very familiar to the Hon. Member, the Leader of the Opposition and Ms. Walton-Desir. I will continue, Mr. Speaker. Delroy Grenville said better days are ahead for his community because of the new Administration. This is the people showing confidence and leadership based on our honesty and integrity. George Chesney said he was satisfied with the job the Administration is doing. Mr. Flemming goes on to say that life was about to return to the 'glory days' because of the Government's interest in people. We are a government about the people. We are telling you what the people are saying about us. We are not standing here and grand-standing and talking about things that you cannot relate to. I am bringing to you things that you can relate to people who are alive and well and responding to this Government.

I want to go on to Buxton. This is a news report of 6th July when there was a Cabinet Outreach to Buxton. I recall on that outreach the Opposition tried to rally the people of Buxton and their surrounding environs by telling them not to attend, claiming they will have a protest... [**An Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*] Yes, Hon. Member. Scores of Buxtonians came out, along with members and residents from their surrounding communities in droves to listen to the Government and to partake in the discussions. The Opposition was left on the side lines. They imported a few persons from other parts of Guyana who were holding placards. It just goes to show that this Government is a government about honesty and integrity. We can reach across the divide, and we can have engagements with people in a truthful, honest, fair and transparent manner. Let us

reflect on the APNU/AFC. Recall, Mr. Speaker, back in 2020, after the APNU/AFC was trying to steal the elections from the people of this country, this is what the Organization of American States (OAS) had to say:

“OAS member states call on Granger administration to allow peaceful transition”.

This is what the international community is saying, this is what the OAS is saying. I want to bring to the attention of the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, that it was President Ali's leadership at the 9th Summit of the Americas back in June, 2022, in Los Angeles, where his leadership led to the establishment of three committees being the Food Security, Energy and Finance Committees. Food Security is being co-chaired by His Excellency the President – leadership in the region. As we speak, the Hon. Prime Minister is in Buenos Aires, Argentina representing this country at the Heads of Government Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) meeting – representation. We just concluded a very successful visit to India, where we showed the synergy between the private sector and Government, having had fruitful engagements, ensuring that we can bring prosperity to Guyana by improving our international image.

If you allow me, Mr. Speaker, former Prime Minister Golding, this is what he had to say going back to the same period that the pernicious actions of a few had done damage to Guyana's image. This is what he had to say about the now Opposition, then Government. This tarnished our image. We have spent time between 2020 and now rebuilding Guyana's image to the extent that our international footprints have increased dramatically. There is confidence in the people of this country. As I speak, Mr. Speaker, the Guatemalans are preparing to establish an embassy here in Guyana. As I speak, Colombians are preparing to re-establish an embassy here in Guyana. As I speak, the Dominican Republic is preparing to establish an embassy here in Georgetown. Our international image has been repaired. It is on the move, being led by His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. I have more for you, Mr. Speaker.

Staying on the elections – ‘The United States (US) announced more travel restrictions on senior Guyanese officials over elections. Will continue to act until Granger's administration accepts the will of the voters’. That is the reality. We have the freedom to travel. All of my Colleagues on this side of the floor can traverse the global environment representing Guyana, whether it is at conferences, conventions or outreaches, we can travel. I dare to say, many of you on that side still cannot travel. That is as a result of

your dishonesty. If you go to the philosopher Hobbes, he has a clear depiction of the People's National Congress (PNC) – the sea monster, unshackled Leviathan. That is the nature of the PNC, in whatever form or shape they take. When one speaks about honesty and integrity, we go to the people. We do not stand and puff on our own. We go to the people. We get the people to tell us and guide us and we respect the wishes of the people. That is why, in 2020, we were returned to Office. In responding to the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, staying on honesty and integrity, she presented to this noble Assembly yesterday about the Amaila Falls Project. I have a document here that clarifies and brings sanity and order.

[The Hon. Minister displayed a document.]

The source here is the Ministry of Finance's Budget Speech and Estimates 2011 to 2014. I can share this with the...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have to. Let me commend the Hon. Member, Mr. Indar. He has shared all the documents he quoted from. They will be circulated shortly.

Mr. Todd: I will, Mr. Speaker. At that time, the Hon. Minister responsible for Finance, my dear brother, Dr. Singh was the sitting Minister of Finance. This is what he had to say. He was not quite sure what more the Government could have done, pointing out that it was difficult to answer questions if they were not asked. The AFC leader, Mr. Ramjattan, in bringing his motion to the floor to reduce the \$20 billion allocation to the programme by \$19 billion, queried of the Minister of Finance as to the progress made in relation to financial closure for the remaining moneys required on the project. I go on, Mr. Speaker. The project which is geared to provide cheaper reliable electricity to Guyana was halted after the political opposition signalled their disagreement with it, despite consultations and several meetings with stakeholders, investors and Government officials. Funding for the project was slashed in the National Assembly and investors suspended their inputs into the project. That is the character of the PNC, in whatever form or shape they present themselves. They are there about wrecking projects. They are wrecking balls. All they do is wreck development. We have to come and always rebuild and to keep this economy on the right path towards development. That is reality. I have the document.

Also, in responding to the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, I have a copy of the World Bank Report which I will layover, of 6th October, 2022 – Extraordinary Economic Growth of 20% to 40% over the last two years, a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita over 9,300 in 2021 from

about 6,000 in 2019. Real GDP estimated to have increased by 19.9% in 2021 owing to the expansion in production which average out at improving the economy. I am trying to bring this to the attention of the people of Guyana so that they can have accurate information within the domain. We cannot encourage the Opposition to be sending messages to the people of this country, which are designed to mislead them. We are in Government, we have a mandate to ensure that the people of this country are well informed, so that we can continue to provide them with the services they so need, so that we can improve their quality of life and standard of living. That is our role.

11.31 a.m.

That is why we have to spend time correcting the wrongs instead of having a healthy debate. That is what we have to do. We have to do it because that is what we have been elected to do. Respect for rights and freedoms is something that the Opposition does not know about. Under the PNC/R, in whatever form or shape they present themselves; they have always had an authoritarian style. They have always had a police state. They have always curtailed the freedoms and always ensured that the people of this country were coerced. Under the PPP/C, we have always worked tirelessly to ensure that we provide the people with the freedoms and the respect for their rights so that they can have the type of livelihood that will allow them to enjoy the partnership that we have.

Mr. Speaker, I draw your attention to our Bill status. I must give credit to the Hon. Attorney General (AG), Senior Counsel, and his team for presenting between 21st September, 2020 and 5th December, 2022, 70 – 70 Mr. Speaker – 70 Bills and amendments tabled in this Assembly. Think about that. This is working for the people. This is providing the framework to allow people to enjoy a predictable and stable environment. Thank you, Mr. Attorney General.

I am also going to submit this to the House. I will not go through it item by item, I know that my Hon. Members on the other side know exactly what I am speaking to. Let us have a little history lesson about the PNC/R. When I think about the PNC/R, I remember a chameleon always changing its colours depending on the circumstance. [An Hon. Member: A chameleon?] A chameleon, yes. That is the APNU/AFC. One may recall in 1964, the APNU/AFC, or I should say the PNC/R, coalesced with the United Force (UF). When they got into Office, that march was over. In the early 2000s, the PNC carried an attachment called the reform

arm. That was disbanded. In 2011, they came with a new colour and brand called the APNU/AFC. Today, they are divorced. They are living in separate rooms now.

When the People's Progressive Party/Civic was established in 1950, it stayed true to form until this day. True to form. Let me also add that, in 1992, the People's Progressive Party/Civic opened up itself to the entire Guyanese population so that any civic-minded member of society could have joined. That remains true to form. When one speaks about consistency, when one speaks about character, when one speaks about honesty and integrity, one sees that in the People's Progressive Party/Civic. We honour the social contract between the Government and its citizens. We believe that we have a role to play in ensuring that we continuously and progressively improve the lives of the people of this country. It, therefore, means that our understanding of trust, our understanding of confidence building, of transformation – those are principles that are embedded in the People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration. When one looks at how we go about shaping our policies which would lead to the budget, bringing numbers to bear on our ideas and our response to the people's needs and aspirations, we have done a very fantastic job. This is based on what the people would have said, the citizens, in resolving conflicts among our citizens.

We can see what the AG would have done over the last two years with 70 Bills and amendments. Also, ensuring that we deliver public service to the people, providing them with a secure and safe environment. We have always remained true to our social contract with the people of this country. Unfortunately, for the Hon. Members of the other side, they do not know about that. They do not understand what a social contract is because they believe in party paramountcy. They believe in taking care of a small few. One could see their actions between 1964 and 1992. One may also see their actions between...

Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly [Mr. Shuman]: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Todd: The years 2015 and 2020.

Mr. Shuman: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly.

Mr. Shuman: I trust that the Hon. Member is careful in his remarks not to impute anything on me as a Member of this House, as I was never in the House at those times.

Mr. Todd: Mr. Speaker, for clarity...

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Deputy Speaker. I have been listening to the Hon. Member and he has been saying the Opposition. I think 'Opposition' refers to anything inside or outside. You may proceed, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Todd: Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear that when I speak about the Opposition, the Hon. Member, the Deputy Speaker, Mr. Shuman, is excluded.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, when you want to exclude the Hon. Deputy Speaker, you can easily say the Hon. Members over there, excluding the Hon. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Todd: I will do that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for your guidance. I will now go back to the social contract that the Hon. Members on the other side, excluding the Hon. Member Shuman, have no respect for. They have no respect for the freedoms and the rights and liberties of the people of this country. They have shown that in Office and they continue to show that out of Office. One may recall that recently there was a leaked tape allegedly involving the Leader of the Opposition and his treasurer. There is absolutely no accountability or transparency in their own space. How could they display that to the people of this country? Their house is in a mess. It is awful, despicable. They will remain a resting Opposition, perpetually.

This allows me to speak about participation and partnership. Our score card, based on responses and engagements with the citizens of this country, is deserving of us being here and being able to, year after year, deliver a budget based on the people of this country. Centred primarily on the people. Everything that we have done, in terms of our policy making, is designed around the people. It is designed to ensure that we put the citizens of this country first. We believe in that partnership. We believe in the people's participation. We believe in that, and we do that. We see the President, Cabinet Colleagues and Members of Parliament (MPs) traversing the length and breadth of this country, meeting with citizens, engaging with them on a regular basis, hearing their concerns. Not only listening but responding and delivering. Meeting, and in some cases, exceeding their expectations.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have exceeded the first 30 minutes. You will have to get someone to give you an extension to conclude.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Mr. Speaker, I respectfully ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, you may continue for five minutes and conclude.

Mr. Todd: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Members in the Opposition, excluding the Deputy Speaker, have been trying to chide me into speaking about foreign affairs. I am encouraged to enlighten the people of this country of a project which commenced under the APNU/AFC that wasted the taxpayer's money of this country. That was to establish an embassy in Brasilia. I have a document here and a report from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. What do we have to say? The consultant reported that 68% of the project has been completed to date. This was a contract that was fundamentally flawed, knowingly. There are Members on the other side, who are sitting Members of the Opposition, who presided over a contract knowing that they could not have delivered on it.

11.46 a.m.

I had a light chat yesterday with the Hon. Member, Dr. Karen Cummings, and she said to me that she was not involved; she inherited it. She acknowledged that they cannot run anything, much less deal with our foreign relations. We, on this side, show clearly that we could manage this country's affairs and provide balanced development to the people of this country.

When we speak about urbanisation, [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** *(Inaudible)*]. Let me tell you all about the border issue. There were the oral hearings in the Hague recently. So, I wrote to the Leader of the Opposition and asked him to send a representative to be included in the team because it was inclusive. He wrote back sending one... [**Mr. Norton:** We do not have a border issue. We have a territorial issue.] We do not have an issue. We know that. You are a junior rank, and we understand that. Let me educate you, Mr. Leader of the Opposition. Venezuela has a controversy with us. We do not have a controversy. When I sent the letter to the Hon. Member, the Leader of the Opposition, to send us a representative, I was expecting him to send the shadow minister. The shadow minister was not capable of making the list. He sent two persons. I am trying to show you, Mr. Speaker, that they are talking about representation and leadership, and they do not have any sort of leadership on their side. There is no representation, and they are not true to form. They cannot even represent their own people. Even the Leader of Opposition does not have any confidence in the shadow Minister of Foreign Affairs and International

Cooperation. What are we talking about? This is a laughing matter.

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Norton]: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

Mr. Todd: Mr. Speaker, I would ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition is standing on a point of order – Standing Order 40(4). I think you may want to...

Mr. Norton: It is Standing Order 41(6), Mr. Speaker.

“No Member shall impute...”

Proper...

“...motive to any Member...”

Mr. Speaker: The word is improper.

Mr. Norton: Sanding Order 41(6) states:

“No Member shall impute improper motive to any Member of the Assembly.”

Mr. Speaker, I want to respond to what the ...

Mr. Speaker: First of all, Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have to tell me your interpretation of the Hon. Minister imputing improper motive on someone on the opposite side.

Mr. Norton: By saying what he said, he was suggesting that we proposed two persons and that is untrue. We proposed one person and the Minister sent, through the Permanent Secretary, to ask for another person.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. That is a clarification which the only...

Mr. Norton: It is totally untrue what he said. [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Speaker: I think we all could learn a bit. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, what you raised was a point of clarification. The Standing Order states that before you could have gone into that explanation, I had to get leave of the person presenting, but I did not put it. I allowed you to speak but I thought you were going to say that he was imputing improper motive on the Hon. Member who shadows him. Hon. Member, you may proceed. I will give you back your one minute and 15 seconds.

Mr. Todd: Thank you for your timely intervention, Mr. Speaker. Let me re-emphasise that we believe in being true to form. We believe that if we look across the divide, we should be able to talk to the people and to those Hon.

Members who have been identified as sitting Members of Parliament (MPs) and as shadow Ministers. That is natural. So, if we cannot follow, have engagement and have continuity, it means that we are not really and properly engaging. We, on this side, are stating that the Leader of the Opposition appears to be, by his actions, not clearly understanding his role as Leader of the Opposition.

We, on this side of the House, are very pleased to know that we enjoy the confidence of the people of this country. We are very pleased to know that we enjoy the confidence of the regional community. We are very pleased to know that we enjoy the confidence of our traditional partners and non-traditional partners. We are pleased to know that we have the full confidence also of the members within the diaspora. We will continue with our urbanisation of this country. We will continue with the human development of this country. We will continue with ensuring that we have an inclusive and ‘One Guyana’. We will continue to have progress and sustainability, and we will continue to have prosperity for all. I do commend this 2023 Budget to this Assembly for its approval. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. We will take one more presentation before the break, and that is the Hon. Member, Mr. Vincent Henry. The Hon. Member has 15 minutes plus an extension of five minutes which could be granted.

Mr. Henry: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Guyana Action Party (GAP), a member of the Coalition, I am pleased to participate in the 2023 Budget debate.

Before I go into the substance of my presentation, I would like to mention that listening to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is like listening to nothing of substance. The most important topic which he should have spoken about is the territorial problem with our neighbour. This is so important. Did he mention it? Did he tell us what is happening at the International Court of Justice (ICJ)? No, he did not. That was a very shameful presentation where the people of Guyana could not have been briefed and told what is happening to safeguard our ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, for every budget debate, I circulate the words and I am hearing cries of shamefulness and nonsense. All of those are unparliamentary language. You have to withdraw it.

Mr. Henry: Okay. I am so advised. I withdraw, Mr. Speaker. I would like to propose that the Hon. Todd goes back to a foreign relations/foreign policy school. Firstly,

please allow me to express my sincere condolences to the people of Cane View, Mocha who faced the wrath of the People's Progressive Party/Civics' (PPP/C's) hurricane apartheid, mixed with a big dose of dictatorship and tempered by ignorance in conflict resolution. The pictures and videos of the police pressing an African woman down in the mud and children in tears, while their homes were being destroyed, will be vividly remembered when Guyanese go to cast their votes at the next general and regional elections.

Guyanese will also not forget the likes of Su and the men in the engine room of the PPP/C who feast on the largesse of Guyana while the poor are relegated to poverty as a way of life. We remember the statement that Su is his friend. He looks after everything. The Hon. Todd said just now that the Government believes and practices honesty and integrity. Remember Su.

We sat and listened to the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh, as he fed himself and all Guyanese a heavy dose of pills, while imbibing a murky liquid that had a striking resemblance to water made available to Guyanese by the PPP/C, all the while regurgitating work done by others many decades ago. It was cut and paste. This *chap* cut and paste other people's work. The direct beneficiaries, who are the people of Guyana, inclusive of supporters of the installed PPP/C, from all reports, are very disappointed that the largest budget ever presented in Guyana has little or nothing for them. The deep feelings of disappointment are shared by non-supporters and supporters of the PPP/C.

On my way here this morning, the taxi man told me that he was expecting so much from the budget. He was all hyped, felt that it was the best and that he was going to get something out of it. He said what he had noticed is that this is the worst budget, and it has nothing for the people of Guyana. He said that what happened under the APNU/AFC was indeed well done. He said that, today, it is worse. The people are talking. The people of Guyana are speaking but you all are making up your own stories. Where is Hon. Todd? All of this, with the largest budget, a budget that is beefed up largely by proceeds from a profit-sharing agreement, made possible by whom...It was the APNU/AFC, when in Government. You are using what we did to now show off for the people and you are still punishing them. The Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance detailed that carbon credits amounting to US\$750 million have been agreed to be paid by Hess Guyana Exploration Limited over a period of time. He further stated that 15% of this amount

would be allocated to the development of Indigenous peoples. While we welcome this initiative, it would be remiss of me not to detail the transgressions that occurred during the process or perhaps lack of due process, which culminated in this decision.

It boggles my mind to know that the Indigenous people, the true owners of the forests, who allowed us to have carbon sequestration and carbon credits for sale, were not allowed to have Free Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) with regard to the Architecture for REDD+ Transactions (ART) process. I note that an attempt was made to whitewash two-hour meetings in certain communities as meaningful consultations. How could anyone go through the entire process of meaningful consultations and then reach an agreement with regard to the ART process in two hours? Further, most of the people of the hinterland speak English as a second language. Then, we were told that the National Tshaos Council (NTC), at its last conference, gave its consent for the Architecture for REDD+ Transactions – the REDD+ Environmental Excellence Standard (ART-TREES). This is the abbreviation for REDD + Transactions, [**An Hon. Member (Government): (Inaudible)**]. You do not know what ART is either, so keep quiet. Again, anyone who attends the NTC conference would know that it is impossible to meaningfully have an FPIC of the ART-TREES process due to the limited time available. To make matters worse, many knowledgeable persons pointed out that the NTC cannot legally give consent for the sale of communities' carbon credits.

12.01 p.m.

The Amerindian Act allows the village council to make decisions with the village general meeting being the final arbiter. Now, we have a half-baked agreement that may very well be challenged in the courts. That is what the PPP/C is always doing – half-baked stuff – half-baked roads and half-baked everything. In my speech in Parliament on full insurance coverage in case of an oil spill, I advocated that ExxonMobil should make payments to the Indigenous peoples directly, and that these payments should be made to the National Tshaos Council. With this in mind, the Guyana Action Party proposes that there be an agreed estimate of the amount of carbon credits available for sale by the hinterland communities of Guyana. Instead of the 15 % of income unilaterally assigned to the Indigenous communities, an agreed upon estimate should be paid.

It must be mentioned that in a recent court ruling, the court pronounced that the Indigenous people of the Upper Mazaruni are entitled to ownership of their ancestral lands.

This will allow the Indigenous people and the people of the hinterland to reap the benefits from their care of the environment and encourage them to continue to do so, knowing that benefits are now available. We further propose that the NTC should strengthen its administrative capacity and consult with hinterland communities which are the true owners of the carbon credits. Hence, the true beneficiaries and real owners of the carbon credits would lead the way for a sustainable and beneficial developmental agenda. It is my understanding that carbon credits could be traded on the international market. What is wrong with involving the Indigenous and hinterland peoples in this trade? In this process, it would be good to discuss the suggestion made by Mr. Sydney Allicock, former Minister of Indigenous Peoples Affairs, that there be established an Indigenous bank, in which all moneys for Indigenous development, especially from such things as carbon credit, could be funnelled.

In my last budget speech, I read the salient part of the Auditor General's report of 2014 which detailed the abuse of the Amerindian Development Fund by the PPP/C's Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. I will not get into that, but you could research it in the Auditor General's report for 2014, where \$1.2 million cannot be accounted for. Apparently, it was used as a slush fund.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you said "abuse". You are imputing that particular Minister abused the fund. I do not think the Auditor General used the word 'abuse'. So, do not misquote him.

Mr. Henry: Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the word abuse was not used, and I withdraw it. Thank you. We have a number of recommendations that we could make about the whole carbon credit sale, *et cetera*. I will just give a few of them because of the time limit. The ART-TREES, we propose, must be discussed at cumulative community general meetings after a general people-friendly information package is rolled out. This subject, with all its implications, is far too important and serious to not have the blessings of the concept of FPIC. One important decision would be to agree with Government on the true amount of carbon credits that are available for sale. The moneys already paid into the Consolidated Fund should be deposited in a bank account that pays interest. After the immediate beneficiaries have participated in an agreed process, and general agreements made via FPIC, then the actual disbursements could be made by an implementing body set up by the NTC, as proposed yesterday by the Hon. Member of Parliament, Mr. Cox. The National Toshias Council should be the lead agency for the Indigenous component of ART-TREES in Guyana. For this

to be successful, the NTC has to beef up its administration and fiduciary systems. This should include improved communications systems, accounting and auditing systems, and a project management unit, among other improvements.

I note that moneys have been allocated to complete the National Toshias Council's secretariat. One must note that a secretariat could not have been possible if lands were not made available. It is apposite to note that the APNU/AFC, via His Excellency, David Arthur Granger, committed and granted prime lands within Georgetown so that the NTC could not only build an administrative centre but also build supporting facilities such as boarding and lodging quarters. This is so that the executive and staff of the NTC may comfortably execute their duties and give improved services to the Indigenous peoples of Guyana.

I noted that the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance regularly embellished the 2023 Budget speech with half-truths and total untruths. This is no surprise. We know that telling untruths is a habit of the PPP/C. It is in their Deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA). One such untruth the Minister mentioned is that the APNU/AFC, in its recent stint of Government, did not grant any land title to the Indigenous communities. Absolute grant of land titles and extensions were granted by APNU/AFC to Mainstay/Waika, Mashabo, Capoey and Yupukari. Legal boundaries were granted for Parabara, Rockstone, Tassarere and Kangaruma. Also, some 45 investigations were completed which included 32 for extensions and 13 for new villages. I know for a fact that the process of granting titles is somewhat lengthy and that many communities were on the verge of getting their titles and extensions under the APNU/AFC's tenure, but the process was derailed because of the no confidence motion by the PPP/C. It must be noted that if the PPP/C had not been successful in their no confidence motion, many communities would have received their titles or extensions. These communities would have included Sand Creek, Shulinab, Parikwarunawa, St. Ignatius and many others. I challenge the PPP/C to grant St. Ignatius Village a satisfactory title to their lands. All the paperwork was done. Just grant it now. We know what will happen in St. Ignatius. St. Ignatius people, we know what will happen.

It was a total eye pass for the PPP/C to hold a ceremony to hand over titles to the villages of Kangaruma and Tassarere, in the Middle Mazaruni, Region 7, only to take it away from the villages after the ceremony. They gave them, and they took it back at the same time. This is the duplicity of the PPP/C. That is what they are. Then, the PPP/C, with much

fanfare, handed over a title of extension to Yupukari at the last NTC conference, although the community had already received that same title from the APNU/AFC. This was a big joke in Rupununi and the Indigenous communities. That is the extent the PPP/C would go to try fool the Indigenous people. They are trying to fool the indigenous people. The National Toshias Council held its elections and conference in a democratic manner under the APNU/AFC. Even the Hon. Deputy Speaker, who was then the Deputy Chairman of the NTC, praised the APNU/AFC for allowing Toshias of the NTC to mainly manage their own affairs.

Sadly, the opposite happened under the PPP/C's watch at the last NTC held in 2022. The entire conference was stage managed by the PPP/C. This included the elections for the Chairman. It is standard practice for the outgoing Council to prepare and implement a handing over to new Council. However, the PPP/C ensured that the former Council, including its Chief, Nicholas Fredericks, was bypassed. The NTC looked like it was then a PPP/C's conference. The Coalition calls on the PPP/C to take its feet off the necks of the Indigenous Peoples. In terms of governance, the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs practices what might be termed *different strokes for different folks*. Hon. Gail Teixeira, I hope you heard that one. It seems that the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs is quick to conduct kangaroo courts against Toshias and Senior Councillors who are accused of wrongdoings and are perceived to be Opposition supporters.

Mr. Speaker: To proceed, you will need an extension, Hon. Member.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Mr. Henry, you may proceed to conclude.

Mr. Henry: The same Ministry ignores such actions when accusations are made against village leaders who are known PPP/C members. *It is different strokes for different folks* in 'One Guyana'. The PPP/C officials who are accused of serious wrongdoings are allowed to walk free. Just recently in Karasabai...We cannot talk people's name and so we will pass that. Who was talking name for the whole day yesterday and even today? Where is the Hon Member? This is perhaps the 'One Guyana' that we hear about where one set of people are sheltered from facing justice.

Another untruth spoken by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance was that the APNU/AFC stopped training of Indigenous youths when it assumed Government in 2015. You hear from all of them. They like to tell untruths. In a previous speech, I gave the corrected version of this matter and will repeat it so that the hard-headed Hon. Members on the installed Government's side would know the facts. In 2015, APNU/AFC's Ministry of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs found that the PPP/C's Cabinet had instructed the then Permanent Secretary (a.g.) to cancel the cheque that was prepared to pay the Community Service Officers (CSOs), thus causing the discontinuation of the CSO programme. It must be noted that the then PPP/C's Cabinet Secretary...

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Proceed, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Mahipaul: Which Standing Order is it? [Ms. Teixeira: *(Inaudible.)*]

Mr. Speaker: Microphone. I am not hearing.

Ms. Teixeira: I wish to remind the House that in August, 2015. [Members of the Opposition: Which Standing Order is it?] Mr. Speaker, I stated the Standing Order. If you shut up, you will hear it.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, please.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I said Standing Order 40 (1). I said it before.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I heard you state the Standing Order. You are standing on a point of clarification. For you to proceed, I would have to get leave of the person currently standing on the floor. Hon. Mr. Henry...so that the Hon. Minister could make her clarification?

Members of the Opposition: No.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I would not be able to...Go ahead, Mr. Henry.

Mr. Henry: In the Rupununi they say *ow na. Ow na*, Hon. Minister. It must be noted that then PPP/C Cabinet Secretary, who signed the letter for the cancellation of the cheque, is now a Minister of the Government and recently spoke.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order again. The Hon. Member is continuing to misrepresent an issue.

Although he has refused me to speak, I am raising it a second time under Standing Order 40 (1).

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I am sure the version from the Government's side will be presented when the next Speaker speaks. Hon. Mr. Henry, you have a minute to conclude.

Mr. Henry: Mr. Speaker, I have been interrupted several times. Could I get back that time?

Mr. Speaker: You have your time – that extra minute.

Mr. Henry: Thank you very much. Whenever one hears the PPP/C speaking to the contrary, one can and must come to the conclusion that telling untruths is part, again I repeat, of their DNA and whatever they say must be taken with a strong dose of cough syrup or something or the other.

12.16 p.m.

Also, the training of some 2,000 CSOs in multiple life skills, inclusive of entrepreneurship, was done by the APNU/AFC and preparation was being made to double this to 4,000, using an improved curriculum, when we came out of Office, had the PPP/C not manipulated someone to launch a no-confidence motion against the caring APNU/AFC Government. I am talking about the training of hinterland youth. Could the Minister of Amerindian Affairs list the names of hinterland youths who have been facilitated to get training and employment in the oil and gas industry or is it that the Minister of Amerindian Affairs feels that training and jobs in the oil and gas sector are not for hinterland youths?

Another vexing issue is the PPP/C's seeming policy of placing *square pegs in round holes*. In a recent questioning on the estimates, I raised the issue of a somewhat strange phenomenon that has been affecting many students in the secondary schools. It must be noted that the PPP/C Members of Parliament laughed in a mocking manner when I raised this serious issue. One such episode happened just a few days ago at the St. Ignatius school when some students displayed paranormal behaviours during school hours. To date, the Ministry of Education is yet to make any comprehensive attempt to mitigate this serious problem. One is forced to question whether the PPP/C and is waiting for deaths to occur before taking actions to find remedies. In the absence of a Ministry of Education's voice and requisite solution to this troubling problem, please allow me to make some recommendations.

Mr. Speaker: I trust they will finish in about 15 seconds.

Mr. Henry: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will use a different place to make those recommendations. I call on the installed Government to raise the Toshaos' stipend to at least \$100,000 per month. The Toshaos are also rural constables and should be paid whenever rural constables are entitled to get remuneration.

In closing, I would like to say that the budget is geared for abuse by the PPP/C. One Minister and a big team with police vehicles flashing went through a village in Rupununi just to tell them that they will be getting a new well in the future. So much money is being wasted. It is for a big spending and big kickbacks. Mr. Speaker, it is time for a change. It is time to balance development in Guyana with the poor getting their fair share of the patrimony. It is time to bring back the APNU/AFC. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. To be fair to the Hon. Member, he actually got eight minutes for the conclusion. Thank you. Hon. Members, this is a good time for us to take the suspension.

Sitting suspended at 12.20 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.36 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. Please be seated. We had an extended lunch. I want to say that for this afternoon, I would advise that we go and have the dinner break by ourselves, and we will continue throughout so that we can complete the business of today. It gets very hard to get people back together after a meal break. I will announce when the supplements are here, and persons can break and have their meals and come back, but the sessions will go on. Ensure that we always have a quorum during the sitting. I now invite the Hon. Minister of Health, Dr. Frank Anthony, to make his presentation. I will start him at 1.38.37 p.m.

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and Hon. Members. *Budget 2023* is \$781.9 billion worth of development for the people of Guyana. No amount of bad talking and no amount of *cussing up* the budget would change a single number in this budget. I want to extend, once again, congratulations to Dr. Ashni Singh and his team at the Ministry of Finance for doing, once again, a fantastic job in crafting this budget which is going to propel the Guyanese people forward.

We meet at a time when the world is recovering from the ravages of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, when most national economies are in trouble, and when many multi-national companies are retrenching people. We meet at a time when, globally, there is looming gloom,

economic gloom, but amidst shrinking Gross Domestic Product (GDP) globally, Guyana stands out as one of the fastest growing economies in the world. By any standard, this would be a commendable achievement. Many reputable international institutions have commended the President and the Government of Guyana for the stewardship of the economy and for the unfurling of the unprecedented transformational developmental agenda in energy, in food security, in job creation and in improving dignity and wellbeing of all the people of Guyana. These investments are making a real difference in the lives and livelihoods of every single Guyanese. Hope has returned to Guyana. Optimism has returned to Guyana and our citizens are excited about the future of Guyana.

While the whole country is excited, there are 31 lonely souls in the Opposition who are desperately trying to hold back progress with their false narratives on discrimination and nepotism. Their objective is not about the people's welfare or wellbeing but to sow doubts and fear and to derail the developmental agenda. The Guyanese people are tired of these false prophets with their false narratives. They see through the bold attempt to rewrite history but whitewashing the past cannot cover the incompetence and mismanagement of the People's National Congress (PNC) and the Alliance for Change (AFC). At the core, they are rotten and those who remain with them and those who associate with them and those who listen to them will be devoured by them. This is not the Guyana we want. This is not the Guyana we deserve. We want a Guyana where everyone will work together to transform this country and where all of us can share and enjoy prosperity and that prosperity is when we have 'One Guyana'.

Earlier today, we heard from two of the speakers on the Opposition benches. We heard the Hon. Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan once again showing a scant regard for the sugar industry and the sugar workers. I do not know what the sugar workers did to this Hon. Member because in almost every budget speech, he would find a portion of that speech to ensure that he attack sugar workers and their families. We just heard him this morning. What did he say? He said that the APNU, meaning the PNC and the AFC, was very proud to right size the sugar industry. What did he mean by that? He meant that they retrenched or fired 7,000 sugar workers. This meant that if an average sugar worker's family is about four persons in a family, a sum of 28,00 persons were left on the breadline. That is the legacy of which he is proud. That is the legacy that he comes every time we have Parliament and talk about right sizing the industry. When we try our best to resuscitate the industry, to give people a livelihood and to

bring back dignity to those families, every time he comes here, and he would say that we are throwing good money after bad money. This is the Hon. Member who, once when they were campaigning before 2015, went out and told the sugar workers that they would increase their salary by 30%. When they got into Government, that is how they repaid the sugar workers. It is not only that. When one looks at the years of APNU/AFC and how they devastated the sugar industry... In 2015, when we left Government, the growth in that sector was 6.9%. In 2016, under the stewardship of APNU/AFC, it dropped to -20.6%. Then, in 2017, it dropped further to -25.2% and in 2018 it went to -23.8% - all minus growth. In 2019 it was -11.8% and then 2020, -3.7%. This is the legacy. This is how they have destroyed the sugar industry. Then, he came here, and he said they did not have money and that they were working with a very small budget. What small budget were they working with?

When one looks at the various funds that they had in the economy... What did they do with the moneys from the Guyana Forestry Commission's (GFC's) fund? They raided the fund, spent all the money and then when we got back, there was nothing there. What happened to the other funds like the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL Inc.)? They spent out all of the money out and, again, now they are crying that during their time they did not have money to spend on sugar workers and other sectors of the economy. If we really look at what they did during that period, they spent close to \$1 trillion, and what do they have to show for it? Absolutely nothing.

He came here this morning to tell us, all of a sudden, that the fisheries industry is on a decline. If we go back to the statistics and go back to the records, what do we find? In 2018, under the APNU/AFC, the fisheries industry declined by 8.4%. In 2019, it declined by a 0.7% and then... Well, that was a slight increase from where it was in 2018, but then by 2020 it made a major dip to -17.1%. The decline of fisheries did not start with the PPP/C; the decline in fisheries started with the APNU/AFC. This is what we are working to correct. This is what we are doing.

1.47 p.m.

The other Member who did not want to say, perhaps, he is from the APNU said that he is from the Guyana Action Party (GAP), and he had a lot of gaps in his presentation. One of the things that he said was that we must get our knees off the necks of the Indigenous people. One would think that during his tenure with the APNU/AFC he would have been robustly defending Indigenous peoples' rights in this country. What

he stood here today and did was offer excuses upon excuses for the way that the APNU, the way the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R), the way that AFC and the way the GAP, treated the Indigenous people of this country. He came here to say that it is not the APNU/AFC that knocked off the Community Service Officers (CSOs). He said there was a letter from a Permanent Secretary (PS) on our side that fired these CSOs. If he would go back and look at the records of this Parliament, in 2015, it was the then Vice President, Mr. Sydney Allicock, who came to this same National Assembly and said that he was the one who wanted a change in the programme so there would no longer be CSOs but there will be another programme called, I think, the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) or something like that. It was a youth entrepreneurship programme. He produced a letter to this National Assembly and so I will ask that the letter be recovered from the records of the Assembly and circulated here to the Hon. Members. Similarly, I would like to ask the Hon. Member, Mr. Henry, to bring the letter which stated that a Permanent Secretary from the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs terminated those CSOs. We want to see that letter in this National Assembly, or he should withdraw the statement and apologise.

I want to talk a little bit about the APNU/AFC's tenure in health. In 2015, we saw a litany of promises that were made by the APNU/AFC. In 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020, there were a number of budgets presented. In each of those budgets, the then Minister of Finance made statements about what would be done in the health sector. I want to recap some of those things. I want to ask the Hon. Members over there, where are these programmes? So, let us go through them. In 2015, one of the things that they promised was that they would set up a paediatric cardiac programme at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). I want to ask, where is that programme? It was there in 2015 and up to now nothing could be produced by the APNU/AFC. We have started putting back a programme that we had before which they dismantled. We used to do paediatric cardiac surgeries in this country, and they dismantled it. Now, we have to rebuild it and that is what we are doing.

In 2016, they promised us that they would bring a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) to study suicide prevention. The year 2016 came and went, and nothing was delivered. There was no suicide commission. It is another broken promise. It is another promise that went unfulfilled. In 2016, in the budget, they said that they would spend \$1.9 billion for the construction of a state-of-the-art speciality hospital at Liliendaal. This was a PPP/C project that we started. Shortly

after they put it in the budget, by the next year they cancelled it out of the budget – no more speciality hospital. In 2016, they also put in their budget that they would build a ten-bed cardiac theatre – whatever that means. This was another broken promise because, after their tenure, there is no ten-bed theatre at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. They also promised to have a new laboratory at the Government Analyst Food & Drug Department. They budgeted \$110 million for the establishment of that laboratory. Here again, moneys were spent and there is no laboratory in existence. This was another promise that they could not deliver on.

In 2017, they promised a mental health institute. Where is the mental health institute? Again, this is another broken promise.

In 2018, they told the people of the East Coast of Demerara (ECD) that they were going to rehabilitate the Dr. CC Nicholson Hospital. Where is the rehabilitation? Nothing was done and this is another broken promise.

In 2019, they promised the construction of a new Accident and Emergency (A&E) unit at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. Where is the new Accident and Emergency unit? This is another broken promise, and nothing was delivered. In 2019, again, in the budget, they promised that they were going to deliver a state-of-the-art trauma centre. Where is this trauma centre? Again, this is another broken promise, and nothing was delivered. This is their legacy. These are a lot of the promises but there was absolutely no delivery. This is what incompetence and mismanagement look like. That is why they are on that side of the House. When you couple this litany of failures with the massive drug shortages that they had in the system; the Sussex Street Drug Bond scandal; the procurement scandals; what happened at Ocean View International Hotel, the fiasco over here; how they shut down the National Ophthalmology Hospital; and how they had no audited accounts at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation for five years; this is mismanagement and the legacy of the PNC/R, AFC and all of them who call themselves the APNU. This is what they want us to forget, but we will not forget this sordid past. Our task today is not only to fix what they have left – this broken system – but we are going to fix it and transform it into a world-class healthcare system.

Fixing the primary healthcare system: Between 2021 and 2022, we have upgraded more than 250 health centres and health posts in every region of Guyana. We have collaborated with the Pan-American Health Organization

(PAHO) and developed a comprehensive package of services whereby we will be able to deliver more than 216 interventions at health centres and health posts across this country. Among these interventions would be maternal and child healthcare. We would be working to put better diagnoses for infectious diseases and chronic non-communicable diseases, to provide immunization for our children across this country, and to make sure that we can also provide eye screening, dental check-ups and screening for hearing impairments.

For eye screening, just last year we started the distribution of 4,500 spectacles to communities in the hinterland. Just to put it into perspective, a spectacle probably costs between \$20,000 to \$30,000 and we are giving them away for free in the hinterland of Guyana. As if that is not enough, we have sent our Ophthalmologists into the regions where we are screening people who have eye problems such as Cataracts. We make a shortlist, bring them out to the Port Mourant Hospital and Ophthalmology Centre – the same one that was neglected by the APNU/AFC – and do Cataract surgeries for those patients. Right now, hundreds of patients have already benefitted from that service, and now people are quite satisfied with the kind of eyecare they are getting from the Ministry of Health.

Up to last year, if someone had to get a hearing aid, it would have cost the patient \$65,000. We were able to screen more than 500 persons across this country and we gave them hearing aids free of cost. In this Budget we would be providing another 1,000 hearing aids for persons who need such service.

To deliver the services at our health posts and health centres – under the APNU/AFC not much training was done for health personnel – over the last two years alone, two years alone, we have trained more than 200 Community Health Workers (CHWs). This is so much so that in every health centre or health post in Regions 9 and 1, there are at least two Community Health Workers. This is what progress looks like.

2.02 p.m.

It is not only that, we have given to these health centres rapid kits that can do all types of diagnosis. We have moved from where we used to do microscopy for malaria to now where we can do rapid testing for malaria. This type of testing is going to be rolled out at all such centres. Once we diagnose someone with whatever ailment, we have all the medicines to make sure that they are treated properly at the health centre. In addition, over the last two years the Ministry of

Health provided to the hinterland communities, to health centres and to hospitals, approximately 31 all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), 14 ambulances, 24 boats, and 9 motorcycles, so that we can improve transportation of the medical personnel and the moving of patients. This is what progress looks like. They had five years and they could not even deliver five ambulances; we were able to do 14 ambulances in just two years. All that I just spoke about was fixing the things that they broke.

What we have been able to do is because, as I said, we want to transform what we are doing from the rudimentary to a world-class system. To do this it requires innovation and it requires the application of technology. With this in mind, the Government of Guyana has started a remote electronic medicine clinic at Nappi, at Parikwarinau, at Yupukari and at Gunns. What is this telemedicine? At the telemedicine clinic that we have put there, we have a computer at each one of these sites. In that computer we have an electronic health record system. The computers are connected to the internet through satellite, and they also have internet enabled devices and are powered by solar energy.

Let me give you an example of the capability of the system that we have just put in. Gunns is probably 500 miles away from Georgetown. When a patient goes to a Community Health Worker at Gunns, we are able to, first of all, talk to the Community Health Worker who puts in their information. Having put in that information, if the CHW cannot solve the problem then he/she can dial up a doctor either at the Lethem Hospital or dial up a doctor at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. When that doctor comes and screens in real time, if the doctor would like to examine the eye, he can have the camera look at the eye; if he wants to examine the ears, the mouth or whatever, he can examine that. If the doctor would like to hear the heartbeat of the patient that is located 500 miles away, then all he needs to do is put the stethoscope and he would hear the heart sound 500 miles away in Georgetown and he would be able to make the diagnosis. If we need to do an electrocardiogram (ECG) we will be able to do that ECG from Gunns, coordinated by the doctors at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. If we need to do an ultrasound, with the ultrasound probes that we have, we would be able. The Community Health Worker would put the ultrasound probe over the abdomen of the patient and the doctor at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation would be able to see the image in Georgetown. This is what progress looks like. This is the new system that we are building, and we do not have it at one place; we have it right now as a pilot in four communities in Region 9, and the plan in this Budget is

that we will be expanding that, so more and more people can benefit from such a service.

What about district hospitals? One of the things that we noticed in a lot of our district hospitals was that many of them did not have surgical theatres and because of that...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister you would need an extension to continue to conclude.

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Bishop Edghill.

Motion put agreed to.

Hon. Minister, yes, you may continue to conclude.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. We started fixing the district hospitals; we have added new theatres. Right now, there are about eight new theatres that have been constructed in different parts of the country; but it is not only that. Last year we started putting in electromagnetic radiation (x-ray). We have 13 new x-rays that would be install between now and the next six months. They would all be installed and all of them would be digital x-rays.

In addition to that, we would be building six new regional hospitals and, as you know, Mr. Speaker, one the hospitals would be at Lima, one would be at De Kinderen, one would be at Diamond, one would be at Enmore, one would be at Bath, and one would be at No. 75. In each of these hospitals there would be about 75 inpatient beds. We would also have modern theatres, new Accident and Emergency units, and new imaging suites, including in each one of them a computerised tomography (CT) scan so that we can do better imaging. In addition to these six hospitals, we will be adding a seventh in Bartica. We have already started the design for that hospital, and it would have similar amenities. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Last year you said (*inaudible*).] If the projects started, what do you want me to do? *Do not talk about it?* I am very proud of it. Yes, we have seven hospitals now and, in addition to that, we have the Paediatric and Maternal Hospital which I spoke about last year too. That is 256 beds, and it is going to be a top referral hospital when it is concluded.

Apart from these hospitals, we would also be introducing new types of services including what we call telediagnosis or teleophthalmology, teleradiology and telepathology. This would cause the turnaround time for samples sent to the labs

to be much shorter. Our calibration with Mount Sinai Hospital is going to see operational efficiency in Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation improved drastically so that patients can have better comfort when they go there. We are also working on our oncology suite and new cardiovascular services. We are also going to be introducing new guidelines for diabetes. In another month or so you will see new national guidelines for diabetes. By the way, the Hon. Minister of Finance mentioned the first diabetic centre. I can proudly say that centre is now operational at Lusignan.

We have many things to be proud of. We have seen, starting from this month, that we would be increasing the salaries for nurses, doctors and every clinical person working in the health sector. A doctor who has graduated, three years after graduation, would now receive a salary of \$450,000 and a nurse midwife would now get \$220,000. Guess what? If you go to their manifesto, this manifesto here...

[The Hon. Member displayed the document.]

...it states:

“The APNU+AFC commits to implementing the following recommendations:”

And the second recommendation states:

“Health services, including the organised export of nurses,”

They wanted to export the nurses. We are trying to train our nurses and retain them by paying them better, and that is what we have started to do from this month. By the way, starting in the first quarter of this year, we will be training 1,000 nurses for the health sector. When we talk about progress and what we have been doing in the health sector, this is what we have been doing. I do not have enough time to talk about all the other programmes. I just want to thank the Hon. Finance Minister and commend this Budget. Thank you so much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, I would not waste too much time responding to the Minister’s shallow presentation. All I would say is if hypocrite was a person... The most telling thing from the Minister’s presentation was his comment that no amount of criticism of the Budget will change a single number. That is the most telling thing about the difference between us over here and you over there. The pursuit of ‘One Guyana’ speaks about inclusivity. It is very telling. [**Hon. Members:** (*Inaudible*)] *It gatt to affect yall; it must affect yall; Ah happy yall responding, Ah very happy.*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker, I beg your protection; the truth hurts. Guyana is a blessed country. We are blessed to the sense of our diversity, six races with different religious beliefs, cultures and ways of life – a way of life forged together through various struggles to emerge as one people. We are blessed as to have bountiful resources, anyone of which, if managed prudently, can deliver a better quality of life for all Guyanese. A wide cross-section of Guyanese, especially our young people across the political divide, believe that our failure as a nation to realise our true potential lies with the polarisation of our society by the two elephants in the form of political parties, and their inability to work together in the best interest of all. Noting these sentiments, the 2015 Coalition Government took a different path, the path of inclusivity, the path of non-discrimination, the path on which the resources of this country would have been distributed in an equitable manner, the path on which every Guyanese felt that they were included in the development of this country, and where there was a good life on the horizon for all.

2.17 p.m.

This translated into vast improvements in health, not only in the renovation of existing facilities and the construction of new facilities but, more importantly, improvement in the actual quality of service and access available to all Guyanese. It translated into a better delivery of education, which we clearly are still benefiting from today. Our vision and management of the public security sector saw the professionalisation of the Guyana Police Force (GPF). There was a stranglehold on drugs and executions were almost zero. Serious crimes were being solved and the general conduct of the Force was heading in the right direction. The Coalition era saw rapid infrastructural development in the form of proper highway roads, community roads, farm to market roads, the installation of sluices and drainage pumps, *et cetera*, all over Guyana, without discrimination.

I need not explain what we did in youth and sports, as the MP Christopher Jones was explicit. What we did for public servants, pensioners... I just heard the Hon. Minister trying to bring forward some belated increase for nurses, after we pressed them and almost threw them overboard in the sea, before they actually came forward with something for our dear nurses and public servants. As limited as the resources were, through prudent management, the Coalition was able to breathe new life into this country and to undertake some of the initiatives that the PPP/C were not able to undertake with the same level of resources. The Coalition restored

some level of unity, civility and hope to our society, but the greatest hope emanated from the expectation of what was on the near horizon, which was hundreds of billion in revenue from our newfound wealth.

Guyana has become a major oil producing nation, and with a growth of 63.2%, it has undisputedly become the fastest growing economy in the world. What does that mean for the small population of about 750,000 people who inhabit this land like farmers, teachers, nurses, doctors, fishermen, vendors and even students? Our oil wells are currently producing at a rate of over 340,000 barrels per day. That production will soon climb to above 600,000 barrels per day. It therefore means that, as bloated as the voters list is, very soon there will be at least one barrel of oil produced every day for every name on that list. The statistic is clear. It is a clear indication that the 'good life' for all Guyanese can be achieved, but it requires a government that has a clear vision and a plan. It requires a government that is willing to put the interest of Guyanese first and above their own personal ambitions, and that of their friends, families and favourites – a term that you all do not like on that side of the House.

The PPP/C's handling of our first oil budget was an absolute disaster. After their poor handling of the economy in 2020 and 2021, 2022 presented a golden opportunity to rebound and to place Guyanese on track to enjoy one of the highest living standards in the world. Instead, through their mismanagement, cronyism, and corruption, 2022 was one of the toughest years for the poor and working-class families across Guyana. The year 2022 saw the average Guyanese family struggling to make ends meet as the cost of living spiralled out of control. The Government Ministers seemed comfortable in saying to the Guyanese people that it was only the food prices that saw a high inflation rate. That is okay for them, because their *bread is well buttered*. When they leave this very House and go to their respective homes, there is food waiting them on the table. What they miss is that the issue of food prices is the most critical issue in the homes of the average Guyanese family.

The Government claims that food prices were inflated by 14.1% and this fans out from the consideration of a whole range of food items. If you look deeper, Mr. Speaker, and analyse the increase of critical everyday items, you will recognise that some of these items increased by as much as 50% to 70%. That is a fact. Rice was around \$1,200 for 25 pounds as of last year. Currently, the price is about \$2,100. Could you calculate the increase? They say we do not know Mathematics. I hope you could calculate it, Cde. Senior Minister in the Office of the president with Responsibility

for Finance. Flour and oil, oil that the Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy... I do not know where he bought his special oil from. It would be interesting if he could have stated where he purchased that special bottle of oil and the use of that oil.

When one visits the market these days, one has to walk with \$5,000 to \$10,000. A simple cabbage costs about \$1,000 to \$1,200. You cannot dispute these facts, Cde. Speaker. Those cannot be disputed. The Government seems oblivious to these facts. To put a shade over it, the Government says prices are stable. Stable, by no definition means affordable. Do you know what really frets me? When Mr. Gordon Mosely posted on his page that the price of chicken in Bartica was \$700 a pound (lb), their public relations (PR) machinery, the Department of Public Information (DPI), and the *Chronicle Newspaper* were quick to state that was not so; one could come by the Bourda Market on Sunday at 3.00 p.m. and will get it for \$500. What a travesty. It is a real travesty.

Budget 2023, while it is 41.4% bigger, it is the same vacuous document being regurgitated from 2022 and beyond. There are two major projects, as highlighted by the Hon. Sonia Parag yesterday. The first one is the Demerara Harbour Bridge for which plans were drawn by the Coalition Government between 2015 to 2020 and then by the PPP/C since 2020. There is no longer anything flattering or exciting about this, except that the bridge has become the subject of controversy to the point where they seem to have announced its construction before settling on where the finances will come from and what percentage of kickback will be available. From the moment the *Vice Media* clip of Mr. Su in the Vice President's (VP's) living room surfaced, those projects began to collapse. Where is Mr. Su? That is the question we must ask. On 11th June, the VP called for an investigation. On 12th June, that was followed by His Excellency. On 13th June, the Hon. Minister Benn – I do not see him in the House – agreed that there should be an investigation. Today, in January, 2023, we are yet to see the launch of an investigation. **[Mr. Mahipaul: Where is Su?]** Yes, where is Mr. Su?

I turn now to the second major project and that is the gas-to-shore project. The PPP/C has a long record of incompetence and mismanagement when it comes to huge projects like the Skeldon Sugar Factory, fibre optics and the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. My colleagues made mention of it. Based on their actions in relation to the Wales gas-to-shore project, and the secrecy surrounding it, we know that it is another tangled web. The PPP/C seems to see natural gas as a mere by-product of oil production, rather than the valuable

resource of itself. Why else would you see the type of carelessness that has plagued anything to do with Guyana's natural gas industry? The centrepiece of this mismanagement is the gas-to-energy project which is at the centre of one of the most controversial pieces of infrastructure in Guyana's history.

The Coalition conducted an initial feasibility study to assess the value of a pipeline and its best potential. The PPP/C tore up the recommendations of that study. It situated the pipeline at Wales which cost the country, at least, an extra US\$100 million, because it is far from the most ideal location. If that were not bad enough, they have refused to conduct an updated feasibility study even though the cost of the pipeline has tripled since that study was conducted. In what world does a major infrastructural project triple in cost and a government proceed without urgent reassessment? We have spoken about containerisation of natural gas which could save hundreds of millions of dollars, and which an updated feasibility study would help the nation better appreciate, but the PPP/C is not interested in sober decision-making and thoughtful planning. They prefer chaos. Why do they prefer chaos? With chaos comes confusion and in confusion there can be secrecy and we know what else could be derived from that secrecy.

There are so many secrets in the gas-to-shore energy project that it is hard to keep track. Here are a few: What is the unit cost of a gas pipeline? What is the unit cost of the gas the pipeline will supply to Guyana? Where is the agreement between the Government of Guyana and ExxonMobil for the construction of this pipeline? What is the final cost of this pipeline and what provisions are in place to address any cost overruns? It would seem to me to be utterly crazy to invest over US\$2 billion on every project without basic questions like these being answered. This is nearly triple the cost of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project and we know what a disaster that was. This energy project dwarfs Skeldon, and we know what a disaster that was. Are we going to keep repeating these disasters forever? If this was the worst of it, that would be bad enough, but this natural gas energy project is riddled with frightening concerns. Here is another one: Why are we working with a Venezuelan company to construct the gas-to-energy plan given the national security concern? Even if the company does its duty faithfully, what is to stop a Venezuelan agent from infiltrating the project and sabotaging it?

On the subject of this plan, we observe that a contract for consultancy services has been signed between Engineers India Limited (EIL) and the Guyana Power and Gas

Incorporated. What is the Guyana Power and Gas Incorporated? What is it? If this company is intended to operate the plant, why has the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) been bypassed? In fact, what is the scope of this new company's powers? This is the type of broad daylight upending of existing systems and institutions that the PPP/C is famous for.

I want to close on this issue with the biggest act of *eye pass* we have seen to date, which is the Government's claim that it intends to finance a stake in the gas-to-shore pipeline directly from cost oil. This arrangement bypasses the very House we stand in, rendering the National Assembly irrelevant, when the Government seeks to finance major infrastructural projects. The Public Procurement Commission, the Auditor General and the Public Accounts Committee are all side-lined in this arrangement. The Government is violating the Guyanese Constitution and the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) in a casual, cold, and malicious way. Our neighbours in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Venezuela) experimented with this type of funding and totally lost control of their finances.

2.32 p.m.

Are we to repeat their mistakes, Cde. Speaker? Clearly, the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) cannot be trusted with Guyana's natural gas sector. It is an obstacle in the way of progress and development. I now turn to oil. The PPP/C has turned a bumper year for oil revenues into a bumper year for fear of the management...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, a Point of Order.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, yes, please state that.

Ms. Teixeira: It is Standing Order 41 (1). I ask that the Hon. Member be very careful with reference to aspersion and allegations or innuendos in relation to a foreign territory with which we have a border issue. The Content of Speech warns us to be sensitive on these issues but, in particular with Venezuela. I ask the Hon. Member to be responsible. I am asking for the Member to be responsible in the innuendos he is throwing out to do with a country we have a border issue with. We are before the International Court of Justice (ICJ) right now. Such statements could cause problems at the World Court. I am therefore asking the Member to be sensitive, careful and not reckless.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Mr. Holder, I allowed the Hon. Minister to make the observation. I personally feel you have a right to traverse that area but,

experience teaches wisdom, and among the most experienced people in here are the Hon. Members, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, Ms. Teixeira and myself. I am sure you are a quick learner. Please, proceed.

Mr. Holder: Duly noted, Cde. Speaker. The only question I would ask the Hon. Minister is if she was... Let me move on. The PPP/C has turned a bumper year for oil revenue into a bumper year for fear about the management of the oil industry. It is truly stunning how many controversies they generated in 2022 with their shady tactics and disdain for transparency and accountability. Guyanese are starting to understand that they are in for a *rocky road* when it comes to the oil industry, and that nothing can be taken for granted, and that constant vigilance will be a necessity. Even basic things such as auditing ExxonMobil's cost oil expenses became the source of public outrage and concern. Recall that the PPP/C allowed the audit window for over \$US7 billion of cost oil expenses to elapse. They were so clueless about the proper management of an oil and gas industry. The Guyana Government had to meekly ask for an extension, which was a national humiliation. They have subsequently caused the nation to be apprehensive that the audit will meet even the most reasonable expectations while concealing its results for months.

On the other hand, they have refused to enforce the requirements for full coverage insurance that ExxonMobil has signed on to in Guyana's development permit, raising the spectre of an unmitigated disaster should there be a major oil spill. We saw Guyana's first oil spill last year as well and no report on it has been publicly ventilated so that the nation can better understand the risk in its face. These are the types of concerns that keep vigilant citizens awake at night. We know that oil is a tricky man to manage and have seen many nations fall foul of poor governance in the sector. Will 2023 bring more of the same? Sadly, this is likely to be the case, as the PPP/C is still to make public the new model Production Sharing Agreement. They have already started the year off on the wrong foot. There is still time for the PPP/C to get their acts together in the interest of all Guyanese. We urge them to put their country and citizens first.

I turn my attention to Region 2. *Budget 2023* is a colossal failure for the people of Region 2. While the Cinderella's County or the Cinderella's region has traditionally voted in the majority for the PPP/C, the PPP/C continue to treat them like a stepchild. There is nothing in this Budget that is transformational for the region. There is nothing in this three-quarters-of-a-trillion-dollars Budget that will cause the

people of Region 2 to say that it is progressing. Where is the regional agriculture plan? Where is the plan to turn around the ailing rice industry? Where is the plan to give the rice farmers the assurance that 2023 will be a productive year for them, that the millers will not continue to take advantage of them, and that the price of paddy will allow them to be able to put food on their tables and to live a comfortable life, at least for 2023?

Our farmers are struggling. Many have loans which they are unable to service. Many rice farmers are still owed two to three crops by the millers. The PPP/C is doing absolutely nothing for them. The PPP/C loves to boast about the one-off flood relief grant as though it was an initiative to propel and advance the rice industry. It has not. Additionally, many farmers complained of being discriminated against and not receiving the grant. There are several social media posts and videos to prove this fact. Many farmers complained that the assistance the Government promised in 2022 in the form of fertiliser did not arrive at a time when the fertiliser was needed and, so the effectiveness was extremely poor. I had to chuckle when I heard the Minister boast about two concrete strips, they called drying floors for rice farmers in a Budget of almost a trillion dollars. Surely, that cannot be the prosperity that this Government is building for tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, there are five programmes that fall under the regional administration, agriculture being one of them. When you examine both recurring and capital expenses, there is a clear indication that the budgetary sums will impoverish our already depressed farmers and other producers of crops and livestock. In 2022, there was little or no progress in maintenance of farm-to-market roads, other roads and trenches. The Hon. Minister, Mr. Mustapha, will soon take the podium and twist all the figures while Minister Bishop Edghill will provide the usual sermon to tell this nation that they inherited dilapidated roads and how many farm-to-market roads they had done to benefit farmers. Mr. Speaker, I am tempted to tell them, in advance, to shut the hell up, go to the region and find these roads wherever they are but I will not.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister.

Bishop Edghill: Yes, Sir. I rise on a Point of Order, Content of Speech. The Gentleman just said, “shut the hell up”. That is what he told Minister Mustapha. That is what the Hon. Member said, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I always take the speaker as speaking to the Speaker. The speaker speaks to the Speaker and, throughout all the debates, I remind people that when they say, “You do this”, they are admonishing the Speaker. I am allowing the Member to tell the Speaker to shut the M. I am listening.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, I hope I can get back my time.

Mr. Speaker: If you continue to incur interruptions, I will get tested to give you back your time but, so far, I note the interruptions for everyone.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Cde. Speaker. I am happy that Minister Bishop Edghill is offended. Minister Bishop Edghill do not go away; I have a few for you.

[Bishop Edghill left the Chamber.]

If we could recall in *Budget 2022*, over 120 roads were identified for completion by the very Minister who just walked out. The Member obviously does not want to hear and to face the facts. I have visited majority of those roads identified where more than 50% of them have not been completed and more than 25% of them are yet to begin. I would have been happy if the Minister could have stayed and answered a few questions. Not surprisingly, the works have not been completed and, in many cases, not even started. Mr. Speaker, when you look at the Budget Estimates, you will notice that they spent almost every dollar allocated. How is that possible? That is like the \$22 million that was given to that contractor that the Minister came out and tried to curse the...

Mr. Speaker: Here you are going to have to be careful, because you said, “given to”. As far as I know, under all Governments, mobilisation advances are provided. It makes it look like the Minister gave this person. Let us talk about the mobilisation given.

Mr. Holder: *[Inaudible]* provided. The PPP/C thrives on corruption.

Mr. Speaker: Again, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, being a senior person, was quoting from a book that mentioned corruption. Here now is a direct claim about corruption against the Government. Please, withdraw that.

Mr. Holder: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker. The PPP/C thrives on programmes that are not consistent with the principles of transparency and accountability. **[Mr. Duncan:** And good governance.] And good governance, thank you. Just last week our councillors asked for the projects submitted by the regions for consideration in the budget. They cannot get it.

Throughout the year we asked for bills of quantities for projects, we cannot get it. Because if they give it to us, their kickback schemes will be exposed. It is all about PPP/C's friends, families and favourites.

For the period 2015 to 2020, all contractors were given a piece of the pie. When we left Office, there were about 15 Afro-contractors and about double the number of Indo-contractors. In 2022, only two Afro-Guyanese contractors were given contracts. One got a million-dollar contract and the other got a measly \$500,000 contract, while others were given tens and tens of millions. In the region, there is a contractor now that has over \$1 billion, and several other friends and families of the PPP/C who are over \$500 million and counting. Even the seasoned contractors who were about for over 20 years within the region are not being given contracts. It is all about friends, families, and...

Mr. Speaker: Again, I do not know about giving. This is imputation. As far as I know, there is a bidding process. There is nobody in Government who gives out a contract by walking around handing out contracts. As far as I know, it has not changed from government to government, is that advertisements, the Central Tender Board, the Ministerial Tender Board, and regional tender boards are brought in the process. I consider what you are talking about as imputing.

Mr. Holder: Noted, Cde. Speaker. Since the PPP/C took Office, there has been an unwillingness in their approach to consultation for projects to be identified and works to be done in communities, so much so that the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) have indicated that their involvement amount virtually to zero and that they are not even given their Bill of Quantities so that they can at least monitor the projects.

2.47 p.m.

Hoppie Street in Dartmouth, rehabilitation in Dartmouth is a typical example. They refuse to consult with our five Councillors there. They refuse to speak with the residents there and so they went ahead and change the road from an asphaltic surface to a concrete surface. Now, the road is a foot high above the shoulders. It is too narrow for two vehicles to pass. Residents have a major problem getting their vehicles in and out of their yards. After I exposed this scheme, they belatedly tried to slope up the edge. As one may know concrete does not join. It is to the point where it is so sloped and an elderly resident slipped, fell and was injured.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I know, to continue, we have to join five minutes onto your time. Actually, it is now 2.48 p.m. so the four minutes of interruption that you had, you have gotten back. Hon. Member, Mr. Jones.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The perpendicular road, the sideline dam that gives access to that road was dug up. I presume it was part of the project. Now, the residents are told that it is no longer part of that project. There is no money there to complete that part, so it is left just like that – dug up and left just in that state. This is the identical thing. I want to suspect that this unfinished section will provide the kickbacks that they so desire as a new contract will be created to deal with that part of the road. The identical thing was done at School Street, Affiance. I am speaking from experience. I visited these contracts and interacted with the people there. There was a \$58 million contract there to do the entire street that runs from north to south. Suddenly, in the execution of the contract, only a section of the road was done. The \$58 million was used up and then a further \$19 million was added for the other section. This is the People's Progressive Party/Civic at its best.

The health services delivery in the region is at its lowest. Healthcare workers have been expressing great dissatisfaction in the way the Government manages these services. Allocations made for the purchase of supplies and pieces of equipment to enhance health services in the region are yet to be delivered and, in some cases, where deliveries were made they were substandard. A typical example is the river ambulance that was purchased by the Government at the tune of \$24 million, which was clearly not up to standard as was observed and commented on by hundreds of Guyanese on a *Facebook* post, featuring the Minister of Health cutting ribbons. Persons were quick to draw to the Government's attention that several proper ambulances were commissioned by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) former Minister, Ms. Lawrence, in Bartica and in Linden to the tune of \$11 million versus their \$24 million. This is the PPP/C.

The Community Health Workers (CHW) programme pioneered by Cde. Lawrence, again, was the programme

aimed at improving healthcare within the region. The PPP/C disbanded that programme and ventured into rebranding it, calling it ‘Nursing Assistants’ now. Whether you call it Community Health Worker, Nursing Assistant it is virtually the same thing. If Dr. Mahadeo wants to claim and the Minister wants to claim that it is a different programme and it is so much more advanced, I dare say to them that it cannot be the case with a programme which sees persons with no experience being brought in and trained for only 13 months, reducing the time of training to 13 months and then you call them that or you claim that it is more advanced. There are so many more things that are going wrong within the region and time would not permit me to mention all of them – in local governance, in the area of public security, crime spiraling out of control, hot spots being created – I will not venture into those at this time.

In concluding, *Budget 2023* lacks vision and a comprehensive plan to transform Region 2. As Cde. Walton-Desir rightfully said, the resources are available but the competence is lacking. As I travelled the region, the sentiments that I received is that the cost of living is killing people and the Budget has nothing for them. I spoke with the 36-year-old single mother, Padmini, from the village of Better Success who works two jobs in order to send her young 16-year-old daughter to the University of Guyana (UG) and who is paying a rent of \$60,000 for an apartment to stay in. She expressed that she was just recently told that due to an increase in cost of living, the rent will now be increased to \$70,000. It is these and other reasons that the Coalition has declared that it will make UG free again; that it will write-off students’ loans; and that it will provide a stipend to students to help vulnerable mothers like Padmini.

With ¾ of a \$1,000,000,000 Budget transformational projects such as the University of Guyana (UG) Campus in Region 2 is what we expected to see. We expected to see a shore-base being established to deal with the issues of unemployment, rather than a call centre – the region is being reduced to call centre jobs and 40,000 temporary jobs. In this Budget, the PPP/C seems to think that the only jobs that are ...

Mr. Speaker: We are now about two minutes over the five minutes. I thought that you were just about to wind up. Please.

Mr. Holder: Wrapping up, Mr. Speaker; wrapping up, Mr. Speaker. I want to close by saying, we would have supported this Budget and the people of Region 2 and the people of this country would have supported this Budget, if there was a

vision and a plan to bring real development and real change to the lives of all Guyanese. In this current construct, I cannot and we cannot support this Budget. I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Chair. Before I call on the Hon. Minister of Education, I just want to remind those who are watching our feed and making some comments, we are seeing a lot of race-bating, and words that are not parliamentary and very abusive online. To our viewers, if you continue this way, we will shut down the commentary online. Please, those persons who are making the comments online, keep them very respectful and ensure that you can make your comments without being nasty. Hon. Minister of Education, it is now your turn. You may proceed.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sir, perhaps we should be examining what example we, ourselves, might be setting to the viewers online. I know there is a young man who did not even know that we were sitting in this House. He thought we were at the Parliament Office, National Assembly. I would not call his name. He is horrified at the exchanges here. This is not a Sunday school; this is a parliament. The word ‘*parole*’ means to speak. There has to be a limit to what we ourselves, as individuals, believe is acceptable in this House and what is our duty here. I like the fact that we have young persons on the other side. In fact, that is what I said to the young-looking chairman when he was elected. I have to be hopeful, given that he has older guidance – I have served with Mr. Norton – that there will be some guidance and correction on this type of presentation in the House.

There is not much that we have been able to agree on. I hope that we can agree that this was a well-crafted Budget, and that the staff of the Ministry of Finance and the Minister who performed these duties did a fantastic job. I particularly like that we have a female Director of Budget. There have been entire world conferences focused on how women should be involved in the budgetary planning process. It can be seen when there is the involvement, the various sensitivities throughout the Budget. I would like to congratulate, particularly, the Director of Budget and her staff, Ms. Sonya Roopnauth.

While we have not been able to agree on much, I think we can agree in this House that certain issues cannot be made a punchline. The issue of domestic violence, whether from the podium or from heckles, cannot be made a punchline. In this House, if we are to believe the worldwide statistics, that Guyana has not escaped, one out of every three women is a

victim or was a victim, right in this House. It is both an insult to persons who are currently undergoing hardships in their domestic relations, as well as frightening to them, if we will make issues like that in this House, whether from the podium, as heckles or a punchline. At least that, we can agree on, I hope. [Mr. Mahipaul: Tell Kwame.] I said, we cannot make it a punchline; own it yourself. Besides, you and each individual here is not going to make this a punchline. Let us carry on from there.

The other thing I hope that we can agree on is that education is valuable and that the only way to permanently and certainly change the trajectory of any country, and the fortunes of any family and community, would be to ensure that any sort of provision that is aimed towards educating communities or individuals is supported. If we cannot agree on those, then we need to have a re-look at what our role might be or what we believe our role might be in this House. I will begin with the University of Guyana and attending all these discussions has to be a level of honesty. The Hon. Member who spoke just before me ended on the University of Guyana with the promises and plans for the students of the University of Guyana. The People's Progressive Party/Civic – it was Dr. Cheddi Jagan who started the University of Guyana. We understand, on this side of the House, how important tertiary education is. It moved from being Jagan's Night School to being an institution that everybody is coveting now. The PPP/C instituted fees and we had a reason for that. Throughout the period of the Opposition's tenure in Government, where many of the Opposition of these Opposition Members sat as Ministers, said nothing while the University fees, whether they were tuition fees or facilities fees raised year after year on the University students.

I am going to lay this over for the House and Minister Indar did it. If we have to be urged to remember truth, I believe that it is important for us to have, so that it is there in front of us for the rest of the debate. *Guyana Times* newspaper dated 7th April, 2017, states:

“UG Council hikes tuition fees by 35%.”

Let me tell you what that means for a student, Mr. Speaker. In 2014, the last year of the PPP/C's whole financial year, a student who was doing a Bachelor of Education paid \$127,000. By the time the Coalition left Government it was \$220,000. [Mr. Mahipaul: *(Inaudible)*] Two-hundred and twenty thousand dollars. Where were your tears then? How much you loved these University students then? A student was paying \$300,000 for a Bachelor of Law when

the PPP/C left Office. The Coalition changed that to \$390,000. For a Bachelor of Engineering, it was \$127,000. By the time the Coalition left Office that student was paying \$220,000. A pharmacy student was paying \$250,000. By the time the Coalition left Office, they were *holding their bellies* to pay \$340,000.

3.02 p.m.

A student of medicine was paying \$500,000. By the time they left Office – these Hon. Members here, who have all of a sudden developed this heavy sensitivity towards the students of the University of Guyana – they were paying \$590,000. These are the real figures. The People's Progressive Party/Civic is here based on promises made in a Manifesto that we went to the people of this country and said, this is what we will give to you to improve your lives. We were very clear in that Manifesto. We got the promises we made from consultation – village to village, home to home, television to television station. We heard what the people wanted and we said, very clearly, we are going to find a pathway to remove the debt that students had already incurred – former students and current students – and we are going to make the university free in the first five years. Do you know why people are not worried? It is because every other promise we made has been fulfilled.

Political parties have to stand with some amount of credibility when they speak. You cannot say in your precampaign – the APNU/AFC – in 2014 that you are going to double the cash grant then, when you get into Office you abolished it completely, give reasons for it and expect people to trust you. The children of this country and the students of this country are aware and conformable that before the end of our first term the University of Guyana is going to be free.

I have heard all sorts of things in this House. I have heard people put a percentage... Yesterday, some Hon. Member, I do not recall who it was, said there is a 1.7% allocated towards providing disposable income to the citizens of this country. For my dear citizens watching, there is no line item called 'disposable income' in the Budget. A whole host of measures taken are expected to one, lower the cost that people have to spend on their daily living and two, allow them more money in their pockets. In this presentation, I hope to show all the various ways that this Budget, at least through the Ministry of Education, is going to allow parents and families to have more disposable income in their pockets even as we build out a better and stronger future for the children of this country. In 2019, the school population was about 185,000 children and the APNU/AFC Government

spent \$18.6 billion – about \$100,000 per child. The freezer has gone on again, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: That is okay, Minister. I do not know who told them to put it on. I instructed that it be off. Thanks.

Ms. Manickchand: In 2022, with the phenomenon of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) which across the world saw a loss of children in schools, a loss of school population, we are able to have in the school population 193,000 children – more students. We will be spending \$237,000 per child. That is double the amount on each child in this country – our Guyanese children. A large part of that will be spent on civil works. I want to be very clear. The APNU/AFC, when they first... In 2014... I heard the most curious statement yesterday when my learned friend, the Hon. Member of Parliament from Region 1, Mr. Cox, said quality education is not about access. Any education has to begin with access. How is one getting this education if there is no access? I really want him to explain that, because that is an extremely profoundly curious statement. I understand why he may be saying that. It may be coming from a philosophy. In 2019, \$3.7 billion was allocated for the education capital budget. The Coalition sent back 58% of that – \$1.6 billion because they could not spend it. They could not send it because it was not important. Access, building schools and institutions are not important. That is what the APNU/AFC represented in this House within the last 24 hours. It is a philosophy. In 2017, they allocated eight per cent of the education budget to capital works. In 2018, they allocated six per cent and in 2019, nine per cent.

In 2022, the PPP/C allocated 23%. In 2023, we are allocating 33% of the education budget towards capital works. That is because providing access to the children of this country is hugely important to us getting quality education delivered to our children. This will get us closer to universal secondary education. Let me say what it is we plan to do.

In Region 1, we have to build schools at Hosororo, Kwebanna, Waramuri and Northwest which we are rebuilding because that was burnt by arson. Surely, we can condemn that act without any prevarications and ambiguity. In Region 2, the Abram Zuil Secondary is going to be finished in about three months. In Region 3, we are building two secondary schools. There would be one at Tuschen and one somewhere on the West Bank. In Region 4, we are going to complete the Yarowkabra Secondary School that began under the Coalition Government and was never finished. We are going to complete the Good Hope Secondary School

that, again, began under the Coalition Government and never finished.

Just so we can touch a little on the race issue that was introduced earlier, those projects were not given to any African-Guyanese contractor. They were not given to any African-Guyanese. They were not procured. They were not given. If we talk about friends and family, the Yarowkabra project was given, was awarded, on 31st December, 2019. On 31st December, 2019, when the election was scheduled for March, 2020. Those schools were never completed as a result of which we still have children... We got the funding for these schools, left the drawing and everything. Seven years later, there are children who finished the entire secondary programme and could not benefit from those schools that were given to friends. Friends who are not African-Guyanese contractors. We will also be building a school at Prospect, Region 4, for 1,000 children. In Georgetown, we are going to be rebuilding the St. Mary's High School, the St. George's High Secondary School, the Christ Church Secondary School that was just destroyed by fire and the North Ruimveldt Secondary School which was also destroyed by fire and is being rebuilt. We are extending the St. Winefride's Secondary School. We are extending the East Ruimveldt Secondary School.

In Region 5, we have achieved universal secondary. In Region 6, we are building a school at Orealla. In Region 7, we are building a school at Jawalla in the Upper-Mazaruni. In Region 8, we are going to be extending the two dormitories, Paramakatoi and Kato, as well as looking at accommodation in Kopinang. In Region 9, we are building a school at Karasabai and extending accommodation facilities, as well as classroom facilities at Aishalton. Region 10, like all the other multilateral schools, will benefit from our World Bank funding that will see us rehabilitating all the multilateral schools. This is our capital programme. I could tell you that from my head. In addition to that, all the dormitories benefitted from a condition survey where we know exactly which sink is not working, which tap is not working, which toilet is broken, which stairway needs to be repaired. We know across this country where it would make no sense to put down a school if we do not do teacher's quarters. Teacher's quarters are being built across Guyana beginning this year and dormitories are being repaired beginning this year. Additionally, all the Fellowship Practical Instruction Centres (PICs) that are under construction will be completed by this year. This is our capital programme.

The APNU/AFC built not a single secondary school in their five years. This is two and a half years into this Government. Not one secondary school begun and completed under the Coalition Government. I just forgot to mention that the St. Roses High School, in Georgetown, will be completed by the PPP/C.

I want to be very clear on the issue of procurement. All of these programmes, all of these buildings, all of these capital works – this is how procurement is done. We put an advertisement in the newspapers. We say, *hear ye, hear ye*, anyone who wishes to come forward and bid the lowest to do these matters, come. It then goes to the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) where – I have not gone to any but, I understand – there is a public opening of the tenders. Persons – not the same people on every project, but different people are selected through a lawful process – go through to who is the most lowest responsive bidder – and then they are awarded to that person. That is how procurement is done in this Ministry. We are opening any procurement of any item, in the Ministry of Education. I would say in the Government, but I want to speak for this Ministry to say one can come and examine it. We do not see that back – any of that. We do not see that back until it comes to Cabinet for no objections. I have no clue who was given and why. We could ask about why someone who appears to be lower in his/her bid, did not get it. There are usually responses for that.

Once we build these, we will be able to deliver the change that these communities need. When we hear, in this House, about equality and equity, we have to match that with action. Those are very nice words. They look extremely nice as a headline, but you cannot come here and lecture us on equality and equity when you could not build a single extension to a single high school anywhere in this country. Earlier this morning, the honourable gentleman from Region 9, Mr. Henry, the Hon. Member of Parliament, said that he was disappointed that the Ministry of Education had not done anything for... For the people watching, there are three levels of education in the public school system, nursery, primary and secondary. I repeat... [Mr. Mahipaul: *(Inaudible)*] I would be embarrassed if I were you too. I understand it. I would be embarrassed if I were you too. I repeat, the APNU/AFC did not begin and complete a single secondary school in this country – nought, nought. They sent back \$1.6 billion in 2019 alone. I did not go back to the other things. This year, we spent 99% of the capital budget and 98% of our recurrent budget in the Ministry; thanks to the Permanent Secretary (PS) of this Ministry, Mr. Alfred King.

That is because not spending means not giving service; spending means people get served.

When we deliver these institutions and teachers in the teacher's housing, you are going to see that result in a few years. You are going to see students graduating, and people being able to manage their lives and participate in this thriving Guyana, in a way that the Opposition never prepared them for. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] I agree. If we build a school and we do not deliver, what is the point? We all have to be invested in this delivery. The Guyana Teachers' Union (GTU), the Leader of the Opposition, the Opposition Members, the parents of this country, the Ministry of Education, the education officers – we all have to deliver. If we do not deliver then we need to get to a table and sit to find out why. We have to sit and find out why. If you want us to talk about equity, I will show you equity just now.

3.17 p.m.

Textbooks – In 2023, we are going to spend \$3.7 billion on textbooks. This will allow us to give every single student in this country, nursery, primary and secondary, all the textbooks they will need except for the enrichment courses. It is not only about money. It is how one organised that money. In 2021, we spent a little bit above \$500 million. In 2021, in the midst of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the world and in the midst of a big flood, we, the Government, were able to give every single Grade Six child student in this country all the textbooks they needed. There are teachers in this House, they could tell you about it.

Do you want me to tell you how that help, Sir? This is how it helped. This is how equity works. If one look at the students who are in the dorm at Turkeyen, in Grades Seven and Eight, there are 21 students going to the national schools: Queens College (QC), Bishop's High School, Saint Stanislaus College, Saint Rose's High School, and Saint Joseph High School. [Mr. Mahipaul: *(Inaudible)*] No. They have always been termed like that. Queens College (QC), Bishop's High School, St. Stanislaus College, St. Rose's High School, and St Joseph High School are national schools because wherever in the country a person is if he/she gets the right mark, he/she will be placed there. Then there are the A-list schools. We need to move away from it. We need to move away from that. We need to go to a place where every child could go to a school near his/her home, but we also need to make sure that we invest in every school and make sure that the standard is the same at every school near their home.

In three years under A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), the children in Grades Nine, 10, and 11... Number nine... That is equity. Due to us giving textbooks and cash grants, more children from places all over this country were able to score grades to get into the national schools. If one does not understand how that is equity, we could chat outside. I would be happy to sit with you. These will also be procured according to the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) laws.

School feeding – In 2019, the APNU/AFC spent \$1.8 billion. Three out of 50 nursery schools in Berbice received it; three out of 50, three over 50. Zero schools received it on the East Bank. Mocha did not get breakfast under APNU/AFC. Ms. Flue-Bess or Teacher Nima could tell you in this House that Mocha did not get breakfast in its primary or nursery schools. Zero schools in Linden, Region 10, received breakfast under the APNU/AFC. That is your equity. Under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C)... [Mr. Ramjattan: *(Inaudible)*] Mr. Speaker, Mr. Ramjattan, my honourable friend, is saying that we now get money to do it. The Government then got \$1.8 billion in 2019. I am getting \$2.1 billion, \$300 million more but in my Government, the PPP/C, all children in Grade six will get it. That is equity. That is non-discrimination. That is equality. That is care for children. You do not even that your neighbours in Berbice did not get this. You could not care less, through you, Mr. Speaker. You could not care less that your neighbours in Berbice did not get this. This is how we know that the APNU/AFC had no care for the sugar workers. It took away the parent's jobs and started a breakfast programme, the least it could have done was to make sure those children benefited from the breakfast programme. Look, I understand this emotion. If I were the APNU/AFC, I would also be highly embarrassed about my record. If it could own its record, then it might tell one that it is on the right foot.

Every child in this country, 89,945 children, will receive breakfast, and that will put more disposable income in their parent's pockets. There is no line item called disposable income, but this \$2.1 billion will go to parents for their children's breakfast meals. On that programme, we are hiring 241 cooks and nine monitors. Do you know how the APNU/AFC did it? I am willing to give you the names. Let us talk equality now. You give me your names who were cooking for you, and let me give you my names, and that is where you will see equality. We have said very clearly whether one is a comrade of the PPP/C or a comrade of the People's National Congress (PNC), if he/she does not cook for the children properly, nutritiously, and qualitatively

good, he/she will have to come off the programme. This is how you prepared breakfast; one person in one community was cooking for the whole region, and when he/she needed mayonnaise, somebody from Georgetown jumped in a bus and drove to Den Amstel to give he/she the mayonnaise. That is why it was never on time. That was how it was done. We would remember, too, that the APNU/AFC said that it was abolishing the Because We Care cash grant. This was after it promised on its campaign trail not only to do it but to double it and give it to private schools. It said that it was abolishing it so that it could give buses, breakfast, bikes, boots, growing shoes, and something else.

In 2019, APNU/AFC bought and gave to villages 21 boats. In 2022, the PPP/C gave breakfasts, cash grants, and 47 boats two years after we were in Government. In five years, it has given 21 boats, and in two years, we have given 47 boats. In 2020, it gave 18 buses. We heard yesterday from Hon. Walton-Desir that the APNU/AFC left the buses to rot. We received... [An Hon. Member (Opposition): *(Inaudible)*] I think the day the Hon. Member was referring to had been the PPP/C days; we did not. We have been giving buses even before the APNU/AFC came in. We came in and met 18 buses. The other Hon. Member who said, oh, you could take all the David G buses and drop the children to the Christ Church Secondary School, was being opportunistic or speaking in ignorance, and by that, I mean lack of knowledge. We in 2022, had 39 buses. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change had 18 on its big bus programme. Our bus programme is a periphery thing and has 39 buses. When you tell us that you had a superior programme, even that was woefully lacking. You have to understand that when you are defending... [An Hon. Member (Opposition): *(Inaudible)*] So, this is disposable income in people's pockets. When parents do not pay... I could tell you that this is not nearly enough. You are saying 18 was enough. I am saying our 49 is not enough.

The Because We Care cash grant – I will not belabour the point, but I will say this, yesterday, speaker after speaker, and I believe, perhaps, today also, were stating that we choose who to give cash grants to. For the Because We Care cash grant, any parent in this country, any parent in this House, or any aunty, uncle, or teacher, name them and bring them if they know children, could tell you that once the children come to the desk, nobody looks up to ask how did your mommy vote, how does your daddy pray or take off your hat let me see the colour of your hair. Somebody over there is saying it is a lie. I am challenging you to bring one single person who was denied this grant based on anything

else other than they did not turn up for it. The only eligibility criteria is that a child must be on the register and attending school. That is it. How is it discriminatory? Members of this honourable House sat here and told their supporters that it is a foolish waste of taxpayer's money. Tell the people that. Members of this House are on record. If somebody is resourceful behind me, he/she will find it so I can play it for you before my presentation is over.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. This is a good time to tell you that you will need an extension or the presentation will be over.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would love to ask that my Colleague has many minutes to conclude. Thank you.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you, Sir. The sum of \$8.6 billion, that is, \$8.6 billion in the pockets of our parents. That is disposable income, and that does not take into consideration the administrative cost. This programme has been audited live twice, and the Opposition will get the audit report in its hands, so do not come to us and tell us about things that we know are untrue because the parents of this country hear you. They know that when they go, they get it. They know their sign. They know that they have to provide their identification cards (ID).

Results – My honourable friend spoke about the results. She said that 30% of the students had passed in 2020 and 32% only had passed under the PPP/C. Mr. Speaker, 30% of a smaller number is numerically a smaller figure. To break it down, 30% of 10 is three, and 30% of 100 is 30. Under the PPP/C, 32% of 16,000 children was what the Hon. Member spoke of, but what the Hon. Member did not do was to the House what the real figures were. Thirteen percent passed when the APNU/AFC introduced something, did not prepare the teachers or children of this country for that examination, and had children crying in the examination room. The Hon. Member knows better. I believe her hands are tied. She is handcuffed to a position, but the Hon. Member knows better. There is a better spread. As I said, there is a better spread. We are seeing children from the hinterland communities that never before were able to pass. As I said, 21 children in forms one and two, people under us, got the textbooks, videos, and all of that, and nine children under the APNU/AFC got three levels. I have to say this benefited the

results of these children and is directly correlated to the Distance Education Programme that we had.

In 2020, we met... We had started the learning channel when we left office. The APNU/AFC said it would use it for political purposes, and I would be happy to layover the record of that after this. When we came in 2020, five months after COVID-19 had hit this country, there were 40 programmes done. There are now 1,800 programmes done in two years. All the grade six and grade five concepts and topics are available now to 85% of the Amerindian villages who never had the learning channel before we gave televisions, satellites, and solar power. In the next three months, it is going to be 100%. We have the largest television channel dedicated to learning in the Caribbean; boast about that when you go out of the country. All of these programmes are on *Youtube*. It was hidden when we came into office. I do not know why one would hide educational content.

We also started the EdYou. FM Radio Station. It is now the largest radio station in the Caribbean Broadcasting Union (CBU). We are actually better than the National Communications Network (NCN). I say that with great pride. The Guyana Learning Channel is run by Ms. Anieshaw Mohamed, a young lady in this country. The EdYou. FM Radio Station is run by Mr. Phillip Williams in Guyana. I am extremely proud of that work. That is the work that has allowed us to reach people where ordinarily unless you could afford a fancy lesson in Georgetown, you could not be reached. The Government then did not need money for this. Tell me why it did not do this. It said we got the money. This needed brain.

The Hon. Member raised the issue of Special Education Needs (SEN), so I want to address it very quickly. We have appointed an Assistant Chief Education Officer, Mr. Keon Cheong and a Senior Education Officer name Ms. Nikoya Alleyne. All 13 SEN schools are undergoing, currently a condition survey, so we will know exactly what they need. We plan to put an SEN classroom accessible in every region, so it is going to be more than one SEN classroom in every region.

3.32 p.m.

We also started for the first time a specialisation at Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE), where for the first time, it has 303 teachers specialising in special education needs. It had CPCE closed when I entered this office, and it did not start a SEN course. Say that to the nation; 303 teachers are registered on that program. We are going to also make the

disability centre that is at Turkeyen the Caribbean's diagnostic and Treatment Centre, which is how it was intended to be. Additionally, CPCE is going to, for the first time ever, they are going to be able to graduate more than 2,500 students because of initiatives taken there to go fully, although not solely online, and have entered 1,893 students when before they could have only done 500. We are going to have more teachers at a better quality.

I will close by saying this. Yesterday we heard about Charmaine. Charmaine is a single mother; she has three children. They are going to school. She has this part-time job. Charmaine is a single mother with four children, has the part-time job, and was getting these hardships. Charmaine would have been a single mother with four children under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), but she would not have gotten cash \$40,000 each; \$120,000 for her children, she would not have gotten breakfast for her children, she would not have gotten textbooks for her children and she would not have gotten transportation for her children. Charmaine's individual condition needs to be looked at, but Charmaine is better off under the People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C), any day of the week and twice on Sunday.

If the APNU/AFC continues to say that it cannot support this budget, it is essentially saying to the people of this country that it does not want them to get \$40,000 per child, it does not want schools to be built in the Hinterland, it does not want special education needs children to be served, it does not want buses and boats for the children of this country, it does not want trained teachers, it does not want more teachers, and it does not want teacher's quarters in the Hinterland. We in the PPP/C are thankful that our vision is not hitched to the APNU/AFC's wants and needs. We would like the Opposition to come along with us, and I am inviting it here openly. Anytime it is ready to work with me, I am ready to work with it—an open invitation. Come anytime. There is much we can do together for the children of this nation. I am also saying this to you if you are going to *cut your nose off to spite your face*, if you are going to try to harm the children to gain cheap political points, we will do this alone because our duty is to serve the children of this nation and serve, we shall. I thank you, Sir. [Applause]

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

[Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.]

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I stand here a little bit shocked by Ms. Priya Manickchand's opening statement in her presentation. I am shocked because she took the time to explain that a

young person was looking at the debates and could not believe the chaos. They are horrified. Sir, I remember being one of those horrified persons looking on at the performance of Ms. Manickchand in the National Assembly. It was the very Member that stood in the National Assembly screaming rape, rape, rape. Why did she not know of the sensitivity of that matter back then that she came to preach to us about here today?

Ms. Manickchand: That is absolutely untrue. The Hon. Member knows that is absolutely untrue. This is a serious issue, Sir.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I am willing to present the video to this honourable House.

Ms. Manickchand: I would ask the Hon. Member to lay it over in this House. Let us put this matter to rest.

Deputy Speaker hits the gavel.

It is an important matter. Rape is not something we play with, Sir. Let us put this matter to rest.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, there is a reason why we have Standing Orders. The Standing Order states that when the Speaker is speaking that there must be silence in the House. If there is an issue that comes to the floor, it is to be addressed in line with the Standing Orders that are published. I am sure everyone has a copy of that. Hon. Fernandes, I will say that the Standing Orders also dictate that every Member of Parliament in this House is an Hon. Member. I think that the Speaker also circulated, if I am not mistaken, yesterday on words that one may not use that are unparliamentary. Please be guided by this. Thank you.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. Noted. To continue to address something said by the Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand. The Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand stood there and tried to lecture to us to tell us what is equity. In her explanation of equity, she actually explained what is equality. There is a vast difference between equity and equality. One cannot misconstrue those concepts. They are very dense economic concepts that have heavy meanings. The Hon. Member actually explained equity as giving everybody textbooks. That is equality, Hon. Member Minister of Education. Equity would be in the distribution of textbooks if you give textbooks to the poorest families first, to the poorest communities first because they are the most vulnerable in society, and they need it the most. Just in case, the Hon. Member needs an avenue to test whether or not her policies are being effective, equality and equity, in order for one to actually measure if one's policies, particularly the

resources that one injects into the system, are being done in an equitable manner, one should be getting equal outcome. Unless every part of Guyana is actually given and has the equal outcome in the education sector, then the Hon. Minister of Education need not stand here and attempt to lecture us on a concept that she is yet to perfect.

I will head into my presentation now. Guyana has entered a period of profound power and financial power in the hands of Central Government. Due of this, rightfully so, Guyanese are demanding more today than they ever did before. Significant improvement in healthcare, higher standard of living, highest quality of education, a living wage, and dignified housing are no longer things our people hope for. These are things that they now demand, and rightfully so. With Guyana's population of about 750,000 as of the last census, I do not know where the next one is; the Government is now tabling a budget of \$781.9 billion which amounts to \$1.04 million per Guyanese and \$3.72 million per Guyanese family. The budget accounts for every Guyanese family \$310,000. This is the reality we are facing today in this House. It is, therefore, only natural for people to expect that this budget will include the provisions that would immediately end things like childhood hunger. It is natural to expect provisions that would make cost no longer a hindrance for persons achieving a higher education. It is natural to expect that in this budget, there should be provisions that provide emergency housing for the thousands of Guyanese families who suffered the indignity of living in squalors of many squatting areas and have nowhere else to go.

By such, it is natural. As natural as these expectations may be, one could search near and far in *Budget 2023* as presented by the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh and one will not find any policy measure that addresses those needs. Instead, in oil-rich Guyana, Guyanese are struggling to feed their families, giving up on their hopes of attending university and praying that the PPP/C does not target their homes, some built in squatting areas for the next level of destruction. Guyanese are forced to go through another year without living in dignity and living in the indignities of poverty in this country with a budget of \$781.9 billion being tabled in this House for us. Three hundred and ten thousand dollars per family, imagine what that would have done for the families who worry about where their meal is coming from.

The PPP/C comes to this House and boasts about the current Gross Domestic Product (GDP). It is necessary that we put the PPP/C's three years into perspective. The non-oil GDP growth rate recorded over the last three years of the PPP/C

rule is 2.6%. **[An Hon. Member (Government): (Inaudible)]** Mr. small intelligence quotient (IQ) over there is trying to heckle, his basic understanding of Mathematics is stuck at the level of $2 \times 1 = 2$, $2/2 = 1$. Sir, you need to take a seat and listen. I know the Hon. Minister Singh said last year and I am paraphrasing here every little child with a pocket calculator will get a different answer. Perhaps, the PPP/C is giving a glimpse into their approach to conducting Mathematical analysis necessary for making major economic decisions in this country, children with pocket calculators. That would actually explain a lot. However, I am confident that the Hon. Minister Singh, that sought to make that correction, Dr. Singh, for that matter is able to recognise that when the mathematical problem is that of an exponential nature and not simply $A+B+C$. I am confident that he was guided wrong.

The PPP/C 2.6% GDP was achieved by emptying the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) of every cent it contained at the start of 2022. Furthermore, in spite of the last three years being the only period of oil production in Guyana's history, in spite of the PPP/C's borrowings, in three years, more money than the combined total of the oil revenue of Guyana received in the same period the PPP/C average yearly growth rate still falls short of the GDP that the APNU/AFC achieved in the first three years that is of the APNU/AFC being in office. The PPP/C spent \$314 billion more in 2022 than the APNU/AFC spent in 2019. This represents an increase of 104.5% in Government spending and yet it delivered only a 2.6% GDP rate over the last three years.

3.47 p.m.

The extent of the People's Progressive Party/Civic failure is even more profound when one considers the fact that the PPP/C increased Government's spending over 23% of non-oil GDP, Sir. Now the learned Members listening here today, I do not want to say on the opposite side. Sir, anyone would understand that if you increase Government's spending by more than 23%, more than the non-oil GDP and you are receiving a lowered GDP Sir than that 23%, it simply means that other aspects, other sections of the economy are actually declining, but Sir guess what? Now we are to ask what sections are declining, Sir? What part of the economy shrank? Was it the investment? Was it the consumption? We are left to wonder whether Guyanese are starting fewer businesses or eating less food, Sir. This is what the information presented by the Hon. Minister of Finance shows. Thankfully, Sir, we have international organisations to help us answer all those questions.

Sir, I refer to polls published by the International Republican Institute (IRI) that shows 22% of Guyanese struggling to feed themselves and their families, and 57% of Guyanese do not have money for anything but survival. Sir, these are the facts we are looking at. This is the PPP/C Governance. Sir, as damning as the actual data is, if one comes to the actual budget that was presented in this House, the Hon. Minister of Finance actually stated that the non-oil GDP growth for 2022 was 11.5%. Sir, but then he lowered his voice a little bit when he came to the targets for 2023, Sir, because in the projection that he is putting forward for the growth of the non-oil GDP, he is now saying that, unlike the 11.5% that happened in 2022, in 2023 he projecting 7.9% Sir, the Hon. Minister of Finance came to this House and presented a budget of \$781.9 billion, yet he is telling us that the non-oil economy will be growing at a slower rate than it did last year. Brace yourselves, people, because that is what he is saying effectively. Sir, the PPP/C, my God.

Already struggling Guyanese were then faced with skyrocketing inflation. It does not want us to talk about this. Inflation affected the poorest and most vulnerable members of society the most because while general inflations total the whopping 13.7% in the PPP/C three years, food prices have been seeing the worst when it comes to price hikes, Sir. According to the Bureau of Statistics, Sir, food prices inflated by 30% under the PPP/C regime. Sir, that means if you have a family that actually budgets... If your family was large enough that you had to budget \$100,000 for food per month, now you have to budget \$130,000 more for food per month. Where do these poor families, the most vulnerable in society, get this additional \$30,000 to feed themselves? We are talking about the food prices here, Sir. Under these conditions, it should be no surprise that 22% of Guyanese find it difficult to feed themselves and their families, Sir.

Now, we see more evidence in this budget that the PPP/C intends to continue its monetary expansion policy with a callous lack of concern for the suffering it is causing and the countless children going hungry with its inflationary policy measures, Sir. With no changes in the monetary expansion policy and with a clear stated intention to drastically increase the money supply and the domestic market by importing massive amounts of money and currency held at the Natural Resource Fund by continuing its borrowing spree that we are talking about also by lowering the interest rate and by the reduce reserved requirement at the commercial bank among other measures Sir, the PPP/C still comes to this honourable House with a projection of 3.8% inflation for 2023, Sir. Less than the 4.1% that the Hon. Minister Dr. Ashni Singh stood in this House last year and projected for persons who cannot

remember. He stood in this House last year, and he said that the target for the 2022 inflation rate would be 4.1%. He was forced to come back here, Sir, to say that the actual inflation was 7.2%, but even with less data than he has, whilst he predicted 4.1%, I had predicted 8% with less data than he had.

Sir, expansionist monetary policies are inflationary by nature. That is such a difficulty, apparently, for the PPP/C to understand. The PPP/C wants to hope that inflation will reduce in spite of it taking no action to achieve the projected reduction; instead, it blames the international market for the inflation caused by the monetary policy that it has in place. When at the same time, Sir, they themselves are saying and the Hon. Minister has said in his presentation also that the inflation is caused by the food price increase. Locally grown foods are what we are facing the hike in prices with. When the Hon. Minister Kwame Mc Coy came to this House yesterday and brought the sugar and the oil that he took out of the hampers that they take and give to people and said that he got it from Mocha; he cannot bring that nonsense to us because the people on the ground are facing the hardship and the difficulties, Sir.

The Hon. Minister Dr. Ashni Singh stood and presented a budget that stated that the external debt was at US\$1.6 billion and the internal debt at US \$2.1 billion, totalling the US \$3.7 billion Sir, given the increased debt for household for 2023 is in excess Sir of \$530,000 Sir. This is the reality that Guyanese are facing today. With a budget, Sir, of \$781.9 billion, the debt burden that is being added to Guyanese shoulders is actually over \$500,000 per household. These are the realities that the PPP/C is bringing to us. Sir, to further elaborate on the domestic debt, the Hon. Ashni Singh went on to say, Sir, in his budget speech and I quote:

“The growth of domestic debt service payments was, in turn, largely due to the commencement of principal repayments on debentures issued in 2021 to securitise an inherited overdraft at the Central Bank.”

This information is false information deliberately spread to deceive people. That Mr. Speaker is disinformation. It was the very Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh who stood in this House and said that as of the 2nd August, 2020, when the PPP/C took Office, the overdraft was \$78.7 billion, Sir. After four months of the PPP/C being in Office in 2020, at the end of 2020, the overdraft was \$116.6 billion, Sir. A sum of \$37.9 billion in a few months, and the Government wants to talk to us, but that was not all, Sir, because just six months

after that, in June of 2021, the Government sold over \$200 billion in debentures to clear off the overdraft. It racked up, Sir, in less than one year, double the overdraft that it inherited from the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Administration on the 2nd August, 2020. So, how dare the Government come to this House and speak about inherited overdraft? That, Sir, is disinformation, and we will not stand for it.

The opening speaker on the Government's side, Hon. Member Mr. Joseph Hamilton, although he is not in the House right now, spoke of opposing and proposing as an opposition. Completely neglecting or pretending not to hear the numerous recommendations that continue to be pushed forward by Members of the Opposition, but Sir, let us turn our attention to wages and salaries. Sir, it was in 2016 when the Hon. Members of the Government's side, Senior Members of the PPP/C Administration, stood in the National Assembly and demanded that wages and salaries be increased by 50%. That was the now Government in Opposition, Sir, that was it proposing as an Opposition. That is how it understood it.

Sir, back in 2016, the budget was \$230 billion. It said public servants should get 50% salary increases. Today with a budget of \$781.9 billion, the PPP/C has absolutely no plan to increase wages and salaries, not even by 15%. Sir, there is absolutely no allocation that is going to provide for that. It talked about line item 6141. There is no allocation that is going to significantly increase wages and salaries for public servants in this country. It suddenly got amnesia when it comes to what it proposed as in Opposition, Sir. *To add insult to injury*, Sir, this one I take personal offence to, the Public Service Minister; oh, she is not in the House right now. I will speak nevertheless, Sir. The Public Service Minister stood in this House yesterday and boldly said that although Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh spoke in the budget presentation in 2022 about revising the Public Service salary scale; it was not until the end of the year that it actually began the process. This is the priority that it actually put on the public servants when it comes to wages and salaries, Sir.

The PPP/C has no excuse for not significantly raising wages and salaries for public servants, and Sir, I will call it out for having the audacity to tell public servants the reason why it is not increasing their wages and salaries in this country is because – it has been doing this –, Sir, is because if it increases more wages and salaries, it is going to put more money out into the economy and it is going to cause inflation, Sir. How dare the Government stand before the people of this country and say that it is going to inject \$781.9

billion into the economy, oh but if you give poor people money, a little bit more, you are going to cause inflation, giving rich people money does not cause inflation too Sir? That is what it wants to tell the people of this country. What economic policy is it looking at, Sir?

In 2016 with a budget of \$230 billion, the APNU/AFC Government gave 10% to the lowest earners in our country, Sir. In 2022, with a budget of \$552.9 billion, the PPP/C came and gave the people 8% Sir and now Sir, in 2023, with a budget of \$781.9 billion, we are yet to hear of salary increases of wages and salaries in this country for public servants. It has absolutely no interest in committing and honouring any one of those pledges it made because it was a political gimmick, and the people of this country are going to stand up, and they are going to understand, the same way they spoke about opening all the sugar estates and all of that, to date it has no plan on doing it. It knows the truth, but it continues to come here and be wilfully deceitful for the need of the right word.

Sir, as we talk about this Budget, I have to speak about unemployment. The PPP/C continues to take to the media with disinformation, and its most recent attempt to address unemployment; I think is one of the most sickening attempts that I have heard thus far. I could not believe my ears when I heard senior Members of the Government saying, 'Guyana today, if you do not have a job is because you do not want one'. Sir, if one needs proof, I am willing to take the video evidence and present it to this House. *To add insult to injury*, Sir, it is now saying that if you do not have a job, it is because you are lazy. I have heard them say this and Sir, and those statements are not only disrespectful to the Guyanese people but also blatant *eye-pass*, as we would say out on the street. To the thousands of University Graduates still searching for a job and Mr. Speaker, I think that it would appear that Senior Members of the Government do not understand the concept of unemployment and how it is computed.

4.02 p.m.

If they did know, they would know that in order for one to be counted as unemployed, one would have to be actively looking for a job and unable to find one. To go out there and say that persons who are unemployed are lazy or do not want a job, is disrespectful to the highest and I will not stand for it in this House.

According to the data produced by the Bureau of Statistics, youth employment was at 31.9%. The overall unemployment was at 14.5%. I have to say at this point that this data is

actually coming from the Guyana Labour Force Survey, 2021 Third Quarter Report. I will call the PPP/C out, also, on holding back data and hiding information from this country. We are yet to receive the Labour Force Survey, Fourth Quarter Report in this country. We had absolutely no report published in the entire year of 2022 because they do not want those facts to be addressed by the public. When those reports are published, we go through them page for page, line for line. They need to do better than that. Those numbers simply say that over 42,000 persons were unemployed as of the third quarter of 2021 – 20,000 plus of those being young people. How dare the PPP/C come to this House and say that in Guyana today, if you do not have a job, it is because you do not want one. How dare they say to the persons at the University of Guyana (UG), who are qualifying themselves, that if there are jobs in the construction sector, they should forget about their degrees in tech or whatever they did it in. Forget about that and go and throw two spades because that is the work available. That is in essence, the policy to deal with unemployment that they are bringing to us here in this House.

The PPP/C's idea of dealing with unemployment is to parade around this country and register persons for part-time jobs. That is their brilliant idea. Even that reeks of wilful mismanagement in the system. Tons of their supporters, who already are employed, are actually signing up as unemployed and now collecting *double whammy* when it comes to the money. Actual unemployed persons are left, once again, on the breadline. Unemployment in Guyana is very real. University graduates are looking for jobs and cannot find them. Graduates from technical institutes are looking for jobs and cannot find them. Youths trained through Government programmes are currently looking for jobs and cannot find them. Mr. Hamilton should know about this. A lot of them went through programmes that he presides over as the Minister. What are we to say of the brilliant policy measures that are in place by the PPP/C, in this budget, to actually tackle this unemployment reality of our country? There is absolutely none. There is nothing to be found in this budget.

You cannot stand in Guyana, in the National Assembly, and speak of a budget without addressing poverty, Sir. Let me speak to the matter of poverty. I cannot speak of poverty and not address the statement made by the Hon. Member, Mr. Indar, yesterday. Mr. Indar stood in this House and presented to this nation, a criticism of the APNU/AFC Administration. He criticised the APNU/AFC Government for spending too much on current expenditures and too little on capital expenditures. For those of you who do not know what

current expenditure entails, let me tell you. It includes things such as wages and salaries. It includes things such as old age pension. It includes things such as public assistance. Every bit of people-centred policy comes under current expenditure, and we will not apologise for spending money on the people of this country. We are proud and we would do it again.

Sir, it is mind-boggling that the Hon. Member, Mr. Indar would critique the Coalition's spending on capital expenditures because it was the PPP/C Government, during their campaign of the 2020 General and Regional Elections, that travelled the length and breadth of this country. Do you know what they were telling their people? *Yuh can't eat road*. Today, Mr. Indar stood in this House and said that we were spending too much on current expenditure and too little on capital expenditure. Some are saying this, and some are saying that. They have to pick a struggle and stick with it. The inaccuracies, and misinformation, and disinformation that they bring to this House are beyond comprehension to this point.

Today, we stand here with a budget of \$781.9 billion and the most minute allocations are being put forward for the vulnerable in society. Whilst draining the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) of every cent, the PPP/C comes to this House and all they could scrape up is a \$5000 increase for pensioners. All they could have scraped up was a \$3000 increase for public assistance. This is the reality that we are facing under this Administration.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I would say that in order to conclude, you would need a five-minute extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. This also includes a minute for the interruptions that were in the Assembly.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance stood in the House last Monday and proposed that the low-income mortgage ceiling be increased from \$15 million to \$20 million. Affordable housing is one of the most important needs of any family, particularly families living in the low-income earning brackets in this country. Government policies need to address such in a strategic and realistic way. Such a policy proposal may sound attractive to low-income earners. After all, that is what it is – low-income earners,

low-income mortgages. We need to deal with the reality of the proposal. It is only fair that we are honest to the people of this country. A \$20 million mortgage taken at a commercial bank for the period of 10 years with an interest rate of 5.95% – we are using the Republic Bank (Guyana) Limited's rate here – will require monthly payments of \$142,000. If you were to apply the 30% principle, the \$142,000 will need to cover 30% of someone's income, that person would need to be making over \$400,000 to access that 20% mortgage. This is the reality of what we are speaking about. The low-income mortgage ceiling of \$20 million is not for low-income earners and the PPP/C knows this. That is why when one looks at the size of the low-income turn-key houses they are building, it will not reflect the quality of a \$20 million home. These are the realities that we are looking at today. I have to say, low-income earners today are still left to see where they will actually be getting the policy measures to aid them in constructing their homes.

For three years now, we came to this House and tried our best to get the fat truth to our Colleagues on the other side. The PPP/C's approach to governance lacks humanity and this is something that was very visible only a short while ago in Mocha Arcadia. The budget treats Guyana's economy as though it is a small collection of large businesses. We cannot continue like that, Sir. In the words of the Indian Economist, Amartya Sen:

“Economic growth without investment in human development is unsustainable and unethical.”

It is unsustainable and it is unethical. It is unsustainable because of the simple fact that an economy is made up of the collective efforts and accomplishments of people, hard-working Guyanese and not a few large businesses. It is the wealth of the people in the economy, not the wealth of the economy that they are in. That must be the primary concern of any reasonable and responsible Government. What is their current level of education? What is their healthcare? What are their diets like? Are Guyanese afforded the opportunity to turn their dreams into reality? These are the questions that would be on the front burner of any responsible Government.

In closing, Guyana under the PPP/C is a place where 57% of our population does not have money for anything but survival. Guyana under the PPP/C is a place where 22% of Guyanese find it difficult to feed themselves and their families. Guyana under the PPP/C is a place where higher education is still out of the reach of the poorest families. All this, while the PPP/C continues to boast of having the

fastest-growing economy in the world. As predictable as the PPP/C's failure may have been, it is still profoundly depressing that we will enter our fourth year as an oil-producing nation with no real improvement in the lives and the standard of living of the majority of Guyanese families, who will continue to suffer the indignities of poverty in this country. We can do much better as a people and I will urge the PPP/C Administration to go back and take a look at the budget that they are presenting to us. Take a page out of the book of the APNU/AFC and actually spend more on current expenditures and the most vulnerable in society. This is the only way we should be able to boast about being the fastest-growing economy in the world. I thank you. [Applause]

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Minister, Ms. Walrond, to make her presentation.

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce [Ms. Walrond]: I rise to support *Budget 2023*, tabled by my Hon. Friend, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. Like our previous budgets, *Budget 2023* continues to make provisions for the development of our country in line with the fundamental philosophy of the People's Progressive Party/Civic which is to secure broad-based inclusive development for all Guyanese. Successive PPP/C Governments have always focused on and paid attention to what we believe are some fundamental development imperatives. These include ensuring that our citizens have access to education, healthcare, and safe drinking water, to name a few. We believe that our people ought to have affordable access to basic food items, such as would ensure a balanced and healthy nutrition. We believe that every citizen has a right to shelter and to own a home.

We have also focused on ensuring that our people are able to earn a living and secure their livelihoods through dignified work. Additionally, we have paid special attention to the development of agriculture because we are committed to food security for Guyana and all Guyanese. These are a few of the fundamental developmental objectives to which the PPP/C has always been committed. These are the reasons why I make mention of them now. The first reason why I mentioned these fundamental objectives of ours is that these objectives are as indispensable to the well-being of individual citizens as they are for our collective development.

4.17 p.m.

We consider things like education, health care, food supply and safe drinking water to be almost akin to fundamental

rights. That is why we are committed to providing certain services free or almost free to those who would otherwise be unable to afford them. It is why we have never wavered in our commitment to providing free education for nursery, primary and secondary students. It is why we continue to maintain a free public health care delivery system and it is also why we have provided a substantial subsidy to old age pensioners for access to potable water.

Another reason I am drawing attention to these fundamental features of our philosophy is, as simple and basic as these things are, they cannot be taken for granted. We cannot take them for granted because it is evident that our Colleagues on the Opposition benches neither understand nor believe in the importance of these things for development. When the Opposition says ... And I do say, for the purposes of this presentation, that when I say Opposition, I do exclude the Hon. Member Mr. Shuman for the purposes of this argument. When the Opposition says to the people that there is nothing for them in the budget that provides \$250 billion for investment in and delivery of health care, education, housing and potable water for hundreds of thousands of Guyanese, this is simply a reflection of the fact that the Opposition places no value on these things. For those of us who do value these things, it is incomprehensible that anyone can say that there is nothing in the budget for ordinary people when we have almost \$85 billion allocated for education. This includes the provision of free education at the nursery, primary and secondary levels to almost 200,000 school aged children, but the Opposition sees no value in this. We have substantial subsidies for tertiary education at the University of Guyana, at the universities overseas and under the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) programme, which has benefited almost 14,000 young people since its commencement in 2021. Yet, they see no value in this. They say the budget has nothing for ordinary people.

In the year of 2021, we extended the 'Because We Care' cash grant to all students which brought the number of beneficiaries close to 215,000 school aged children, but they see no value in any of this. Our critics continue to maintain that there is nothing in the budget for ordinary people. How can anyone claim that there is nothing in the budget for poor people, when we have allocated \$95 billion for health? Ninety-five billion dollars for a system that provides health care services to tens of thousands of people each year. A system that provides free of cost services such as, doctors consultations, laboratory tests, prescription drugs, maternal health care and direct subsidies for dialysis treatment, among other benefits. Many of our people could not afford

comparable services in the private health care system, yet the Opposition sees no value in this.

The political Opposition sees no value in the provisions for six regional hospitals and the paediatric and maternal hospital. They do not conceive that these seven hospitals will provide hundreds of jobs to Guyanese during their construction, thousands of high-quality health care jobs during their operation and serve tens of thousands of our citizens far into the future. No, all they see is a contractor obtaining a multimillion-dollar contract and beyond that they see no value in this measure. We have an allocation of \$72 billion for the housing and water sectors. This is reflective of our philosophy that every Guyanese should be able to afford a home and that all should have access to potable water either at home or, where this is not economically feasible, within a reasonable distance from it. The Opposition sees no value in this. All told, when we look at these sectors in which the State provides these social services to the majority of our population, the total allocation in our budget is over \$250 billion. That is almost one-third of the budget dedicated to securing what we believe are fundamental elements of a civilised society – health, education, housing and access to potable water.

I have not yet touched on our measures that deal with the other fundamental elements of our philosophy which is food security. Despite all of this, the Opposition says to the people 'there is nothing in this budget for you'. The Opposition describes \$250 billion in essential social spending as nothing. But we understand that this is because they truly do not see these things as important. If the Opposition believed in the importance of education, they would not have taken away the uniform and school grants, and they would not have hiked the fees for University of Guyana students by 35% when they were in Government.

Had the Opposition believed in the importance of universal access to safe drinking water, they would not have taken away that subsidy that the PPP/C Government had instituted for pensioners. If the Opposition believes, as we do, that every person should be able to own their own home, they would not have disbanded the Ministry of Housing. They would have made all efforts to ensure that the housing programmes begun by the PPP/Civic were continued. They would never encourage anyone who placed their trust and confidence in them to reject a guarantee of a freehold property in favour of trying to demand unrealistic levels of compensation for land to which they have no remotely viable claim to legal title. If the Opposition believes, as we do, that people should be able to earn a living through dignify work,

then they would not have callously dismissed over 7,000 sugar workers and over 2,000 Community Service Officers (CSOs) nor would they mock the part-time work. No party which truly cares for people would ever simply retrench almost 10,000 people and walk away without a backward glance. To add insult to injury, the retrenched sugar workers were forced to move to the courts to receive the severance that was legally due to them.

There is a signal lesson here. That lesson is that values matter. I am at *ad idem* with the Hon. Member Walton-Desir on this. The Hon. Member said that, if one looks at the budget, one would see what we value. Well, if one looks at the budget, one would see that almost one-third of all spending is dedicated to providing social services which directly impact hundreds of thousands of Guyanese every day, in every county, in every region, in every town, in every village and in every community in the country. That is the real reflection of our values. If one examines budgets of the PPP/Civic Governments over the decades, one would see those values consistently reflected in them. But still the Opposition says there is nothing in the budget for ordinary people and we must treat with that.

Let us imagine for a moment that what the Opposition said was true, as far fetch as it is. What would Guyana look like if we had nothing in the budget for health? What would it look like if we had nothing for education, nothing for housing, nothing for water, nothing for social security and so on? What would Guyana look like? It turns out that we do not have to go far to see what it looks like when a Government sees no value in looking after the fundamental needs of the people. We lived through that right here in Guyana in the 1970s and the 1980s under the PNC and we were headed right back there in the period of 2015 to 2020, when the PNC led APNU/AFC Coalition was in Office. I know that they do not want us to speak about these things, but we have to speak on these things. We speak of them because we have to understand the thinking, the values, the culture, and the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) of our friends on the other side. We have to look at their past in order to understand them in the present. In the 70s and the 80s, under the Government of the PNC, if one visited a public hospital, one would be lucky if one could even get Panadol to ease his/her pain.

During that time, the economic conditions in our country were so dire that our teachers were immigrating in droves to the Caribbean, Africa and to other corners of the world. During that time, one could barely find anything other than rice, sugar and salt on the shelves of the supermarket. People

had to line up for hours to obtain basic food items. During that time, thousands of our citizens could not even dream of affording their own home. They were forced into squatting in conditions that were poorly drained, bushy swamp lands without roads, electricity, potable water or communications. The rural poor, primarily the women and girls amongst them, walked long distances to collect water for cooking and other household purposes. At that time, industry and our agriculture were decimated, we could have barely fed ourselves, our people were impoverished. We were the sick child of the Caribbean, pariahs in the region.

Lest the Hon. Colleagues on the other side of this House be inclined to dispute my characterisation of those years under their tenure, permit me Sir to quote at some length from a paper published in a Journal of Africans studies out of the University of California, Los Angeles in the year 1982. The author of the paper was Professor Clive Thomas, and it is titled *The Current Crisis in Guyana*. Professor Thomas opens up by saying:

“In Guyana at the moment there is a fundamental crisis which involves every major dimension of national life.”

He goes on to say:

“At the heart of the crisis is the shocking reality that there has been the virtual destruction and consequent collapse of the production system in the country.”

The Professor then outlined the disastrous declines in sugar, bauxite and alumina between 1970 and 1980 and concluded, by saying:

“The PNC takeover of the economy has therefore been accompanied by rapid destruction.”

Bear with me please because, as we say, during the years of 2015 to 2020, history repeated itself. He further said:

“.... the system of public utilities has virtually collapsed. Electricity, water-supply, public transport, telephone services.... all have deteriorated to levels unheard of before.”

He then said:

“Less than 10 percent of health personnel is engaged in preventative medicine and almost all the health facilities are confined to the urban areas....”

So, when the Hon. Member says that it is ludicrous to put the hospitality institute in Port Mourant it is a reflection of their philosophy, that facilities should be confined to urban areas,

that no investment ought to be made in the rural communities. We need to look pass that to understand them and their thinking. Professor Thomas continues to say:

“In housing, the targeted production for the period 1972-1976 was 65,000 housing units. Of these 6,000 houses were built.... Since then with the collapse of the economy, housing construction is at a virtual standstill.”

When we wonder why it is that they shut down the Ministry of Housing and decimated the housing programmes, we must understand that this is reflective of their philosophy which places no priority on housing. Finally, Professor Thomas says in that paper, that the result of the PNC’s mismanagement, and I begin the quote:

“... has been an estimated decline in real per capita income of the order of 44 percent between 1976-80...”

“This declining economy has been accompanied by increasing unemployment (now estimated to over 40 percent of the labour force), widespread inflation currently at a double-digit rate... and shortages of everything from food to spare parts.”

4.32 p.m.

There we have it, not in my words, but in the words of one who not so long ago was a part of the APNU/AFC Administration. That is what Guyana looked like when the budget had in it nothing for the people. I know that some of our Colleagues on the other side would want to be quick to quote Professor Thomas on some of the criticisms he levelled against the PPP/C Governments. All I would say to them is that the article, which I quoted from, comes from a pre-reviewed academic journal published by a world-renowned university. Without intending to disrespect Professor Thomas, I rather suspect that the publications the Opposition may rely on would lack this requirement for rigorous academic scrutiny.

Our Colleagues on the other side do not want to hear us speak of these things. I know they will want to say that all of this is ancient history, but, as we saw in the period 2015 to 2020, history repeated itself with the same economic mismanagement and electoral malpractice that we saw in the 1980s. Thankfully today, the situation could not be more starkly different. Today, tens of thousands of our citizens own their own homes having benefited from the housing programmes of various PPP/C Administrations. Today, in hundreds of communities across the length and breadth of

Guyana, our people have access to safe drinking water. Today, our people have ready and affordable access to prescription drugs, including those to treat chronic illnesses like diabetes and hypertension. We have instituted an unconditional grant for dialysis treatment for anyone who requires it.

Today, we are investing significant sums in upgrading healthcare facilities across the length and breadth of the country, not just in the urban areas. Our primary and secondary schools’ performances have been steadily improving as we continue to invest in the construction and upgrading of school infrastructures, as we heard from my Hon. Colleague, Minister Manickchand. We are working on upscaling teachers as well as improving their salaries and working conditions. Today, we are no longer the sick child of the region. Our leadership in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is acknowledged. Our Caribbean brothers and sisters are once again making their way to our shores in search of prosperity as they did in the pre-independence era. Today Guyanese can travel to the United Kingdom (UK) without a visa because our people are no longer presumed to be economic migrants, since we have rebuilt our economy and restored Guyana in the eyes of the international community.

We have made all of these gains because of that fundamental people-centred development philosophy of which I spoke. *Budget 2023* is based on that same philosophy that delivered those gains between 1992 to 2015 and from 2020 to present day. The Opposition must oppose, and we take no real issue with that. Ideally, we would wish for rational and constructive criticisms, but we have what we have. We must treat with the contributions of the Opposition such as they are.

Part of the reason for this recurring claim that there is nothing in the budget for ordinary people is that the Opposition looks at each budget in isolation, as though every year the country resets and starts from scratch again. Each budget is merely the current year’s provision within a multiyear programme. That is why you will see the budget framed in a context of a medium-term expenditure framework. Bearing this medium-term framework in mind, I will treat with some of the criticisms levelled by the Opposition. Most of the Members on the other side have spoken about inflation. They said that we have nothing in the budget to combat inflation. I am no economist but even the little economics that I know tells me that if one is looking to a fiscal policy to combat inflation, his or her options are essentially to increase taxes, reduce spending or both. When

it comes to inflation, we are not trying to raise taxes like the Coalition did or reduce social spending as they did. We are committed to spending that improves the lives of today and builds prosperity for tomorrow. Our challenge is to manage that spending in a way that ensures inflation is restricted to a manageable level. To put it simply, we have to grow at a pace which we can sustain.

The largest contributor to inflation is the price of fuel and petroleum products. Among the latter are fertilizers, critical of course to our agricultural industries. We have removed excise tax on fuel completely in 2022 and this measure has been preserved in 2023. Preserving this measure is a deliberate policy choice. How could the Opposition rationally contend that we have made no provision that provides relief for increases in cost of living? In 2022, we also provided a massive fertiliser subsidy – \$1 billion – to farmers. Taken together, these two measures, the excise tax remission and fertiliser subsidies, contained price increases in production, transportation and distribution for fresh fruits, vegetables, and livestock. These measures also allowed for cash crop farming to rebound after the disastrous floods of last year. We contend that were it not for these policies, food prices would have been far higher than they are now. How could anyone rationally contend that we have done nothing to deal with the cost of living?

In 2020, we removed value-added tax (VAT) on data and electricity. In subsequent years, we reduced excise tax on concrete and other construction materials. We removed 200 or so taxes that were instituted by the Coalition Government. We have made a deliberate policy choice to preserve these measures in *Budget 2023* and all of these have served to cushion the impact on the man and woman on the street. How really could it be said that there is nothing to deal with the cost of living increases?

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in its *Caribbean Economic Quarterly Report* for December, 2022 recognised all of these measures as policy responses aimed at easing the impact of increases on the population. The IDB recognises them, but the Opposition tells the people that they do not exist. For good measure Mr. Speaker, I will also draw your attention to that IDB Report that also acknowledges that the inflation we face is primarily induced by global events, including the Russia/Ukraine conflict. Mr. Speaker, if you would recall in 2021, even though inflation was measured at 5.7%, we instituted a public sector salary increase of 7% across the board. Public servants would not only, therefore, preserve their real wages but increase them as a result. In 2022, in the face of an inflation rate of 7.2%,

the minimum increase for public servants was 8% across the board with further increases for our hardworking nurses, policemen, soldiers and other members of the Disciplined Services. These claims that we have no provisions to cushion the effects of rising prices cannot stand up to serious scrutiny. It is not a serious conversation.

I had the opportunity to listen to some of our Colleagues, senior Members of the Alliance For Change, speaking on a television programme on 14th January, “the Alliance on the move”. On that programme, the Hon. Members called for 100% subsidy for the Berbice Bridge, the Demerara Harbour Bridge and for all the ferries and bridge crossings. They called for 100% subsidy of university fees, cancellation of all student debts, almost doubling of the minimum wage at one stroke and to top it all off, they called for a reduction in VAT. To sum it up, they basically called for substantial increases in expenditure together with reductions in tax revenues. To pay for all these additional subsidies and for all of this additional spending, their attitude was basically ‘we have oil money, so let us spend it’. It is this same kind of attitude that led this country to rack and ruin in the 1970s and 1980s. I am not saying this to insult the Hon. Members. I am saying this to put the Guyanese people on notice that this is what awaits us if we let the APNU/AFC get their hands on the levers of Government again with this type of thinking. What would they have us do, when as surely as night follows day, oil prices dropped from the current geopolitically induced high.

Just this morning when speaking to a group of potential foreign investors, my Hon. Colleague, Dr. Singh, made the point that in the recent past, we have seen oil prices as high as a \$140 per barrel and we have seen them as low as \$20, and even lower per barrel. When we no longer have oil-revenue applied subsidies, will they have us remove all those subsidies and expose the Guyanese people to massive sticker shock, like they did in the 1970s or having to increase the wage bill to unsustainable levels? Would they have us implement the massive retrenchment we saw in the 1980s, when public servants were severed in the thousands or like in the 2020 period when they retrenched the sugar workers and the CSOs? After they racked up the expenditure to unsustainable levels, we can look to history again to see what they would do when the oil prices drop. Mr. Speaker, permit me to quote Professor Clive Thomas again from the same paper. Faced with the self-induced economic crisis, the Professor stated:

“The main focus of government policy has been to seek to reduce workers’ living standards in order to reduce consumption...”

I will continue:

“To achieve this the government’s assault on the workers’ standard of living began in 1976 and the main mechanisms used were:

- (1) the removal of all government subsidies...
- (2) increased taxation...
- (4) retrenchment of workers...
- (5) a freeze on all wages...
- (7) cuts in social spending...”

Does this sound familiar, Mr. Speaker? Many of us know what usually happens when a country has to look to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for assistance. It usually comes, the IMF, with a standard laundry list of onerous measures that impose severe hardships on the population. But Professor Thomas wrote that the PNC programmes were so severe and so brutal that the IMF did not have to impose any additional austerity measures other than restricting Government borrowing. He asserted that:

“The anti-working class character of the government’s policy was already formed before its approach to the IMF...”

From the interventions that we are seeing from the opposite side of this honourable House, we can see that if the Opposition had their way, what they would do would be for us to return to the reckless policies of the 70s and 80s. They would *lick out* the oil money in the good years, like they squandered the sugar levy, and when the prices drop, true to their anti-working class credentials, it is the poor amongst us who would have to shoulder the brunt of the burden to take us to economic recovery. I know that they do not want to hear these things. They do not want us to expose their history, but, as I said, history repeated itself. Look what happened in 2020. In 2020, almost 30 years after we thought we had closed the...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, in order to continue, you would need a five-minute extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that my Colleague is given a minimum of five minutes to conclude. I would like her to have much more time of course.

Motion put and agreed to.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, you may proceed.

Ms. Walrond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Look what happened in 2020. In 2020, almost 30 years after we thought we had closed the door on a particular sordid chapter of our history. Almost 30 years after we thought we had left the nightmare of electoral malpractice behind, came the worse attempt at election rigging. That disgrace led the OAS Observer Mission Head to declare that he had:

“...never seen such a transparent effort to alter the results of an election...”

They do not want to hear it, but I am raising these things because I want to say to all Guyanese who believe that the economic bungling and the electoral malpractice of the 1970s and 1980s are firmly in our past, they would be sadly mistaken. The period 2015 to 2020 shows clearly, that the leopard has not changed its stripes. If we dare to think that even for a minute the danger is behind us, we have powerful proof to the contrary given to us literally today. That proof lies in the fiction that they continue to promote about the 2020 General Election. Every time they refer to us as the ‘installed Government’ as several of their speakers did yesterday and again today, what they are saying about the election is that we lost, they won and that the real result of the election is in the numbers on the bedsheet, on the spreadsheet which they can prove from the Statements of Poll (SOPs), which the former President has never seen but which the current Leader of the Opposition has safely in his possession waiting to produce when the time is right to do so.

4.47 p.m.

We cannot safely say that these things are in our past because they have passed on the doctrine to the generations of their party. Some of the most ardent defenders of that big fiction were the young ones, the future of the Opposition. They were the ones who were there at the recount, doubling down on the big fiction every day: Hon. Member Hughes, Hon. Member Patterson, Hon. Member Jones, Hon. Member Duncan, and Hon. Member Mahipaul who, I understand, is the youngest Member of this honourable House. The culture and the values have been handed down to the next generation on that side of the House. So, we know what we can expect when the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) is to return to office, even with that generation in leadership. When we speak of development, we usually implicitly mean social and economic development. I have spent a lot of time on our measures for social development because it is important to

us to remind the Guyanese people that, even as we pursue transformative economic development, we remain true to our commitment and our core as a people-centred social development, something which the Opposition would have them believe is non-existent.

I wish, therefore, to turn to some aspects of our economic development as regard tourism, industry and commerce. The Caribbean Premier League (CPL) will return to Guyana in 2023, and it will again in 2024. In 2022, almost as immediately as we announced the dates for cricket carnival, hotels were fully booked for that period. In addition to hotel bookings, we had almost 250 potential bed and breakfast facilities that were inspected and conditionally approved to provide service to visitors.

Cricket carnival had tremendous economic impact on a range of Guyanese, including transportation service providers, bed and breakfast owners, small vendors, artists and performers, in addition to hospital and restaurant operators. It drove record levels of visitor arrivals in September, 2022. Our visitor arrival rates for 2022 exceeded 291,000, a 94% increase over 2021. This performance exceeds even the global recovery rate of 65% and the regional average of 81%. We aim to build on this success of cricket carnival, and as I said a little earlier, the event will return this year and next year, in keeping with our plans to attract major events and conferences to Guyana, with their spill over effects on our service economy. I would note that a strategy like this would have no prospect of success if our country had not been returned from a pariah status. That certainly would have been the case if we had not foiled the attempts to roll back our democracy in 2020.

Mr. Speaker, we continue with our quests to open up new air routes to destination Guyana. You may recall that in 2021, we added a new carrier in the Caribbean, providing access through Barbados to several Caribbean countries and beyond. In 2022, another airline, FlyAllways, commenced operating a Guyana to Cuba route. In a few weeks, we will witness the inaugural flight of British Airways, which will commence flights from early 2023, providing a virtually direct route to London. These developments will increase the viability of our business and leisure tourism market.

I am wrapping up, Mr. Speaker. In the area of small businesses, we have dispersed well over 2,000 grants directly to small, medium and micro enterprises in the two years since coming into Office – over 2,000 grants. Last year, we dispersed 1,430 grants to these enterprises through the Small Business Development Fund (SBDF). In the five

years of the Coalition Government, it distributed a mere 560 grants. These grants go mainly to small operators, the man and the woman in the street looking to run a business, and to young people. By this, I mean to say those very people who the Opposition claims to care for and say that we do nothing for. We have distributed over 2,000 grants in under three years while the Opposition distributed 560 grants in just over five years.

In my inaugural presentation to this House, I pledged the Administration's commitment to operationalise the Belvedere Business Incubator Centre (BBIC) within our first term in Office. You may recall the due attention to the fact that the Coalition held a purported launch of this facility just prior to the 2020 election – an election gimmick clearly. Might I remind the House that the facility they launched was in fact an empty building – no equipment, no furniture, no staff and not even any electricity? Today, I wish to place on record that on 11th October, the Belvedere Business Incubator Centre had its relaunch. I am pleased to report that the Centre is operational and the businesses within Region 6 have begun to benefit from this investment. There are more than 2,000 pounds of agro-processed products, including a range of Indigenous flowers, that were already produced at the Incubator.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, I do recall some sentences ago, I think it was two minutes ago...

Ms. Walrond: I will wrap up.

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, some two minutes ago, you said you were wrapping up. I think your time has expired. I will give you 30 seconds.

Ms. Walrond: Mr. Speaker, these are just some of the initiatives in *Budget 2023* through which we shall be improving lives today and building prosperity for tomorrow. I unreservedly support the measures contained in this budget and I urge all of the Members of this honourable House to support likewise. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. I now call on the Hon. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley to make her presentation.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Good afternoon, all. I should also say happy New Year, since I have been here... Mr. Speaker, as I stand here to give my response to *Budget 2023*, it would be remiss of me to not start off by speaking to some things I believe should be dealt with. We normally rise and speak about this House being an august House, and I am not too sure if sometimes we understand what that means. Sometimes we say "August", not recognising that is not how

the word should be pronounced. It means respected and impressive. When I sit here... and it is not only myself. I heard the Hon. Priya Manickchand speak to it, that is the crass and uncouth behaviour of many Members of the National Assembly, even when they are not at the podium. It resonates and it gets online, even if one is not in front of the microphone. People in this National Assembly seem unable to live by the standard that should be set as Members of this House. We are asked to, and in some cases demanded...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Members, Hon. Kwame McCoy, it is important that every Member is given a fair opportunity to be heard, and I would like to hear what the presentations are.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: We are asked, and it is often times demanded, that we call each other "honourable". That title, I think, requires also a certain level of responsibility by those who hold that title.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to firstly state that as Members of Parliament, we should have or hold higher standards and recognise that when we are in this National Assembly, it is not about a laugh and a joke. It is about representing the people and the interests of the people, and so everything that we say and do should be in the interest of the people. On that note, I should also add that it also bothers me when Members of Parliament (MPs), in particular Ministers, come to this National Assembly and behave in this manner. How it is they treat their staff in their ministries? That, for me, is bothering, and it begs the question whether the public servants in the various ministries are working under conditions that are not the best.

I have the honour – I am not sure if it is the fortune or misfortune – of shadowing the Minister of Public Service. Yesterday, though I was not here, I was able to listen to the presentation – if we can call it a presentation – from the Minister of Public Service. At the end of that presentation, the only two things that came to mind were whether or not the Minister was actually in charge of the Ministry of the Opposition or the Ministry of the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL). I could not figure out that it was the Ministry of Public Service. The Minister spent 20 or 25 of her 30 plus five minutes speaking about what is happening in the Opposition, another five about what is happening in the GOAL, and very little to nothing about what is happening in her own Ministry.

I must give congratulations to the Minister of Education who, this morning...I may not have agreed with everything that the Minister said, but the Minister spent most of her minutes giving us a sense of what she plans to do for her

Ministry, and I must commend her for that. Dr. Frank Anthony as well did that today. So, I must commend the two of them for that. The rest of the Ministers came here and gave the Guyanese people no sense of what exactly they plan to do with this money they have placed in this budget. I think that is sad. I think that we should expect more from the Ministers. Yes, they know what they are doing, but they are here to let the Guyanese people... [Mr. Mahipaul: They do not know what they are doing.] Well, I hope they know what they are doing, and if they do, then here is where they let the Guyanese people know that they are coming to this Assembly, they are asking for \$788 billion, and what they plan to do with the money they are asking for.

We heard from the Minister of Labour. Did we hear anything about what is happening in labour? We heard from the Minister of Public Service. I do not know if that is the worst speech which I have heard in the decades I have followed Parliament. I was more disappointed in the Minister because I expected more of the Minister. I do not know her personally, and I am sure her family and friends think she is a wonderful person, but what was portrayed yesterday, I think, as Members of Parliament, we could, and we should do better. There is always a place for politics. There is always a place for showing that you know somebody's personal information. There is always a place for that, but when we stand here in the National Assembly, it is my honest opinion that we should get to the business of the Assembly and mind our behaviour and attitude when we are presenting here.

I am wondering now about the public servants. Since the Minister spoke very little about the public service, there are a lot of questions that I do have. I am not sure when we will be at a place for her to be able to respond to them. When you look at the budget, and you look at the indicators...For example, the indicators that had done well over the last year were those that dealt with training. There was a lot of work done where training was concerned. There was a lot of work done where the GOAL is concerned, but all of the indicators that looked at the actual policies to help the public service move from where it is to where it should be, have all reduced from where they were last year. Their targets and where they actually got to were reduced from 2021 to 2022. I think that is something that we have to look at. If you are going to come to the National Assembly and you are going to be asking for moneys, then you need to say what policies you are going to be implementing to ensure that they moneys are spent effectively.

5.02 p.m.

In spite of everything that is being said, I am hoping that some of this comes over and it comes across as not being facetious and not as me trying to demean anyone but to help us to understand that more is expected of us and more should be done while we are in this Assembly. I have no clue whether or not, over the last two years, any new policies have been thought of and have been implemented to ensure that public servants are better off now, in terms of them becoming more professional, ensuring that their work space is in a ... what is it they use to get the work done, and the services they have to carry out for the public, whether that has gotten better over time. Hopefully, at some stage, the Minister would be able to speak to these things.

I also noticed that in the 2023 Budget, there is some talk about new policies being implemented. I heard the Minister of Labour, at some point, speak to the fact that some outside person did an assessment of the labour force. That is actually a good thing, but I am hoping that we could get some more information on that. Maybe that assessment could be laid in the House so that the country could get a sense of where we are where labour is concerned and what is required for us to move that forward. There is apparently a lot of conversation right now about bringing persons into the country because there is some sort of labour shortage. My question then is, what are we doing, as a country, to ensure that, before we bring persons here, Guyanese people who need jobs and are looking for jobs are in a position to take those jobs? A link between the training that is happening in the public service and what is happening at the Ministry of Labour is actually necessary. I am hoping that we can do something to deal with that.

Mr. Speaker, I need to comment on something which I forgot and which I should have done a bit earlier. The Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce just spoke. She was very good, and I commend her, too, for citing Professor Thomas. She did it quite a few times and I was actually shocked that she went to Professor Thomas to quote him. If you went to the 1970s, I will bring us a bit closer to. The same Professor Thomas, whom she found to be very honourable and very sound that she was able to quote him, also said we had an underground economy that accounted for \$188 billion between the years 2001 and 2008. He estimated that the public procurement frauds which took place under the PPP/C – and this is in *Kaieteur News* newspaper – amounted to about \$140 billion. He said he calculated from the estimates provided by none other than Guyana's former Auditor General, Mr. Anand Goolsarran, in Part XI of a series on public financial management. While it is all good to go back all the way to the 1970s when it was a whole

totally different dynamics in the world economy and the local economy during that time, we are going closer to 2001 to 2008 when it was said by that same gentleman what was happening when the PPP/C was in Government. So, we can use the same quotes. The Minister also mentioned and spoke about how it is that the APNU/AFC would want to spend the oil moneys. She gave a hypothetical situation and asked if, for some reason, the cost of oil reduces, what would then happen? All the subsidies that we gave to persons will then have to dry up and all of those things.

Let us look at it this way. The Minister has not recognised that what they have just done with this particular budget is drain all of the current budget and put it into capital projects. Let us do that 'what if' scenario. What if the cost of oil drops now? No money is going to the people, but it is going to the capital projects. If the cost of a barrel of oil drops, what then happens? Those contracts that you have started for which you have used the oil moneys would have to stop halfway. The people would have received nothing from the oil funds and so the people would have been left no economically different than they are currently. The capital projects would be there for everybody to see, half done, as with the Skeldon Sugar Factory, as with the fibre-optic cables and other things that have been done in the past.

When you are making such statements, you have to be clear as to what exactly it is that you are saying. What I think my colleague, Ms. Juretha Fernandes, was saying earlier is focusing on the current part of the budget is just as important and it cannot be left to the whims and fancies of anyone, without recognising that it is important to increase the salaries and wages of public servants and also ensuring that people have access and opportunities to good funding so that they remove themselves out of poverty.

Mr. Speaker, do you know what is sad and what I recognise? There are obviously two different philosophies. There is a philosophy that focuses on infrastructure and there is a philosophy that focuses on people, in terms of development. There are different phases of development. There are different types of development. There is infrastructural development but there is also human development. If it is that we decide that we are going to utilise the majority of our budget and the majority of the moneys from our Natural Resource Fund to focus on capital and infrastructural development and not as much on human development, then I think we are going in the wrong direction.

On one side, there is human development. Maybe, anybody would say that just focusing on human development may not

be the best option. I do not disagree with that, but I think we need to find the balance between capital investment and current investment. Sadly, this particular budget does not find that balance. I think we need to do more where that is concerned. There is a lot that can be said where this budget is concerned. A lot of my colleagues have gone into specifically where they disagree with the budget. I would not say I disagree with everything. There are some projects that I think are good. There are some projects I think are good for the country. What I think needs to be understood is when the people or the man in the street hears that we have a 40% increase in a budget and there is money from oil that they did not think would ever happen...for ages my parents have been saying we have oil, but we have not found it yet. Now, that the money has been rolling in, they are expecting to get a little bit more than what they are currently getting.

[Mr. Speaker assumed the Chair.]

It is not a case that they must not do any capital projects or infrastructure, but how do we put a little bit more moneys into the pockets of those who need it and those who, after this year, will see the roads, will see the bridges, will see the capital projects but still cannot feed their families? Is there any policy in the budget that deals with that? For example, the Ministry of Social Protection, there is a \$3,000 and a \$5,000 for the different sections of our society that particularly need it. I believe that more is required and that is what I am saying. On that note, what I would say, at the end, is more is required of us and more has been demanded of us. With the oil resources, I think we should do more for the people. If we can possibly work together to get that done, I think we would be at a better place in this country.

There is such divisiveness that is happening in our National Assembly which has seeped through the entire society that I think we need to recognise that. I think sometimes we live off of it. We think, politically, that it is the best thing to do, to have our country divided because that is how you can determine where your votes will come from. At some point, if it is that, as a society, we are going to move forward, we need to do better than what we have been seeing over the last five to 10 years in this country, and probably since independence.

I will ask of the Government side...Yes, you are in Government. Some may say installed but you may disagree. Yes, you are there at the helm of power but that does not mean that you have to wield all the power. What that means is disallowing, discriminating and marginalising against persons who you believe may not be on your side. That is

not how a government should function and so better should be expected of you and demanded of you and you should do better. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Now for the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, Mr. Ramson. Hon. Minister, you may proceed with your contribution.

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, I am very pleased to stand before this House to support the largest budget in our country's history and also the fact that there are no new taxes added. It is 41% larger than the previous year's budget. In relation to the previous speaker, one would expect that coming from the Guyana Nation Builders Movement (GNBM), she would be one of the persons to support a heavy infrastructure budget to build the country. After listening to so many of the presentations from the APNU/AFC, the Opposition side, over the last day, I am reminded of the quote by Mark Twain where he said:

“Let us be thankful for the fools. But for them the rest of us could not succeed”.

When I came to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport, our Ministry had \$2.4 billion. This year, our Ministry is getting \$7.1 billion. I would like to take, at this point, the opportunity just to express my gratitude to His Excellency the President, Mr. Ali, for all of the support and guidance, the direction that he has been giving me and our Ministry in the last year. I would also like to take the opportunity to express my gratitude to the Vice-President, Minister Singh and his team at the Ministry of Finance for all of the support that they have given to me over the last few months or so in relation to the crafting of the budget. I would also like to thank all of the people of the communities in which we have been working aggressively, where they have welcomed me, welcomed our team, welcomed our Ministry and for all of the work that we have been doing in those communities that have been bringing meaningful and tangible success and development to them.

It has been a tremendous year of achievement for the Government and a phenomenal year of growth and development. In 2022, over 10,000 house lots were allocated. That is more than 20,000 since coming into Office. I have said it before and I want to say it again, this has been the greatest transfer of wealth to the average Guyanese person in any five-year period to date. We have given out more than 7,500 scholarships in 2022 and over 13,000 since we came into Office. We secured the biggest carbon credit deal in the world, where Guyana will receive a

minimum of US\$750 million for 30% of our standing forests.

5.17 p.m.

We also included in that deal – Minister Vickram Bharrat – the legacy credits of \$187 million to cater for the APNU/AFC's failed period. We increased the children's cash grant, which the APNU/AFC removed, to \$30,000. This year, we are increasing it to \$40,000. We built new highways, thousands of roads and streets, new schools, new hospitals and healthcare clinics and new police stations. The road to Lethem has started. As we promised in the manifesto, all the heavy lifting for the Demerara River bridge has been done, which the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan had said was a *pipe dream*. We also did the heavy lifting for the gas to power project. All of these will be completed within two years before our tenure is up.

As we promised in the manifesto, we put our oil blocks to auction. As we promised in the manifesto, we passed the local content law. We set a regional record for passing 25 pieces of legislation last year. The Government worked with financial institutions to secure the lowest mortgage rates in our country's history so that ordinary people could secure mortgages to build their homes. We secured, for the first time in 10 years, the CPL finals and semi-finals. As we promised in our manifesto, we launched the National Sports Academy. We commenced construction of the mini stadiums. A new mobile phone carrier is about to start operating. We now have visa-free access to the United Kingdom (UK). We signed a deal with the Mount Sinai Health System for better healthcare for our Guyanese people.

Our non-oil growth is 11.5%, which makes us, as a country, the second fastest growing economy from a non-oil perspective. Put aside the oil growth that we have had. The non-oil growth of 11.5% has made us the second fastest growing economy in the world. Our macroeconomic indices have improved as well. Our debt to gross domestic product (GDP) ratio has improved while other countries like Japan, Singapore, Greece, the United States of America (USA), the UK, Canada, Spain, France have ballooned their debt positions. Meanwhile, ours has improved. Our balance of trade is now close to US\$3 billion surplus. Our foreign exchange reserves have now returned to the levels at which we left it before leaving Office in 2015.

Things have been moving so fast that some of the known and usual suspects have been saying that we are moving too fast. I have news for them. If they think that we were moving too fast, *they ain't seen nothing yet*. All those amazing things

happened for our country in 2022 and not a single statement of positivity came from the Opposition. Many of the people in the country have been saying positive things about how the Government has been performing. Not a single word of positivity is coming from the Opposition. If you want to be taken seriously, you should, first of all, start by acknowledging all of the successes that we have had so far.

Meanwhile, we have seen a stellar year of performance by the Opposition as well. We have seen that, for three months in the year 2022, they left the country without a Leader of the Opposition. After a few months of his performance as Leader of the Opposition, some of his own members have said that it is best they return to the situation of not having a Leader of the Opposition. There was an attempt to steal the Mace on *Facebook LIVE* and while all the cameras were on. Imagine, after attempting to steal the Mace, they went to court, while they were suspended, to overturn the suspension and failed again. This is another case in which the Hon. Member, Roysdale Forde, could not succeed. They also had three APNU/AFC Members who resigned from their seats as Parliamentarians. What is interesting to note is that none of those seats were filled with any young persons. This is just as they did when they were in Government, when they failed to give young people the opportunity that they promised to give them in Government. Many young people were thrown by the wayside. They had three opportunities. There were three resignations of Members of Parliament (MPs). Not a single seat was filled by a young person.

The General Secretary of the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) has resigned. I am now hearing that her successor has resigned. The Treasurer of the PNC/R has resigned and has alleged serious corrupt practices and racism. The Opposition voted against the Local Content Bill. A Bill that was supposed to bring benefits for Guyanese to get opportunities for business and employment in the oil and gas sector without which they would have never had the opportunity, they voted against. They boycott Parliament many times and they go around the country telling falsehoods to people, trying to block projects. They told people not to take the vaccines. They told people that they should not take the scholarships. They also told the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) that they control not to support the clean-up efforts that the Government was leading. [An Hon. Member (Government): A stellar year.] The fact is that was their stellar year – 2022. It is now commonly understood by everyone in the country that the Opposition is lazy, it is not credible, and it is useless.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have to withdraw the word lazy for me.

Mr. Ramson: I withdraw the word lazy, Mr. Speaker. They lack energy. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** They are lethargic.] They are lethargic, I am being advised. That is why they are unable to get a crowd anywhere. On Boxing Day, I saw that they had a ‘big green lime’ at Congress Place and even for the ‘green lime’ they were unable to get a crowd. Over the course of this debate, it would be senseless for the Opposition to come to the people of the country, having had already five years in Government, having spent \$1.4 trillion in this country and having lost the elections. Do not come and tell us that you can do a better job. I have heard the argument that the country needs a strong Opposition. What the country needs is a responsible Opposition, not just a strong Opposition, but a responsible Opposition.

How is this budget crafted? I want you to know that when it comes to analysing countries and the quality of the country that we are living in, we make comparisons all the time. Why is Guyana in this situation? It is always the quality of our infrastructure. If one wants persons to have a better life in this country, one has to give them quality infrastructure. Anyone who doubts the importance of quality infrastructure, just remove the seawall for one minute, or for one day, or for one week and Georgetown would become unliveable.

This year, again, we are spending heavily on infrastructure. I call infrastructure the great equaliser because whether you are rich or you are poor, you have to drive on the same bridge, you have to drive on the same road, you have the same source of electricity, you benefit from the same canals and you benefit from the same sea defences. Many times, when people say, *ya can't eat road*... I have heard them say that. *Ya can't eat road*. Actually, you can. When the Government spends on infrastructure, let us say building a road, it goes to a contractor. The contractor has to pay workers, the contractor has to buy materials like asphalt and sand and loam. That goes to a business. Those businesses have employees. Those employees also have to pay taxes. The contractor has to pay taxes. They have to pay the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). It keeps expanding for everyone. They have to rent machinery and move trucks. The truck drivers and everyone get an opportunity to eat as a result of spending on infrastructure. Even the banks get to expand their commercial activity because we are spending. They are going to have to go and take out loans and pay off interest, *et cetera*. Even the accountants who have to file their taxes get an opportunity to work. The legal clerks and

the clerical staff are getting opportunities to work. All of that expands economic activity and expands our tax base. So, everyone gets a chance to eat. It also creates the connectivity of trade.

When one wants to talk about sustainability of growth, it is about creating the connectivity of trade. One thing that this type of spending – which is infrastructure based – that many people do not understand is that it is cumulative. Every minute saved and every dollar saved multiplies across every citizen and it adds up to greater and greater output, greater disposable income, greater consumption and greater timesaving. If the Opposition is really concerned about inflation, from an economic perspective, the last thing that you want to be doing is to be pushing rapid spending on salaries and Government transfers. That is the last thing that you want to be doing because that is the classic recipe for inflation. Too much money chasing too few goods. That is the simple description of inflation. Too much money chasing too few goods. These are points that may be lost on the Opposition, but it is not lost here on us in terms of an economic philosophy.

I want to speak on my area. We have spent some time on the bigger picture and what we are doing. For sport, it has been another phenomenal year for us. We commenced the construction of the mini stadiums at Anna Regina and Mackenzie. We commenced the transformation of the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall. We commenced construction of modern stands at the athletic tracks in New Amsterdam and Linden. We completed construction of a new stand at the Leonora Track and Field Stadium. We completed the procurement of quality, international lights at the synthetic track in New Amsterdam.

5.32 p.m.

We completed major renovation works at the Guyana National Stadium. We completed the procurement of international lights at the Uitvlugt ground. We commenced construction of a new doubles squash court. We have commenced construction of a new racquet hall at the Guyana Racquet Centre. We commenced construction of an all-weather cricket training facility at the Guyana National Stadium. We completed the asphalt work at the Linden track, and we are about to lay the synthetic materials with the supervision of REGUPOL BSW from Germany. We completed payment for the repair of the track.

As for community grounds, something that is very close to my heart, we have completed and supported works being done, just last year, to 55 community grounds. I saw in the

news media reports that they said it was 55 since coming into office. I saw, inadvertently, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance said it was 55 since coming into office, but it is just 55 in last year alone. It is 92 since coming into office. We have lit 21 of those grounds since coming into office. When we are doing these community grounds, we have an integrated approach to what we are doing so it is not just about doing the grounds, it is offering all of the opportunities and connecting with the communities so that we could know how we could get over the opportunities in all of the areas that we are offering. In that way, we could offer it to the young people so that they could be a part of the programme of development and training.

We were the first country in the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) to secure the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) for school's programme. Working with the Guyana Football Federation (GFF), we were able to secure Guyana as one of the host countries for the under-19 World Cup that was held earlier this year. We hosted the Inter-Guiana Games (IGG) games after five years and for the first time had nine disciplines. We expanded the National Sports Academy's programme by hiring certified coaches to run the nurseries. Our Teach Them Young swim camp had over 1,600 kids. The programme was successfully implemented with not a single incident. We held the One Guyana President's Cup tournament with the GFF. I was just in Region 9 and I heard the story of one of the villages. It was explained to me that two of its members, two of its young football players, had the opportunity to represent the region because it is a new format for the tournament. They are now selected for our national pool of players. Had it not been for that programme they would not have been part of that national programme. We also held the Caribbean Junior Squash tournament right here in Guyana. This year, we are once again heavy on building the infrastructure for facilities. Training and the sports policy will be completed.

What is important as well for this year, I want to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that for the first time in any budget presentation we have the words 'cricket academy' included. For all these years, we have been a leader in the world for cricket talent and producing some of the best in the world. Cricket has been on the decline in the region. It is the first time we are taking hold of this as part of the Government's programme to improve the talent and the performance of all of our cricketers by building a cricket academy.

I want to respond to some of the things the Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, had said yesterday when he wanted to compare the records of the PPP/C and the People's National Congress (PNC). When one compares the 28 years of the PNC and the five years of the APNU/AFC, which is 33 years, and the PPP/C's 23 years plus two years, which is 25 years – and just for the sake of clarity for the folks on the other side, 33 is more than 25 – it was under the PPP/C that the Guyana National Stadium was built. It was under the PPP/C that the National Aquatic Centre was built. It was under the PPP/C that the public national squash court at the National Racquet Centre was built. It was under the PPP/C that the National Gymnasium was built. It was under the PPP/C that the synthetic Track and Field Facility at Leonora was built. All of that was done without the oil money. The only sports facilities that the PNC or the APNU/AFC have ever built in their 33 years in office were: one, the Cliff Anderson Sports Hall; and two, the D'Urban Park project for which \$1.4 billion was spent and \$600 million cannot be accounted for. Even the MacKenzie Sports Club was not built by the PNC. It was built by the Demerara Bauxite Company (DEMBA). When the Hon. Member, Mr. Barbershop, boasted about the APNU/AFC buying a replay screen for...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I do not know that we have an Hon. Barbershop member.

Mr. Ramson: Forgive me, Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, who may be seeking the proprietorship of a barbershop. When he said and boasted that the APNU/AFC bought a replay screen for the Guyana National Stadium, it was the PPP/C that built the entire stadium, and that point would be lost on them. That is how parochial they, on the other side, are. In all of the references that were made in relation to the hosting of the tournaments, they were just the temporary beneficiaries of the PPP/C's vision and investments that were made.

When he mentioned about the sports policy, I happened to do some digging to find the minutes of the Guyana National Sports Commission where, at the meeting on 28th June [**An Hon. Member (Government):** *(Inaudible)*] He was at that meeting, along with many other persons. Here is what is stated in the minutes, that Mr. Butts mentioned that a news report spoke of a sport's policy being presented to Ministers and Cabinet by the end of the month, but was puzzled as to how the Commission was left out of the process; Dr. Roach suggested a follow-up meeting with the Minister; Mr. Jones mentioned that the associations and federations are saying they had no input into the document which is contrary to the reports which said wide consultation had been completed of

the document. Mr. Roach said the whole situation worries him. That is what is contained in the minutes of the Guyana National Sports Commission, a meeting that he attended.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, two things: “that he”, please, I allowed you two times to make reference to the Hon. Member without...; and secondly, to layover that minutes.

Mr. Ramson: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Secondly, please layover the document that you are using.

Mr. Ramson: I will lay it over. It is important that what they want me to complete in two years, is something that they never completed in five years. So, it is important to note the duplicity. When he made reference to the statement by Boxer Keevin Allicock, I want you to just listen, Mr. Speaker, to what the statement was. I will layover all of this, Mr. Speaker. [**Mr. Seeraj:** Hon. ‘he’ (*inaudible*)] No, this is Mr. Keevin Allicock. He said:

“Let me state for the record that I have never met that individual before, and I do not... know who he is.”

He was talking about somebody who was sitting at the press conference.

“Let me also clarify once again that my previous public statement had nothing to do with the Government of Guyana and the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sport, but had to do with the Sports Associations. In fact, I issued a subsequent statement immediately thereafter stating that I have “ALWAYS had the support of the Office of the President and the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sport” and I expressed my gratitude for that support. While I do not get involved in politics and I would like the Opposition to leave me out of their drama, as we say in Guyana you have to give jack his jacket - this Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sport has been the most active, supportive, effective and visionary that this country has even seen.”

I cannot help but note, when he spoke about the Aliann Pompey tournament, that even the simple things they could not get done. We had to spend \$77 million last year so that the track could be repaired. Even though the damage to that track happened within their five years period, during the warranty when we could have gotten it replaced and fixed for free... Because they did not do what they were supposed

to do, we had to spend \$77 million to do that. Mr. Speaker, I know time is moving, so I want to move to the...

Mr. Speaker: This is a good time to ask for an extension for you.

Ms. Teixeira: I would like to ask for my colleague to be given time to conclude his presentation.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister, Ms. Teixeira.

Motion put and agreed to.

Hon. Minister, Mr. Ramson, you can continue to conclude.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The highlight of our cultural calendar was the successful hosting Guyana’s new tourism product, which was the cricket carnival. The Ministry partnered with the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce and successfully held 15 events and a road parade over the two weeks period. It was hugely successful. One of the events was the ‘One Guyana’ mega concert which saw the fulfilment of a commitment by His Excellency of a stage only for Guyanese artists. This was the largest crowd for any ‘Guyanese only stage’ in our country’s history. All of the revenue from the gate went to the performers. The sum was doubled by President Ali. The other first for us was the moving of the independence celebration to another region, Anna Regina. This, again, was hugely successful. We intend to rotate to another region every year.

We have reintroduced the Guyana’s Prize for Literature and introduced, for the first time, a youth category. We will culminate in a literature art festival during the Mashramani period. Mr. Speaker, I just want to show you what happened during the APNU/AFC period. They killed the Guyana Prize for Literature. This is the article that was published in the process of killing the Guyana Prize for Literature. This is 8th October, 2018, the caption states:

“Guyana Prize impasse for Cabinet this week.”

The sub caption states:

“- Norton unsure if money available for literary award”

Imagine he was the Minister and he was not sure. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible*)] That is Dr. George Norton. Imagine he was the Minister and was not even sure if the moneys were available in the budget for the award. He then went on to state:

“I have sent in a memo to Cabinet. I am going to Cabinet with an agenda... I hope that we can discuss it on Tuesday.”

And what is the result of his Tuesday discussion, his agenda? The prize was killed; it was never held again.

5.47 p.m.

Working with my colleague Ministry we also were able to secure representation of our culture at the FIFA World Cup in Qatar, which was fully funded by Qatar. Working with my brother here, we were able to secure that. We also had the cultural/creative industries grant. The Ministry also introduced, for the first time, the youth culture camps to expose young minds to visual and performing arts to enhance their awareness of Guyanese culture and heritage – 240 youths participated in the sessions where they focused on traditional drumming and drum making, traditional dance and modern dance, drawing, painting, heritage awareness. During the heritage aspects they were able to visit historical sites. We held consultations under cultural policy which will be concluding this year. We had over 2,000 persons; young people, we were able to engage within the sector. Some of the projects that we did were significant. We completed the installation of seats in the balcony at the National Cultural Centre. We also completed the replacement of the Umana Yana's roof. We completed the access-way and benab at Hogg Island and Windmill. We completed accessibility to projects at Fort Nassau and completed enhancement work to the 1763 Monument and the Enmore Martyrs' Monument. This year one of big things that we have on our programme is to focus on getting our creative industries academy or institute for creative arts accredited.

This year, also on youth, we are spending \$94 billion on education, \$2.7 billion injected into the University of Guyana, \$2.5 billion into the technical institutes, \$1.8 billion into Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarships, \$488 million for the Board of Industrial Training (BIT), \$200 million into the youth entrepreneur projects and agriculture, \$960 million for us on training, *et cetera*. This is one of the things that we are most proud of: we have engaged more than 5,000 young people in our youth programme in the National Science Fair or the Presidents' Youth Award. We also had our robotics training. One of the things that we are proudest of, which we launched yesterday, we were able to retrofit the buildings, purchase all the tools, and do the upskilling for all of the trainers so that we could launch a transformational training program for technical and vocational (Tech-Voc), where young people could enter our

institution and get their technical and vocational training in four months, in four of the main areas, and it would be five this year. There is no other technical and vocational training programme in Guyana or in the West Indies where one could get Council for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (CTVET) certified in just four months. We will be expanding that this year.

I have the great privilege and honour of being the Minister of Culture, Youth, and Sport to come and add my voice to all of the work that we have been doing at the Ministry, and to support the work that the Ministry of Finance has been doing. I would like to leave this lasting word, this closing word, a special thank you from my own Ministry, all of the hardworking staff, all of my colleagues at the Cabinet, for all of the support they have given to me, to us, and by extension all of the young people, the tens of thousands of young people that our Ministry has been able to engage, improve and give leadership and mentorship to across the country. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Speaker, having listened to the Minister who just concluded his presentation, his embryonic remarks, his quote, was intended to insult the Hon. Member before him. I too am reminded of a quote from the famous Greek playwright Aristophanes who said:

“Ignorance can be cured, but stupidity is forever.”

As I stand to join this debate and lend my voice to *Budget 2023*, permit me to express my gratitude to the hardworking public servants at the Ministry of Finance, and the Hon. Minister Dr. Singh, for the Budget he has presented, a budget that promises to play a pivotal role in where our country will go and how our people will benefit from the utilisation of the nation's resources, which is yet to be proven. Dr. Singh, Hon. Member, your hardworking staff at the Ministry, have given services above and beyond, and they are yet to be rewarded with an increase from this very/said Budget. Where is the gratitude?

Budget 2023 has guaranteed and garnered from this side of the House the most appropriate adjectives to describe it in its truest sense, in its realness, the honest views of the majority of the people in this country. Taking the opportunity, as I so have, I too would accurately like to give my description of this Budget which is an unadulterated extortion of the people's money. This Budget does not reflect the will and desires of the small man, the majority of the people who are eager, hopeful and optimistic about getting more from this Budget which has epitomised the term, ‘the paradox of plenty’.

Whenever one reads a budget or listens to the presentation, no matter how long it is, the small man is only concerned with what is in it for him. The pensioners want to know what you have given them. I say, without successful contradiction, that the paltry sum of \$5,000 was not pleasing to this demographic of the population, especially those who are taking care of their grandchildren. They are immensely disappointed. Parents who will benefit from the Because We Care cash grant of \$10,000 more, we are thankful for this increase and we welcome it. Equally so, we believe that the increase, Mdm. Minister of Education, should be complimented with the reintroduction of the Five B's Initiative. Mr. McCoy, the Hon. Member, tried to trivialise the importance of this programme which played an important role in providing free transportation and hot meals to countless parents and children who benefited from this initiative. I seriously hope that the Hon. Minister of Education will give some serious consideration to this sensible proposition and add it to her Ministry's program.

What is one of the most disappointing groups of people is our hardworking public servants who expected from this Budget to see what they will be getting to help cushion them from the challenges posed by the high cost of living. They continue to wait in anguish. It is most unfair to the hardworking people who contribute to the nation's coffers and keep the engine of Government running. Hon. Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, I beseech you to provide our public servants with the answers they seek.

The theme of any budget is of utmost importance, for it gives insight of what is to come and it lays the foundation on which that vision will be realised. This budget's theme, *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*, is an oxymoron in many respects to its contents presented, and in some instances very misleading with its inaccuracies and misrepresentation of the facts, which I will highlight in a moment's time. It would be remiss of me not to highlight what I believe was most impressive about *Budget 2023*, which was the Minister's stamina to stand and present for over six hours, six hours without a bathroom break. Sir, I must confess...

Mr. Speaker: Just let me correct you. It was five hours and twenty minutes officially.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I must confess I have always admired Dr. Singh's style of debating long before coming to this House. I believe he too is secretly disappointed that he was unable to give more to the people

most in need when more is available. In fact, I believe I speak for every Guyanese, especially all public servants, youths, senior citizens, the vulnerable and the poor, when I say we wish if this very impressive demonstration of the length of the Minister's presentation would have reflected real beneficial policies and programs that would have actually brought tangible life changing opportunities and benefits to help them with the harsh realities of the extremely high cost of living. The plight of the poor in my constituency, Region 10 in particular, and that of the ordinary and Guyanese in general in this country, which is the fastest growing economy in the world, is most unacceptable, given our vast wealth and our population's size.

The framework of *Budget 2023* as posited by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, on 16th January, 2023, is a pointed reminder to all Guyanese that if they are at the bottom of the social ladder, the PPP/C Administration, through its trickle-down economic policies, will ensure they remain there. Referencing the World Bank's report, it is a fact that price inflation on food and the essential dietary needs for a food basket remains at well over 20% and continues to rise. No theatrics by the Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy, could dilute or evade this fact. His prized trick in an effort to debunk the real expressed views of ordinary Guyanese, with his display of two commodities from his well-endowed food pantry, will not fool anyone. In yesterday's *Stabroek News*, on page 13 captioned *How the cost of living is hitting people*, this is what real Guyanese are saying. I wish the Hon. Member Mr. Todd was here because Mr. Collin Rodney is also from Linden. This is what he had to say:

"Every item has risen in the market... Just imagine we are importing sugar in Guyana and a pound is now \$200... three months ago, it was \$80... milk... \$720... (from) \$460."

Ms. Eliza Smith said:

"The rising cost of living is affecting me in groceries... I could not afford to pay \$340-lb, \$350-lb for ochro now to feed my family of six. The ground provision too is very costly too, a pound of plantain now is \$240."

Citizen Mr. Ousan Gardon said:

"The rising inflation is too high... 2/3 months ago... Sweet potatoes used to be \$100 a lb, now... is \$350."

Ms. Jennifer Robeiro:

“... a pound of tomatoes now is \$600.”

These are the views of real Guyanese people, Mr. Speaker, not the invisible man the Minister claimed to have bought his imported sugar from, when he voted successfully for the failing Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) that gets billions more every budget. When I read the comments of the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers Union (GAWU) stating that this is a pro-budget, I longed to ask them to please point us to the measures in this Budget that address same.

6.02 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I know you would secretly agree with me that it is utter wickedness when the Government would forcefully give public servants an 8% increase, and tax it in 2022, knowing full well that food prices alone would absorb such a meagre increase.

It is visible for all to see that this Budget has heavily endowed the Ministry of Public Works to the very big chunk of *Budget 2023*. I am first to admit that the road to development is the building of roads, bridges, roadways, and proper infrastructure, but this Budget remains of genuine concern for me, for the majority of my colleagues in this House, and all Guyanese living on the coast, which is way below sea level, and no serious consideration is being put to the protection of our sea defences. Equally, there is the poor quality of works being executed on our roads, drains and bridges. Coupled with that, the inadequate skillset at the Ministry and at some contracting firms to complete those works in a genuine time is of great concern for us. As important as those infrastructure works are for poor Guyanese, as the PPP/C had said when in Opposition, they cannot eat roads and bridges, and many of them do not work for GuySuCo which continues to get never-ending billions.

Mr. Speaker, I must turn my attention now to provide some comments on the previous speaker's portfolio that continues to pose a challenge for me to gauge the productivity of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. If one was to ask me from outside of Guyana which sports discipline had taken off in 2022 under the leadership of Minister Ramson and his Sports Commission, I would have to conduct a study session. My colleague asked the Minister to make sense. I daresay this Minister, with this very important Ministry, makes no sense. In fact, I would like to thank the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance for speaking on behalf of this Ministry for the Hon. Minister. Most of Guyana is aware that for the last three budget debates in this House, this is what the Minister's

presentation represented for this Minister, who's magnified gross incompetence of this Ministry is concerning. This Minister is more concerned about *Facebook* likes on his Ministry's page. In 2020, the Hon. Member in his debut speech as the Minister said:

“...when I got to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, our *Facebook* page had 6,000 likes. Within one month... 10,000 likes.”

In his *2021 Budget* presentation, again, the Hon. Minister informed this august House, and I quote:

“Imagine, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, when I got there had 6,000 likes on Facebook. Today, it has over 22,000 likes on Facebook and 25,000 followers.”

What a remarkable accomplishment. Well done, Minister. In thanking the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance for ably assisting his colleague, I must inform him that some of the information provided was misleading, grossly inaccurate. And I am confident that the Hon. Minister was not academically or intellectually dishonest. I do not believe that the Hon. Minister would intentionally provide this House with inaccurate information. But I must inform him, the Hon. Minister, that at page 60 of his budget speech he was misled to believe that those two synthetic tracks in Regions 6 and 10 were completed; they are far from that reality.

The track at Linden, however, was blessed with being fenced twice. So it has two fences less than five feet apart. Sir, I do not possess the sagacity to understand the logic of spending an additional \$26 million for a second fence. Is it to prevent the country's best athletes from accessing the facility? It is important to note that despite all the challenges of having to access the barrack facility where the track is being built, that did not hinder our region's prolific athletes from winning the sixth consecutive National Cycling, Swimming and Track and Field Championships, a total of 17 overall. Sir, what was most disappointing about this victory is that the Minister with responsibility for our young people and sports did not recognise the importance of presenting himself, not only to present the winning trophy for our future sports ambassadors and offer them some encouraging words, which speak volumes of the Minister's ineptitude...

Equally disappointing was the no show of the Minister of Education; that was not expected from the Hon. Minister Ms. Priya Manickchand. What is really the plan of the Ministry for the continuation for our star athletes after high school? Is

there a plan to have the University of Guyana (UG), have a real sports programme to facilitate the continuation of our nation's sports pursuits? I believe we have the best of opportunities, here and now, to utilise one of the most dynamic and phenomenal Vice Chancellors that the University of Guyana now has. Dr. Paloma Mohamed is a woman who thinks outside the box. I believe she is a revolutionary and, more importantly, I believe the Minister of Education and the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport should engage the Vice Chancellor to bring this much needed component into reality at the University of Guyana to offer scholarship opportunities to our athletes, to continue their education and craft. Additionally, I believe the time is right for Linden to be given an arm of the University of Guyana, similar to that at Tain in Region 6. As I indicated to the President on his visit to Linden, our athletes need more than a completed track and an upgraded ground; our athletes need those facilities to be furnished with gyms and athletic training equipment, different sports gears for their respective disciplines, trained coaches, exchange programmes, and scholarships for our gifted athletes, which he accepted are most needed, and I presume he was in full agreement.

I am happy with the increased allocation for sports but, I must confess, I do have some legitimate concerns of seeing the benefits of all those moneys. The reality is that none of the sports disciplines in this country have improved despite having all of those resources. None of the sports disciplines, in January, 2023, are at the levels of 2019. The distinct failure of the Minister with the responsibility for this sector has compelled none other than the Head of State himself, on the 27th October, 2022, to publicly apologise to the nation's athletes for the lack of support they received. This is the President saying that he apologises to the nation's athletes for the lack of support they received. He assured athletes that, under his watch, their sacrifices and challenges of the past will not be their future. This statement by the Head of State is testament to the confirmed failure of the Minister to execute his mandate on behalf of the President as is...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I have no problem with you quoting what the President says, but now attributing that to the failure of the Minister is imputation. You need to withdraw that.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The President by virtue of his own words has expressed his no confidence in his Minister who is clueless of...

Mr. Speaker: Absolutely not; you are trying hard to say the same thing. Please, withdraw that one. You have been going

great so far, you have covered so much ground in such a short time; you are going great, do not spoil it.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Speaker, in heeding to your advice, one would be directed to say, based on the President's comments it can be inferred that the President himself has expressed no confidence in his Minister...

Mr. Speaker: You are insisting that you want to use that. There is an issue with respect to the Standing Orders and using the President's name to influence a debate. You are now trying to use that to say the President has no confidence in the Minister, and I do not think that is what he said. Please strike all of those, and I am striking them right now from the records, and do not go back down that road.

Mr. Figueira: I am so guided, Mr. Speaker, and I wish I can continue uninterrupted, with your guidance of course, Mr. Speaker. The development of culture, youth and sport, despite being given sufficient resources, has not garner any significant difference under the leadership of this Minister. Those words uttered by the Head of State, I believe, is one in which any self-respecting person, having heard those words from their boss, would have done the honourable and dignified thing and resigned. It is a mark of mature intelligence when one can read not only what is on the lines but between the lines. The President, in an effort to save and salvage the undeniable failure of the Ministry...

Mr. Speaker: You have to totally withdraw that because now you are using it, I think intentionally too, to deal with influencing the procedure in the Parliament, and the Standing Order is quite clear. Quoting what the President said is...

Mr. Figueira: Withdrawn, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I am not taking away your time. I have stopped the clock. Go ahead Hon. Member.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In efforts to save and salvage the undeniable failure of the Ministry, many efforts were taken by the superior head of this Minister to take charge, himself, with regard to leading the country's two most prolific sports, cricket and football, in 2022, with the concepts 'Cricket Carnival' and the 'President's Cup'. But is that enough? Is that what is needed to develop sports in Guyana? Certainly not, Mr. Speaker. The \$4.3 billion allocation, which is a significant increase of \$1.1 billion, will essentially focus, I am told, on the construction of multi-purpose sporting facilities and ensuring there is much need infrastructure. But the development of sports requires much more than infrastructural development that is most welcome.

6.17 p.m.

The Ministry had \$3 billion last year for sports. This is a reflection of \$7.5 billion in two years and \$9 billion will happen this year. The needed question to be answered is – where is the evidence of all those resources? What significant impact was made from the utilisation of those resources? Who really benefited?

Mr. Speaker, did the Everest Cricket Club Ground have any benefit from all the moneys? I do not expect you to answer, Mr. Speaker. I was told that the Minister loves cricket. He is an ardent fan of the sport. With all this love for the sport, how many regions were furnished with cricket pitches to promote this sport by the Minister who claims to love cricket? The development of an all-purpose cricket club at the Guyana National Stadium is unacceptable. The region with the most prolific athletes, Region 10, has no cricket pitch. How many regions benefitted from cricket gears and how many cricket matches were supported by the Minister? How many football courts were constructed across this country and which region benefitted from gears? How many coaches from the respective disciplines benefited from accredited coaching programmes from the parent bodies of those different associations and federations? How many associations, federations and clubs were furnished with the necessary equipment and how many athletes were furnished with the proper gear for their respective sport of choice? What did the increased allocations over the past two years did for impacting any identifiable sport? I dare say, none.

We had oil money in the 2022 Budget. Sports was given \$3 billion dollars and our athletes overseas representing Guyana. The fast-growing economy in the world was begging for food and proper medical personnel, while the Minister was issuing press statements to save face. What an embarrassment and what a disgrace. We had oil money in 2022, and the National under-14 (U14) footballers had to miss an important Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) tournament because of airfare challenges at that time. It would seem that the more money we have, the more difficult it is to make prudent decisions. The more money we have, the harder it is to see the evidence of those spending. The Minister boasted in his 2022 Budget presentation about receiving the support of all the sporting disciplines in Guyana. My question – in 2023, is the Minister willing to give each of the sporting disciplines who he claimed supported him, a financial subvention of at least 25% of their annual budget to avoid Guyanese ambassadors begging when they represent us abroad and to assist with their sports

programmes? We have oil money and we should use it wisely for our athletes' benefit.

The Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport spent close to half a billion dollars in the last two years. The Hon. Dr. Singh during his presentation indicated that 54 community grounds were upgraded across Regions 1 to 6 and Regions 8 to 9. The revelation has aroused the suspicion of many communities and we would like to know from the Minister, the names of those community grounds and how much resources were expended for those said upgrades. In December, 2022, Region 4, East Coast of Demerara's team had to travel all the way to the East Bank of Demerara to use the Guyana Football Federation (GFF) all-weather ground to complete the village aspect of the tournament. This is because the Minister only enhanced sunshine grounds. None of the investment went into all-weather facilities which was suggested in my presentation last year – starting with one such ground in all 10 regions because it is most needed given our climate.

With \$250 million in 2022 and an additional \$250 million in 2023, this is the equivalent of half a billion dollars for ground enhancement and no region can boast of having an all-weather ground – except at the Guyana National Stadium which is for only cricket – with lights, washroom facilities and a mini pavilion that can accommodate at least 1000 spectators. With all these resources, it is grossly unacceptable. This is the vision of the Minister and the Ministry, even as Guyana continues in its harvesting of oil and the billions of oil from our natural patrimony. I have always in my conscious effort to help this Minister, provided only constructive criticism, which he apparently takes personally – but it is never with the intent to belittle the Minister. That is not my forte, for he does that on his own.

In every single budget debate, I have provided workable solutions that I know, once implemented, will enhance sports in general and provide our nation's athletes with the best opportunities to excel and succeed in their crafts. Sports has to play a more defining role in carving our national identity. It requires a strategic time-bound developmental plan. A plan that requires a deliberate, tailored and focused approach to identify out of the 40 Olympic disciplines, 10 or 15 disciplines who provide us with the greatest of opportunities to win Olympic medals. Focusing on those identified disciplines as a national priority, with a time frame as advised in my 2021 Budget presentation should be taken seriously.

Mr. Speaker: At this time, a serious extension is needed.

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 very much. Hon. Member, please.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, for your gracious extension, Mr. Speaker. If the Minister and his uninspiring and visionary gang at the Ministry continue in this deadbeat posture, His Excellency's desire for Guyana to advance to the 2026 World Cup, would be nothing but a fleeting illusion.

Culture: The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, in his Speech adumbrated that it is important that the moment be seized to harness and fortify our rich cultural diversity. These are words beautifully put and accepted by us on this side. I shudder to think and moreover, I am of the belief that the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport do not understand this view. I have said it before, but I believe *Stabroek News* editorial in last Sunday's paper has encapsulated this position from an independent standpoint which is very apt. It states:

“The current Minister of Culture, ... has never shown much enthusiasm for his portfolio, ...”

Has never!

“... or even, for that matter, a sure grasp of what all aspects of it entail.”

It questions – does the Minister, Mr. Ramson, Jr. have any vision for the sector? This is an independent editorial articulating the very views that we on this side have been saying since the inception of the Minister being at the Ministry. I believe I have answered that question. I believe the head, the boss, of the Minister has answered that question. I believe the Minister knows the answer. We all have concluded that he does not hold the passion that is required and the vision that is required to lead this Ministry. I believe our uniqueness as a people of six different ethnicities, multi religions, and multi-cultural experiences – our customs, norms, foods, music, dance and all that makes us Guyanese – present the best opportunities for us, as was articulated in my 2020 Budget speech for the promotion of the brand, Guyana.

With the award of \$1.4 billion for culture and arts in Guyana, if we fail to continue not recognising our country's most celebrated activity, Mashramani – I believe and I believe those on the other side share the same view – which embodies *Guyaneness* in the truest sense. This celebration makes us unique from our Caribbean counterparts. This

festival should be branded and promoted as our indigenous version of the carnival but this Government through its most incompetent Minister has deliberately failed to put the necessary resources to propel Mashramani to the heights of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival, Barbados's Crop Over, Saint Lucia's Jazz and Arts Festival and such likes. Imagine, Mashramani 2023 was launched and again the Minister who is responsible for this portfolio was visibly absent.

I am very happy with all the other allocations for the recording studio which was proposed by me in my 2022 Budget debate. It is now going to be materialised and help talented and aspiring musicians. This is the maturity I long to see in budgets – where there are reflections of the best ideas of our people. This recording studio and subsidies for recording artists will most definitely enhance Guyana's musical potential. So, I welcome this initiative but, more importantly, I am compelled to ask the Attorney General (AG) once more to see the importance of bringing copyright legislation to this House so that our gifted artists, musicians, playwrights and poets can benefit from their intellectual properties. We have a solemn duty as leaders in this country to understand that our most prized possession is not our oil resources; it is our young people. I am happy that the Minister of Education is taking a very magnanimous approach to leading this Ministry, I believe, in the direction that it should go. As you have invited us to work with you, I am committed like all of us in this House to give you all that is required with regard to our best ideas, to ensure that the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport and all of the Ministries that provide service to the people embody what it takes to propel Guyana to the heights that it rightfully deserves.

With regard to this Budget and the fact that it does not encapsulate all the ideas that the people of Guyana have presented through their elected representatives, I cannot wholeheartedly support this Budget in its entirety. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now invite the Hon. Member, Mr. Charlie, to make his contribution.

Mr. Charlie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I just want to rebut the last speaker the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira. The Hon. Member of the Opposition now seems to have the answers and is telling the Government what to do. This clearly shows the incompetence of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) when they were in Government.

Mr. Speaker, allow me first, to congratulate the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh and his staff at the Ministry of Finance for producing a budget that sets the framework for Guyana's growth and development. The forward movement of our people and their advancement: *Budget 2023* is an embodiment of hope, the spirit of optimism and the definition of *One Guyana*. It is not my intention, Mr. Speaker, to drag you and the Guyanese along an aimless road of negativity.

6.32 p.m.

It is not my intention to drag you and the Guyanese into a debate that seeks to castigate Guyana. It is my intention to school the honourable Opposition Members, I will serve as a guide for them to come to the irrefutable position that *Budget 2023* is good for the poor working-class people of this country and has indeed the measures are all laudable and will have an impact on the lives of the ordinary folks when its fiscal bite becomes a reality. Since assuming Office in August, 2020, the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government has transformed the economic landscape of our country through its budgetary allocations. In the last two years in Office, the PPP/C Government has improved the quality of the country's social and physical infrastructures; improved access to shelter through the provision of housing to low income families across the country; expanded economic base of the country; improved the competitiveness of the domestic economy; improved the country's human capital; strengthen the national institution responsible for safety and justice; reduce poverty and inequality; maintain fiscal prudence; and ,most importantly, restored hope in Guyana.

The 2023 National Budget stands at \$789.1 billion and coincides with the theme: *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*. I want to ask your permission, Mr. Speaker, to give a synopsis of their track record. The APNU/AFC's legacy of moving Guyana backward did not start in 2015; it began much earlier. Since attaining a combined majority of one in 11th November elections, the APNU/AFC weaponised the parliamentary process for selfish political gains at the expense of the Guyanese peoples' wellbeing. The APNU/AFC deliberately blocked \$90 billion in programmes designed by the PPP/C Government to benefit the Guyanese. Their goal was to weaken the ability of the PPP/C Government to deliver on its mandate, while creating a political environment that fostered discontent among our people. As a political tactic, they wage

the campaign of misinformation in a calculated plan to design, distort and obscure the truth.

In 2015, the APNU/AFC combined their operations and use their armoury of tricks and deception to win political power with a parliamentary majority of one. Rather than progressing their menu of promises as outlined in their Manifesto, they mismanaged the resources of Guyana; harmed our democracy through unilateral and unconstitutional actions; incompetently negotiated many state contracts, bungled by key investment opportunities; and, in the process, damaged prospects and the economic wellbeing of Guyanese. The APNU/AFC suppress the work of constitutional bodies such as the Integrity Commission and the Audit Office of Guyana by reducing their budgets and curtailing their independence. Through their actions, they have been found to be the most incompetent Government in our entire independent history.

One of the first act of the APNU/AFC in Office was to offer themselves and their inner cabals huge salary increases leaving behind scores of nurses, teachers, members of the discipline services and other workers. They promised to end expenditure wastages but, instead, they more than double-spend on international travels by an increase over \$1 billion during their tenure. They spent over \$2 billion on dietary supplies. They increased spending on security service by over \$2 billion and rental and maintenance of buildings and equipment by over \$3 billion. If that was not enough, they then embark on a programme that ignores the 2015's Manifesto promises and instead made *ad hoc* decisions to enrich themselves. During their 2015 campaign the APNU/AFC made several promises to the Amerindians which included: more jobs, improve healthcare, education and the acceleration of the land titling programme. However, weeks after they took Office, they fired 1,972 Community Support Officers (CSO) and withdrew funds to finance the Amerindian community development plans – shame. Who the cap fits, let them wear it.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have to withdraw the word 'shame'.

Mr. Charlie: I withdraw, Mr. Speaker. They took away some 6,000 solar panel systems which were earmarked for Amerindian communities, dismantle the Amerindian land titling unit and scuttled the Amerindian Land Titling Project started by the PPP/C Government. Amerindian lives have changed for the worse under the APNU/AFC with increase taxes, value-added tax (VAT) on hinterland fuel and travel, neglect of hinterland roads, shortages of medicine at health

centres and declining of jobs. They have reduced Amerindian presence on the Amerindian Peoples' Commission and attempted to weaken Amerindian rights through a revision of the Amerindian Act. To add, the APNU/AFC also established a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) to investigate Amerindian lands, while one of their Ministers when they were in Government called the Amerindian people avaricious and to this effect they should not benefit from the proceeds of the oil and gas. However, all of this, the APNU/AFC did to our Amerindian people but, we, on this side of the House, are building back the House, starting from the foundation with resilience because we care for every citizen and the Amerindians are priority. Never again! I would ask my Hon. Members to say with me, never again! The APNU/AFC fooled the Amerindian population but we will never be fooled again.

Mr. Speaker, I am not finish telling you about the horror story that the APNU/AFC were the authors of. They have failed the miners and loggers by imposing the tax on capital equipment, leaving hinterland roads in a state of collapse and not offering adequate security. The overall effect of such policy polarises on the part of the APNU/AFC caused a significant decline in economic activities in the country. The APNU/AFC discriminated against the business community by assaulting transparent transactions using political discretion to process incentives, disposing of state lands and other state assets, and procuring goods and services using secretive processes that were only available to businesspersons close to the APNU/AFC. The APNU/AFC promised increase investments, lower taxation, provide jobs and stimulate wealth creation. Instead, they increased taxes and fees, failed to attract new investments and created jobs, and there was a decumulation of wealth in Guyana. They have failed to offer a coherent plan to address these issues.

However, *Budget 2023* gives every Guyanese a chance to a good education, access good paying jobs, be able to start their own businesses, raise and provide for their families, own their own homes, live in a safe and secure environment, and retire with dignity. *Budget 2023* gives every Guyanese full access to equal healthcare, safe water, the ability to participate in sports and recreation and free practice of their religion and culture. *Budget 2023* is 44.4% larger than *Budget 2022* and it is undoubtedly the largest budget and it is fully financed with no new taxes. *Budget 2023* is the first budget to benefit from the sale of Guyana's carbon credits, which will amount to \$31.3 billion in revenue in 2023, alongside the transfer of \$208.9 billion from the Natural Resource Fund (NRF) to the Consolidated Fund this year. *Budget 2023* strikes a balance between addressing pressing

needs for today and the critical investments needed for tomorrow.

There is \$3 billion is salary adjustments, which would benefit 5,000 healthcare workers and 9,000 members of the discipline services. There is an increase on the monthly income tax threshold from \$75,000 to \$85,000 monthly, which would release a total of \$3.3 billion into the hands of taxpayers and removing 12,000 taxpayers from the tax net. The Because We Care cash grant moved from \$25,000 to \$35,000. This will benefit over 214 schoolchildren in public and private schools and will replace an additional of \$2.1 billion in the hands of their parents. The sum of \$10 billion is allocated for the expansion of the part-time job and we heard all sorts of comments about the part-time job. The Opposition does not understand what the part-time job is. The sum of \$5 billion is allocated for an additional cost of living measures to be determined from their ongoing community engagements. We are moving with the increase of the Old Age Pension from \$28,000 to \$33,000 placing an additional \$4.4 billion of disposable income in the hands of 73,000 pensioners in Guyana. The increase of public assistance from \$14,000 to \$16,000 to benefit 29,000 persons and this will place \$700 million of disposable income to these individuals. The sum of \$1.8 billion is allocated to commence the rehabilitation expansion and reconstruction of the Georgetown, New Amsterdam and Linden hospitals as well as four telemedicine centres in Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9. The sum of \$830 million is allocated to complete the design and commence construction of the Bartica Regional Hospital. The sum of \$1 billion is allocated to retrofit and upgrade health centres, health post and other facilities across the country. This sum of \$237 million is allocated to update Karasabai, Annai, Sand Creek Health Centres into district hospitals, providing radiology and laboratory services in Region 9. The sum of \$2.5 billion is allocated to purchases and medical equipment in 2023 across all 10 Administrative Regions of Guyana. Over \$500 million for training of healthcare professionals and more than \$900 million to address noncommunicable diseases including mental health. I am sorry the Opposition is not here, I think, this would have been good for them to benefit from. In 2023 a sum of \$94.4 billion has been allocated to further improve access to and the quality of education for all Guyanese. The sum of \$1.4 billion is allocated to further upgrade and extend water supply systems and construct wells in several hinterlands communities of Regions 1, 2, 7, 8 and 9. The sum of \$100 million is allocated to support activities associated with observance of International Decade for People of African Descent Assembly – Guyana (IDPADA-

G). Also, there is an allocation for the support of the Office of the Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker: Before you go onto any other, you would need an extension, Hon. Member.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker I would like to ask for an extension for my Colleague to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

6.47 p.m.

Mr. Charlie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Amerindian and hinterland development – The PPP/C's Government commitment following its Manifesto promises, resulted in the prioritisation of Guyana's first people's education, health, housing, infrastructure, social well-being, employment, youth development and development of the village economy. The sum of \$4.7 billion is allocated for the Amerindian development programmes and initiatives. Mr. Speaker, do you want to hear more? Here is more.

The sum of \$2.7 billion is budgeted for the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF). There are 233 Amerindian communities who would positively benefit from this allocation. The sum of \$5 billion is allocated for hinterland road development; \$500 million to advance Amerindian land titling activities to safeguard and improve the security of land tenure enjoyed by Guyana's Indigenous people; and \$124 million for the celebration of Amerindian heritage in 2023. This Budget is a people's budget. There is \$91.8 million for the National Toshias Conference (NTC) and \$500 million is allocated for the construction and equipment of information communications technology (ICT) hubs in Amerindian villages. The Indigenous people will be at the forefront of directly benefiting from the PPP/C Government's effort on climate change. Finance – Fifteen per cent of revenue received from the sale of carbon credits will go towards the investment in Amerindian village sustainability plans produced by villages and communities.

Budget 2023 gives hope to every Guyanese – every Guyanese. A hope that all of our people will prosper and all of our people will have an improvement in their lives. It is with this hope that will drive us along the dream that we will see every Guyanese accomplishing his/her ambition right here in their homeland of Guyana. Together we will, as a people; together we must, as a people; together we will move

Guyana, as *One Guyana*. I commend *Budget 2023* to this House for passage and I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Mr. Charlie. The next presenter is the Hon. Member, Ms. Maureen Philadelphia.

Ms. Philadelphia: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Sir, as I rise to make my contribution to *Budget 2023*, I must first say a heartfelt gratitude to the personnels at the Ministry of Finance who worked tirelessly to complete the document for its presentation in this noble House.

Budget 2023 was delivered to this nation on 16th January under the theme: *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*, albeit an oxymoron. I wonder what must have been the thoughts of right-thinking Guyanese, including you, Mr. Speaker, and all the Hon. Members on the other side, when a mere 10 days before its presentation in excess of 50 Guyanese were made homeless. Further, they come here telling us about improving lives of people today and, of course, shouting the '*One Guyana*' mantra. Further, as if that was not enough, Ms. Ellis was dismissed from her place of employment making her both homeless and jobless. To compound this situation, a two-year-old child is affected. Sir, this is unconscionable and heartless. Then, the same people are touting the '*One Guyana*' mantra, when we continue to see the marginalisation of the people, even a kiss does not demonstrate love. Let us ask Jesus Christ, who was Judas? Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? The squatters of Pigeon Island were not treated as refugees. They were given \$80 million and, of course, titles would be awarded for the land they are occupying. I warned, the famous civil right activist, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said:

“The arch of the moral universe is long but it bends towards justice.”

Beware, the Coalition would be back and Guyanese will once again be treated with dignity and respect. This Budget is the largest in four years in oil rich Guyana with a total of \$781.9 billion. While the increased threshold is now \$85,000, a \$10,000 increase, it is woefully inadequate to cushion the high cost of living with this Olympic running price increase. I say visionless; I say paradox of plenty.

Region 4's budget was hijacked in 2022 by the dictatorial Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall. This hijack took place even though elected officials tried feverishly to make their input in representing the people they swore to serve. We

continuously see the marginalisation of specific communities.

Sir, here we have what Nabaclis road looks like and I could make them available to you. I have quite a lot here that you could see. Sir, I want to tell you that the Nabaclis public road is referred to as the Nabaclis middle walk. It is the same road that the Hon. Member, Mr. Mustapha, used to visit to talk with the farmers. Over 6,000 residents use this road but, shamefully, the dictator instructed for this piece of road at Cove and John that houses only two families be given priority. Even dogs make use of that road. The fact of the matter is none of the roads in Nabaclis are worthy. Even the bridges are very deplorable. As I said before, I have them all here and I would lay them over. An 84-year-old woman, Gladys Smith, took in one evening and had to be lifted out since the vehicle could not access her home. Am I to understand that this is the land of the forgotten? I guess not. I beg that urgent attention be paid to this community so that the residents could breathe fresh. Ms. Veronica Andrews died last Sunday. She fell ill and the taxi could not get to the area because of the state of the road. The ambulance did not get there on time. These are just a few of the many cases.

[Hon. Member displayed a document.]

Further, I give you some highlights. This has to do with the Victoria East sideline. I have here the condition of the roads in Plaisance. I could leave them with you again. Here, is the condition of some of the roads in Buxton. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? At Haslington, Block 20 Housing Scheme Network, all of the roads are in a deplorable state. I refer to them as specific ocean and Mediterranean Sea. While I speak, I remember that I want to talk about Bareroot. The Hon. Member, Mr. Deodat Indar, visited and promised the people in that area to give them bridges and roads. It has been nine months, thereafter, and they have received nothing. As a matter of fact, on 5th September of last year Bareroot was plagued with a freak storm. I have something here to show you what was left of the home of five of the residents there.

[Hon. Member displayed a document.]

I wept for a young couple. The mother is pregnant and has two underage schoolchildren. Of course, their home was destroyed and all that was left was the floor. I challenge the Men On Mission (MOM) to reach out and touch. Do you know what, Mr. Speaker? I could make comparisons as I move along. As for the condition of the roads that exist in other communities and those communities, I speak of are Lusignan, Enmore and Enterprise just to name a few. Of

course, while contracts are awarded and these communities are enhanced, these contracts are given to friends, favourites and families of the PPP/C cabal, and less than 72 hours they begin to crumble. The Hon. Minister is proud of his legacy of the green and red villages. Of course, the word 'shame' is unparliamentary, so I will not use that word. Even as I speak, I must commend the Coalition Government for the sterling work it started in preparing titles for the residents of Bareroot, which this present Regime continues, and want to behave like Jesus Christ superstar when that community was developed under the PPP/C over two decades ago.

In 2022, under line item 6211, \$21,320,000 was requested and a paltry sum of \$18,230,000 was received. This year \$36 million was requested again but only \$26.2 million was allocated. How could the office function effectively? How, Hon. Dharamlall? You have a responsibility which ought to be treated with respect. I say kindness is a colour of your heart, which that heart knows only how to paint. I trust that your heart could speak to you, Hon. Member and that any Gafoors Limited has it in stock so you could purchase. Sir, please be reminded that line item 6211 is the council's budget and when it is treated this way, the constituencies suffer. All Guyanese must be comfortable when the continuous discriminatory and dictatorial practice will seize. While there were budget discussions this year, we still see the shameless act based on what was provided...

Mr. Speaker: I am very disappointed, after you have reminded yourself and then skilfully navigating that word. Just withdraw it.

Ms. Philadelphia: I am guided, Sir. May I move on?

Mr. Speaker: Yes. You just have to withdraw.

Ms. Philadelphia: I withdraw, with your guidance, Sir. There were more than 45 projects that was presented but only nine were catered for in this massive \$781.9 billion Budget of the Cooperative oil Republic of Guyana.

While I commend the Minister of Education with her sterling contribution, I must admit that some parts were riddled with inaccuracy of which I am going to address shortly. In 2022, \$72.8 billion was received towards world class education in Guyana. They said that Good Hope Secondary School could not have been completed then but it is now catered for, so many years later. I recall in 2021, when I questioned the Hon. Member, she said to me there are building defects, but yet here and now, the same Hon. Member said to us that the school is now being completed. Further to that, the Hon. Member mentioned that no school was built whether started

or completed under the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU). May I remind the Hon. Member that, as I stand here, I am heading one of Guyana's premier nursery institutions as an early childhood educator. That institution was built under the APNU/AFC Government. I further say, Eastville Secondary was constructed under APNU/AFC.

7.02 p.m.

I say the Eastville Secondary School and the Eastville Nursery School were constructed, the Good Hope Nursery School was constructed, and I recall the Christianburg Primary School was under construction. The Minister said not one, and so I beg to correct that anomaly. I want to ask, is this how we want to cater for education? Hon. Manickchand further stated that the moneys were allocated to procure goods and services and to ensure that all institutions benefit from this, but I want to say that schools are starved of textbooks and other accessories, coupled with flooding and infrastructural deficiencies not limited to electrical, plumbing and other aesthetics. In 2023, a whopping \$94.4 billion has been allocated to education. I trust the deficiencies mentioned above are catered for.

I further want to remember what was said by Hon. Priya Manickchand, how much moneys are spent to ensure that Special Education Needs (SEN) education is adequately catered for, yet two minibuses requested by Region 4 to take our SEN learners to and from school was denied. Again, minibuses requested to ensure that our learners from the highway get to and from school was denied. Additionally, I am proud of the legacy of the Coalition. We said it, and we proved it—bus, boats, bicycles, and breakfast. School attendance and performance improved as a result of initiatives such as the public education and transportation system, which was aimed at combatting high truancy and dropout rates by providing same. There should be support for at-risk students. Programmes that provide targeted support for at-risk students, such as those living in poverty or experiencing behavioural or emotional difficulties, can help to keep these students in school. As I speak, I saw a breakaway at one of our premier secondary schools.

Mr. Speaker: Let us take a breakaway now and ask for an extension for you to conclude.

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

Question put and agreed to.

Ms. Philadelphia: Sir, these should include counselling, academic support, and extracurricular activities. I know the

Ministry introduced guidance counselling in secondary schools, but it is woefully inadequate. We were deliberate in developing our human resources with the construction of technical and vocational education and training hubs at Bina Hill, Lethem, Mahdia, and Mabura to bridge the gap between hinterland and coastland while enhancing hinterland access to post-secondary education. The poor and vulnerable will not benefit from this Budget in its current form. Nothing suggests the village economy will begin to grow and people's lives will be impacted. As I conclude, I remind us of the words of Reggae Legend Bujū Banton's song, Untold Stories:

“I am living while I am living to the Father I will pray.

Only Him knows how we get through everyday.

With all the hike in the price,

Arm and leg we have to pay,

While our leaders play.

Who can afford to run will run,

But what about those who can't?

They will have to stay.”

I say to my Guyanese, hold a strain and change will come. As a result of this, I cannot support this Budget in this form. [Applause]

Mr. Narine: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to *Budget 2023*. Indeed, the Budget, when implemented, will take us further down the developmental path and bring us closer to our national goals. *Budget 2023* envisages a steadily development country where our people live in a cohesive and modern society, where their dreams are made possible, and where families can make meaningful contributions to our country. These I see as the lofty ideals *Budget 2023* is set against as we strive for equality and ensure the fruits of development are shared by everyone.

As I listened to the debates and comments outside this August House, I have come to two realisations. One, the APNU/AFC, since the budget presentation, has not advanced anything meaningfully. Rather than constructive submissions, several presenters from that side of the House have resorted to divisive rhetoric. I understand the Opposition, excluding, of course, the Deputy Speaker. Apart from the depression of divorce, the Opposition has nothing to say. Maybe it is, as Vice President Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo

said, that it does not understand the construct of Budget 2023". I would urge the Hon. Members on that side of the House to enjoin the Government in advancing a programme benefitting all Guyanese. But I wonder, is the Opposition really committed to nation building, or is it all huff and puff?

Secondly, these debates articulate policies and measures advanced in *Budget 2023*. Though we may be distracted by the spuriousness emanating from the now divorced Coalition, I do not believe our Guyanese brothers and sisters can fully grasp from these exchanges what is in store for them. Indeed, *Budget 2023* is wide ranging and comprehensive. As I commend it, I am confident that the Government, after we wrap up our debate, will continue to lay out the budget's plans and programmes. Our Guyanese family, as His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali put it, must know what their Government has in store for them. *Budget 2023* has been hailed as history making and transformative. This year's budget is our nation's largest, and we will redouble efforts to enhance our people's welfare. Moreover, the plans of the budget will hasten the transformative agenda and reshape our landscape.

Budget 2023 brings the Guyanese working man and woman closer to their aspirations. It makes the dream of homeownership easier and affordable. It demolishes the concept that owning a motor vehicle is a luxury. At the same time, it puts more money into the hands of our workers with no new taxes. For me, this is what makes *Budget 2023* history making and transformative. Never in our history was it so exciting to be a Guyanese. Never was there so much to expect, and never was there such national pride. Indeed, it is almost unbelievable to recognise that in such a short period, the Irfaan Ali-led Government has reversed our nation from the lethargy that characterised our national space during the five years of the Coalition.

Budget 2023 allocates a significant sum of its expenditure toward the social sectors. Such investments have been the hallmark of every People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government. The PPP/C, since its foundation, has always been a pro-people and pro-development party committed to improving the lives of our people. Past and present PPP/C Government's investments in education, health, water, housing, and social services not only protect our Guyanese family today but ensure that tomorrow and the days after are bright, fruitful, and prosperous. *Budget 2023* is welcoming, continues and expands on that proud path, and places our people's wellbeing at its centre.

Budget 2023 has earmarked almost \$95 billion for the education sector. Today, the aspirations of our nation's children are no longer confined to their dreams. In the sector, I recognise the expansion of infrastructure alongside enhanced capacity and capabilities. These investments bode well for our nation's children. That apart, the opportunities to attain a university education has been enhanced through investments in the University of Guyana and the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) programme. Emphasis on expanding technical and vocational education (TVET) to expand our pool of artisans is also helping to mould our nation.

Similarly, enhancements in health care are assured as several new hospitals are under construction. I recognise, too, the emphasis on strengthening and improving our capabilities as the sector is on an upward trajectory. This is a far cry from the days of the infamous condom bond. *Budget 2023* also provides more breathing room and greater opportunities for our healthcare professionals.

Likewise, expenditure to expand the provision of treated water is laudable. We were told that, very soon, most citizens will benefit from fully treated water. Given the rundown state of the water company in 2020, this is a remarkable achievement and a reminder of the Government's commitment to bettering the lives of our people. In housing, substantial sums have been allocated. Indeed, the demand is significant as the former Coalition Government really did nothing when in office. But our Comrades in that sector are not daunted and unlike its predecessors, are hard at work expanding our housing stock.

7.17 p.m.

Indeed the dream of home ownership is being realised by thousands of Guyanese under the PPP/C. The continuing and expanding support to our poor and vulnerable must also attract our appreciation. Today, the helping hand of the state remains a source of comfort for many of our Guyanese brothers and sisters. I am fortified in my belief that His Excellency the President, Mr. Ali, and his Government, in the coming years, will ensure that such assistance is expanded.

I also paid keen attention to what *Budget 2023* has for our workers. I must say that me nor the working class are disappointed. Our workers stand to receive aggregately more than \$3 billion just through the improvement of the Income Tax threshold. That is only one policy. In the interest of the workers, our Government, this PPP/C Government, has continued not to levy any taxes on fuel, foregoing some \$17

billion in revenue. Additionally, a reduction in freight charges for imports is meaningfully assisting in mitigating the rising cost of living. Financial support towards the Guyana Power and Light (Inc) and the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) to maintain electricity and water tariffs represent significant support to the working class. Since the presentation of the Budget, I have seen in the media and elsewhere some wild statements by Hon. Members of the divorced Coalition. They have short memory. Just a few years ago, Guyanese had to pay taxes on water and electricity. Our children had to pay value-added tax (VAT) to go to school. When we visited the hospitals, taxes were charged, as well as a host of other hikes.

Today, the Irfaan Ali Government has removed those burdens from the backs of the working class, placing a substantial sum of moneys in the pockets of our working people. Today, it is the PPP/C which is giving and not taking from our workers. Today, it is this Government which is chartering a prosperous course for all Guyana. While our Colleagues from the Coalition may want to mouth off, its record of destruction speaks loudly. It is chalk to cheese when compared to what the PPP/C has done in a relatively short period of time.

As someone very close to the sugar industry, I laud the Budget's allocation of \$4 billion to the Guyana Sugar Corporation, Inc (GuySuCo). This support will continue. The effort of repairing purposeful and vindictive damage inflicted by the APNU/AFC when they were in Government. The reorientation of the industry is moving at a pace, and I recognise the efforts to improve revenues, enhance efficiency and reduce costs. The extension of the packaging plant at Blairmont and the construction of a new plant at Albion will undoubtedly enhance the industry's march to sustainability. Packaged sugar is sold higher than what is obtained from raw bulk sugar. I am aware that the industry has secured markets in several countries. However, it is limited by its packaging capacity. This is welcoming news, and it is an indicator that we are moving in the right direction. The efforts to enhance mechanisation also present greater opportunities to improve productivity and efficiency. I am certain that these investments will pay dividends several times over and redound to the industry's performance.

On sugar, Mr. Speaker, I saw an Opposition Member, the Hon. Ms. Walton-Desir saying in a news report that investment in the sugar industry was throwing moneys into a black hole. The Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan said it was a bad investment, and his Colleagues in the APNU/AFC

rightsized the industry. It was the same, Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan and the infamous *neemakharam* who promised the sugar workers a 20% increase. During its term of Government, not a cent and dismissed 7,000 workers under the guise of right size. It was the same, Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan when he was Vice-President who, refused to have an impact assessment study done. Cde. Speaker, it can only take evil people to commit the acts that they have committed against those poor workers. This naked, undisguised insult to sugar workers and all our people in the sugar belt must not be tolerated. It has no place in our society. Do the Hon. Members, and for that matter, the wider APNU/AFC, have any care or regard for the thousands who depend on the industry? Is it that those in the sugar belt are lesser morals, destined to some inhumane existence? It is unacceptable that such derogatory sentiments could come from the Opposition, excluding, of course, the Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: At this time, we will need an extension for you to conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that my Colleague be given additional time to conclude. Thank you.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Narine: It is unacceptable that such derogatory sentiments could come from the Opposition, especially when it is aware of the painful consequences of its callous decision when it was in Government, which caused tens of thousands at the sugar belt to be pushed into a miserable existence. Let it be known every insult against the sugar workers, some of who are supporters of the APNU/AFC would be a nail in the coffin of the APNU/AFC. Its time in the Opposition would be extended as fresh smoke rise from the chimneys of Rose Hall estate and life flourishes again in the sugar belt under this PPP/C Government with provisions in our 2023 Budget.

I take this opportunity to congratulate the Hon. Minister Dr. Singh and his team at the Ministry of Finance. I also recognise the leadership of President Dr. Irfaan Ali, Vice-President Mr. Jagdeo, and the Cabinet in developing an advancing Budget for the people. Certainly, *Budget 2023* will advance the well-being, the welfare, and standard of living of all our people. It places Guyana further along the journey of prosperity and brings one's dreams into reality for thousands of people. *Budget 2023* consolidates the achievements since the PPP/C reentry into Office in 2020. It represents a continuation of the Party's contract with the Guyanese people, and it is a tangible manifestation of the Guyana we yearn for.

Mr. Speaker, I commend, once again, Budget 2023 and encourage all Guyanese and our families to reject the narrow and vilest diatribe coming from the APNU/AFC. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Ms. Veerasammy: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. On the onset, I would like to congratulate my Colleague and Comrade the Hon. Dr. Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, for bringing to this House the most transformative and people-centred Budget. You, my Comrade, continues to amaze Guyanese with your eloquence and the way you captured and offered resolutions to the issues affecting them. You presented a Budget by the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) that is based on the PPP/Civic Manifesto. You also included His Excellency Dr. Ali's vision for *One Guyana*. Thank you, Comrade.

I would like to recognise the hard-working staff at the Ministry of Finance and all Government agencies who contributed to the preparation of *Budget 2023* under the theme "*Improving Lives today, Building prosperity for tomorrow*".

Please allow me to clarify a few issues raised in this House by Members of the Opposition. I would like to state that no amount of spinning of the truth would change the reality of this Budget. This Budget is for our own people, and it will begin the transformation of Guyana into a modern country. *Budget 2023* focuses on people, infrastructural enhancement and economic diversification. The transformation plan outlines aims at improving the lives of everyone, all Guyanese. We understand that this is a debate and, in every debate, there is a proposition and an opposition. The responsibility of the Opposition is to destroy the credibility of the proposition. We are not here to be destroyed. We are here to inform Guyanese and correct all the distortions. Our Guyanese sisters and brothers are smart people. They know that this Budget was prepared with them in mind. They know that this Budget was prepared with them to give them a future that they all deserve. They know that the PPP/Civic Government is serving their interests.

We will continue to forge ahead to improve our people's lives. The infrastructure to diversify this economy, to strengthen our legislative section and to improve our services across Guyana. Economic growth and development will directly improve peoples' socio-economic and psycho-social well-being. We will build a Guyana that will be admired by all while we maintain our cherished Guyanese hospitality. To drive the transformation projects outlined in

the Budget, Guyana needs a workforce that is educated and skilled. This workforce will build the One Guyana envisioned. This work force will be created through the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarships. The Board of Industrial Training that they do more than a dozen courses, the Women's Innovation and Investment Network (WIIN) training programme, and of course, the University of Guyana – the premiere tertiary educational facility and the numerous educational institutions around Guyana.

I referred to the above three because they are fully financed by the Government of Guyana. The larger percentage of the GOAL scholarships beneficiaries are women. The WIIN Programme also caters to the need of mostly women, while the Board of Industrial Training (BIT) focuses on improving the skills of the youths, including young women. This Budget is gender-focused and gender sensitive. The projected infrastructural expansion and beautification of our country will amaze all. We cannot be wowed by other peoples' countries. We have to work together to make Guyana into the paradise it can be.

Mr. Speaker, do you remember why we were lagging behind other parts of the world? It is because of what the People's National Congress (PNC) did to us for 28 years – between 1964 and 1992. It was their mismanagement, rigged elections, starvation and bankrupt policies that stymied Guyana's economic growth and development.

7.32 p.m.

Those same bankrupt ideas were exhibited between 2015 and 2020, that resulted in the economy contracting, and people kicked out of their jobs. Imagine, on top of all that, it increased taxation. That pushed our people further or backwards into impoverishment.

The Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance outlined numerous infrastructural projects, which include the four-lane Demerara Harbour Bridge, the highway from Ogle to Eccles, the many hinterland bridges, the farm-to-market roads, highways, the refurbishment of community roads and bridges, not forgetting the gas to shore project. These projects will contribute to improving people's lives and save them time and money. Good roads will get persons from one place to another in a shorter span of time. The developmental projects outlined will create jobs and put billions of dollars in disposable income into the pockets of working-class Guyanese. When moneys go into families, women benefit, children benefit, and elders' benefit.

Allow me to deviate for a minute. Let me remind you how taxpayers' moneys were spent by the Coalition while in Government between 2015 to 2020. Remember the drug bond? I will only remind you of two. A small house it rented from one of its allies and paid \$12.5 million per month in rent. Could you remember the over \$1 billion dollars that was spent to build the D'Urban Park that now houses vagrants? Could you remember the \$600 million that the Auditor General said could not be accounted for? We could spend the rest of the night here and debate the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) incompetence and how it squandered the taxpayers moneys while it was in Office.

The APNU/AFC Coalition laments that the 2023 budget has nothing for workers or Guyanese. Let us remind ourselves of the APNU/AFC's salary increases paid to public servants between 2015 and 2020. Public servants know that the salary increases they were given during the years 2015 to 2020 was a sham. They were more impoverished, and mothers had a difficult time providing for their children. Ask mothers about the \$10,000 'Because We Care' cash grant that it took away from our children and had the audacity to impose a 14% value-added tax (VAT) or taxes on school items, medical supplies, and food items. Ask elders, and they will tell you how they were affected when the subsidy for electricity and water was taken away. Ask elders how they felt when VAT was imposed on those very utilities, including internet, food, and medical supplies. The APNU/AFC gave openly, then stealthily took it away in taxes from our people.

Let us talk about what the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government has done in the last two and a half years for our people in relation to salaries and the billions of dollars in disposable income that have been put into the pockets of our people.

Firstly, no taxes were imposed on our people in the last four budgets. Value-added tax was removed from food items, school supplies, medical items and medications, machineries, and equipment. The latest one is that VAT was removed from housing materials. We have a housing boom in this country, and this is a very welcome initiative. Value-added tax was also removed from water, electricity, and the internet. Several taxes were restored to 2015 levels. Land rent in the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary (MMA) was restored to 2015 level. In 2022, the income tax threshold was raised from \$65,000 to \$75,000. This year, it was raised from \$75,000 to \$85,000. When we raise the tax threshold, we like to be silent, and we like to criticise, but this tax

threshold, no matter how small the amount, has put some moneys in the pockets of our workers.

In 2021, over 50,000 public servants, teachers, members of the disciplined services, and government pensioners received a 7% retroactive salary to January. The Opposition comes here every year, it criticises the budget of not raising salaries, but do you know what? We give increased salaries at the end of the year, and women can take that money and buy a hell of a lot of things and gift it to their families.

In 2022, approximately 52,000 of those workers were given an increase in salary of 8% retroactive to January. In December 2022, President Ali announced major salary increases for doctors, nurses, and health workers. Law enforcement officers and military personnel were also given a one-off cash grant at the end of last year. Increased salaries for that level of workers is a manifesto promise kept. In 2020, households received a \$25,000 Covid-19 cash grant, and all frontline workers received Covid-19 packages in their salaries. This continued in 2021, and our hinterland sisters and brothers also benefitted.

Mr. Speaker, you are aware of the stimulus packages or cash grants that were given to our people – sugar workers, fishermen, children with disability, *et cetera* to help them with poverty alleviation. Could you remember the APNU/AFC's promise of a good life for Guyanese between 2015 to 2018? Could you remember that the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, changed his narrative in the 2019 budget when he said his Government never promised a good life in the first five years. All of us were probably hearing different music. Could you remember the slogan of a good life that was accompanied by the slogan *this is awe time*?

It was these types of false promises that caused the voters to cast them aside in 2020, and democracy was restored in August of 2020, after five long months of the APNU/AFC's varied attempts of rigging the March 2020 elections. But they forgot one very important fact. This is not 1964 to 1992. This is an era of social media, internet, science, and technology. In this era, our people are educated. They listen, assimilate, and rationalise more. They read, and they observe. Experience became their greatest teacher, and they know that all they received from the APNU/AFC between 2015 and 2020, was a promise of a good life that became a good lie. We in the PPP/Civic do not make empty promises. Our Manifesto promises were carefully considered to guarantee maximum benefits for all. Now, it is implementation time, and we are known for not breaking

promises. We are known to work hard to defend democracy, and we will build a prosperous Guyana for all to enjoy.

People are living healthier lives today because of the vast improvements in medical science and the increased number of doctors available to patients to improve their lives. The PPP/Civic Government, from approximately 100 doctors, now have about 1,500 doctors across this country. That is a very important point to note. This is something the Hon. Members on the Opposition benches seem to forget. To guarantee an improved healthcare system, hospitals, and health centres will be equipped with modern amenities, trained staff, and improved services. This is a welcomed initiative in rural and hinterland communities. Every district across Guyana has health care systems. Hinterland communities have health outposts, health workers, and medex. Further, health centres across Guyana have doctors, most have pharmacies, and many are moving to provide laboratories so that patients do not have to travel to main hospitals to get their blood work done while being ill.

We promised, *“Improving lives today, building prosperity for tomorrow.”* This is what we mean; reducing maternal deaths, improving antenatal care, building new hospitals in rural communities and equipping them with human and technical resources, improving diagnostic capabilities and bringing health care closer to home. To reduce and eliminate maternal deaths and child mortality, the new state-of-the-art hospital is a dream come true for expectant mothers. This hospital is a direct benefit for our women. The 2023 budget is a promise made, and a promise kept.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, this is a good time to seek an extension for you so that you could conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that my Colleague be given additional time to complete her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Ms. Veerasammy: Mr. Speaker, 8,000 of the 20,000 house lots allocated in the last two years were allocated to women. We have done a fantastic job of ensuring that households have access to potable water. We will be spending the next couple of years to work on ensuring that households receive treated water. In the 1970s and 1980s, the older Comrades or, the older persons in this House may remember that women used to have to walk miles away from their homes to fetch a bucket of water to give their families to drink. Now, that time is spent with their children and with their families. Quality time is diverted elsewhere.

On the Guyana Online Academy of Learning scholarship programme, as promised, 14,000 of the 20,000 scholarships were awarded. Guess what? About 60% of those are given to women because the women are coming forward and applying for the scholarships. [**An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)**] Yes. Imagine that. The Opposition is saying that this Budget has nothing for people. It boggles one’s mind to understand where it is coming from. Could you remember, that in the 1970s and 1980s, many girl children could not have accessed tertiary education? It was because of compulsory Guyana National Service. The GOAL scholarship does not tie anyone to anything. Imagine how far we have moved ahead. We are building an educated nation that will take Guyana from where it is to where it is supposed to be.

Parents of almost 200,000 children are waiting anxiously for the Because We Care and uniform cash grant of \$40,000. One of my staff came to me and asked, Ms. Veerasammy, is it true that I am going to be getting \$40,000 for my children? You mean, this year I do not have to spend a cent from my pocket to buy school things for them? I said, yes. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Could \$40,000 buy school things?] *Y’all* did not give them a cent. *Y’all* took it away. Even children in private schools are receiving this same benefit. Not like the ‘David G’ buses, boats, bags, boots and bicycles programme that benefitted the children of certain communities. This budget has allocated funds to ensure that 85,000 children benefit from the school feeding programme. When parents do not have to provide meals for their children, moneys remain in their pockets to do something else.

The Women’s Innovation and Investment Network Programme is working excellently in reaching out to women and girls across Guyana. More than 8,500 women and a few men were trained in the last 2 years. I had called out the Ministers of the Coalition while we were in Opposition, telling them, and encouraging them to use the institution to educate our girls. We are back on par. Thank you, Dr. Vindhya Persaud.

On the topic of old age pension, we decry the moneys given to old age pensioners. Old age pensioners are not only given \$5,000 in increase. Value-added tax was removed from those utilities water subsidy was given back to them.

Children up to 18 years old received that cash grant. That is not enough. Those children are going to be put on a fixed establishment where they will be given public assistance. Over the years, public assistance will continue to grow, and

parents are going to get more help for them. Under the Coalition, one could not access wheelchairs.

7.47 p.m.

I just have one more point, Sir. Under the Coalition, parents could not have access wheelchairs for their children or their family members. This has been remedied by the PPP/Civic Government. No one will go without a wheelchair, a walker or a walking stick. We must respect the people who are suffering from disabilities. Sir, I commend this budget for approval. Thank you, very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members we have completed our business for today. I now call on the acting Prime Minister, the Hon. Member, Mr. Anil Nandlall, to move the adjournment.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“I move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10.00 a.m. on the 25th January, 2023”

[*Prime Minister (ag), Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs*]

Prime Minister (ag) Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: Thank you, Sir. I move the adjournment of the Assembly to tomorrow morning at 10.00 a.m. for continuation.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Members. We are now adjourned until 10.00 a.m. tomorrow morning.

Adjourned accordingly at 7.48 p.m.