



**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

58TH Sitting

Friday, 27TH January, 2023

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.19 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.,
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Prime Minister's Office,
Colgrain House,
205 Camp Street,
Georgetown.*

Vice-President (1)

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

[Absent – on leave]

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,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation,
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+*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,
Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance
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+ Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,
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Ministry of Public Works,
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Kingston,
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+ Hon. Dr. Frank C. S. Anthony, M.P.,
Minister of Health,
Ministry of Health,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P.,
(Region No. 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),
Minister of Education,
Ministry of Education,
Lot 26 Brickdam,
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[Virtual Participation]

+ *Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P.,
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Ministry of Home Affairs,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

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

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

+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
Minister of Natural Resources,
Ministry of Natural Resources,
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[Virtual Participation]

+*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,
Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
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+ Hon. Nigel D. Dharamlall, M.P.,
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Ministry of Housing and Water,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,
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Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports,
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Georgetown.*

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

[Virtual Participation]

Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P.,
*Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
Fort Street,
Kingston,
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Hon. Warren Kwame E. McCoy, M.P.,
*Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister,
Office of the Prime Minister,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

Other Members (14)

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

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East Bank Demerara.

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

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No. 66 Village,

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Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,

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41 Robb Street,

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

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South Cummingsburg,

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[Absent – on leave]

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

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Leader of the Opposition

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Lot 410 Caneview Avenue,
South Ruimveldt,
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[Absent]

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

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Craig Milne,
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Hon. Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P.,
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Hon. Mr. Ganesh A. Mahipaul, M.P.,
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Hon. Ms. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P.,
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Hon. Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P.,
*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),
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Hon. Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P.,
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Hon. Ms. Beverley Alert, M.P.,
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Hon. Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,
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Church Street Mahdia.
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West Coast Demerara.*

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

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

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

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Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

Ms. Hermina Gilgeours,
Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
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Audio Technician
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Audio Technician

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Visit by the Political/Economic Chief of the United States Embassy - Georgetown

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, in our gallery this morning is the Political Analyst of the United States (US) Embassy, Mr. Brian Hall. He is joining us for part of the sitting today. Welcome, Mr. Hall.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[For Oral Replies]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, yesterday we deferred three questions from the Hon. Member, Mr. Jermaine Figueira. I do not know if someone from... My apologies. Are we not there yet?

Yes, Hon. Members. As I was saying, we had three questions deferred yesterday to today. I do not know if someone from the Opposition, A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), will ask those questions for Mr. Figueira. No? Hon. Member Mr. Vinceroy Jordan, you have the floor.

(2) Procurement and utilisation of Cane Loaders

Mr. Jordan: I will ask question 2. Can the Minister inform this House on the following questions regarding the procurement and utilisation of cane loaders purchased by GuySuCo after August 2020:

- a) What is the number of cane loaders that were procured by GuySuCo between September, 2020 and 31st October, 2022?

Mr. Speaker: My apology, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, the Hon. Member has gone to Question 2. Maybe someone else may ask the first one on behalf of the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira. Mr. Jordan is asking number 2. Go ahead Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan.

Mr. Jordan:

- b) What is the cost of each cane loader procured?
- c) Please state whether there was a process of public bidding (state date and medium of advertisement) for the cane loaders and who won the bid?
- d) If there was no bidding process, please say who was given the contract and the basis for doing so, including if the GuySuCo Board played a role?

- e) Please state where each of the cane loaders purchased between September, 2020 and 31st October, 2022, are presently located and the date they arrived at that location?
- f) Please state how many man hours each of the loaders purchased between September, 2020 and 31st October, 2022, worked at their present location since arriving there?
- g) Please state how many of the cane loaders purchased between September 2020 and 31st October, 2022, are in a ready to work condition if they were needed by GuySuCo at 1st November 2022?
- h) Please state how many man hours were available at each estate for cane loaders to work between September 2020 and 31st October, 2022?
- i) Did GuySuCo Board recommend the purchase of these specific types of cane loaders?
- j) What was the country of origin of the cane loaders and is this the same country from which pre-2020 cane loaders were procured from?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Agriculture, you have the floor.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: Mr. Speaker, although the Order Paper is saying that these questions should not be proceeded with at this sitting, I want to... **[Mr. Patterson: (Inaudible)]** ...the back here. I want to inform the Hon. Member that no cane loaders were procured during the period he mentioned. That answer nullifies all the other questions that he asked.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, the asterisk also deals with oral questions. We may have to use one for oral and two for deferred questions. There were two other questions in the name of the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira. I do not want to say I will strike them off, but I think it is total disrespect. Yesterday, the Hon. Member was late. I was informed that someone would ask the questions on his behalf. Then we got a deferral yesterday to today and we cannot be here. I continue to ask that Members be on time and that we get a prompt start. We still have quite a bit of tardiness.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, you have the floor.

Mr. Patterson: You proceeded onwards, Sir. Could I ask the questions for Mr. Figueira?

Mr. Speaker: Yes. I give you leave to.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, this is question 3 pending. Which is the question? Member...

Mr. Speaker: We have two. We have the first one...

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance [Dr. Singh]: Mr. Speaker, may I?

Mr. Speaker: We have the first one...

Mr. Patterson: Which was just done. Which was just asked.

Mr. Speaker: No. That is the second one asked and it was answered.

Mr. Patterson: *Oh*, yes. Sir...

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

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, may I with your permission, say and reiterate and endorse fully, as I support your comments earlier, it is utterly contemptuous of this House to place questions on the Order Paper and to absent oneself persistently from the sitting on which the questions are listed and, indeed, not brief any of your Colleagues. They do not even know which question is slated to be asked. It is disrespectful of this House, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, you have the floor.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my Colleague, the Hon. Member Jermaine Figueira, who lives in Linden which is almost 70 miles from here, and he has to traverse the East Bank...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please. When there are sittings, there are accommodations provided at the expense of the people. I know you made a good attempt to try to offer an excuse. Even I have moved into my daughter's place about five minutes away from here, and I live at Eccles.

Mr. Patterson: Very good, Sir. Unfortunately, Member Figueira does not have any daughters around.

Mr. Speaker: You may proceed, Sir.

(1) Indoor Facility for Linden

Mr. Patterson: The question is to the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport. Can the Minister inform this House when will the work on the indoor facility for Linden commence and when is it likely to conclude?

Minister of Culture, Youth & Sport [Mr. Ramson]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I always like to... **[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]**

Mr. Speaker: He has to bend. He is vertically challenged.

Mr. Ramson: I may have to speak up on this one. I always like to come a bit early. This is because we have just witnessed a comedy of errors from that side of the House in relation to the simple asking of a question of which that is one of their primary functions. In relation to this specific project, as the Hon. Member may know, two projects would have started there. In relation to the indoor facility, working with my brother from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, the Hon. Member Hugh Todd, because of the nature of the discussions, the negotiations and sensitivities at the stage it is at right now, I am unable to provide an answer. I will be able to provide one around October or so.

Mr. Speaker: By October of this year?

Mr. Ramson: That is correct, Mr. Speaker. This involves inter-governmental discussions, as you may be aware. There are some issues that have to be finalised that I cannot disclose publicly because of the stage of those discussions. Thank you very much.

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

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I think that is self-explanatory. October of this year just highlights how efficient they are. I will now go on to question number 3. Question number 2 was asked by my honourable partner, Mr. Jordan.

(3) Pending Applications for Death, Marriage, and Birth Certificates

Mr. Patterson: This question is to the Minister of Home Affairs. Can the Minister inform this House of the number of pending applications at the General Register Office for:

a) Death certificates for the years 2018, 2021 and at 31st October, 2022?

b) Marriage certificates for the years 2018, 2021 and at 31st October, 2022?

c) Birth Certificates for the years 2018, 2021 and at 31st October, 2022?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister Teixeira, you may proceed.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Hon. Mr. Speaker, I understand that Minister Benn is attending a funeral of a relative. He will be coming but he is at the funeral right now. I apologise for not raising that earlier so that that question could be deferred.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, we will see how we could work in the answer, shortly.

Mr. Patterson: Just a query, Sir. The question was for oral response, are you now...

Mr. Speaker: Yes. We will ensure that we could...

Mr. Mahipaul: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: It is interesting to note that the Hon. Members are related.

The question was deferred.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

Motions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2023, of a total sum of seven hundred and twenty-one billion, five hundred and twenty-nine million, and seven hundred and thirty-four thousand dollars (\$721,529,734,000), excluding sixty billion, three hundred and fifty-one million, two hundred and twenty-nine dollars (\$60,351,229,000) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in Schedule 1, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and make further provision in respect of finance:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly approves the recommended lumpsum subvention for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2023 as

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

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

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

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

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now proceed with the budget debate 2023. Our first speaker today is the Hon. Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, the Hon. Member Mr. Lenox – with one ‘n’ – Shuman.

10.34 a.m.

Deputy Speaker [Mr. Shuman]: Mr. Speaker, I want to say thank you to my colleagues on this side of the House for cheering me on and championing me. It is the first time, in my entire presence in the Parliament, that I actually felt like they were developing some kind of a liking for me. I take this opportunity to wish my colleagues on both sides of the House, yourself and all the staff of Parliament Office – the ones I have not seen as yet – and the entire nation a happy and prosperous 2023. I trust that 2023 will be tremendously better than 2022. I will say, unreservedly, that *Budget 2023* sets the tone for this year to be a great one. I also want to take this opportunity to thank the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and his fantastic staff for taking the time – I know it has been a very tedious, time consuming, long hours – and everything that it entailed to produce *Budget 2023*. I sincerely hope also that my words properly and appropriately reflect what is contained therein.

Before I get into the substance of *Budget 2023*, I want to start off with something that I find rather displeasing and something, I must say, in which I am quite disappointed. It is my sincere hope that the Elections Commission (GECOM) and the country at large pay attention. On my side of the

House, and I will exclude myself since I just happen to sit on this side, I have sat and listened to a political party, which sat in breach of the Constitution for many years and many months, continue to trample on that very Constitution. It is what we, as parliamentarians, swore to on day one, when we were all sworn in – to uphold the Constitution of Guyana. Every Member of Parliament (MP) in this Assembly has sworn to uphold it.

When I started off and in almost every presentation that I have made, I have admonished my colleagues on this side to do better and to lead by example. The people, at the end of the day, exercised that confidence in their franchise to put all of us in this House. I have asked, on several occasions, for all of my colleagues to not revert to race baiting. We come here and put sound bites that will reach the far ends of this globe. Why? It is because it makes us look good. I look at the Constitution that we all swore to uphold...and I have it right here. Everyone was furnished with a copy and so for those of you who have not read... [An Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*)] I will get to that. I thought that a party that exhausted every single constitutional means to hold on to power had educated itself, read the Constitution and knew what its obligations were, as written in this book. I will state that I am so sadly disappointed. On day one, our very first speaker came into this House and started to speak about an apartheid state, inherent racism, racist policies and all of these things. [Mr. Mahipaul: Sing for your supper.] I would rather sing for my supper than steal for my supper. I will read article 160A of the Constitution for the nation who is listening and for those who want to go online:

“(1) all persons and political parties are prohibited from taking any action or advancing, disseminating or communicating any idea which may result in racial or ethnic division among the people.”

Those are some very critical words that we in this august House have sworn to uphold. Yet, we have Hon. Members coming to the floor in violation of that constitutional article. Once again, I say that it is my sincere hope that the Elections Commission is paying attention. I go to another speaker, who spoke about the respect and conduct that we ought to have in this august House. It is as if they had just discovered or just found themselves. They had a eureka moment. It is my hope that the eureka moment will continue to the end of this Parliament. Their conduct in this House when they attempted to steal the Mace, pulled out all of the wires and wanted to create chaos in Parliament... Being the primary chaos agents in this country, you cannot come to this House and speak about august House. For those who are listening

and maybe for my colleagues on this side who never understood what august means, there are so many words that one could use to describe august House. Here are a few of them: distinguished, respected, eminent, vulnerable, illustrious, prestigious and renowned. There are so many others. What I will state is that the behaviour I have seen from some of my colleagues does not give justice to the definition and that I find rather disappointing. I would venture so far as to say that if Mr. Charles Darwin were alive today, he would have lived to see the Darwin theory of evolution debunked because my colleagues on this side of the House seem incapable of evolving to a higher status.

I sat in my chair...and one of the things about sitting up there is that sometimes I avoid the eyes of my colleagues in the Opposition and whomever else, but it gives me ample opportunity and time to take all of the notes and to listen to all of the presenters, as I continuously and consistently have done for every single sitting that my colleagues, I say my colleagues because they are all here...When there is a sitting of the National Assembly, some of them do not even bother to log in and do not even show up. I think the taxpayers need to tie performance and attendance to the pay of every parliamentarian. If one cannot produce or attend, then by virtue of those attendances, one's salary should be reduced. I was actually tempted to come here in my traditional attire today, but I feared what would be happening behind me.

Mr. Speaker: In addition, it is very cold in the Dome.

Mr. Shuman: I am acclimatised, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. Once again, it goes back to the definition of august House. We heard presenter after presenter come into this House and say that it is important that we are honest with the people. I really do not like walking back into history... Yes, it is nice to reflect and be guided by the events of history, but if we are going to talk about coming into this House and thinking that we could sit here with some degree of integrity and be honest, the nation still awaits the truth from my colleagues on this side. The nation still awaits those Statements of Poll (SoPs). Let us start there for honesty. If we on this side cannot be honest, it becomes difficult for us to call the other side...I do not want to say dishonest, but it really becomes difficult if we do not have a platform of honesty on which to stand. If we are going to be honest, let us be honest about what transpired in the election of 2020 and everything else that ensued.

I go to great lengths to not lambaste my indigenous colleagues because I think we have enough issues of our own. As arguably one of the most marginalised people in the

country, we have our own issues. I really go to great lengths to not admonish them, publicly or on the floor, about their attitudes, behaviours and mistruths because I think those things could be resolved with dialogue. There are opportunities to address it, but when one comes to the podium and pedals untruths – I am cautious not to use the word lie – then, at some point, it needs to be corrected. Once again, if we cannot lead by example, then how do we now hold the Government accountable? That becomes a really difficult task.

I heard my colleague from Kako and... [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] My sincere apologies. We will get to that. They are also waiting for a better life which was never delivered. The Hon. Member came to this podium and spoke about the court case that was caught up for 24 years in Parliament. When the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) was in office, they did absolutely everything they could to frustrate that process. The Hon. Member was the Minister of State at that time, maybe only by title, but the authority was completely stripped from that office. Just by that simple action, one knows about the degree of respect they had for the Indigenous peoples. I am happy to state that it was because of constant dialogue between the Attorney General and myself and the justice system – I do not want to name the specific justices – that we have managed to work our way through. Thus, the people finally got the written ruling. It was with the support of the Hon. Attorney General. You cannot come to this podium and lament how great you were in office when, in fact, you did absolutely nothing.

10.49 a.m.

You did everything to frustrate the system. We go back to this thing about honesty. My colleague from the Guyana Absent Party, I mean the Guyana Action Party (GAP)...I will say unreservedly that I have the absolute and the utmost respect, the most that anyone could think of, for Mr. Sydney Allcock. The unfortunate thing is that when that Member was an Hon. Member in this House, much like the Leader of the Opposition, he saw so many swords and knives at his back that he could not perform. The key figures in that Ministry tried to undermine him – they all wanted his job – much like they are trying to do the Hon. Leader of the Opposition. It is unfortunate that within one political cycle we stand on this side of the House to see three separate Leaders of the Opposition. One cannot lead if one cannot get one's house in order.

The Hon. Member from Region 9 talked about getting your knees off of the necks of the Indigenous peoples. I stand here as an example. I could speak with authority because I was a victim of the very discriminatory process that the Hon. Member spoke about, except that it came from this side when they were in Government. When I was Vice-Chairman of the National Toshias Council, they tried to throw me in jail and they tried to destroy my life. When the National Toshias Council had its conference, they said the Council had control, but they would write the programme, they would control the agenda, they would control where we stayed and our travel. When we had a very comprehensive agenda for all of those meetings, members of the Ministry at the time literally took our agenda and tore it up. They said that we did not need that; they had one. You cannot speak about taking your knees off of the necks of Indigenous peoples when your party tore up the agenda. There is a very interesting thing about the truth. The truth is like salt in a wound that will continue to burn, and it is going to continue to hurt. When the truth hits the floor, this is what ensures. Once again, we talk about an august House. Listen to the behaviour of my colleagues.

They speak about land titling. I sat on the Amerindian Land Titling Board as a member of the National Toshias Council. I sat on that board as a substantive member representing the Indigenous peoples of this country. I will tell you why I continue to say I have the utmost respect for the previous Hon. Minister and First Vice-President. Amerindian land titling moved absolutely nowhere. I could say that with authority because I sat on that board when party affiliates from the APNU/AFC sat in that room and said they were not giving out any more land titles. This was not on one occasion. On multiple occasions they said that. The Hon. Minister at the time could not do anything. That was the degree of respect they had for Indigenous peoples. If I were to maybe expand on that – and I think I would have done that previously – the APNU/AFC removed the title from one Indigenous area and that is Annai. Instead of giving titles, what they did, literally, was take away. I listened as the Hon. Member spoke about extensions, titles and what and what, extolling the so-called fantastic virtues of the APNU/AFC when they were in office. Once again, the record needs to be set straight. When you come to this House, you have an obligation to tell the truth to the people, and that truth means that sometimes we have to swallow the bitter pills of our under achievements.

I want to say to my colleagues from the African Cultural and Development Association (ACDA) and all of my colleagues who are descendants of the terrible atrocities of slavery that

the Indigenous peoples in this country do not stand averse or opposed to reparations. We stand arm in arm with every single Guyanese to ensure that the injustice of slavery is corrected and that there is a reparations movement. We should not be looking at each other's issues as competing. While they are not the same, they are not competing. We are not competing for the same space. I go back to that point that the then APNU/AFC Administration established a Commission of Inquiry (COI) into lands and completely excluded the National Toshias Council. You excluded the premier Indigenous representative body, and you say that you were a caring Government and that you cared about Indigenous peoples. The record needs to be set straight. I hear my colleagues asking for me to go into the substance of *Budget 2023*. I think they want to urge me to move on because there is a saying that truth is like poetry, and we know how many people like poetry.

In my inaugural presentation in this House, I spoke about the severe psychological discomfort that an Indigenous Deputy Speaker would bring to my colleagues in this House. You could listen to it. That is the psychological discomfort it created to know that there is the first Indigenous Deputy Speaker in this House. In my inaugural address, and to contextualise *Budget 2023*, I spoke about the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund's (UNICEF) report on the status of Indigenous women and children in this country. I spoke about how difficult – and the report said it all – it was for Indigenous peoples to have access to education, have access to healthcare, have access to finances and a whole host of things. This is the official *Hansard*, and it is from my inaugural presentation. I had to go back and make sure that I was not mistaken and that what I had in my records matched what is on this paper.

When I started off, I spoke about the difficulties of Indigenous peoples in accessing healthcare and education. I will say, unreservedly and unapologetically, that what I have seen in my tenure with this Administration... To answer the Hon. Member from Region 9, who is behind me and... **[An. Hon. Member: What is it that you did for the people?]** ...asking what I have done for Indigenous peoples, I will tell you. It is because of continuous diplomacy and hard work that the Indigenous peoples now have better access to education and access to internet from 2020 to now. Someone said tell us about gold. I will tell you. If we are going to use gold as a marker, why do we not speak about what existed before that, which was absolutely nothing? When we are going to go to markers and when we are going to deal with how you change things, how you influence things... I would have hoped that some of the most learned friends on this side

would have read a little bit a philosophy. Confucius said that you should be as gentle as the wind. You are to be felt and not seen. This is because of constant collaborative efforts to ensure that what is contained in that report from UNCIF gets addressed. From 2020 to now, where, I would say, next to no Indigenous person had access to further learning, under the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) programme, so many Indigenous peoples now have access to education. I do not have the statistics, but that is a matter which I think anyone could research.

I go to the Hon. Priya Manickchand's portfolio. I had spoken about access to language programmes in relation to where we started off in 2020 to date. I had a discussion with the chief person in charge of education in this country. The language programme that we spoke about is now being launched as a pilot in two communities and is to be rolled out in 18 communities, as is contained in *Budget 2023*. That is a massive cry from the zero that ensued pre-2020. That is progress.

11.04 a.m.

I spoke about access to health and healthcare. I see my honourable colleague, Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo, is not in the House. It has been an ongoing conversation to deliver and find more effective ways to deliver healthcare to Indigenous peoples. It is not a matter of walking in there. We know the geography is tiring. It is very challenging. We know that, sometimes, communication is difficult. This has been a comprehensive and continuous dialogue among Dr. Frank Anthony, Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo, many other health professionals and I in finding ways to effectively deliver health services to the hinterland. That is a continuous dialogue process that is yielding results, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Deputy Speaker, to continue this dialogue, you will need an extension.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Cde. Speaker, I seek your guidance. The Hon. Member has disassociated himself from the Opposition and so I am seeking your guidance...

Mr. Speaker: Good attempt, Hon. Chief Whip. Any side of the House can stand and move an extension.

Mr. Jones: In that case, I do move that the honourable Government Advisor be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, you have the floor.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, given that our friends on that side of the House clearly have a difficulty with free speech and free expression, it gives me great pleasure to move...

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, are we allowed to make speeches here in the House?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister...yes, Hon. Chief Whip...

Mr. Jones: As I said, Sir, I move that the Hon. Member be given...

Mr. Speaker: I recognise the mover as the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance.

Mr. Jones: Sir, I was still on my feet.

Dr. Singh: It gives me great pleasure, Sir, to move that the Hon. Member be given additional time to complete his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Deputy Speaker, you have five minutes to conclude. The clock starts at 11.07 a.m.

Mr. Shuman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Given that I have not touched on some of the other topics that I wanted to, I would have asked for maybe another half of an hour or one hour to continue. Judging from all of the heckling and yelling, it was in good taste not to have dressed in my traditional garb today because, once again, who knows what would have come from behind me. Mr. Speaker, it is as if my colleagues on this side of the House are impervious to the truth. There are so many communities. My friend on this side is talking about selling out Indigenous peoples.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but express some sense of humour in what emanates. I will say that I never took any money from SLED to do anything, and I will leave that there. Let diplomacy take its course. It is as if my colleagues on this side of the House have a difficult time in looking at Guyana grow. They have a difficult time with the trajectory that Guyana is on. *Budget 2020* came in and corrected what was done in 2019, when there was no budget passed and when they spent money without consulting the public and without having a Sitting of the National Assembly. That money literally had to be paid in 2020. There seems to be some level of discomfort. When a legitimate political party and representative of the people come to this House and ask for an endorsement to spend from the public's purse, it creates a discomfort.

Where *Budget 2021* started off, *Budget 2022* built on that and *Budget 2023* complements what operated in 2021 and 2022. If we are going to talk about development in this country, it requires that we have an open mind, that we embrace change and that all of the developmental changes that are going to come are appropriately resourced, which is what *Budget 2023* does. It seems as though there are people in this Assembly – and I will not call names or say who they are – who want to see Guyana stuck in a pre-1985 era. I say that because when we talk about rigged elections, when we talk about the public’s purse and when we talk about lack of accountability, it seems as though there are some people in this House who want us to stay in that era. It also seems to me that my colleagues seem to want to say to the Ministers of the Government on that side, ‘how dare you try to make the lives of Guyanese better?’, ‘how dare you want to say that you are going to deliver education and healthcare to Indigenous peoples?’ and ‘how dare you allocate money to undertake Indigenous land titling?’. This is what seems to be coming from this side. They are saying to the Government, ‘how dare you look after the people’s interest?’ That is what it is sounding like to me.

Mr. Speaker, I know that my time...and we are really tight on it. I wish, like I said, that I had an hour, maybe more. I remember a lesson that I had in art class, and I am sure that many of my colleagues on this side would have attended art class, and it takes me back to a quote that I remember reading about Michelangelo. I will contextualise this in terms of Guyana. I think someone had asked him how he carved an angel. He said that he sees a marble and chisel away everything that is not. *Budget 2023* is the sharp end of that chisel that is meant to carve the beauty that Guyana eventually will be. With that, I will say that this budget endures my 110% support. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Acknowledgement of special guests in the gallery

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before I call on the next speaker, join me in acknowledging the presence of former Members of Parliament, Mr. Ernest Elliot and Ms. Genevieve Allen. Good morning. We acknowledge the presence of His Worship the Mayor of Georgetown, Pandit Ubraj Narine, and also my good friend and guest today, Colonel Ronald Hercules.

Our next speaker is the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, the Hon. Gail Teixeira. Hon. Minister, you may proceed. Hon. Minister, before you start, again, I talk about the unparliamentary words in the House,

and I urge all Members to observe the protocol. You may proceed, Hon. Minister.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Sir. Mr. Speaker, I join with my colleagues on this side of the House and Mr. Shuman in supporting *Budget 2023*. This budget comes after the emergency budget of 2020 and the 2021 and 2022 budgets.

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, continues to shout and Hon. Chief Whip, I would ask that you speak with the particular Member. Hon. Chief Whip, the Hon. Mr. Mahipaul is becoming a bit disgusting now. Hon. Minister, you may proceed, starting now.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I said, this budget comes after the emergency budget of 2020 and the 2021 and 2022 budgets to rebalance Guyana after the five years of the APNU/AFC’s incompetence as a Government. It has set the foundation for its transformation, steadfastly, carefully, calculatedly and step by step for the sustainable transformation of our nation. *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*. The vision laid out in our 2020 manifesto, led by the visionary leadership of President Mohamed Irfaan Ali; Vice President, Bharrat Jagdeo; Prime Minister, Mark Phillips and supported by all of us on this side of the House and the electorate who voted us in, speaks to a future that brings hope, pride and dignity for all Guyanese.

Mr. Speaker, I have the honour and sometimes non honour of having been through 32 budgets as a Member of Parliament. I must say that gone are the debates – and I think you would support me on this – from the Opposition People’s National Congress (PNC) side, with leaders like Mr. Desmond Hoyte, Mr. Winston Murray, Mr. Kenneth King, Dr. Faith Harding and Mr. Deryck Bernard and yourself, Mr. Speaker, when you were a Member of Parliament for The United Force (TUF). They came with substance and were effective Opposition Members. Since 2012, the APNU/AFC Opposition has become irresponsible, reckless and lacking in substance during these debates, even when they were in Government, worst so in this budget. Dare I say that the listening public, like us on this side of the House, have been subjected to the vitriol of the APNU/AFC MPs, who appear to be living and nurtured in a bubble of intellectual opportunism and naysay and, in some cases, sheer intellectual bankruptcy. I listened and I have this mental image in my brain of the witches in Macbeth, the three witches who sat over the cauldron and stirred the pot. In Shakespeare’s Macbeth the three witches said:

“Double, double toil and trouble;

Fire burn and cauldron bubble.”

That is what you are doing. Always fire burn and cauldron bubble; trouble, trouble. A rap singer may want to break that into a nice rap song. It might be appropriate because this is what they bring to Guyana. I say intellectual opportunism repeatedly as they have misquoted and misinformed about the contents of official regional and international reports. Let me just quickly go through some of these. They kept referring to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Report on Latin America and Caribbean on food security. The figure - they keep bandying around is 42% of the people in Guyana not having a diet, not having food security and not eating properly - is not the figure for Guyana. It is the figure for the Latin American and Caribbean region.

Secondly, in the same FAO Report, they seem to have forgotten or not read that Guyana places among six countries with the best nourishment rates in the Latin American and Caribbean region. This intellectual opportunism and, as I said, bankruptcy will continue to show it. I heard a Member, who has left his seat, talk about the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Article IV 2022 and castigated... but the Article IV of 2022 Report on Guyana stated that public debt stood at 42.9% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at the end of 2021, one of the lowest in the Caribbean region. It also pointed out that the IMF noted the PPP/C Government of Guyana's progress in strengthening Guyana's anti-corruption framework and fiscal transparency in the extractive industries. It pointed out and went on in a number of ways to explain that.

11.19 a.m.

The International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) report also stated in relation to the expenditure on public investment and construction that this was a way to:

“...ease cost-of-living pressures for the population.”

These investments can once again be seen in the 2023 Budget with additional capital investments in key infrastructure projects.

“This level of public capital investment, as well as the authorities' commitment to a zero overall balance in the medium term... form the basis of...”

a progressive and positive...

“...medium-term macro-fiscal framework...”

as is laid out by the IMF in its 2022 level.

“With this level of expected public investment implementation, and with tenders for large infrastructure projects allotted to international firms that will import capital goods and workers, inflation is expected to be contained in the medium term.”

I am quoting all the time from the IMF. In addition to that, the IMF notes that it expects inflation to rise to 9.4% by the end of 2022. However, it admits that there are efforts by the Government of Guyana to reduce the impact of many exogenous factors and ultimately reduce the actual rate of inflation as compared to the estimated rate of the IMF. Lastly, in comparison to the region, it notes that “growth is higher in Guyana” than in its regional partners, owing especially to the expanding oil and gas sector, which we know. Inflation is also reported as remaining subdued in comparison to regional peers.

“The fiscal performance (of Guyana) was better than in any other regional commodity exporters and external borrowing remained low.”

This document was misquoted in this House yesterday and gave a totally different picture. It was totally different. This is repeated, in what I call, intellectual opportunism in the nicest, and intellectual bankruptcy in the worst. [Dr. Singh: You are being polite.] I am being very polite because the Speaker has made it very clear that certain words cannot be used here. So, let us go on.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you had one *bleep* already. Yes, irresponsible.

Ms. Teixeira: There is the *Study of the socio-economic impact of the closure of the GUYSUCO sugar estates on sugar workers in Guyana*, an International Labour Organisation (ILO) document, which was published in January, 2021, and done by the University of Guyana (UG), GREEN Institute as the contractor. Despite what the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan has said, this document states:

“...it was found that the livelihoods of sugar workers who were laid off were severely compromised;..”

They were severely compromised. The document goes on to show that even years later “some workers were still unemployed at the time of being interviewed”, while most who did find new jobs were doing so on a “part-time or seasonal basis”. The whole document is here, yet the Hon. Member made it seem as if the closure of the estates... By the way, Mr. Speaker, I must remind the House that the former President, Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger, appointed a

Commission of Inquiry (CoI) into the sugar industry. That Commission of Inquiry advised that any closure of any estate would have catastrophic repercussions, not only for the sugar workers but the entire country. That was totally ignored because the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) has a tendency of feeling that it knows it all. They are dismissive, dismissive of any opinion that is different from theirs. This is as an example today, when an opinion from the Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, Hon. Member Mr. Shuman, was different from theirs. This is a trend in the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) of the APNU/AFC. They cannot take people with different views.

There was a quote too on the Norwegian consultant – Norconsult. This document that I am reading is the *Review of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project in Guyana Final Report*. It is dated 12th December, 2016. This is what it states on page 35 of 49... It points out the table. There is a table with the options for Guyana – the Amaila Falls, Kaieteur Falls, Tortruba, Upper Mazaruni, Arisaruni and Oko Blue. They graded them by their suitability and ability to provide hydropower for Guyana. It states from the table:

“... that Amaila Falls was the most attractive project both from a technical/economical point of view and from an environmental/social point of view.”

Yet, people quoted the Norwegian report and distortedly and totally conveyed the wrong impression. All these documents I will lay over because I sincerely hope that the Hon. Members will read. The conclusion on page 37 states:

“From a financial and economic point of view, development of Amaila Falls seems to be the optimal solution for meeting the electricity demand in Guyana.”

...despite the risk. I think I have shown enough of the level of intellectual opportunism and bankruptcy, but I only named a few. One Member of the Opposition got up yesterday and proposed mortgage relief as if this was a new idea. The Hon. Member did not seem to have read the Budget, which is not surprising. Page 92 of 101 of the Budget points out that the mortgage relief – I guess it was tiring to read so much – proposal is to increase it from \$15 million to \$20 million. It is right here. Obviously, the Member never read it. I used the phrase ‘intellectual bankruptcy’ because how does one explain when those on the opposite side, meaning APNU/AFC, cannot imagine a Guyana that is on the move, that is transformed to be a model nation with a low carbon diversified economy with

transportation links, a new city, a deepwater harbour, a new suspension bridge across the Demerara River, a new bridge across the Corentyne River, where our people can live in new housing schemes, new emerging preurban and urban centres, where we can produce food so that everyone can have a healthy diet, where our children and grandchildren can achieve their dreams, where no one is left behind, and we care for the elderly and differently abled under the banner of ‘One Guyana’? Why is it so difficult for you to support that?

I will explain why the APNU/AFC has problems. They have fed themselves a diet of a vision or a view that is consumed with victimology, fear, division, and racism. I have wondered why they could not imagine this. They not only cannot imagine it, but they adamantly refuse to be a part of this vision and refuse to be part of the transformation process. Worst yet, they try to undermine the progress and halt it by whatever means. My conclusions are that the APNU/AFC and its mother party, the People’s National Congress/Reform (PNC/R), have never gone through soul searching to really understand their role. They have fed their supporters a diet for over 50 years of victimology, racial division, fear, fiction, and untruths, that they cannot extricate themselves from and change course. They are so buried, psychologically, physically, emotionally, and intellectually, in this morass that they have created over the 50 years, that they do not know how to extricate themselves. They do not even comprehend that if they apologise for all the wrongdoings – all the rigged elections, all the victimology of Guyanese, all the violence that was portrayed in this country, and worst and most recently, the 2020 Elections – they may have hope for the future, they may have a chance in the future. [Mr. Mustapha: Did they apologise for that?] No. Of course not; they would not. They have fed their supporters this.

The problem is that they have descended to such depths of inequity and depravity that the more the Guyanese people want progress and the more the people respond to the Government’s programmes, whether it is housing, the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL), the Get Ready for Opportunities to Work (GROW), the Women’s Innovation and Investment Network (WIIN), the part-time jobs, the small business grants, the Black Belly sheep and roosters – whatever you call them – they go into a tailspin. They do not know what to do, except to pull the one card left in the pack. Do you know what that is? It is race. Yet, they refuse to recognise how isolated they are. The people are moving forward, and they are caught, stuck going at some mileage that they cannot even catch up with the people.

People want to move forward in this country. They do not want to be dragged constantly into this unpalatable cauldron of venom and toxicity. This cauldron of venom and toxicity, our people do not want to hear this. They have had enough of the speeches in this National Assembly and on this budget; the people are saturated. They do not want to hear them anymore. They want to go on with their lives, to have a house, some land, and a car. They want their kids to have a good education and they want to access jobs, create small businesses, farm and fish. They want some gainful economic activity so that the women and young women are not being left behind in this country. You have not read the signal right about what women are doing in this country. You have not read it right. You are off the course because you are blinded. You are jaundiced; you are looking at the country and the people with jaundiced eyes because it is all race-baited.

Mr. Speaker, 60% of the GOAL scholarships are women recipients; 44% of the household recipients are females with small businesses. In the *World Economic Forum, Global Gender Gap Index, 2021 to 2022*, Guyana ranks 35th out of 146 countries that were studied in 2022. This is a significant improvement from a ranking of 53 in 2021. Imagine, we jumped 18 spaces in one year. How did we do that? We ranked 17th globally for legislators, senior officials, and managers; our literacy rate is at an exceptional level; and Guyana is tied for first place for enrolment in both secondary and tertiary education under the *World Economic Forum*. For Guyana's health and survival, it is placed first for the sex ratio at birth. It is also placed first on the global scale for life expectancy with other countries. [Mr. Ramson: You should have let him come first.] The Hon. Leader of the Opposition is coming later and I am sure that he will respond to me. On the 19th of January, at a press conference stated:

“Budget 2023 confirms that the government is clueless, incompetent, uncaring, and anti-poor.”

It goes on to state that the Budget:

“...confirms that the government is more interested in serving its business cronies than in lifting the quality of life of the Guyanese...”

people. It goes on to point out:

“... the PPP will not eliminate poverty, will not ensure that families can live comfortable and happy lives...”

Then, on the eve of the Budget's opening, the debate, on Monday 16th January there is another press statement that comes out from the office of the PNC/R. It states:

“Guyana has, for instance, one of the highest rates of poverty and inequality, infant mortality, maternal mortality, suicide, child malnutrition, and preventable deaths.

Our country has one of the lowest levels of life expectancy, numeracy and literacy, education performance, and access to quality health care. These indicators are not abstract statistics.”

Mr. Speaker, I have presented you with statistics. The problem again with the Opposition is that it is just verbiage supported by nothing. It is sitting on quicksand. For everything that we are looking at data-wise, we have a long way to go because we are a small, developing country, but we are making progress. This is under the PPP/C, because they took us back during the five years.

11.34 a.m.

They took hundreds and thousands of dollars from each family with all the taxation that they brought on our people and value added tax (VAT) on essential food items and, yet, they come here sanctimoniously and pretend that they did a good job. In *Access to finance*, Guyana records near equal rights with women and in terms of inheritance rights, women, daughters and widows in the report have equal rights. Again, more statistics.

The APNU/AFC does not comprehend this forward and progressive movement of our people. In fact, as I said, they cannot comprehend it. It is unfathomable to them while at the same time each of the Members of Parliament (MPs) benefit from the measures that the Government has introduced as they should. The people like the Budget measures. They understand these will bring benefits to their lives and they want more and more, and that is normal. They will get more. They understand that the country is progressing; just look around you. As I said they come to the House with tainted glasses; they need new glasses. Maybe they should join Dr. Frank Anthony's eye care programme and get their sight corrected, because streetlights are going up where there were not any, roads are going up where there were not any, bridges are going up where there were not any, and houses are going up. If they want to have an aerial view of the housing programme, take a flight from Ogle and fly over Cummings Lodge and Industry. This is where they see progress. Our people will always want more, and we will produce, we will give them as they deserve. They know now, in 2023, that things are better and far better than under the APNU/AFC.

One Member on the other side said the Government had its 'boot on the necks of the people'; the Government being us. This was a Freudian slip. It was the 'APNU/AFC boot' that was on the neck of the Guyanese people, that with 200 taxes took out \$200,000 out of the pockets of each family, that scrapped the cash care programmes and took billions of dollars, over its term in Office, out of the pockets of school children in our country. The country is alive, and the 'APNU/AFC boot' has been taken off the neck of the Guyanese people. Our people can breathe again, and they want to grasp the opportunities that are available to them. The APNU/AFC MPs came to this House and talked about friends, families and cronies, and my colleague Mr. Vickram Bharrat showed how all our Guyanese are friends, families and new friends. But whilst the APNU/AFC MPs, desperately, in much of their presentations, were defending their record of Government they could not answer, if they had done all the things they claim to have done, how come the Guyanese people rejected them at the electorate; how come they were not brought back into Government? That is something they need to have a cathartic moment in their Parties.

They calculatedly omitted to tell the House that their Government had the highest level of executive lawlessness in the history of our nation, with consistent violations of the Constitution over the entire term of Office, which escalated after the no confidence motion and the 2020 Elections, when the head of the Organisation of American States (OAS) Observer Mission, former Prime Minister Bruce Golding, reported to the OAS Permanent Council in July, 2020, that he had never witnessed such a transparent effort to steal an election. The audit reports of the years 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019 are filled with case after case of breaches of the Procurement Act and the Financial Regulations during the APNU/AFC time. The Public Procurement Commission's (PPC's) report on the new Demerara Harbour Bridge exposed the collusion of a Minister and the entire Cabinet to cancel tenders from over 20 foreign and local companies and gave the contract to a company that never bid, and, after the exposure, after the report of the PPC, continued to pay that company an additional \$126 million from the Demerara Harbour Bridge Board. Seriously! Then they come here and try to play holier than thou. They come here trying to pretend that they are pure.

While I was in Opposition, I probably had some more time than I may have now, but I compiled a list of scandals up to 2019, 57 scandals – please notice, 'scandals' – with procurement, with executive lawlessness, with cronyism and paying companies money when they had not produced work,

etcetera, and paying their financiers. Regrettably, there are a number of persons in this House who were involved in these things then, and some are before the courts, so let me leave that as it is. You know who you are, and we know who you are. In April, 2020, the Auditor General did a special report which was tabled in the House called *COVID-19 Pandemic Assistance Voucher Programme*. It was tabled in this House and deals with the period of April, 2020, when COVID-19 came around and what efforts the Government supposedly did to bring relief to our people. I wish to remind you that one had to go and register at the Forbes Burnham Research Institute (Burnham Institute), in the building opposite the National Cultural Centre, which was the former President's home that he donated as the Burnham Institute. People had to apply there for the vouchers. What did the audit report find? I am reading, quoting, that is from page iii, the Executive Summary. It states:

"People who needed assistance were denied. Over 9,000 of the 11,000 qualified applicants did not receive vouchers..."

Mr. Speaker, 9,000 out of the 11,000 never got their money.

"...and officials have not explained why. The programme excluded persons in the hinterland regions. Instead, they were promised hampers.

Payments worth millions were not verified. Vouchers totally \$56 million were not checked before paying suppliers. This weakness could have resulted in overpayment to suppliers and eligible persons not given much needed relief.

Vouchers not used were left unsecured. Over 3,000 unused vouchers valued at least \$90 million were unsecured on a desk. As a result, the vouchers could have been easily accessed and used to obtain items from supplies."

It goes onto to talk about the weak information data system to track and to keep records of what happened. This, of course, I am sure, will become an issue at the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). What is clear, they said, repeatedly, in this House, that they came in and there was no money. Again, intellectual bankruptcy, because all the Bank of Guyana reports show that \$780 million of foreign currency reserves were left in May, 2015 and by August, 2020 it was down to around US\$200 million. Where did the money go? What did you do with it? You do not trouble you reserves; you are very careful with your foreign currency reserves. In fact, you try to keep at least three months

reserves in stock for a rainy day. The other area that preserves us, helps us to have for a rainy day, to save and to hold on to money is the gold reserve. Another scandal. I see someone writing all the time on the paper who was part of the Guyana Gold Board, and sanctimonious as usual. There is a gold reserve scandal. These are the assets of the people, our savings for a rainy day. We left \$13 billion worth of gold reserves and by the 2020 it was less than \$200 million. Do you know what they did? They took the money, the gold, and they sold it when the gold price was lowest on the world market; the lowest on the world market. This is the height of incompetence, the height of irresponsible leadership. They took the two pillars that we have in case of instability, in case of exogenous factors, that one can fall back on, and they exploited, they squandered it, with very little of a trail left.

In contrast, the procurement laws are being upheld, the constitutional oversight bodies – the Audit Office of Guyana and the PPC – are functioning, the judiciary is functioning, the Parliament Office is functioning. The legislators are a different issue. The APNU/AFC claim, they go out there with this race card that Indo-Guyanese are getting contracts...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I have to play the timecard; you will need an extension.

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker I asked that the Hon. Member be granted a five-minute extension.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Prime Minister.

Motion put and agreed to.

Hon. Minister, you have five minutes to conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: They talk about Indo-Guyanese getting contracts and pointing to this apartheid that they like to refer to. But I have a question. I sit in the Cabinet; I see contracts coming up. How am I to know the company named 'ABC' and 'JW' and 'N&S'? How do I know the ethnicity of a company? How does one deal with the ethnicity of a company? This opportunism bankruptcy, intellectual opportunism, is so offensive; so offensive as far as I am concerned. If one goes to the thousands of small contracts at the local government level and the Regional and Ministerial Tender Boards, those contracts are given to all ethnic groups that have a right to bid and be considered, and if responsive, they get the contracts.

They make fun and make light of the increase on the threshold from \$75,000 to \$85,000, but this will bring for all

taxpayers, by the relief of deducting \$85,000 for those of you who earn more than \$85,000, over \$1,000,000 in relief in taxation. They say that there is nothing in the Budget. I can predict that when Mr. Norton gets up the quotes I gave from the press statements will be the line he carries – nothing there, nothing to deal with poverty, nothing to do with this; the race card will be pulled out and the cronies and conies will be pulled out. Clearly, they lack any comprehension of how the economy works and how the Budget's measures bring relief. I asked the Hon. Members to look at an excellent article in the *Mirror Newspaper*, by Dr. Leslie Ramsammy, on the Budget and the measures that affect the Guyanese people. You will hear our luminaries coming after us, particularly my dear friend, Dr. Ashni Singh, who will tell how with the measures we are giving billions of dollars into the pockets of people, unlike what they did. They took money out of people's pockets; we are putting money back in. We have done it in the 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 and for the next 20 years when we stay in Government.

Hope and optimism, why do they not get it? Six hundred companies have been registered with the Local Content Secretariat; 1,000 small contractors have been encouraged and assisted to get registered and bid for small contracts across the country. Each of these small contractors, one thousand of them, hire at least five people. It creates jobs. Twelve hundred small grants, according to my colleague Minister Walrond, received by small business in 2022, a 40% increase than before. The Amerindian Village Councils, no matter what Mr. Henry says, are being given contracts to build roads and infrastructure in communities. Waramadong, in the same region, Upper Mazaruni, where the Hon. Member comes from, has a contract to build a new primary school and it is being done.

11.49 a.m.

Everywhere one goes, there is change. The architecture is changing; the landscape of each village, each area and each part of this country is changing rapidly. The level of race and racial innuendos was sickening in this debate; deliberately putting one area of the country and one ethnic group against each other is reprehensible. They cast empty barrels around, dropping laced comments about discrimination, but they refuse to bring one single case of such. The people know you better than you know yourselves. They know you better than you know yourselves because they have experienced you from 1964 to 1992. They have experienced you from 2015 to 2020, but they also experienced you in 2011 when you got the one seat more and we were in Government. They saw

you cut \$90 billion out of the budget for the Amerindian Development Fund, for airstrips, and salaries for public servants. They saw all of that. I repeat, the people know you better than you know yourselves.

This is a visible, accessible, accountable, and communicative Government to all Guyanese. We are based on a policy of inclusivity and participation. We brought in new initiatives such as Men on Mission, for example, to fight domestic violence. Why are you not standing with us? This is not, as Ms. Priya Manickchand said, a political issue. The President's Youth Advisory Council has involved young people across this country in learning to take on leadership and solve issues. The Natural Resource Fund has been congratulated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as we amended it last year to allow for participatory oversight. The Leader of the Opposition has to name his person on one of the committees. I am not *au fait* that he has done that yet. The two names came from the parliamentary committee as required. But, the one thing is that this issue of our oil revenue comes here. We never touched the money until that Act was brought back and passed in this House in 2022. Do you not think it might have been tempting? If it was in your hands, you would have gone with it already.

I predict; I can know. I am not a *farsee*, as they say in creole. *Farsee* meaning that I can see in the future. I do say that today when the Leader of the Opposition speaks... I will be followed by Ms. Hughes and Ms. Volda Lawrence and we will continue to hear the three witches turning the cauldron. We would hear the three witches stirring the cauldron:

“Double, double toil and trouble;

Fire burn and cauldron bubble.”

Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. The next speaker is the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes. Hon. Member, at 11.53 a.m., you may proceed.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is ironic how life is because in this Parliament and in the previous Parliament, in the long wee hours of the morning, I have seen a red-headed witch flying through the Chambers. I would like to start by giving a warm welcome to Ms. Letitia Wright from the Black Panther movies, and I say to her, welcome to beautiful Guyana.

Once again, I am here to address this honourable House on another budget. This time our 2023 national Budget: *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*. I

am fortunate to have heard this morning, at five minutes to nine o'clock, Mr. Bobby Vieira on his '104 programme' who reminded us to ignore loud and aggressive persons for they are a vexation to the spirit. Therefore, to the Hon. Member who has an inferiority complex when it comes to me, I feel sorry for you. I know the challenges of size, and I expect you to behave the way you do. I want to ask the Hon. President to make sure that the most Hon. Kwame McCoy is part of that 'Mission of Men' that we support. Let me start by recognising that the preparation of any national budget, especially one of this size, is no easy task. I recognise the long hours of work that was undertaken by the staff of the Ministry of Finance, and you, Hon. Minister Ashni Singh, and most importantly, the families of staff members who have endured many hours of their loved ones working overtime to fashion this budget. To all of them I say, thank you.

As I stand here to address this august House in my British accent, thank God I am proud of the strong Guyanese education that taught me to speak properly; all right here in Guyana. I would like to think that my immediate response to that comment about a British accent would be to just laugh in the face of such pettiness, at this critical juncture in our history. I cannot believe this because it hurts me to think that, in this day and age, we are still quibbling over distractions so as not to address the real issues. One might also assume that I do not appreciate the efforts that have been made to put together this Budget that, maybe for the first time in our history, has behind it the resources to provide for our people in ways that we could never have thought of before. I do appreciate the effort, though woeful it is, but my overriding response is a deep disappointment that this opportunity to really give our country and our people what they have waited so long for, is an opportunity lost. I cannot but weep for my people, the people of Guyana, who would hope that they would see more in this Budget, a true understanding of any government, the need to put their people first and to see that the benefits gained from the oil money, could create real time transformation in people's lives. I had earnestly hope that this Budget would showcase a change of thinking on the part of the PPP/C, and that they would see what could be done with the resources we now have available and would have the moral inclination to do so. Alas, all to no avail.

In addition to the lack of understanding of the needs of the Guyanese population that has been highlighted in this budget presentation, is the willingness to defend its inaccuracies with a state of inaccuracies and in some cases, outright lies that are mindboggling to say the least. Our aim as elected

representatives of our people is to ensure that we provide the means for every last one of them to live full lives, to have access to quality healthcare and education, to have the means to earn a living, to provide for them a dignified old age and to use the country's resources towards that purpose. On behalf of my people, the people of Guyana, the questions I must ask are these: How does this budget contribute to better lives for our people? How does it improve education and healthcare? How does it allow our people to have the resources to live comfortably? How does it add dignity to the lives of the elderly? This Budget has the responsibility to articulate a vision for Guyana and this is what we are not seeing. What will the country look like in five years or in ten years? A real vision cannot be found amongst the collection of large infrastructural projects thrown together. There are few truths that we hope, I hope, we all can agree on in this room, regardless of the hostilities, the vitriol, the lack of respect and downright verbal abuse hurled especially to us women, in this honourable House.

The first truth is that, regardless of which side of the House we sit, any government in office in Guyana from now on will be able to have money to spend in the medium and long term. The gods have given us those gifts and we are thankful. The question is, how do we prioritise the welfare of all of our citizens, our children, our pensioners and those with special needs? How does this Budget treat these groups? This must be our number one consideration. This Budget is set at \$781.9 billion. This is the first budget to benefit from \$31.3 billion from the sale of carbon credits along with the transfer of \$2.89 billion from the Natural Resource Fund. Real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) grew by 25.1%. The United States (US) dollar has been relatively stable over the last two years and even before. All good Mr. Speaker, and all good 'Mr. Junior Minister of Finance'. As I am fair in my assessment of the positive nature of these indicators, I want to give credit where it is due, a failing highlighted during these budgets. No matter how you cut it, our nation would be sitting in a totally different place had the APNU/AFC Coalition not pushed the development of our oil and gas industry, as any good government was expected to. What is sad, is the Minister's constant tirade that he collected a damaged economy. At this point in time, I want to remind us all how this economy was ticking, as far back as 2018. The...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, just give me one minute. Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy, you are in my right ear. I cannot help but hear you. Could you tone down what you want to say and be a bit more effective in it? I am now getting overly

annoyed with the shouting from you. You will get back your time, Hon. Member. Go ahead.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wanted to remind the 'junior Minister' of how strong our economy was in 2015. These are the words of the International Monetary Fund and, of course, I am going to be sharing all of these documents with Parliament. This is what it said:

"Guyana's Economic growth strengthened in 2018 with broad-based expansion across all major sectors. Real GDP grew by 4.1 percent..."

It goes on to say:

"...production, which was largely financed by foreign direct investments (FDI), petroleum sector. Public finances improved in 2018 as the central government deficit came in at 3.5 percent of GDP, lower than the budgeted 5.4..."

It goes on, economic growth increased:

"The medium-term prospects are very favourable as oil production is on schedule to begin in early 2020."

We started in 2019 but there the Directors were saying the management of Guyana's oil wealth and the emphasis on the need to complement it. Sorry.

"They commended that the NRF's framework aims to save some of the resources..."

I do not want to spend more time but to say that there was no bankrupt economy in 2018. This is where I want to say that since assuming office...

12.04 p.m.

I want to quote page one by the Hon. Minister, who I see had to get up and leave and that is okay; I know how that feels.

"Since assuming office, our Government has set about the task of repairing the deep and lasting damage caused by five years of misrule and mismanagement..."

What is good is that the Hon. Member introduced to this Parliament the term "intellectual dishonesty". It is interesting that the Minister himself is a victim of his own intellectual dishonesty. The shouts that nothing was done has been resounding but, as I said, the facts are here on the emergence of Guyana's oil and gas industry, which the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) so

carefully chartered so that all Guyanese can reap the benefits.

In terms, we know the road to first oil, 2015 to 2019. I want to mention some of the things that we achieved in those four short years with less money to spend and restrictions on spending money. We strengthened the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), signed a new agreement, a production licence, established the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI), established a Department of Energy and even created the very first Guyana International Petroleum Business Summit & Exhibition (GIPEX) oil conference – a big outpost for oil conferences. We keep hearing that this is the first time. We did it in 2018 and 650 persons paid to come and that was when we were in Government. We signed bilateral partnerships, memorandums of understanding (MoU) for training and got support from the World Bank (WB), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Chatham House, the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the Oxford University and it goes on. Tonnes of work were done by hardworking and committed Guyanese. It is time we give credit where it is due.

I note that in 2016 our inflation rate was 1.4, 2017 – 1.5, 2018 – 1.6, 2019 – 0.1, by the same Government that supposedly mismanaged the economy. Today, it is a whopping 7.2% and rising as the food costs highlight. Is that prudent management of the inflation rate? If we look at Appendix VI in the Budget, it talks about our public debt. I do not want to list all the figures because of time, but I just want to say that in 2018 it was \$1.79 billion and by this year we expect it to be \$4.4 billion. The Minister states, on page 29:

“Since returning to office, we have invested over \$10 billion in plant and equipment...”

This year, sugar gets over \$4 billion, and yet when the Coalition was in power and so called “mismanaged” the industry, in 2019, 92,282 tonnes of sugar were produced. In 2022, under the excellent management of Dr. Singh, the People’s Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) could barely produce 47,000 tonnes. This does not make a lot of business sense.

I do not have to repeat the pain our citizens are experiencing with the high cost of living. We have heard the present cost of items in the basic breadbasket of goods. I am asking, is this really the best we can do, this fastest growing economy

in the world, one of them? The best we could do is to give the pensioners a \$5,000 increase. Allow me to directly show good quality Depend diapers. A bail is for \$4,000. I know that Depend diapers can be bought cheaper in Guyana, but it was a pensioner that said to me, “Ms. Cathy, we buy this one because it lasts a lil’ longer”. Your \$5,000 increase would be spent on 18 Depend diapers and, maybe, we could throw in a bottle of Ensure for the pensioners. Is that the best we can do? Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh, you and the PPP/C Government have given the pensioners nothing really and that is why we had recommended \$50,000. Our persons with special needs, whom the Minister of Education boasts we are going to do more for, which is good, get an increase of \$2,000. Really, Mr. Speaker? That is actually two taxi drops, assuming that the person is living in Georgetown. If the person is living anywhere near Herstelling, it would be \$2,000 or \$2,500, depending on the time of day.

There has been much debate on the future of education. I am strong and I support the programmes that you are going to improve and the ability to give a higher quality education to our students. We have to ask, how come, with a Budget of over \$700 billion, we have to until 2025 for the university students to get a little something? Could we have not given them a 50% reduction in the fees? Get creative? Work together? Maybe arrange a 25% rebate? Something to help the students in these difficult times. How can we justify putting \$4 billion into sports – and I am a strong supporter of sports – and a little over \$3 billion for the University of Guyana (UG)? The premier institution where we and the private sector expect our qualified Guyanese students to come out from, especially given the local content requirements. Five of the eight faculties at the UG are science based. Within the faculty of Social Sciences, there are 12 different disciplines. How do you justify the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship programmes getting about half of UG’s budget with no physical infrastructure to work with? Politics should never intrude on our educational capabilities. The Guyana Learning Channel is, quite possibly, the most important mass education tool for primary and secondary education in Guyana, and it must be commended. This entity has been unable to reach its full potential because it continues to be constrained by nepotism and limited thinking. Why should someone who is related to the sitting Minister of Education be running that facility with no broadcast experience and no education background? These are the issues that continue to plague us and these are the issues that have to be addressed. We could have used the opportunity of these debates to discuss these issues.

How is it possible that the APNU/AFC Coalition, at a time when there were no oil reserves, was able to make permanent salary increases in wages and salaries for teachers, nurses, doctors, the defence services, police and security forces? It moved from 39,570 in 2015 – again, I do not want to spend time on the breakdown – to 70,000 by 2019, a 77% increase. I want Guyanese to understand what I am saying. I am making a distinction between putting and increasing your minimum salary as opposed to one-off cash grants. I want Guyanese to understand that if you were receiving a minimum wage of \$39,570 in 2015 and by 2019 you then started to get \$70,000, it means you are getting an extra \$30,400 every month before tax. Imagine, by the end of the year, you would have received approximately – do not knock me down for it – \$365,000 extra. Now, do you understand, Guyanese, how small that \$35,000 one-off cash grant really is? We recommended taking the minimum wage to \$100,000. Do the poorest Guyanese not have rent or a mortgage, family, electricity and all those costs to pay? What is of great concern, which is reflected in this Budget, is the Government's propensity to provide cash grants instead of increasing wages and salaries. What exactly is a cash grant? I want everybody to understand that we are in support of cash grants, but there must be a top-up. Guess what, you cannot take a cash grant to a bank. You cannot use a cash grant that is unpredictable and subjected to the whims and the fancies of this Government to give it to you. You can do very little, long term, with it. These are the fundamental problems.

On the tourism development front, I want to say that what is important, what we have to look at, long term, with regards to a long-term plan for economic development is that information must be driven by data. All of us in this House, including the private sector, must be given the opportunity to interrogate that data. I ask the question to the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, what is the data that we can use that supports the decision to place a much-anticipated hospitality training school six hours away from the geographical area of our new hotels? All the new hotels are going to be on the Coast and yet we are asking that investor to work out residential accommodation for his staff to be able to go to the hospitality school, which we know is an important institution. I worked and did studies on that also. Why would you give a potential investor that burden when we know he/she wants to ensure that his/her staff can go on with on-the-job training? That is why I am saying that to say to this honourable House, "why not an urban area?" is a totally unacceptable answer. Bring the data, Ms. Minister. It is the same sort of thinking and lack of data that allowed

us to create a synthetic track in a location where our data does not show that the majority of our athletes come from, and the athletes that can use it have to take two buses each way.

I want to note that when it comes to some sectors, reductions have been huge. Gold is a classic example, where the earnings were \$876.6 million by 2022 but had fallen to \$80.30 million. Sadly, one of the problems we have had in these debates has been the gross inaccuracy deliberately voiced and spouted out here. One of those is that of the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC). We heard the Junior Minister of Finance, the Minister of Agriculture and others spoke of the APNU/AFC bankrupting the Guyana Forestry Commission. Again, nothing could be further from the truth. *The Report on the Forensic Audit and Review of the Guyana Forestry Commission* dated 31st December, 2015, by Mr. Anand Goolsarran, on page 8, informs us of a totally different position. It states:

"During the period 2006 to 2010, the Commission made payments to other State agencies totalling \$1.284 billion out of its retained earnings (accumulated profits) ... Of this amount, two payments totalling \$600 million were made to the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Ltd. to meet the 2007 Cricket World Cup expenditure and to assist in the cost of construction of the Marriott Hotel. Another amount of \$600 million was transferred to the Governor of the Bank of Guyana as the liquidator of the Colonial Life Insurance Company."

Do you see where that money went prior to 2015? We are reminded at 1.34:

"Section 22 (1)(a) of the Act prohibits the Commission from making any loan or grant except for the purposes of carrying on the functions of the Commission. Despite this, September 2014, Cabinet approved of the Commission granting a loan of US\$600,000 to the Iwokrama International Centre."

12.19 p.m.

I am a strong supporter of Iwokrama. I have visited it several times. I have encouraged my family when they come to go and visit. However, let us not talk about violating the law when you are doing it yourself. At paragraph 1.36 states:

"The Commission's main operating bank account was overdrawn by \$90.245 million as at 31 May

2015. ... For May, 2015, the overdraft interest was \$489,204.”

That is what we are talking about. I want to go also to this Report that was tabled in this House - *Signed Away*, I think it is called. I would not say what it is. I am going to ask the Parliament to share this information. The Hon. Minister on this side, Minister Rodrigues came here and pontificated about the Global Witness Report. She stressed the ‘C’ word. Do you know the ‘C’ word? [An Hon. Member: We do not know, tell we.] We cannot say it. [An Hon. Member: Corruption?] That is it. She stressed the ‘C’ word but what she did not do was state that Global Witness itself withdrew its Report and that *Forbes* Magazine did a story on the withdrawal of that Report. The information is here. We may have forgotten our own Guyana *OILNOW*: Global Witness withdraws Report on Guyana. It is right here. From *Global Witness*, it states:

“Statement on the withdrawal of the Global Witness’s report on Guyana’s oil sector”

“Our February 2020 Report on Guyana’s oil sector, *Signed Away*, is not consistent with that focus and for this reason that we have decided to remove it from our website and stop using it in our campaigning work. We regret any unintended negative consequences arising from this report, ...”

Then, there was the assessment that *Forbes* magazine – the very reputable *Forbes* magazine– made on those. Let me quote. It states:

“Yet on closer examination, the allegations don’t really stand up. Global Witness states repeatedly and unequivocally that it found no evidence of any wrongdoing by ExxonMobil nor Guyana’s government ministers.”

Could you imagine that? This is what *Forbes* magazine states:

“In the end, just a few hours of analysis reveals the Global Witness report for what it is: An ideologically-motivated attack piece aimed at some of the biggest players in the oil and gas industry, ...”

I will add, the former Government which – given the group’s history – comes as no surprise at all. We all know that Mercury was contracted and Global Witness was just one of the many deliverables. Our Vice-President said publicly that it was money well spent.

I would like to now look quickly at the area for which I was responsible as former Minister of Public Telecommunications. I want to look at this because I listened in horror as the Minister of Amerindian Affairs came to this House, stood at this podium and uttered a battery of untruths. It was disingenuous at least and downright dishonest at worst, to suggest that nothing was done in this sector under the last Administration.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, the word ‘dishonest’ has to be withdrawn. Before that I will ask that you get an additional five minutes. You had...

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker, my apologies.

Mr. Speaker: I said before, you had made a statement that the Hon. Minister, Ms. Manickchand, had hired her relative at the Learning Channel. I would also need you to produce that evidence. Hon. Member, Mr. Jones.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Chief Whip. Hon. Member, the clock starts at 12.25 p.m.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will withdraw that word and just say that the former Minister was mendacious in her utterings when she stood at this podium. She spoke about finding a variety of Tablets and batteries at a location in Diamond. Do you remember that? This is where I would like to submit also the audit of the One Laptop Per Family (OLPF) project. The Report states at item seven:

“Procedures revealed that the management was unbale to account for an additional 1,875 laptops costing \$109...”

million plus.

“... laptops acquired by purchase or grant of \$55,145, some 5,136 were either stolen or are defective.”

“The total cost was \$1.6 million.”

Lots of those were left in a location and I have a feeling that that is the same location she is referring to. I do not have to talk about training over 4,000 students, about creating over 170 Information and Communications Technology (ICT) hubs, connecting Ministries and setting up Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) dishes.

I want to comment very quickly on a comment that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance made when he talked about the Hinterland Poor and Remote ICT project languishing. That is the word – ‘languishing’. Believe it or not, for that project we signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and also there are photographs online of the former Minister of Finance signing with Mikiko Tanaka, former United Nations (UN) Representative. We worked with Khadija Musa, since 2016 when the Ministry was created. Do not come and say nothing was done. At the end of the day, what I want to say is that my presentation is not an indictment on what was done but it really is a hope that we can search for common grounds. Let us all understand how we are failing our people because an eye for an eye, would make us all blind. I could mention, of course, the fibre-optic cable. I just want to remind people of the figures - \$13 billion wasted. Not a cent of this cable is anywhere between Linden to Lethem and managed by the son of a former President. Mr. Speaker, I will lay over that Report too.

We have allowed race and politics to divide our country to our own detriment. If we do not see that the world is watching on and laughing, as our resources are depleted to the benefits of others, then these days of debates would be an exercise in futility, another wasted opportunity. Surely, our ability to understand history, the challenges that hate and conflict bring to a country should encourage us to be able to meet in a different way, encourage dialogue and to come to some common ground. We have all made mistakes in the past and we understand the challenges any government may face in the search for lasting solutions. I am not here to put down the efforts to craft this Budget. Unfortunately, one of the rallying cries in this House has been the chance of rigged elections. We maybe do not realise that perpetuates a stereotype, that one’s ethnicity is responsible for the damage that was done to our electoral process, when we all know that it was an incompetent Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) that failed to deliver on a good election. Up to today, it is not willing to examine its administrative processes. These are the things that we must be honest enough and bold enough to have a conversation on. I want to close with a quote from the most honourable Lee Kuan Yew:

“A nation is great not by size alone. It is the will, the cohesion, the stamina, the discipline of its people and the quality of their leaders which ensure it an honourable place in history.”

Mr. Speaker, we on this side look forward to creating and contributing...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I see the Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, on the floor.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker, thank you and sorry to interrupt the Member. I hear the Hon. Member and Minister, Mr. McCoy, shouting out Ms. Myers name in this Parliament and this is happening over and over again with people who are not here.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not see that as a Point of Order but I have already named a Minister already. Hon. Member Ms. Hughes. proceed.

Ms. Hughes: Could I just read the quote again?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Ms. Hughes: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I was closing, I urge that we work together. I wanted to end with this quote from Lee Kuan Yew:

“A nation is great not by its size alone. It is the will, the cohesion, the stamina, the discipline of its people and the quality of their leaders, which ensure it an honourable place in history”.

We, on this side of the fence, on this side of this most honourable House, are committed to help ensure that Guyana becomes the next Singapore in the Caribbean for the benefit, though, of all her citizens. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Guyana. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Mr. Speaker, I am kindly asking for the floor. I am...

Mr. Speaker: Now, for the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs, the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, I am kindly asking for the floor. This system has failed.

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: **[Mr. Duncan:** High administration of Justice. Only AG in the Caribbean, not in the world.] The Elections Petition that you filed was thrown out. I will tell you about it. That is what was important about the case. The opportunity is now mine to offer a few remarks on the 2023 Budget. I would like to begin by offer... **[Hon. Members:** By offering.] ...by offering my warm congratulations to my venerable brother, the distinguished Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and his industrious staff for preparing and presenting the third installment of our Government’s fiscal plan and

developmental agenda for this financial year in the form of Budget 2023.

12.34 p.m.

Much to the incomprehension of the Hon. Members on the other side, *Budget 2023* was not crafted in abstract. In the year 2020, the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) went to the electorate with a 5-year development plan. We explained that plan to the electorate and we told the electorate that if they support that plan, then elect us to Government, we will implement that plan. They did elect us and we are implementing the third instalment of that plan. The Manifesto that we went to the people with - I have it in my hand.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

If I am only to look at the front page of that Manifesto, it contains certain promises which we went to the electorate with. I will go through briefly, as a report card, in relation to those promises.

The first one, removal of taxes on cell phones and data – we delivered that in 2021. Twenty thousand online scholarships – this is a 5-year promise and we delivered over half in two and a half years. **[Mr. Ramson:** We will deliver that this year.] And we will pass the 20,000 mark this year. Reversal of 200 taxes and fees – delivered; done. A sum of \$40,000 per month in old age pension in our third year; we are at \$42,000. **[Mr. Ramson:** Surpass. Surpass.] We are going to surpass this in the 5-year period. Reversal of value-added tax (VAT) on electricity, water, food and medical supplies – delivered. Restoration of electricity and water subsidies to pensioners – delivered. The sum of \$50,000 'Because We Care' cash grant – we are at \$40,000 in the third year. The creation of 50,000 new jobs – we have put the sugar workers back; we have put the 2,000 Community Service Officers (CSOs) back; we have put back the 30,000 persons that you dismissed; and we have created thousands of jobs in the oil and gas sector, and all the other sectors in the country. A plan to reduce crime – I have here what the Crime Chief said on 17th November, 2022. The Crime Chief said that serious crime has dropped by 19% last year. I have what the Commissioner of Police said on 17th December, 2022, – cops record 30% decrease in serious crimes in Georgetown. Free education from nursery to university – it will be delivered in the 5-year period. Fifty thousand low income house lots – we have already delivered 20,500 and we have 11,000 more to deliver this year. We do not operate in Government in abstract. We have a plan as responsible leaders. This is what we agreed with the

electorate and we are delivering in accordance with this Manifesto.

What is worrying is the approach displayed by the Hon. Members on that side. Every speaker on our Government presented cogent and compelling cases, sector by sector, for *Budget 2023*. It was all lost on the other side. Every Member of the other side has rejected *Budget 2023*. It means that you see nothing good in the Budget. That is worrying. The irreconcilable difference...

Mr. Shuman: Mr. Speaker, I stand on a Point of Order.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, you may proceed.

Mr. Nandlall: Yes. I apologise to the Deputy Speaker. For the remainder of my presentation, I exclude you, Sir. Members, on the other side, have displayed the difference in philosophy. It characterised their conduct in Government; it is characterising their conduct in their own political party, as I will demonstrate, and it is characterising their conduct here.

We have crafted this Budget in a sustainable way. Great references have been made to the oil wealth. They would like for us to spend it all today, but that is not our philosophy. Our philosophy is to spend to make today better, but to make tomorrow greater. That is the philosophy that guides this Budget. Those on the other side prefer instant gratification. Our Budget theme says it. It reflects our philosophy: "*Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*." The other side would prefer the Budget theme to read: 'Spend all today, and to hell with tomorrow.' That is the philosophy. Unwittingly, it came out yesterday afternoon in the presentation of the Hon. Member from Region 8, Mr. Richard... **[Mr. Ramson:** Sinclair.] ...Sinclair. **[Mr. Hamilton:** The Hon. Member.] The Hon. Member. What he did yesterday was a very revealing thing. He used the total population and divided it by the value of the Budget and he boldly declared that every citizen in Guyana should get over \$1 million. Forget about the developmental plan, but just share out the whole Budget. That is the philosophy; that is the philosophy. **[An Hon. Member (Government):** Do not build any roads.] No. Do not build anything. Let us spend and let us spend.

Last week, it is the Vice-President who said that the big picture of *Budget 2023* is lost on the Opposition. The Vice-President was wrong because every picture is lost on the Opposition. They are coming up blank, blank, blank – like the 30 blank cheques. Mr. Speaker, they will tell us that that is the People's National Congress/Reform's (PNC/R)

business but let me tell you what is important. As long as the PNC/R pose and present themselves, unfortunately, as the alternative Government – the PNC/R's business is the public's business. That type of conduct, which is the signing of 30 blank cheques, characterised and typified their performances in Government... [Dr. Singh: And has no place in Government.] ...and has no place in good governance and accountability.

Like most of you, I had the benefit of listening to that recorded telephone conversation and I heard the Treasurer. The poor fellow was complaining, he said, my God. I have never signed my name so much. I forgot how to sign my name. One Hon. Member from the front bench... I heard his voice distinctly. All he could say is wow, wow, wow, wow. I thought I was listening to a siren. After a time, I thought I was listening to a siren. It was one 'wow' per cheque – 30 wows. You come here to lecture us on good governance and that is what you are doing in your own Party. [Dr. Singh: What did Mahipaul say?] Mahipaul said we have to take it to the leadership. Mahipaul was smart enough to record the conversation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General (AG), is Mahipaul someone outside of the House?

Mr. Nandlall: No.

Mr. Speaker: Oh okay.

Mr. Nandlall: He is the most Hon. Member. In fact, I have to give him credit. He was very honourable in that conversation.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may proceed.

Mr. Nandlall: When they come here to talk about accountability, the people of Guyana must be reminded. As I said, it typified their conduct in Government. That is why they saw nothing wrong in giving a contract to rent a building in Albouystown – a house – for \$12 million to a friend. Throwing the procurement process aside. The gentleman bought the house for \$20 million and he received three months' rent in advance – a sum of \$36 million – before the tenancy commenced. That is how they dealt with public moneys. It is a philosophy. It is a philosophy. Let us take incompetence into consideration. [Dr. Singh: Meanwhile, he was a tenant of the last Speaker.] Yes, a tenant of the last Speaker. One heard all the high-sounding notes from the last Speaker, but we did not hear about the tenancy. They came here and they lectured us about incompetence. I cannot speak to every Minister between 2015 to 2020. Let us deal with the Attorney General that

they imposed upon us; let us deal with him. That was a gentleman whose incompetence was unparalleled in any part of Planet Earth. Imagine, he was supposed to be the legal advisor to the Government and, within the first year, the Government ended up hiring six legal advisors for him. Are you coming here to tell us about incompetence? Again, it reflects a mindset. There was a President who felt that he was above the law. His Attorney General said that to the court. I am going to give examples. When President Brigadier (Ret'd) Granger unlawfully revoked the Red House lease, his Attorney General went to the court and said the President is above the law.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker; Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Holder, you have the floor.

Mr. Holder: I rise on Standing Order 41, Contents of Speech. Standing Order 41 (7) states:

“The President's name shall not be used to influence the Assembly.”

I submit to you that the Hon. Member is using...

Mr. Speaker: Hold a minute, AG.

[Mr. Speaker in aside with the Clerk of the National Assembly.]

Mr. Nandlall: That is the philosophy I am talking about. They do not...

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Member Mr. Holder, I think that Standing Order refers to the sitting President.

Mr. Nandlall: Obviously, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I cannot uphold the Point of Order.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker, I could recall in your previous Rulings that if he is not here to defend himself then the Hon. Member should not be mentioning his name.

Mr. Speaker: We are speaking about the policies and...

Mr. Nandlall: I am talking about track record in Government which I must be able to say. I must be able to speak about that in a budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. AG, you must allow me to rule and then give you the floor.

Mr. Nandlall: Yes. Of course, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Okay. You may now continue, Hon. AG.

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you very much, Sir. I was speaking about a philosophy that was reflected in policy and behaviour on that side. The President at the time felt that he was above the law. He unlawfully rescinded a 50-year-old lease for the Red House and his Attorney General went to the court and said that the President is above the law and that he cannot be sued. He is not answerable to any court. The court overruled him. He did not learn. The President then rescinded 50 rice farmers leases at the Mahaica, Mahaicony, Abary – Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA). He went to the court again and he argued that the President is above the law. The court overruled him. He did not learn. The President unlawfully appointed James Patterson to head the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) and he went to the court again and said that the President is above the law. The court overruled him. He still did not learn. Only this week, he went to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and told them that he is above the law and they chased him out. Look at this.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

No one is above...

Mr. Speaker: Honourable AG, I do not think the CCJ chased anyone out. I think you could use better language.

12.49 p.m.

Mr. Nandlall: The CCJ summarily disposed of him by reaffirming that no one is above the law. The CCJ told Mr. Basil Williams that before dismissing his application. The people must know the level of incompetence that this nation had to endure and then, the Members on that side are coming here to lecture us about competence in Government. Rightfully so, I must give the Opposition credit. It saw the disaster that he was and replaced him, but it replaced him with the Hon. Member, Mr. Forde. Its fortune had not fared better. I cannot go through case by case, but let me take the two most important cases, that is, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) two election petitions. When it filed the petition, Mr. Forde boldly held a press conference in front of the High Court and told the nation that by those two petitions, the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) would be removed from office in six months, well, in six months both of his petitions were dismissed and the PPP/C is here two and a half years later stronger and better than ever. It tells us about incompetence.

The Hon. Members on that side have, once again, resumed that discredited narrative of accusing this Government of

extrajudicial killings—the Hon. Member Coretta McDonald, stood there at that podium and alleged that the families of the Henry boys, Mr. Haresh Singh, Mr. Quinton Bacchus and Mr. Orin Boston, are still waiting for justice. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** Yes.] You hear the echo, yes. It is its philosophy. What the Hon. Member had omitted to tell the House is that two persons have been charged and committed for murder for the Henry boys. A Preliminary Inquiry (PI) was held, and they were committed to the High Court. Four persons were charged for the death of Mr. Haresh Singh and a PI was done, and they have been committed to stand trial. Three officers have already been charged after the Police Complaints Authority did an independent investigation in relation to the death of Mr. Quinton Bacchus and the cases are going on in court. A Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) constable was charged with manslaughter in relation to Mr. Orin Boston.

The Opposition would come here and create a subtle racial message that the PPP/C Government is unleashing a police force against it. That is the subtle message of racism. We know what it caused as a result of some of these killings. The violence on the roadways at West Coast Berbice; the robberies, vandalism, arson, and destruction of properties. On the East Coast of Demerara, the robbery of hundreds and the destruction of properties going into the millions is a result of some of these deaths. I consulted with the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and I got the statistics. I will share it with the National Assembly. Between 2015 to 2020, before August, 41 persons died in police custody or at the hands of the police, almost eight per year while the APNU/AFC was in Government. We never alleged extrajudicial killing. We never put people on the road. We never encouraged people to beat, burn and rob. That is the difference in political leadership. I speak personally to two of these victims; Mr. Lallbachan Bachan, who died at the Suddie lockups on the 31st June, 2019, and Mr. Kalicharan Saywack, who died at the Sparendam lockup on the 28th January, 2019. Instead of alleging extrajudicial killing and playing politics with the death and tragedies of these people, we instituted legal proceedings on behalf of their families, and we won millions of dollars in compensation for them. That is the difference in leadership.

I could continue, but let me move quickly to the legal sector. This year is going to be a watershed for many projects in the judicial and legal sectors. It will begin with the establishment of a law school on these shores, a regional, legal, educational institution. It has some history. Thanks, Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of President with Responsibility for Finance. Let me resuscitate and remind

the Hon. Members. [An Hon. Member (Opposition): Who vision it was?] Wait, I will tell you who vision it was. One day in 2017, we heard a big press statement that the Council of Legal Education (CLE) granted permission for the establishment of a law school. It was a big spread in the newspapers and then an agreement was signed by an unknown university to partner with the Government.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

Look the Attorney General well attired in his suit. One cannot stop them for pump and pageantry. There was a signing and it was obviously on the front paper of the newspapers - signed an agreement stating they got permission. It did not stop there. Fifteen acres of land were identified at the University of Guyana and sod was turned; pump and ceremony. They did an artist's image of the law school. Look it is here. [Dr. Singh: Where is it?] I have it here.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

It is an artist's image. It gave it a name, the JOF Haynes Law School, and then *lo and behold*, a public statement was issued by the Council of Legal Education that it never gave permission for the establishment of a law school in Guyana. We could understand the former Attorney General's claims of him losing cases, case files, and law books – blame me for it – but how does one lose a whole law school? It tells us about incompetence. Fortunately, last September, permission was granted by the Council of Legal Education, the proper authority, for us to begin work on establishing a law school here. The Government has established a team and that team will be working with the Judiciary, the University of Guyana and the Guyana Bar Association towards the attainment of this objective. We are doing things the proper way and not the way the APNU/AFC used to do it.

This year also, the important commission to reform our Constitution will be established. Last year we passed the Constitutional Reform Commission Act. This year, we will see the establishment of the Constitutional Reform. We hope that the Opposition will come on board and cooperate with this process because, after all, it promises as we did that it would deliver to the people constitutional reform. It has failed abysmally before, and we hope that it will not fail the people again.

Last year, we inducted a batch of special prosecutors comprised of Bachelor of Law (LLB) students whom we specially trained at the University of Guyana in a very innovative initiative, where we had the Chief Justice

lecturing, the Director of Public Prosecutions lecturing, and visiting legal luminaries from across the Caribbean lecturing in a specially comprised programme to equip these Bachelor of Laws holders with the necessary skill set to put them alongside the Police Prosecutors in the Magistrate's Court. We graduated 35 Special Prosecutors from that programme who are currently in the Magistrate's Court in our country in Regions 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10. Another batch of 35 will begin training within a month's time and once they graduate, they will also be unleashed in the courts of our country, giving priority to courts that we have not yet covered.

Last year we implemented the Restorative Justice Act. This year, we are going to establish a Restorative Justice Centre and a secretariat that will bring the Act to fruition. It would be recalled that in this legislation, the focus is against custodial sentence and on the exploration of other forms of punishment. In particular, it brings the victims and the perpetrators of the crime together and tries to repair and restore the relationship and have them work out their own form of punishment for want of a better word. Significantly, it goes into the society, itself, trying to find the root cause of the criminal conduct and working to address it. It is a very important social reform in our country that will take root in the criminal justice system during the course of 2023, and of course, it is directed to non-violent offences only.

This year we are going to complete a massive building at Suddie on the Essequibo Coast that will provide accommodation for officers of the Director of Public Prosecution's office as well as living quarters so they are comfortably placed when they are executing their tasks on the Essequibo Coast. This year also, two edifices will be constructed; one at Lusignan on the East Coast Demerara and one at Vergenoegen on the East Bank Essequibo, which will accommodate a hope and justice centre or two hope and justice centres. These institutions will provide legal, medical, and probationary services to victims of domestic violence, sexual violence, child abuse, *et cetera*. Accommodation will be provided for the victims so as to remove them from the source of the violence if necessary. Under this programme, we will draft a bill to abolish preliminary inquiries in criminal proceedings in Guyana. Every day or so often, we read in the newspapers of complaints about delays in the criminal justice system and the length of time that accused persons are languishing in prison. Part of that reason is that, currently, the law requires a preliminary inquiry to establish a prima facie case before going to a judge and jury. Right across the Caribbean and even beyond in the Commonwealth that one tier or first tier of the criminal process or the criminal trial process has been abolished. Now the

statements can be reviewed, and a magistrate could determine whether to commit or not. We are moving in that direction, removing that tier from the criminal trial process and accelerating the trial. That will result in the elimination of a tremendous backlog. The heat is on.

This year, we will also review the Plea-Bargaining Arrangement Act. Some years ago, we introduced in a statutory form, plea-bargaining. Plea-bargaining simply means the meeting of the Prosecutor and the accused persons, once certain safeguards are in place, for them to negotiate and work out a settlement or a reduction of sentence that is acceptable to the fundamental principles of justice, so that people do not have to go there and get excessive sentences or they do not detain the court process unduly, neither should they get a slap on the wrist for offences that might offend the moral values of our society.

1.04 p.m.

Unfortunately, this mechanism has not worked in the manner that we contemplated. With the input and with the help of the Director of Public Prosecutions, I have commissioned a review of this Bill to enquire into why it has not worked and let us address those concerns so that we could get it to work and it will also bring greater expediency to the administration of criminal justice. We will also be working with the Guyana Prison Service to retrofit the mental health unit at Lusignan Prisons and train prison officers and related personnel in mental health. We will also upgrade computer laboratories in four prison centres across Guyana in providing computer hardware and accessories for prison centres at New Amsterdam, Lusignan, Timehri, and Mazaruni. We will also support the Drug Treatment Court of Guyana by the procurement of computer hardware accessories and the provision of one five-seater 4x4 vehicle.

In the area of the Deeds and Commercial Registry Authority, with our ever-expanding commercial sector, obviously, this is an important state department that must be targeted for expansion.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, as you noted the heat is on. You will need an extension.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: May I ask that the Hon. Member be granted an extension to conclude his presentation?

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Nandlall: We started the construction of a building at Suddie on the Essequibo Coast, a three-story building at the

cost of \$480 million that will house the Deeds and Commercial Registry Authority's operations there. In this Budget, there is an \$800 million allocation for the construction of a new building across the road from the New Amsterdam High Court that will house the operation of this important entity.

Let me go straight to the Judiciary. The judicial sector has some very important projects. Continuing from last year in the Northwest Magisterial District, we will be completing the Magistrate Court and living quarter at Port Kaituma, Region 1. Also, we will be completing the Magistrate's Court and living quarter at Mabaruma, Region 1. We will be completing the Magistrate Court and living quarter at Vigilance on the East Coast of Demerara. The expansion of the Court of Appeal building will be completed, Essequibo Magisterial District will see the completion of the Bartica Magistrate Court phase 2, Essequibo Magisterial District will see the completion of Mahdia Magistrate Court, phase 2, East Coast Demerara Magisterial Court District will see Cove and John Magistrates Court completed and Mahaicony Magistrates Court as well. Work will be done also in extending the living quarters at Lethem Magistrate Court. Extension will be done also at the Diamond/Grove Magistrates Court to erect a storage bond at that location. The West Demerara Magisterial Court in Wales will be retrofitted and a library and research centre is going to be constructed. Elevators are going to be installed at the High Court in Berbice, Demerara, and Essequibo.

For 2023, new courts will be constructed with living quarters at Timehri. A new court and living quarters will be constructed at Friendship on the East Bank of Demerara, and that is along the intended new highway. In Essequibo Magisterial District, we will construct a new Magistrate Court, living quarters, and an access bridge at Anna Regina. Many Members may know that the Court is currently in a police station, for the first time, it will get its own home. Mahdia Magistrate Court, Phase 3 will be completed. At La Parafaitte Harmonie, we are building a Magistrate Court and living quarters. Bartica Magistrate Court will also be completed, and a marshal bond and document centre will be constructed at the Georgetown Magistrates Court.

I move quickly to our legislative agenda. As usual, we have a very aggressive legislative agenda for the year 2023. If I could run through them quickly, the Summary Jurisdiction Offences Amendment Bill, the Companies Amendment Bill, the Landlord and Tenant Amendment Bill, the Evidence Amendment Bill, the Summary Jurisdiction Procedure Amendment Bill, the Court of Appeal Amendment Bill, the

Extramural Work Amendment Bill, the Limitation Amendment Bill, the Criminal Law Procedure Amendment Bill, the Planning and Development Single Window System Bill which is already in the National Assembly, the Radiation Safety and Security Bill, already here, Combating of Trafficking in Person Bill, Border Patrol Bill, Firearm Control Bill, Apostille Bill, Leave with Pay Amendment Bill, Electronic Communication and Transaction Bill, Anti-dumping Bill, Engineers Bill, Securities Bill, Recording of Court Proceedings Bill, Foreign Judgment Reciprocal Enforcement Bill, Business Name Registration Bill, Gambling Prevention Amendment Bill, Rice-Farmer of Security Tenure Amendment Bill, Data Protection Bill, Health Information System Bill, Real Estate Bill, Food and Drugs Bill, Gaming Bill, Criminal Law Procedure, Pre-bargaining and Pre-arrangement Bill, Paper Committal Bill, Petroleum Production Bill, Electronic Case Management System Bill, National Intelligent and Security Bill, Surveillance Devices Bill, Arbitration Bill, Public Health Bill, Solid Waste Management Bill, Family Violence Bill, Subsidies and Countervailing Measures Bill, Safeguard Measures Bill, Social Workers Licencing Bill, Cooperate Tax Amendment Bill, Caribbean Community and Amendment Bill, Sexual Offences Bill. There are a series of legislation that we are required to bring in conformity with our international obligations.

Also, before I close this year, myself and my brother, the Distinguished Minister of Finance will lead Guyana's efforts in preparing Guyana's financial structure at the level of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF). That will require us to pass a whole set of new bills, regulations, and also bring together all the relevant players and prepare them for that assessment. Before the Cabinet of Guyana is our national plan for the year 2023 to prepare us for that very rigorous and important exercise. I spent this time in my budget to outline the level of work that we have to do in Guyana in establishing that important legal framework that will cradle the developmental agenda of our country.

Again, I appeal to the other side. I heard the empty words of the Hon. Member Catherine Hughes that they are onboard. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** You do not say it is empty.] Yes. It is empty because I listened to the presentation. The Hon. Member said that at the end after objecting to us building a hospitality centre at Port Mourant and building a track at Lenora. I understand the undercurrents of those objections are not lost on the Guyanese people. We have to build a united country, and we have to diversify development across all sectors of this country, and across geographic regions. We will not develop one region in our country. With those

few remarks, I lend my 100% support to *Budget 2023*. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs. Before we take the suspension for lunch, I have had, many times before, to deal with the criticism of the Rulings of the Speaker by Members outside of the House. As we were listening to the presentation, the Hon. Chief Whip from the Opposition was at it again. I am trying my best to ensure that we keep fairness between the two sides in the presentation of their speeches. Yes, I allowed one particular phrase from one Minister and from the other side too. When it started to become abusive, I stopped it for all sides. If that is biasness, I accept biasness. We now take the suspension for lunch for one hour.

Sitting suspended at 1.14 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 2.31 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members. Please be seated. Our next presenter is the Hon. Member Ms. Volda Lawrence. At 2.32 p.m. we are going to start your clock rolling, Hon. Member. It seems like the microphones are temperature sensitive. We are going to hold it. Let us see if the technicians could get it going for us. I have asked that the AC be turned on. Many times, if you [*technical difficulties*] extremely cold. I am sitting on my hands. Now I will relax, I ordered gloves. [**An Hon. Member:** Is it for all Members?] I was going to make the offer because it is going...

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to begin by extending heartiest congratulations to Mdm. Gail Teixeira, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance who had the opportunity to act as President on Monday 23rd January, 2023. This honour, though brief, must not go unnoticed as it underscores the heights to which women could aspire and attain. Bravo, Mdm. Teixeira.

I will now move to my remit to this House and the Guyanese public on *Budget 2023* presented by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Singh under the theme *Improving lives today, building prosperity for tomorrow*. The *Budget 2023* could be described as overwhelming in terms of length of delivery and underwhelming in content. The focus continues to weigh heavily on bricks and mortar, that is, on physical infrastructure and less on people and human development. The Budget treats people as appendages and side shows. Rather than being integral to the development process. Lamentably, rather than the goal of the massive spending being cantered on the improvement of the quantitative and

qualitative lives of the people of this country, the Budget seems to view people and poverty as irritants to be swatted, not unlike an unbearing fly. *Kaieteur News* on Friday, 20th January, 2023 cites a recent FAO study titled:

“Regional Overview of 2022, Towards Improving Affordability of Healthy Diets”

Before I go on, let me state that in the second paragraph of the foreword it reads thus:

“...statistics show that the prevalence of hunger in the Region rose from 5.8% in 2015 to 8.6% in 2021. This prevalence is below the global average of 9.8% in 2021.”

2.35 p.m.

I highlight that to debunk what is being said on the other side, that this was on the 2019 report. What it stated was that around 5% of Guyana’s population is undernourished, and a further 43% cannot afford a healthy diet. This report coming on the heels of the recent World Bank Report released in October 2022, paints a damning picture of the incompetence and uncaring attitude of the Government. Although dropping from 61% in 2006 to 48% in 2019, poverty in Guyana remains unacceptably high. Anecdotal indicates that the poverty rate worsened over the last three years and that the phenomenal overall growth in the economy has not been matched to a phenomenal growth in the standard of living of the majority of Guyanese. The lack of originality in *Budget 2023* is evident from the introduction, which bears an eerie resemblance to that of *Budget 2018*. Not complaining, just highlighting that appropriate recognition is due. There seems to be a familiar pattern as for example, the recent signing of an operational agreement for the Natural Resource Fund (NRF), without referencing that what was being signed was an updated version of the agreement signed on 11th December, 2019 between the former Minister of Finance Mr. Winston Jordan and the Governor.

Budget 2023 is not grounded in a medium to long-term development plan nor a fiscal framework. The Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), Sir, cannot be considered a long-term development plan. It is geared more towards monetising Guyana’s ecosystem. Nothing is wrong with that. It is just not a substitute for a development plan, especially given the magnitude of resources available. Without such a framework, the nation will continue to be confronted with nightmarish projects that reflect more the dream of one failed politician over the other.

Our budget should be presented before the start of the financial year. As former Minister Mr. Jordan stated when presenting *Budget 2017*, the early presentation is a prerequisite for the budget to properly serve as an economic, financial, management, and accountability tool. This is even more important given the substantial increase in the size of the budget over the last three years. Although the *Constitution of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana* provides for presentation no later than 90 days in the new financial year, this emergency measure has become the norm, except for the years under the Coalition Government. It is opposite to note that budgets presented after the year started caused tremendous stress on the human and institutional capacity to execute projects and programmes in the truncated period. That being said, Sir, I now turn my attention to page 8 of the Minister’s presentation on Gross Domestic Product (GDP). While the economy has grown appreciably over the last three years, it has been attributed to the ramp-up production of oil. Allow me to share with you the growth of the economy when oil’s contribution is stripped from the gross domestic product. During the years 2016 to 2019, the overall growth rate percentage ranged from 3.8% to 5.4%, while the non-oil growth rate ranged from 3.8% to 4.3%. However, for the last three years, Sir; 2020 to 2022, the overall growth rate percentage was 43.5%, 20.1%, and 62.3%, respectively and the non-oil growth rate percentage for those years was -7.3%, 4.6% and 7.9%, respectively.

We are told by the Minister in this budget that in 2023, the overall growth rate is expected to be 25.1% and the non-oil growth rate 7.9%. I have just outlined that growth between 2016 to 2019 was more broad base. The dominance of oil is reflected in the statistics of post 2019. From a modest 20% in 2019, oil’s contribution to overall GDP growth rose sharply to 82% in 2022. Although it is budgeted to fall just under 70% in 2023, the medium-term outlook is for oil’s contribution to rise well above 70% as more Floating Production Storage and Offloading (FPSOs) are introduced and come onstream. We know these things, Minister; no need to behave like the Government is Houdini. While the Government’s propaganda machine is in overdrive to hoodwink the Guyanese people that we are the new Dubai, the non-oil sector where the real economic and fiscal truth lies, paints a frightening picture. These frightening numbers tell us that the non-oil sector is in serious trouble and as the regime dances in the carnival of corruption and waves the...

Mr. Speaker: Bleep.

Ms. Lawrence: I withdraw Mr. Speaker. ...GDP numbers while shouting 'fastest growing economy', due to oil, it is carnage in the pots and breadbaskets in the homes of the Guyanese people.

I turn my attention to production. *Budget 2023* non-oil projections seem inconsistent with the global economic outlook described in Section 2, pages 6 to 7 of the budget as well as, the historical performance of the key sectors. Section 2, paragraph 2.6 acknowledges the twin evils of declining prices of Guyana's main export commodities and the likelihood of a global recession. Yet, the Budget predicts substantial recovery in some sectors and massive growth in others. On the one hand, the Budget paints a dismal external picture but a glorious one domestically, as if Guyana is autarkic, totally divorced from the happenings externally. Mr. Speaker, allow me to share with this House, in 2019, we produced 92,256 tons of sugar. Last year, we produced 47,049 and the Minister tells us that in 2023, we will produce 61,000 tons. For rice in 2019, we produced 682,080 tons of rice. Last year Sir, we produced 610,595 and the Minister tells us that in 2023, we will produce 652,102.

Bauxite Sir, in 2019, under the Coalition Government, we produced 1,631,451 tons. Last year, we barely made it to 706,634 and we are being told in this honourable House that we will produce some 775,884 tons this year. Looking at gold. In 2019, the declaration was 634,904 ounces. Last year, we barely scraped in 484,415 ounces. Nothing is stated for the projection of 2023. Sir, the figures just outlined show starkly that the *Budget 2023* projections for sugar, rice, bauxite and gold will not meet 2019 achievements. In fact, they will fall short by 34%, 4%, 52% and 18%, respectively. Since the gold projection for 2023 was not stated in the Budget, it was assumed that output would increase by 7%, in line with the percentage increase for the other mining sectors. This massive infusion of cash in the sugar and rice sectors via the public sector investment programme and direct cash grants on the one hand and the substantial fiscal and other incentives granted to the rice and gold sectors including, free fertiliser, removal of Value Added Tax (VAT) and duty free fuel, have failed to stimulate output. May I say it loud and clear that this Budget is not the APNU/AFC budget, neither are the figures therein.

I turn to inflation. Nothing has been more characteristic of the mismanagement of the economy than the steep rise in inflation over the past three years, compared to the previous five years. Allow me to highlight. Sir, between 2016 and 2019, the inflation rate was between 1.4% and 2.1%. During the years 2020 to 2022, we saw 0.9% to 7.2%, and the

Minister tells us that in 2023, we will have a 3.8% inflation rate. Between 2021 and 2022, inflation averaged 6.5% compared to the previous five years' average of 1.5%, indicating that the average inflation for the past two years is more than quadruple the average inflation recorded for the previous five years. The already high overall inflation rates for 2021 to 2022 masked the true situation facing the poor and underclass in the country. It is well known in the economics literature that poor people tend to consume most of their meagre income on food and shelter. *Stabroek News* on the 14th January 2023 provides evidence of a widespread increase in prices from December 2021 to December 2022 in basic foods, and all produced locally. I am not going to remind this House that a bundle of bora increased from December 2021 to 2022 by 183%, Boulanger rose by 150%, cabbage rose by 130%, and the list goes on. Mr. Speaker, eggs are Mr. Eggs; you used to buy three for \$100, but now you cannot even get two for \$100 because of the 82% increase. Sir, wage increase in the past two years failing to compensate for the rise in inflation. It is easy to understand why poverty and extreme poverty are high and rising and why more than 40% of the population cannot afford a balanced and nutritious meal.

I now turn to budget deficit. While it is acknowledged that Coronavirus (Covid-19) and the war in Ukraine disrupted the supply chain of goods and services and contributed to the rise in domestic inflation, an unappreciated contributor is the massive increase in the money supply occasioned largely by the rapid expansion in public expenditure.

2.50 p.m.

It would be apt to note that, in 2019, our public expenditure totalled \$291.6 billion with a Central Government deficit of \$29.9 billion. Last year, it was \$615.2 billion for total expenditure with a Central Government deficit of \$155.5 billion. The Minister told us that in 2023 the total expenditure will be \$781.9 billion, and the Central Government deficit will be \$167.6 billion. This is some 11.5% of non-oil Gross Domestic Product (GDP). There is no doubt that the absolute size of the budget has grown appreciably since 2019 – from \$291.6 billion to a projected \$781.9 billion in 2023. This is an increase of 168%. Up to the end of last year, the increase in expenditure between 2019 and 2022 was 111%. However, that ramped-up expenditure was only able to generate a tepid average real non-oil growth of 2.9%. This was less than the real non-oil average growth recorded for the previous five years when the Coalition Government had considerably less resources to manage the economy.

Capital expenditure plays a critical role in advancing an economy. Indeed, capital investment should contribute to economic growth and higher standards of living through its linkage with labour productivity. So, not only is size important but also, quality matters, thus underscoring the need for these to be kept in sharp focus. With the availability of oil resources, the Government has ramped-up capital spending. The capital budget for 2023 is 142% higher than in 2022. Its implementation, even in the best circumstances would have seen challenges. In circumstances where the implementation window has been reduced to 10 months in an environment of shortages of the four Ms – shortage of manpower, shortage of materials, shortage of machinery and shortage of management – where corruption in the public procurement and implementation process abounds; where evidence of

Mr. Speaker: I just got another bleep.

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Norton]: Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, a Point of Order...

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, am I to understand that you cannot say the word ‘corruption’ in this House anymore?

Mr. Speaker: Yes. You cannot.

Mr. Norton: Could we ...?

Mr. Speaker: It is unparliamentary.

Mr. Norton: It is unparliamentary to use the word ‘corruption’.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, could I clarify? As I understand it, if one says that somebody is corrupt, if one says this Hon. Member is corrupt, that is unparliamentary...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I will deal with this after the current speaker concludes her presentation. As of now, it is unparliamentary - bleep. I trust that the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, did not patent the bleep.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Where evidence of crumbling infrastructure including roads and bridges proliferates, it is doubtful that the objectives of the capital programme will be achieved. In fact, conservative estimates put 20% to 25% of the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) in jeopardy through *bleep*. Bigger is not necessarily better, we must never put quality over quantity.

Budget 2023 repeats the mantra like previous budgets; it is fully financed without an increase in taxes. A point to note is that all budgets are fully financed since projected expenditure must match projected revenue – whether these are garnered by taxes, other imposed borrowing or the printing of money. The rapid growth in the size of the budget is also reflected in the massive growth in the absolute and relative sizes of the Central Government deficit. From a nominal deficit of \$29.1 billion in 2019, the Central Government deficit ballooned to \$155.5 billion in 2022, an increase of 420%. This deficit is projected to rise further to \$167.6 billion in 2023 or 7.8% more than in 2022. There is 460% above that recorded for 2019 under the Coalition Government. Since deficits add to the public debt, then over the period 2020 to 2023 – Guyanese people listen to this – this Government would have added over \$500 billion, some US\$2.5 billion to the public debt. In terms of the relative Central Government deficit, this has increased more than four-folds between 2019 and 2022, rising from a modest and manageable 2.9% of non-oil GDP in 2019 to 11.8% of non-oil GDP in 2022.

I now turn my attention to debt management. *Budget 2023* speaks to prudent management of the public debt. Though the debt rose by 16.9% in 2022, to reach US\$3,654.9 million – see page 18, section 3.4 – the increase is not surprising given the immediately preceding discussion. The Government’s eschewing the use of the burgeoning Natural Resource Fund (NRF), in preference to borrowing from any and all sources on the assumption that oil prices will remain high, thus, allowing easy repayment of loans taken today. They are falling into the same trap as Ghana and Nigeria, for example.

It is instructive to note that we look at our public and publicly guaranteed debt between the period 2018 to 2023. In 2018, it totalled US\$1.792 billion with the external component being US\$1.322 billion. In 2022, it amounted to US\$3.653 billion with an external component of US\$1.572 billion. The Minister tells us that, in 2023, it would amount to US\$4.461 billion with an external component of US\$2.146 billion. The external public debt has risen steadily since the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) was installed into Office in August, 2020, rising from US\$1.32 billion in 2020 to a projected US\$2.146 billion in 2023 or 62%. The country’s exposure has swung from borrowing from multilateral financial institutions, principally the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the World Bank, the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), *et cetera*, to bilateral countries. Any collapse in oil prices will leave the country

dangerously exposed to the situations not unlike what happened in Sri Lanka and Uganda.

I now look at balance of payments. Developments in the balance of payments mirror the performance of the rest of the economy. Oil dominates the export receipts of the country in an indecent manner. It is instructive to note that our merchandise export for 2019 was US\$1,587 million. Since the first oil in December, 2019, oil's contribution to export earnings from merchandise has risen sharply from 41.1% in 2020, to 87.5% last year and is expected to maintain this very high share in 2023. When it is compared to 2019, when non-oil exports contributed to all the merchandise export receipts of the country, oil exports have crowded out the non-oil exports in a very dramatic fashion. So, from all the talk of spending to avoid the Dutch Disease and all the talk of focusing on agriculture and achieving a 25% reduction in the food import bill by 2025, the evidence indicates that the Government's policies are having little to no effect on diversifying the economy.

Let us look at our non-oil exports. In 2019, it was US\$1,567 million and in 2022 it was US\$1,425 million. In 2023, we are told that we will meet US\$1,644 million. These figures indicate that, since 2019, earnings from non-oil merchandise exports have not been matched or surpassed. In 2019, such earnings were US\$1,567 million but these declined in the next two years before recovering slightly in 2022. The projection that these earnings in 2023 will surpass those of 2019 for the first time, cannot be upheld to the scrutiny of *Budget 2023's* predictions of falling commodity prices and likely global recession – the Minister told us that. That the economy could be so quickly caught in the jaws of the oil sector, is frightening as the fragility on which the economy's transformation is being undertaken. My time is limited. Hence, I must move on and I turn to the budget measures.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, for you to move on, we will have to extend your time.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you may continue to conclude in five minutes.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps the measures are the most underwhelming and ineffectual part of the budget. Some measures will have no impact on the current situation, as they are merely being continued. As such, their benefits are already being enjoyed. These

measures relate to the maintenance of zero excise tax on fuel and the use of pre-Coronavirus 2019 disease (COVID-19) rates for the calculation of applicable customs duties and taxes. Some measures will be of little to no interest to the poor and low-income earners. These relate to the removal of value-added tax (VAT) from electric vehicles – *haha* – and the increase in the mortgage ceiling to \$20 million. *Oh, Mr. Speaker, which poor person can afford a loan of such magnitude? Thousands of house lots have been distributed over the last two years, yet many of them remain empty, growing grass and vermin because of the inability of owners to access bank financing. The removal of VAT on the sale of residential properties is hard to fathom at this time and appears contradictory. On the one hand, incentives are provided to boost the capital stock and on the other, valuable income is being transferred to the rich for dealing in the sale of properties.*

3.05 p.m.

May I remind the Government that this act has been flagged under the anti-money laundering regulations as having a high potential for laundering illicit proceeds. In *lieu* of a publicly functioning public transport system, the Government continues to incentivise individual ownership of vehicles. Nothing is wrong with that, but this has a very tax on the country's foreign exchange supply. More importantly, it is the gridlock that has been created by the massive importation of vehicles within a deficit laden and highly compromised road transportation network. This is hard evidence, we experience it every day. I surely believe that the Government can give some reconsideration in this area.

The fiddling of the income tax threshold every year is an anthem to any proper tax system. Since coming into Office, the Government has changed the threshold twice in two years, suggesting that they have no comprehensive tax reform in mind. In the 2017 Budget, the Coalition Government introduced a radical measure to the income tax, increasing the tax threshold to the greater of \$720,000 or one-third of the employee's salary. *Budget 2023's* proposal to raise the threshold to \$1,020,000 or \$85,000 per month is as mean spirited as it is ill-thought. With the current minimum wage at \$80,892, a 5% increase in salary in the year of 2023 would effectively wipe out any potential benefit this measure was meant to give. In fact, a 6% increase would see \$745 of the new minimum wage being subjected to 28% tax. Secondly, because of the one-third income that is already granted as a free income tax allowance, those currently earning an excess of \$255,000 will not be impacted by this threshold increase. Many of the members of the

Discipline Services and the health sector, who are beneficiaries of the elevated salaries payable from 1st January, will not be amused with this threshold change. With the level of withdrawal expected from the NRF, the Government could have moved the threshold to at least a \$150,000 while keeping the one-third of gross income.

In wrapping up, let me say that I am surely grateful for this opportunity to represent the many Guyanese people and my party in this debate on the 2023 Budget. I also take this opportunity to thank all of our public servants who contributed to the preparation of this budget and estimates. As I leave, allow me to share this quote from Nelson Mandela, he said:

“A fundamental concern for others in our individual and community lives would go a long way in making the world the better place we so passionately dreamt of...”

Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much Hon. Member. Hon. Members, every year, especially during the Budget Debate, this list of unparliamentary expressions is circulated, to which we have added, ‘shame’ and ‘shut up’. Sorry I did not use ‘bleep, bleep’, Mr. Duncan. It also says, ‘expulsion of words and phrases if the Speaker is of the opinion that words used in the debate are defamatory, indecent, unparliamentary or undignified, he may in his discretion ‘bleep, bleep, bleep’.

When the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan spoke, I allowed some amount of leeway with respect to quoting his regular reference to the 2005 study he quoted since I used to be sitting in the [Inaudible]. Then I noticed it being proliferated in the House, expect just around lunch time, the Hon. Chief Whip for the Opposition called me bias because I noted the use of unparliamentary words and quotes, and I shut it down. It started with the Hon. Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan. So, these words, until we change them in our handbook and the Committee that deals with the Standing Orders and rules tell me there is going to be a free for all, I will implement these. With this Hon. Prime Minister, it is your turn to make your contribution to the 2023 Budget Debate. Mr. PM your clock starts running at 3.11.50. p.m.

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to give my support and contribution to *Budget 2023* aptly themed: *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*, which was, once again, prepared and presented to this Parliament Office by the Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, the

Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. Minister Singh and his committed and hardworking team from the Ministry of Finance have contributed and continue to deliver for us and our country by preparing budgets that continue to steer us on the trajectory set forth by our PPP/C Government to transform Guyana and touch the lives of every single Guyanese across the length and breadth of our country, creating impacts that allow for our people to live comfortably with the confidence that there is a bright tomorrow, there is a bright today. That will undoubtedly continue so long as the PPP/C Government remains as the helm, driving prosperity for all Guyanese.

In the years of 2020 and 2021, our Government presented budgets that sought renewal. In the year of 2022, we continue our story with a budget focused on perseverance. That is, pressing forward to build anew. This year 2023, our \$781.9 billion budget will focus on sustainability and that is building a prosperous Guyana that will remain for future generations to come.

It is absolutely no surprise to us on this side of the House that the Opposition came to this Budget Debate every single day of this week to preach that this budget has nothing for ordinary people. Of course, one would have wasted their thought thinking that even one Member of the Opposition could see the bigger picture and comprehend the benefits of this budget and how it will transform Guyana and the lives of every Guyanese. But this is totally understandable because they could not devise any programme or policy during the five-year term, they were in Office which could benefit the people of this country. Instead, they were focused on what they could grabbed for themselves and their cronies, neglecting the people of this country and coming now to pretend that they care about us and the people of Guyana. They think the people will forget what they did to our economy and to our democracy, but the APNU/AFC will forever be remembered as the riggers, the destroyers, the out of touch, the visionless. They had their chance, and they blew it. There is no coming back for the APNU/AFC. You are already divorce, you are APNU and AFC, so there is no coming together and coming back.

I noticed the Leader of the Opposition sitting there and sulking on that side of the House. Probably thinking about the next blank cheque. Are you thinking about the next blank cheque that needs to be filled out in his own handwriting? I feel his pain. Imagine being the leader of a party and sitting among people who have no respect, regard or loyalty for you. With daggers aimed at your back, that must be tough. All of us listened to the recording and the people on your

side listened to the recoding too. That should not have happened to you as a leader. I wish to submit to the Hon. Member who is leading the Opposition, the Leader of the Opposition, both of us are brothers from Linden and I will have your back. I will look out for you against those fifth columnist in your midst who are trying to derail you. It is the same APNU/AFC Government that did nothing for the people, that is coming here now with their bare faces to say what is not enough and what should be, when they had five years and did little or nothing but run our country into the pits, watched people go through hardship and did nothing to improve people's lives, but instead found ways to make life harder for the ordinary people. For the ordinary man, while they enjoy their feast, suddenly the Opposition knows what is good and what is not, what is the better level of increase, what is the better percentage to increase salaries and pensions and everything by, and what to reduce taxation by. [Dr. Singh: And full of ideas.] Full of ideas and what is not but failed to deliver the promises in their own manifesto.

One thing is for sure, our Government, as you heard from the Hon. Nandlall during his presentation, is on track to delivering what is set out in our manifesto – 100% completion of what is set out in our manifesto by December, 2025. That is our commitment to the people of Guyana. I need to do some house clearing, in terms of rebuttals, before going into my substantive presentation. I will start with their manifesto, Elections 2015 manifesto, A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Coalition. It is a good read.

3.20 p.m.

I will bring your attention to page eight:

“APNU+AFC ACTION PROGRAMME FOR THE FIRST 100 DAYS”

I will not read out all of the 21 items that are listed there, but the ones that are important:

“2. Significant salary increases for government workers...”

That was in 100 days.

“...including nurses; teachers in primary, secondary and tertiary education; security personnel; and civil servants on the traditional payroll.”

What we had in those 100 days was a 50% salary increase for the Ministers of the Government and nothing what they set out here. At number 7:

“7. Return of television station to Lindeners.”

An area that is close to my heart. They never returned it. It took the Hon. Minister, Kwame McCoy, to deliver on this promise made by the APNU/AFC to their own people, who they claim are their strong hold.

“8. Waiving of duties on fuel, tools and small scale mining equipment bought by identifiable holders of small concessions.”

We did that. It was not done in the ‘100 days’.

“11. Establishment of a National Cane Workers and Cane Farmers Conference.”

This was the biggest joke for the ‘100 days’ because what they did, and not in the ‘100 days’ but it was conceptualised in those ‘100 days’, they sent home 7,000 sugar workers.

“12. Establishment of a National Rice Farmers and Rice Millers Conference.”

But the ‘100 days’ passed and the leadership of the APNU said it plain to the rice farmers that the Government had no business in rice production. Just imagine that.

“16. A Code of Conduct will be established for Parliamentarians...”

Please listen:

“...Ministers and others holding high positions in government public office to abide by, including mechanisms for demitting office if in violation of the Code of Conduct.”

What we had was a cover up policy for ministers who were fingered in corruption. Is the word ‘fingering’ a violation of the House, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Prime Minister (PM), bleep, bleep. The bleep is for an unparliamentary word.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Contrary to the rules that are expected of ministerial appointments, there is another one:

“17. The National Youth Council will be convened and its mandate, terms of reference and programme of action produced for endorsement at a National Youth Conference.”

I will leave the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to pronounce on that when he takes the podium. I say nothing more on that.

“19. Liberalization of the Telecommunications and ICT sectors;”

I am happy to have the Hon. former Minister of Public Telecommunications in the House and to say to her that the process was deliberately delayed by this very Minister. You deliberately delayed the liberalisation of the telecommunications and ICT sectors. You did that.

“20. Adoption of a long-term sustainable economic development plan to realise the vast potential of this country;”

It is quite obvious, that was not done in 100 days. That had to wait until August, 2020, when the PPP/Civic assumed Office. They failed in the 100 days, but our vision and our plans are now being vigorously implemented in a sustained manner through the Budgets of 2020, 2021, 2022 and now 2023. It was your manifesto and your failure. I will continue with my house clearing. Maybe I should deal with the last one first, instead of going from the start. I should deal with the last one first. The Hon. Volda Lawrence... [Mr. McCoy: Vulgar Lawrence.] ...Volda Lawrence just spoke and that is fresh in your memory. I only did Economics 101 and 102, Accountancy 101 and 102 and Politics 101 and 102 at the university, but I will leave the schooling in economics for Minister Ashni Singh when he takes the podium. Hon. Volda Lawrence, I must commend you, however, for your impressive display of your lack of a thorough understanding of the macro-economic concepts you tried to grapple with and tried to communicate to this noble House, in a most confused manner. We can go to this, it is only 101 pages. On page 8, you said and pronounced on non-growth in the non-oil sector. At A, 3.1,

“3.1 Mr. Speaker, at the time of Budget 2022, it was anticipated that real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would grow by 47.5 percent, with the non-oil ...expand by 7.7 percent...”

“3.2 It is now estimated that our economy grew by 62.3 percent... in 2022 in real terms, with a very strong expansion of 11.5 percent in non-oil real GDP.”

Why do we have the Members of the Opposition coming to this House, having supposedly read this document and trying to fight against it? The Hon. Member mentioned about inflation. COVID- 19 and the supply chain challenges lead to inflation throughout the entire world. Every high school student knows about that. I commend an article for the Hon. Member to read. It is a simple article. It states:

“THE COSTS OF MISREADING INFLATION.

The 2021 surge in global shipping costs was a canary in the coal mine for the persistent rise in inflation.”

I say no more. Just go and do some reading. The Hon. Member talked about the tremendous increase in the capital budget, but she needs to tell us why we had that tremendous increase in the capital budget. We are not only building roads because she seems to feel it is only roads. We are not only building schools, hospitals and have an expansive housing project. We are building a brand new bridge across the Demerara River. We are constructing a gas power plant and a natural gas liquid plant, as part of the gas to energy project. That takes tremendous amount of money. It may sound mind boggling, but just wrap your brains around the figure. The 2023 Budget is transformative. Key word – ‘transformative’. Look it up. As a former Minister of Public Health, I am not surprised by your misunderstanding of diseases, especially when you seek to use the term Dutch Disease. Then again, I will leave the schooling to Dr. Ashni Singh to explain to you what the Dutch Disease is really about. We cannot tell the Guyanese people not to buy more vehicles, however, we will build and expand the roadway, the infrastructure and the primary and secondary network for our people to drive their vehicles. To simply put it, highways to happiness.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, that is the famous title of a famous manifesto.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I remember, Mr. Speaker. Sorry for plagiarising. Earlier, we were assaulted by the Hon. Catherine Hughes today in this noble House. She started by asking for a 15% reduction in the University of Guyana fees, when you, Hon. Catherine Hughes, were a Minister in the Cabinet who rose the fees by 35% during your tenure. You were part of that decision. All are involved and all are consumed on the other side. You are all responsible for that injustice towards the people of Guyana. She also talked about increases for all workers. The Hon. Minister...

Mr. Shuman: Mr. Speaker, I stand on a Point of Order 41(6)...

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I said, “the Cabinet”, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Shuman: I think the Hon. Prime Minister said “all of you over there” and I want to...

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I stand corrected. All of the Members on the Opposition who were part of that Cabinet were responsible for that injustice on the Guyanese people. Again, the Hon. Catherine Hughes talked about salary increases for all workers over the period 2015 to 2020, and how it was some 70% increase in salary, but they took away the bonus from the Disciplined Services. They took away the Because We Care Cash Grant from their own supporters' children. Then they claimed they had no fiscal space, yet they spent over \$1billion feasting themselves within their offices and whenever they congregated. It was 50% salary increases, as I mentioned before, for Cabinet Ministers in less than 100 days. I did not receive any deposit in my bank account, on 5th October, 2020, when I sat in the sitting room of the official residence of the Prime Minister, and signed, liberalising the telecommunications sector in Guyana. I did not receive any deposit in my account for that act. That was redounded to the benefit of all the people of Guyana, including the Opposition. I do not know who received several deposits for delaying that, but that will come out. With time, the truth would be revealed.

3.35 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member talked about how the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) had lots of money in its bank account, but the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources would tell you differently. The Guyana Forestry Commission, at the time when we assumed Office, had no money to pay its staff.

The Hon. Cathy Hughes, again, talked about the Minister of Education and some family member of hers running the Guyana Learning Channel. The Guyana Learning Channel was being run by PhD holders when we took over. There were some 40 academic programmes on the channel when we took over. In under 2 years, we have now done more than 1800 programmes, completing all of the grades 5 and 6, and much of nursery, primary, and secondary.

Then, Hon. Cathy Hughes went on to talk about the Hinterland, Poor Remote Communities (HPRC) internet connectivity project and how the Hon. Member had a signing ceremony, a signing ceremony where some US\$17.1 or above million was signed to commence this programme, sometime between 2015 and 2020 when she was in office. She tried to speak glowingly about this project. When I assumed responsibility for public telecommunications and Information and Communications Technology (ICT), I summoned the Project Manager and asked for a status update on this project. I was told that the equipment was in the country and that it was stored in some containers in the

parking lot of a certain hotel. I asked to visit the parking lot to see the equipment, and lo and behold, the same weekend the Project Manager moved all of the items to a hurriedly rented bond in Diamond. A Chinese supermarket converted to a bond overnight and stored the equipment. Nothing was done. The Hon. Member signed the document, the money was made available, and the equipment was bought and placed in the bond after being stored in containers.

I wish to remind all that the HPRC was conceptualised by a previous PPP/C Government. I have one here for you, Hon. Member. One hundred ICT hubs are on track to be operationalised by January 2023, equipped with 20 laptops, printers, and scanners, 32-inch television, surge protection, security locks, fans, cubicles, chairs, installation of 75 photovoltaic (PV) systems of 15 250-watt solar panels, digital inverter, power cubes, batteries, surge and lighting protection. Seventy ICT hub managers will be trained in January, 2023 in areas of computer literacy, report writing, internet and e-mail, PV technicians, PV basics and effective communication. Twenty-five photovoltaic technicians will be trained in the area of solar installation. Over 98,000 residents in 200 hinterland poor and remote communities will benefit from this project. This is a benefit that the people should have had before 2020. However, this is a benefit we are committed to ensuring that the people start enjoying in this year, 2023.

The Hon. Member went on to talk about not getting onto the internet. When we assumed Office in 2020, hinterland communities were provided with a 1-megabyte (mb) per second internet connection *via* satellite. Residents struggled with slow loading times, buffering, and limited access to online resources. However, between 2022 and 2023, my Government upgraded and will continue to upgrade and maintain the system. Now, they are having a service of 4 mb per second, not one, internet connection – four times what you gave them. With committed bandwidths and without any data caps or limits, residents will have access to a much faster and more reliable internet service that can support online video conferencing, education and content downloading. This upgraded internet will also provide improved access to education for students, especially those benefitting from the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship. These are some of the corrective measures that we had to take in order to improve the lives of the people of Guyana.

We hear about the opening ceremony and the unveiling of a plaque for an infectious disease hospital at Liliendaal. But no one was allowed to have a conducted tour of that facility

after the unveiling because there was nothing inside the building. At the time when the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) was ravaging the people of Guyana...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, time is of the order now. You will need an extension to conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Prime Minister be given time to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, you have another five minutes to conclude your presentation.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The failed implementation of any project to repair the Linden/Soesdyke Highway must rest on the chest of the Leader of the Opposition. I know he was not a Member of Parliament at that time. To claim that Region 10 is your stronghold, and you chose not to repair that main artery – in military terms, that “main supply route” – to the people of Linden, a town and a region that is dear to my heart, is a signal failure of the APNU/AFC to deliver to what they claim to be their constituent. We have secured a US\$120 million loan to fix, once and for all, that highway: a brand-new highway for the people of Linden, Region 10.

[**An Hon. Member:** 150.] It is \$150 million. I stand corrected. [**Mr. Ramjattan:** (*Inaudible*)] I am coming to you now. The Hon. Ramjattan likes to talk about them being the ones having us enjoying revenue from oil and gas, but that oil and gas approval for the exploration was signed in 1996 by the late President Janet Jagan. [**Ms.**

Teixeira: It was 1999.] I stand corrected. It was not 1996 but 1999. Oil was discovered in 2015 during the tenure of President Donald Ramotar, and everything was going well. I have three wrong things that happened, to educate you or to remind you, Members of the House. The controversial Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) was signed by the APNU/AFC Coalition Government. The best deal was not negotiated for the people of Guyana. Again, you failed the people of Guyana.

To add insult to injury, they attempted to cover up the signing bonus, the \$18 million that was bequeathed to the people of Guyana. They attempted to cover that up. Four Ministers of their Government told the people of Guyana that they did not know about the signing bonus. Then, one Minister, when he was pressured, said he thought it was a gift. Then, they proceeded to railroad and rush through the Natural Resources Act at a time when they were a caretaker Government. The only constitutional obligation was to hold elections in 90 days. Mr. Speaker, again they failed us, but

again we took corrective action. Today, we have a NRF Act that is transparent, that has all the trappings in keeping with the Santiago Principles, and has heavy obligations placed on the shoulders of the Minister of Finance to report on every deposit and every withdrawal from that fund. I just want to end by saying that the Hon. David Patterson... [**Mr. Ramson:** Honourable?] He is still honourable in my books. The Hon. Member came to this House and lied about the Amaila...

Mr. Speaker: Prime Minister, we cannot use...

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: He misrepresented the facts on the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. Mr. Speaker, I know I have run out of time. All the documents and all the evidence are there to show that the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project was a viable project. Had we continued along that development trajectory that was set out by the previous PPP/C Government, we would have had 165 additional megawatts (mw) renewable energy delivered to the people of Guyana, especially the people of Linden and Bartica, five years ago. I want to end with two quotes. The first one is from Thales of Miletus, the Greek Philosopher and Mathematician, who said:

“The most difficult thing in life is to know yourself.”

You, as Opposition Members of this House, must come to the debate with truths and facts, regardless of how painful it may be to you. The second quote is from Noam Chomsky, American Linguist and philosopher in his own right. He said:

“Nobody is going to pour truth into your brain. It's something you have to find out for yourself.”

The people of Guyana are beginning to find out the truth for themselves. We have an Opposition that failed the people when they were in Government. I wish to end by saying that they must remain on that side of the House and allow development to take place in Guyana. All we are asking you is to not be detractors to the development process; be part of the development process. I believe, again another proverb, an African one this time:

3.50 p.m.

“If you want to go fast go alone, if you want to go far go together”.

Let us go together. Let us support this budget and develop Guyana. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Prime Minister. I was informed that the Hon. Member, Mr. Jagdeo, will not be speaking. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I would now call on you to make your presentation. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, we start the clock at 3.51 p.m.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister ended on a note that is very apt to him. No one can pour truth in your brain; you have to find it yourself. Let me remind you that when the People's National Congress (PNC) left Government in 1992, there was money in the budget to build a Soesdyke/Linden Highway, which the PPP/C took away and used in other places. That is a truth. Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the word 'joker' is unparliamentary. Could you tell me, so I do not use it as a means of description of the Prime Minister (PM)? Could I?

Mr. Speaker: A joke is well taken, and I made quite a few in the House.

Mr. Norton: Okay.

Mr. Speaker: But calling people joker is like (*inaudible*).

Mr. Norton: Well, it must have been a joke for the Prime Minister to sit there and say that we built a COVID-19 hospital, and we did not invite people. Who would have toured a COVID-19 hospital when it was just opened? It makes absolutely no sense. The Government might have allowed you to tour, if it were the PPP/C, because they want to get rid of you. I had to shift from my text to deal with the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister tried to go on like if he has some affiliation to Linden. It was only when he became Prime Minister that he began to return to Linden and that is a fact. I have been in contact and in Linden continuously. The Prime Minister spoke about us not having a national youth conference and council. We did, right in this building. Emerging from it, after consultation, was a youth policy that still exists, while your Government has none. I believe the script that you were given turned out to be an embarrassment for you. Who will come here, knowing that in under five years the APNU/AFC increased workers' wages by more than 70%, and make the kind of statement he made?

It is one thing to come here, Mr. Prime Minister, and tell us about the gas-to-shore energy plan and the money but you cannot tell us until now, how much it will cost and what will be the cost of the electricity to the consumer. If you fail to do that, then you are wasting our time. There is much more I want to say but the Prime Minister, in the face of fact, ran. I do not like talking behind people's backs so I will reserve it for when I catch him again. I moved away from the protocol

to deal with the Prime Minister. I want to say a special thank you to all the Members of Parliament on the Opposition side. They have critiqued this budget in such a way that the people of Guyana have long concluded that this budget does not cater for them. I believe, as well, that we have done exceptionally well because when the Hon. Member, Mr. Vinceroy Jordan, spoke about what happened in Region 5, the Government went and had them giddy-up and so they have been working since Wednesday, after the budget, until now to rectify the problems. The people of Region 5 asked me to say thanks to the Member of Parliament who raised it. For the first time, there is some responsiveness from the Government.

As the Prime Minister talked about the love for Linden, I wonder if he knows that right now, Linden has a water crisis, and the people of Linden are not getting water. He needs to go and check. That is the reality. I am sorry the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, is not here. I brought to the National Assembly the state of Prince William Street, the street I am living in. He stood in this House and told this House that street was completed. I will circulate it. That street is terrible. We need to check to see what happened with the money that they purportedly paid the contractor. There is another piece of information that is distant from the truth, since I cannot say the word lie. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance said that in 1992, they inherited a state-dominated economy. May I remind him, so that the facts can prevail, that Mr. Hugh Desmond Hoyte had divested most of the State enterprises and when they came to power, Guyana's economy was on the way to liberalisation? The National Assembly is supposed to be a place where the Government comes, puts its budget and we then come, and we critique the budget. Then, we expect the Ministers, in responding, to respond to the criticisms. That is not what is happening here. The Ministers come to *cuss* and *buse*. We are going to continue to lift the standards of this Parliament.

The focus of development in Guyana must be our people. It is my intention, today, to outline the APNU/AFC's people-centred vision of development for the people of Guyana. Our people-centred vision will be implemented under the theme, *In Pursuit of Stronger, Integrated and Inclusive Development to Guarantee a High Quality of Life for all Guyanese People*. This becomes necessary since this budget is a disaggregated set of projects with no clear philosophy underpinning it. The 2023 Budget can never deliver a high quality of life to our people. While infrastructure development is needed, this budget is structured to focus on infrastructure at the expense of the development of our

people. We cannot condone that. Such an approach is a mechanism to place the nation's resources in the hands of the wealthy and those who have no interest in legality – since I cannot use the word corrupt – at the expense of the poor and vulnerable who really should be the main beneficiaries of our resources. This budget will see the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer.

We are operating in real terrible times. Our people-centred development strategy recognises the need to solve the problems of our society at various levels. They must be dealt with at the level of the individual, the family, the community and the national and international levels. We need a holistic approach to deal with our problems. This piece-meal approach will not solve our problems. It is for this reason that the Men on Mission (MOM) is ill-conceived. It assumes that the problem to be solved will be solved by men on a mission. It has to be solved by men, women, boys and girls and institutions working together to eradicate poverty, restore law and order and develop new humane values that allow our society to progress, while at the same time being inclusive, respect the rule of law and promote a democratic culture, a culture which eludes the PPP/C regime. Good governance is needed but cannot be achieved because the PPP/C is hell-bent on controlling and dominating every aspect of the lives of the people of Guyana. To use the words of my good friend, Mr. Ramjattan, they are control freaks.

No society can progress when a culture of barbarism is the order of the day. The bulldozing and destroying of the homes of innocent Guyanese at Cane View, Mocha is a clear indication that this Government is not committed to human rights and the rule of law. The PPP/C has committed a heinous crime against the people of Mocha. The barbarism that characterised the PPP/C regime is a new low in the treatment of the poor and dispossessed in our society, The PPP/C has lost whatever links it had to humanity. It has none at present. I believe the PPP/C will pay dearly at polls for this heinous crime they committed on innocent people. This is more so once we get a clean voters' lists. It is apposite, at this time, for me to respond to the Minister of Housing and Water. It is true that, as Leader of the Opposition, I asked Cde. Mahipaul to make contact with Mr. Croal and he did. The explanation he gave here is not the best reflection of the reality. When he was contacted, he told Mr. Mahipaul, and he communicated it to me, that the decision was taken above of him, and he could not do anything about it. Why come to this House and give a totally different impression? I believe that it was the intention to do what they did at Cane View. It was part of their *modus operandi*. Remember, Mr. Benn, the hammer man.

4.05 p.m.

This budget does not take a holistic approach to Guyana's development. It is the bringing together of different, sometimes unrelated projects, with the hope that it will result in national development. It will not. We need to recognise that there is a new dispensation in Guyana. At this stage, we have finances from oil and gas. We must note that. The significant difference between the PPP/C and the APNU/AFC in Government is the existence of oil resources for development. There is no sense in comparing 2015 to 2020, where there were no resources from oil, and 2020 to now. What must be stated is that there are the resources to do what we are asking to be done. Unfortunately, the PPP/C seems not disposed to investing in our people. We will invest in our people. We, in the APNU/AFC, will pursue this strategy of ensuring our policies, programmes and projects are geared to improve the quality of life for our people. That is why we named it a people-centred programme. We believe that a *sine qua non* for development is the development of our human resources. We will focus on developing our human resources.

I now turn to human resource development. Human resource development is one of the most important subjects to be dealt with by a developing country. We need to develop our human resource capabilities in all sectors. We need to develop our human resource capabilities to be able to monitor and audit cost oil so as to allow us to garner more at the level of profits for the investment in our people. The resources garnered from oil must, therefore, be spent to improve our human resources capabilities. A survey needs to be done to determine the human resource needs of all sectors in our economy and the requisite action taken to ensure we develop our own resource capabilities in a way that is determined by the needs of our society rather than the training programme on offer by others. It is the needs of the society that should determine the training and scholarships we deliver. We have no problems with the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) but it should be structured to serve our society.

This might be the biggest budget in terms of resource allocation. Unfortunately, the resources are badly allocated. It is one of the smallest budgets in terms of allocation of resources to the people since it is focused on putting resources in the hands of the rich. We, in the APNU/AFC, commit ourselves to deliver a high quality of life to the people of Guyana utilising innovative measures and people-centred programmes as we utilise the oil resources with which our country has been blessed. We will implement a

plan and not continue to pull projects from the sky, as this Government continues to do. Poverty alleviation and eradication are two important objectives we set ourselves. Spending money to facilitate illegal activities cannot be a viable strategy. In other circumstances, I would have said corruption, but I cannot.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, this is the third time you have tried to be very skilful in introducing unparliamentary words. I know you are skilful enough to now desist.

Mr. Norton: I now turn to poverty alleviation and eradication. The critical task before us is to develop a strategy to alleviate and ultimately eradicate poverty since poverty is one of the key causes of our many social and other problems. The Government has to accept this as a fact or else they will continue to be in deep trouble. Unfortunately, *Budget 2023* has no such strategy. The APNU/AFC wishes to recommend the following measures to deal with the high levels of poverty in Guyana. One, we will identify the communities with high levels of poverty.

Two, we will conduct a national poverty survey to further understand poverty in Guyana. Based on this survey, we will determine what is the minimum liveable income and ensure those in poverty earn a minimum liveable income.

Three, we will educate those in poverty in financial literacy and small business management with the aim of giving them grants and loans to enable them to establish micro and small businesses.

Four, ensure that our people are literate. Our education system needs to return to the fundamentals and to ensure that by the time a child arrives in Grade 3, he or she can read, write, count, comprehend and reason. In this regard, our education system has failed our people, especially our young people. One of the prerequisites for poverty alleviation and eradication is the development of a literate and functioning society. We will pursue that. We need a literate society, and our resources need to be placed into ensuring this objective is achieved, cognisant of the new technological era in which we live. Illiteracy contributes to poverty and must be eradicated.

Five, develop projects in impoverished communities to lift them out of poverty, using both job creation and the promotion of micro and small businesses. We will train for employment in both the private and the public sector.

Six, we must remove income tax from all those living below the poverty line. No one earning below \$150,000 should be

paying personal income tax in this oil-rich country. This budget illustrates that the burden of taxpaying is on the small man who is poor and vulnerable. Most of the taxes are coming from personal income tax. It is unacceptable and it is unfair.

Seven, the use of salary top-ups to bring Guyanese above the minimum liveable income.

Eight, the provision of \$50,000 per month to students to attend our tertiary institutions – the Guyana School of Agriculture (GSA), the technical institutes, the University of Guyana (UG), *inter alia*.

Nine, special scholarships for the children of the poor who are capable. This is dear to many of us, who may not have been in this House, had the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) not put in place a system that allowed poor people to realise their potential.

Ten, we must make technical and vocational training available to the poor and their children.

Eleven, the provision of increased public assistance to the poor and their children. Clearly, \$2000 increase in public assistance is ridiculous. It is unacceptable as it is unbelievable. What is worse is the arbitrary way in which a Minister could take away that assistance.

Twelve, it is such circumstance that the APNU/AFC Government will establish objective criteria for the allocation of public assistance. It cannot be at the whims, fancies and caprices of a Minister.

Thirteen, we will reduce value-added tax (VAT) to 12% so that it will ease the pressure on the poor.

Fourteen, we will develop a network of early childhood education centres and systems to help single parents, and the poor in general. I invite Members of this House to go to poor communities and see women departing and leaving their children, with no protection for them, to go to do security work. This society owes it to them to develop a system of early childhood education centres. We have to get special training for the poor and vulnerable.

Fifteen, Guyana needs a programme to house the homeless. I invite anyone in here to drive Regent Street at nights and see the number of people sleeping on the pave in oil-rich Guyana. Unacceptable.

Sixteen, develop a more all encompassed, nutritious school feeding programme to alleviate childhood malnutrition. That will be done.

Seventeen, we will implement a national school children's transportation programme to take our children to school, be it on land or river. It is not enough to come here and criticise the Five Bs initiative where, without oil resources but from the assistance of people – not Government money – we were providing boats, bicycles, *et cetera*. You come here to criticise it rather than appear to be a Government that is concerned, by proposing a network of transportation that will allow our children to get school and ensure that that burden is not on their parents.

Eighteen, we will build sustainable communities. This means communities with high quality educational, health, recreational and other modern facilities, potable water, electricity, roads and proper drainage that are necessities if the community is to develop, and not a farcical Silica City. Why should we be fighting with highfaluting schemes? When we came into power in 2015, we had to put lights in Farm, roads in Farm and virtually every area. We have many so-called housing schemes that do not have the basic facilities, but the Government comes to tell us about Silica City. Let us make the cities of poor people the same level of the Silica City that you envisage.

Nineteen, the development of these communities will demand trained social workers, psychologists and other professionals, and a reorientation of law enforcement to understand and deal with the many social problems confronting our communities. We teach our teachers to teach, we teach policemen to enforce laws, but we fail to give them the professional training needed to deal with the social problems of this modern era. Our teachers, medical workers, and our police, *inter alia*, have to be re-educated to face the many social problems confronting our society. The APNU/AFC's aim is to develop sustainable communities with informed citizens that are law-abiding and committed to the development of a Guyana that is free from ethnic prejudice. We want our people to live and work together. Merely saying 'One Guyana' cannot solve the problem.

4.20 p.m.

To this end, we have to root out the illegalities and lawlessness that characterise our society. Lawless societies do not develop. As we pursue the development of sustainable communities, we must keep in the mind the aim of reducing the gap between towns and rural areas and the coast and hinterland. Our people-centred vision is aimed at giving all people, wherever they are, a high quality of life. That is what we must pursue. In indigenous communities, sustainability must mean that our indigenous people must be

trained and financed to be able to take on construction and other contracts in their communities. While our indigenous people need a fish, it is more important to teach them to fish and share in our national patrimony in a more meaningful way. All communities, including indigenous communities, must be made self-sustainable communities.

Twenty: We will promote community development and local leadership to unleash the talents and energies of our people in communities. In this regard, we will promote local democracy and take action to remove party politics from local development and allow local authorities to function in keeping with the law and the needs of the people in their communities. There is too much domination and control from the centre. This approach of domination and control of local democratic organs constitute a fetter to development.

Twenty-one: On that side they talked all the time about house lots – 20,000 house lots; 50,000 house lots. While house lots are on offer, many Guyanese cannot afford to build. House lots and housing are not the same. The APNU/AFC will afford poor and vulnerable Guyanese the option to be part of a rent-to-own scheme. This will remove the need for poor Guyanese to have to find large sums to get a mortgage and will make homeownership more accessible to the poor and vulnerable. Their rent will go towards the payment for their house. Such an initiative will allow the poor to own their houses without having to fund a percentage of their mortgage as is usual. In other countries rent-to-own contributed significantly to poor people obtaining homes. There is no sense in telling us that this was reduced and that was reduced and then the money that a person has to find, he/she cannot find. The best option is rent-to-own. We advocate that.

We will expand the funding for the Small Business Bureau (SBB) to facilitate youth, women, single mothers and other vulnerable Guyanese. The provision of grants and credits to the unemployed to facilitate their involvement in agriculture and agro-processing will be undertaken. This measure will go a far way in improving production and will bring down the high cost of living thus reducing inflation and positively impacting the pockets of poor Guyanese. We cannot wish poverty away. Cash grants, though needed and welcome, cannot take our people out of poverty. We need measures like the above-mentioned to address poverty. I know they all have left because they keep saying that we do not offer solutions. I have just given them 22 solutions. As they sit enjoying taxpayer's money and eating, I hope they listen and implement.

It is this kind of visionary thinking that Guyana needs and not the pasting together of projects to facilitate illegal practices for the governing elites, families, friends and favourites, that is not what we need. While we seek to eradicate poverty, we must at the same time deal with the high cost of living. This Budget is found wanting when it comes to measures aimed at addressing the high cost of living. This Budget rehashes the same old measures that were announced in 2022 that failed to bring down the cost of living. The rehashing of them is a clear indication that the drafters of this Budget have no clue of what needs to be done to stabilise and ultimately reduce the cost of living. All Guyanese should know that if this Government was serious, it would have had released measures in this Budget for the cost of living. We wish to proffer a raft of measures to mitigate the high cost of living.

These measures will include among others: one, vouchers for those in public transportation so that they can have access to lower gasoline prices. This is important because transportation contributes.

Two, the waiver of electricity charges for low-income Guyanese.

Three, the waiver of water charges for low-income Guyanese.

Four, grants of \$5million or more to small businesses based on objective criteria so that they can expand production. When production expands at the local level, prices stabilise and eventually come down; so it deals with inflation. The distribution is based on the equity of the excess \$60 billion Guyana received from last year's unexpectedly high oil prices, which translates into \$300,000 per household.

Six, a minimum of 50% wages and salaries increase for all public servants; 8% is not enough to impact the cost of living. The inflation has eaten away at that already, and therefore, the real wage of the Guyanese worker is less this year. There should be the writing-off of the University of Guyana (UG) student loans and fees to free up disposable incomes for families. This can be done now. It does not have to wait until 2025. We have the resources. It would be remiss of me if I do not remind this House that Guyana did it without oil, with more poverty in the 1970s and 1980s, until the PPP/C terminated it in the 1990s.

Another critical issue for us to address is the question of unemployment and underemployment. While we welcome citizens who have no jobs obtaining \$50,000 per month, this is not the solution to employment. It might be useful to the

Government as a tool for bribery and control, but it is also a manifestation that the Government has failed in its quest to provide jobs, especially good paying jobs, for our young people. We need not just to create employment but to produce jobs that are high paying and allow our people to have a liveable income and a decent life. We know that this Budget is short on creating employment that allows our people to live decent and comfortable lives. We wish to recommend the following measures for our people-centred vision that will result in the creation of employment for our people and redound to the benefit of people, especially our youth.

Our policies to generate high paying jobs are as follows: one, taxes for agro-processing and other manufacturing with competitive advantage should be removed, allowing technologically advanced, high paying manufacturing, to take its place.

Two, a national productivity bank should be created to offer low interest loans to medium to large scale businesses to facilitate job creation and expansion. We know that the private sector has repeatedly complained about high business interest rates. We must address it.

Three, the Small Business Bureau (SBB) should be massively expanded and properly managed with millions of dollars in grants to allow small businesses to develop, bring new products to the market and otherwise expand. This should be accessible to all Guyanese.

In collaboration with ExxonMobil and its partners, extensive oil and gas training should be offered to allow Guyanese to access jobs in that industry. Training at Port Mourant alone is inadequate. There are many other institutions across Guyana that must be utilised to train our people.

Five, guaranteed high paying government jobs. I repeat, guaranteed high paying government jobs. In this regard, university graduates must be employed to undertake analysis of our problems and offer solutions resulting in development being data driven. There are many university students out there who have graduated and cannot find a job. If the Government undertakes to create proper think tanks and working bodies, and pay people to do the research, *et cetera*, we will be in a better position.

Six, grants must be made available for new people in agriculture and for existing farmers to ensure increased agricultural activity as a measure to prevent us from experiencing the Dutch disease which is at our front door. These grants to farmers will allow them to boost

productivity, grow their farms and increase their earnings by acquiring better equipment. It will contribute to the development of the non-oil sector.

Seven, construction jobs will be created to facilitate the Government's rent-to-own low-income housing schemes.

Eight, we will create construction jobs through a government infrastructure development programme that builds modern homes and other facilities for teachers, health workers and other public servants who have to serve away from their homes. All those public servants complain about how bad the facilities are. Members of Parliament and local government representatives must be provided with well-paid staff to help them better respond to the needs of the Guyanese people and represent them.

Well-paid teachers and training staff must be hired to facilitate evening training at government schools, whether for widely available adult education classes or technical ones. The restarting of the night school programme, which begun under the APNU/AFC, is a good starting point. We must not be carried away by all of these top students. It is estimated that about 16,000 children wrote the Grade VI Examination or the Common Entrance Examination but only about 5,000 matriculate, meaning they have five Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) subjects with Mathematics and English, then the system dumps them rather than developing an evening school, a night school, so that they could return and make themselves eligible to work and train.

Funding for community development and the creation of liveable spaces throughout Guyana will create hundreds of jobs in design and construction.

Twelve, cheaper electricity from power sources such as solar energy will facilitate job creation through various formers of value-added manufacturing. This will be prevalent in designated industrial zones in all regions. The forgoing must be done while simultaneously taking measures to reduce inflation. In this regard, as one would have recognised, many of the measures contribute to dealing with inflation. The Government clearly does not have a plan.

4.35 p.m.

I want to turn to manufacturing. This Budget lacks measures to contribute to the development of the non-oil sector. The Government seems to be 'a little boy flicking' and hoping he lands on his feet rather than his head. Tax breaks must be targeted not scattergun. When it comes to the industrial policy, there are vital and specific circumstances, such as stimulating industries that face challenges in starting up and

scaling. To this end, we call on the Government to reduce the corporate tax rate for non-commercial businesses involved in agro-processing to 0%. Additional categories for manufacturing should also be assessed and incorporated in this policy, based on the competitive advantage. Further, these incentives should be coupled with grants to farmers, as we have previously proposed, to help them to expand production, to meet the expected increased demand for produce. These targeted policies in the agro-processing industry will stimulate activities such as the canning of fruits and vegetables or the production of juices and similar natural beverage for export.

Further, this policy approach will ensure benefits are not concentrated in one or two regions for selfish political gains but spread nationally to encourage development wherever conditions are suitable. This will swiftly generate tens of thousands of jobs as international manufacturers are attracted to Guyana, much the same as they have flocked similar low-taxed nations. We do not need to wait for low electricity price, which may never materialise, to see manufacturing grow in Guyana. This is even more so since the project for cheap electricity is in the hands of the second Vice President of 'Sue fame' who presided over the most failed projects in the history of Guyana. Instead, we should learn from those nations which have leveraged thoughtful tax policies to stimulate export industries.

Mr, Speaker, I want to read for you a passage from a Brown University paper – and I have it here to lay over – that describes the benefits of targeted sizeable tax breaks as opposed to the scattergun approach the PPP/C uses to reward its cronies. It concerns Operation Bootstrap which Puerto Rico established all the way back in the 1940s, and which formed an ideological back bone of the effective industrial policies of dozens of countries and special economic zones. I quote:

“Perhaps the economic measure most important to Operation Bootstrap's success was the tax exemption policy for U.S. and other corporations that invested in the island.

Industrial growth on the island after 1947 suggests that the tax exemption program was successful. In 1949, the United States Department of Commerce estimated that the 1,998 manufacturing establishments in Puerto Rico employed 55,000 Puerto Ricans, with an average workforce of 27.6 persons... By 1967, 2,367 manufacturing establishments employed 121,537 Puerto Ricans,

with an average of 51.3 per establishment. Perhaps more significantly, the Department of Commerce valued manufacturing in Puerto Rico in 1949 at \$93 million. By 1967, it estimated that manufacturing was producing \$621 million for the island. Evidently, Operation Bootstrap successfully industrialized the island. Perhaps more importantly, it successfully shifted the Puerto Rican economy's dependence from agriculture to industry in less than twenty years."

That is what Guyana needs. Shifting Guyana's economy from agriculture to this type of value-added industrial production has been a goal of Guyanese development policy for decades. The Hon. Speaker will tell you that since we were in youth politics we were talking about that, but it eludes us. Under the Coalition we began this process by reducing the tax rate for non-commercial businesses to 25%. We must continue to reduce taxes in a targeted way to create tens of thousands of jobs. The PPP/C has not figured out these types of tax policies. After being in office for 25 of the last 30 years, it is testament that the PPP/C has not figured out these types of tax policies; after being in power for 25 of the last 30 years it is testament to the limited thinking, poor historical knowledge, and fundamental inability to create jobs. We promise you that, as a Government, we will create the jobs, and we have given you the mechanisms to do it.

I turn to the public service. According to the World Bank, Guyana is expected to grow by 25% in 2023. The Government cannot continue to pretend that Guyana is a poor country where public servants must scrape and toil just to get by. We will depend on public servants even more as Government's revenue surge and Government's programme grow in scale and complexity. We reiterate our call for all public servants to be given a 50% increase in wages and salaries. However, public servants' compensation must expend beyond just salary increases. We must empower public servants with the best possible facilities to make them effective. We must empower them with professional training so that they can improve their productivity and advance their careers. Additionally, we call on the Government to extend duty-free concession for vehicles to a larger group of public servants. Since I was a public servant, whenever I became one in the 70s, it has remained the same group virtually. We want to make it clear that we consider public servants to be vital to Guyana's development and will do everything in our power to support them. We will professionalise the public service as we did when we were in Government. Public servants can tell you they operated with much more freedom

between 2015 and 2020 than they operate now. They live a life of fear.

On the other hand, Guyana's labour needs serve as a backdrop for another lie we must not let stand. At the United Nations last year, the President boasted that spending on education will be increased to 20% of the budget. That works out to \$156.4 billion this year. It may be obvious to everyone in this esteemed House that the education budget this year is not \$156.4 billion. In fact, the Government has missed its target by \$62 billion, a truly monumental sum. What love for the public servants. The PPP/C does not believe in education, in the same way that they never intended to spend 20% of the budget on that Ministry. If they had intended to do so, the University of Guyana would have been free, billions would have been provided to upgrade the university, lecturers and teachers would have received a 50% pay increase and tens of thousands of students would have been receiving student stipends. Even further, the APNU/AFC will implement a student stipend policy. We could easily afford to provide 50,000 students with \$50,000 per month to assist them with educational expenses. That will also contribute to poverty alleviation. These stipends which should go to the students at the University of Guyana, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), night schools and other such institutions, will also incentivise Guyanese to train or retrain in order to build the robust work force required.

It is very important for us to give our students stipends. When I was Presidential Advisor for Youth Empowerment, we did a survey. We found that when children were close to the institution, whether it is Government Technical Institute (GTI) or New Amsterdam Technical Institute (NATI), they tended to stay in the institution. When they have to travel and face the cost, they fall out. We need to begin to help them to be able to not only go to school but to stay in school. This policy which we call 50 for 50 represents the type of serious initiatives that will help to energise and mobilise Guyana's youth. We must recognise that Guyana's change in economy provides change in opportunities, and that we have a sworn duty to help Guyanese seize these opportunities.

I turn to infrastructure. Guyana needs a sound infrastructure development plan. While we see the need for the development of community roads, our infrastructure development plan must see us developing roads and bridges linking all ten regions. Such developments will not only open new lands, they will also give us the opportunity to shift our economic and other activities to highlands and reduce our vulnerability to climate change. Guyana needs to

shift its development to highlands. It must be the irony of the century that this Budget theme is *Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity For Tomorrow* while the Government continues to promote the bulk of development on the low coastline areas with all that this portends. How could we say we are catering for the future knowing the situation with climate change? Common sense and the fact that it is predicted that our coasts will be inundated by 2030, we must reduce the focus on the low-lying coast and begin to shift to highlands. Clearly, this Budget is not building prosperity tomorrow. It is increasing our vulnerability to climate change. It is a visionless budget.

It is apposite to point out that this regime continues to pursue development on the low-lying coastal plane at a time when they themselves are talking about climate change. To shift our economic activities to the highlands, will not only allow us to deal with climate change, it will also increase opportunities for eco-tourism since it will open new hinterland lands and expose Guyana's natural beauty to Guyanese and the world. It is well known that many Guyanese cannot see Guyana because they cannot afford it. We need to change that, since this move will facilitate a cheaper avenue for Guyanese to explore and experience our beautiful country. Our infrastructure development must be based on a plan that opens Guyana's hinterland, reduces the need for expansive and expensive drainage system, while offering new safer and secure lands to our people. Our highlands offer such an opportunity. People follow infrastructure and if we continue to focus on the coast, we are ourselves contributing to making us more vulnerable to the ill-effects of climate change. All larger infrastructure programs must, of necessity, have proper feasibility studies and environmental impact assessment. We have lost too much under the PPP/C Government by being involved in projects such as the Skeldon Sugar Modernisation Project, the E-Government project, the fibre-optic cable project and the Enmore Packaging Plant, among the many failed projects under the Jagdeo PPP/C Regime, as a result of lack of proper feasibility studies.

I turn to housing. The shift to highlands will open new vistas for housing, business and access to new freshwater resources, building materials, and the increased safety of our people from the threat that the sea level rise poses.

4.50 p.m.

We are blessed with highlands. We need to reimagine Guyana and unleash its potential in the interest of all the people of Guyana. Such a shift will place us closer to our

many waterfalls with hydropower potential and therefore reduce the cost of transmission of power to distant places. As we conceptualise housing, let us focus on new sustainable communities as we seek to house our people. The APNU/AFC will implement a hinterland development programme which will be guided by a well-thought-out land use policy. At present we put anything anywhere. We need a land use policy so that we choose the best places for housing, the best places for agriculture and the best places for manufacturing. One cannot wake up the next morning and say, *oh*, I feel like putting it here.

I turn to agriculture. Agriculture has to continue to be critical in the development of Guyana. It must play a pivotal role in providing food for our people. In this regard, the APNU/AFC will promote agricultural development in every region as part of a wider plan to ensure all regions are self-sufficient in food production. This will go a far way in reducing the amount of money regions spend on transportation and will also result in the reduction of food prices in those regions, and is therefore anti-inflationary, and will redound to the benefit of the people of Guyana. Why would we be heading food security in the Caribbean region without food security in our ten administrative regions? *Charity begins at home*. The APNU/AFC government will focus on food security in every region and the excess from those regions can go to the Caribbean regional security. As a concomitant of our regional agricultural development, we need corresponding agro-processing facilities in every region. Basic economics teaches that location matters. It is therefore mind-boggling when the Hon. Member from Region 6 indicated that they will place the agro-processing centre at one extreme of the region – I think it is either Skeldon or Corriverton – forcing those at the other extreme to incur high costs to get to the agro-processing centre. An APNU/AFC government will strategically place these agro-processing facilities so that all can access them at a relatively cheap cost. There had to be little or no thinking going into that, so we put it at the other extreme. More importantly, it is well established in this country that the East Bank of Berbice has some of the most fertile lands, why would you put it at another end?

I turn to oil. If, at the end of this year, Guyana never puts another floating production storage and offloading (FPSO) vessel into use, we would still be one of the highest oil producers per capita in the entire world. We will be producing easily four times as much oil per day as the Republic of Ghana (Ghana), ten times as much as the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (Trinidad), and far more than Equatorial Guinea, to which we have often been

compared. We cannot continue to operate like novices who have no idea of how an oil industry should be properly managed. Our Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources should be constantly engaging and reviewing the laws and regulations that govern this industry. Our Public Accounts Committee (PAC) must keep the industry under constant scrutiny and our auditing capacity of both the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and the Auditor General's office should be expanded until it is the envy of the oil-producing world. Our national university should be placed on the path to become one of the foremost oil and gas focused learning institutions worldwide. That is the kind of ambition we need to have. Critical issues in the oil and gas sector need to be under constant scrutiny. We cannot continue to have it mismanaged in the head of the incompetent second Vice President. We need to ask the following questions...

Mr. Speaker: Another bleep.

Mr. Norton: Are you talking about "incompetent"?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Norton: Okay, withdrawn. We need to ask the following questions: What are our estimates for the oil price next month, much less next year? How many shipments do we estimate we will receive this year accounting for fluctuation in daily production value? How many further oil finds do we expect this year accounting for the number of exploring activities and our internal estimates of the probability of success? We need to do this kind of analysis. While we welcome ExxonMobil's investment in Guyana, we cannot throw our hands up in the air and *hope against hope* that ExxonMobil will run its operation effectively and transparently. The Government still seems to be in awe of the 'oil major' and any oil company that comes to Guyana, completely unaware that world-class expertise can be imported to help Guyana effectively govern this sector. The Department of Energy under the Coalition made steps in the right direction that we need to build on. Instead, we are asked to place our faith in a man who has failed perpetually.

Mr. Speaker, after all, incompetence does not prevent the Government from releasing the long overdue audit of United States (US) \$7 billion in cost recovery expenses. Incompetence does not prevent the Government from releasing the full, model Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) for scrutiny. No, this is the work of a malicious intent to hide from public scrutiny and accountability. It has gotten to the point that when it comes to oil, the Government is viewed with extreme suspicion by even the most moderate names. When I mentioned Equatorial Guinea earlier, it was

not done idly. That country is famous for monumental levels of secrecy and corruption. Mr. Su, who levelled accusations of bribery in Guyana, even mentioning an oil deal, would fit right in that scheme. But Equatorial Guinea is not just corrupt; it is poor...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you are taking a lot of liberties. The other issue was imputing, Standing Order (SO) 41(6), which has often been quoted. That is why I stopped you previously. Good.

Mr. Norton: That country is famous for having a GDP per capita that rivals many European countries while 70% of its people live in desperate poverty. Guyana resembles Equatorial Guinea more and more every day, with more than half of the Guyanese living in poverty while the PPP/C elites, friends, family, and favourites gorge themselves.

Foreign investment: We believe that foreign investment must be encouraged as we continually aim to diversify the Guyanese economy. We believe that a combination of foreign investment and local private sector growth can help us to build robust industries throughout our country. A dynamic local business environment must also provide space to small and medium-scale enterprises.

Youth, sport and culture: We see culture, sport and entertainment as critical to national identity, the development of the tourism industry and our goal of a comfortable and happy society. We must cherish and promote local culture and cultural events, celebrate our nation's history and welcome tourists who come to share in our society's beauty. This renewed focus on what we are proud of in Guyana, will help to bring Guyanese together and promote social cohesion. We do not believe that cultural erasure, which the PPP/C is practising by ignoring Mashramani, is the way forward for Guyana. It is now about one month from Mashramani, and we have not heard almost anything about our country's most cherished annual celebrations. Resources should be invested to promote local tradition, artists, and crafts, with Mashramani front and centre. Similarly, the PPP/C sees Guyana's sports as unserious and unimportant except for partisan and political gains. We know that Guyanese are blessed with physical talents of many flavours, and we must set ourselves goals that match those talents as well as considerable resources. How many podium finishes is the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport targeting this year and over the next five years? Do they even contemplate such deliberate goals? All they do is keep telling us about grounds, most of which they have not completed. Each community should have spaces for

entertainment so that local artistes can perform, art be displayed and sold, and citizens engage in relaxation. In the course of developing multiple avenues for entertainment, we will seek innovative ways to enable our artistes, artists, folklore singers and writers to pursue their craft. The APNU/AFC will give youth, sport and culture the attention it needs to contribute to the development of Guyana and a rounded personality.

I turn to foreign policy. At the international level, it is necessary that an international environment is created that is conducive to Guyana's development. Unfortunately, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation seems not to understand his role, or is just incompetent, and clearly lacks the intellectual sagacity that is needed to formulate...

Mr. Speaker: I would not allow you to impute; (SO) 41(6) on the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Mr. Norton: I withdraw. The Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation lacks the intellectual sagacity that is needed to formulate and implement foreign policy. You would agree, Mr. Speaker, that it demands nimbleness of mind. The Hon. Member, Mr. Todd, should stop embarrassing himself and resign. Guyana's foreign policy needs to create an environment for Guyana to progress. The discovery of oil has opened new vistas for Guyana while simultaneously eventuating new challenges. These challenges must be addressed and surmounted. As the world moves toward new and renewable energy, we need to pursue these energy options while simultaneously promoting a foreign policy strategy that gives us environmental space to develop our oil and gas sector, while at the same time pursuing sustainable development. In this regard, the existence of a large forest cover must not only be used in transactional terms but also as a bargaining tool to give us the environmental space to develop our resources, that is the work of the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

At the foreign policy level, we need to engage the developed world and remind them that we have agreed to be guided by the principle of 'shared but differentiated responsibility', and to argue for environmental space to permit Guyana to develop its oil and gas resources. It is in this context that we need to forge relationships with countries to help us to benefit significantly from our oil and gas resources. The Ministry needs to recognise that many developed countries that are rich, including the United States of America (USA)

and the United Kingdom (UK) are seeking more benefits from oil companies and, therefore, the opportunity should be taken to craft a foreign policy strategy for us to benefit from this confluence of interest and allow Guyanese to obtain the support of the other countries, including developed countries, as we seek to benefit from our oil resources.

5.05 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, I have outlined a lot and I just want to make one last major point. It was said here that we did not have solutions. I think we gave solutions that even the Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy, could use. All that we have outlined are only possible if we have good governance. Guyana, today, is marked by the absence of transparency and accountability. There is an unbelievable assault on democracy. For some reason, the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) seems to believe that democracy is only about elections. They do not believe that there are substantive elements of democracy – governance issues – in which they should follow Article 13 and be inclusive. They have the audacity to tell even the civil society that it was not elected and therefore it would not have a say. Modern democracies accommodate. Modern democracies accommodate civil society. Civil society is seen as an integral part of the democratic development, but it is not so with us. We are deteriorating, at a fast rate, and we are now seeking to gerrymander boundaries. It is something that we have heard of since the 1960s. A clean voters' list is critical to elections that all of us accept. If the Government believe as they constantly say – we will be over here for the rest of our lives – give us a clean voters' list and put it to the test. You give us a clean voters' list and put it to the test. The assault on our freedoms and expression must come to an end. It is not part of a democratic culture. The politicisation of the Guyana Police Force (GPF) is empty democratic and should come to an end. We need independent public institutions that can act as a cheque and balance on the excess of this Government.

Governance is a critical issue. Government can put how many proposals they want but if people do not believe that they are involved, you will not succeed. Look at the amount of money you put into rice yet, it failed and did worse than under us. We have outlined the weaknesses of this Budget. We have pointed out that it does not deliver poverty alleviation measures. Mr. Speaker, we have shown you that it has no measures to reduce the cost of living. Mr. Speaker, we have shown you that it has no measures to create employment. Mr. Speaker, we have shown you that it does not focus on the development of our people. Mr. Speaker, we

recommend to you that you borrow from our people-centred vision and bring a budget that allows our people to develop. This Budget asphyxiates the poor man. This Budget stifles the poor man. This Budget kills initiatives. It is for those reasons I cannot afford to support this Budget. However, if the Government shows any responsibility and is prepared to be responsive to the concerns, we might very well reconsider our position. I want to thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Member Mr. Norton. Now, to conclude the debate on the 2023 Budget, here is the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance.

Some Members of the Opposition left the Chamber.

Dr. Singh: I rise to conclude the first half of consideration by this honourable House of *Budget 2023*. The first half, of course, focused on the general policy debate in anticipation of the consideration of the Estimates of Expenditure next week. As I do so, I thank all of my Colleagues on this side of the House and, indeed, the Hon. Deputy Speaker for their various invaluable contributions to this debate. As is traditionally the case, Ministers and Members of Parliament (MPs) took advantage of the opportunities presented by this Budget's debate to elaborate – in far greater detail than the Budget Speech can do – our Government's plans, programmes, policies and various initiative contained not only in the Budget but indeed in our Manifesto, and how we see successful and complete delivery of our manifesto's commitments during the course of this term of Office.

The Budget debate, of course, is a very important part of the annual economic cycle and an important part of the annual parliamentary calendar. Presenting, as it does, not only an opportunity for Government MPs and Ministers to do as I just indicated but also present opportunities for Members on the opposite side of the House to articulate their alternative visions for the country; and to outline alternative initiatives and proposals, considering that in a normally functioning democracy, the Opposition would consider itself to be a Government in waiting. Sadly, on yet another occasion, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) failed woefully to avail themselves of the opportunity presented by the debate on *Budget 2023*. Instead of presenting an alternative vision for Guyana and instead of proposing alternative policies, programmes and initiatives, they regurgitated the standard, overworked, tired, old and overused diatribe – very tired – which has long been

overtaken by time and which has subjected to multiple rounds of scrutiny by the people of Guyana who roundly and robustly rejected it in March, 2020.

Why is that important? This is because, we, in the People's Progressive Party/Civic, in a completely unrestricted and unlimited manner, subscribed fully and wholeheartedly to the democratic model of governance. That democratic model of governance requires us to submit ourselves to an electorate, once every five years, as is in our Constitution and it also requires us to respect the will of the electorate. In fact, if one was to consider the political history of Guyana, one would see the People's Progressive Party/Civic accepting election results even in times when there was compelling evidence of those elections having been rigged. In fact, today, I do not believe that anybody – including anybody in the People's National Congress/Reform – even disputes the fact that elections were systematically rigged. This is now an accepted historic fact that the PNC/R engaged systematically in electoral rigging for the entire duration of its time in Office until 1992.

If I am to borrow a phrase used by the Hon. Minister, Ms. Walrond, who spoke so appropriately of the *leopard not having changed its spots*, one might have thought that having spent some time in Opposition, the PNC/R – however, they now style themselves, APNU/AFC – has learned some lessons from the past. They returned to Government, not having learned anything, and instead, reverted instantly to their old dictatorial ways. What is even more alarming is that those ways have been roundly rejected in 2020. Maybe, I should say this, in 2020, I think most people recognised that Guyana was at a historic juncture in its economic history. It had just become an oil-producing nation. I believe the first oil was in December, 2019. I think that everybody, the Guyanese people, were fully seized by the magnitude of the moment. They had, fortunately, the privilege of being able to look back in recent memory to consider the People's Progressive Party/Civic, in Government. Well, in fact, those who are old enough to remember, considered the PNC in Government from 1964 to 1992. They had a long period over which to observe the PNC/R in Government. They had the period from 1992 to 2015 to observe the People's Progressive Party/Civic in Government so they had an alternative against which to compare. In case the pre-1992 era was a distant memory, particularly for younger voters who might not recall or might not even have been around during the pre-1992 era, the Guyanese people were afforded the privilege of witnessing the PNC/R now called the APNU/AFC back in Government from 2015 to 2020. In 2020, Guyanese voters, young and

old, went into the polling stations armed with a rich set of comparative experiences of alternative governments and, therefore, were better informed to make a decision as to whom they wanted in Government at this uniquely historic moment in our country's economic and broader evolution.

5.20 p.m.

The people of Guyana armed with that information spoke resoundingly and elected the People's Progressive Party/Civic back to Government. I have no doubt in my mind that having listened for the last five days of debate in this House, the people of Guyana feel fully vindicated, indeed feel reinforced, in the appropriateness of the judgement they made in 2020. Why do I say this? I considered what approach I would take to this wrapping up of the debate; I could take every single speech presented or every single point made and – I made copious notes – respond to them, that would take me a very long time, more than the five hours of my original speech. I want, in particular, to focus on the speech given by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition and one or two other critical issues, purely for illustrative purposes and I will then close or rest my case.

As I listened to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, a word that has fallen out of popular usage, a particular word came to my mind and it is a word like I said has fallen out of popular usage a lot of people might not be familiar with it or perhaps they might. About 100 years ago, and I believe it is about 100 years ago, there emerged a usage of a word called 'bloviation', I think the Hon. Prime Minister is familiar with this word bloviation or bloviating. The person who performs this act or the individual who engages in bloviation is deemed a bloviator. In case I was mistaken about the meaning of the word, I resorted to that good friend of the modern man and modern woman, I referred to good old *Google*. I confirmed my recollection, to bloviate or the act bloviation and this is the word that came to mind as I was listening to Mr. Norton. He struck me as a bloviator *par excellence*. [Bishop Edghill: Give us the meaning.] Like I said resorted to *Google* and it states to us, in its dictionary, you will see it is defined all over the dictionaries that to bloviate or bloviation... I will just share with you two definitions:

“The art for speaking for as long as the occasion warrants while saying nothing at all.”

This one applies, particularly, to Mr. Norton. Secondly, it can be defined as:

“an army of pompous phrases moving over the landscape in search of an idea.”

Mr. Norton came here today and bloviated for maybe an hour and a half or two hours, invoked all manner of outdated concepts that he might have encountered in the years of 1960s and 1970s, spoke about targeted tax breaks, spoke about people-centred development, spoke of all manner of lofty sounding words, what was it, intellectual sagacity? He is a man given to using all of these big words and fancy phrases to impress people with his intellectual capacity while beneath that is absolutely no substance whatsoever. Asphyxiating – the Budget is asphyxiating the Guyanese people. Mr. Speaker, if you listened, as I am sure you did and as I know you always do, Mr. Norton started out on the premise... Let us start out where he started out. I think, maybe, he thought he wanted to amuse us when he started. I thought it was comedy and not bloviation that he intended. He came to the podium. He started out by saying that when the PNC/R left Office, in his customary manner – you know he puffs out his chest and puts on his important Leader of the Opposition voice to make sure Mr. Forde is kept out of the job and Mr. Mahipaul – in 1992, there was money in the Budget to build the Linden to Soesdyke Highway. Sir, I know that you have an abundance of youth still on your side, but I know you too can recall 1992 with perfect clarity. In 1992, the PNC destroyed Guyana. The Guyana left was in the state of PNC destruction, was incapable of paying public sector wages, was incapable of servicing the country's debts and was incapable of providing basic medication in hospitals.

The Minister, Dr. Anthony, reminds us that rodents were crawling on the beds and biting the limbs of patients in the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. Mr. Norton comes here with a straight face and seeks to tell the people of Guyana of that in 1992. I do not believe that there is anybody in Guyana who recalls, with any degree of clarity, would be able to forget the pain and suffering that Guyanese of that era were going through. There were no fuel, no electricity, lining up for fuel, days and weeks of blackout, no basic food supplies. Mr. Speaker, if you can recall that was the pre-1992 era when basic food supplies were banned. When I say to young people that potatoes or wheaten flour... [Mr. Hamilton: You could not get them.] It is not that Guyanese could not get them; they were illegal commodities. People were imprisoned for having wheaten flour and potatoes in their possession like it was... When I tell people that a person had to bury sardine cans... There are backyards in Guyana that are landfill sites for sardine cans, people had

to bury them because they were afraid to put their sardine cans in the dust bin.

Then, Mr. Norton comes here and wants to paint this alternative reality, looking the people of Guyana straight in their faces and seeking to paint this parallel or this imagined reality, almost as if they are living in a dream world, by saying that in 1992, we had money to fix the Linden to Soesdyke Highway. In 1992, they could not fix Main Street. Those who had cars could not drive – I am going to come back to cars in a minute – from the Pegasus Hotel to the Bank of Guyana in half of an hour or with no traffic. Person had to navigate the potholes from the Ministry of Finance to the Central Bank. They were streets in Guyana that were popularly called... I recall some streets in Kitty that were popularly called ‘abortion avenue’. One could not have navigated the street if she was an expectant mother. Mr. Norton comes here today, with a straight face, and wants to tell us that in 1992 we were ready. The people of Guyana know better but we should not be surprised by this because it is Mr. Norton and his Party – I am not going to repeat, I have said this many times in this House and many of my Colleagues have said it too – who looked at the people of the world in their faces and said to them with a straight face, 33 is not bigger than 32. They continue to say, up to today, not only that they did not rig the elections but that they won the elections. They continue to say up to today that they won the elections.

The reality is that in 1992 when the People's Progressive Party/Civic came to Government, Guyana's debt to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) ratio exceeded 600%. As a matter of fact, at the end 1991, it was 617% to be precise. Consider for a moment, that the debt of Guyana is six times the size of its economy. When we left Office, in 2015 rather, we had brought that down to less than 40% – from 617% in 1992 to less than 40%, that was the legacy of the People's Progressive Party/Civic in 2015 and there was no oil. They like to say oil revenue, but that was not achieved with the benefit of oil or oil revenue. It was achieved on the strength of prudent and responsible management by this People's Progressive Party/Civic in Government.

Mr. Speaker, if you are to consider every single key economic indicator, they claim – they want to speak about 1992 – to love public servants and they like to be selective about the facts that they bandy around, consider for a moment that in 1992 when they left Office, the public service minimum wage – the very Public Servants who they claim to love – at the end 1992 when the eventually demitted Office was the princely sum of US\$22 per month the

equivalent of US\$22 per month. Today, we have increased that to the equivalent of US\$388 per month from US\$22 per month. Now, is it where we would like it to be? It is not where we would like it to be and it is our intention to continue to increase it progressively. The answer is not to increase wages in a wild and reckless manner which, in fact, would be more inflationary than anything else and, therefore, undermine the value of people's fixed income, their salaries.

5.35 p.m.

The solution is progressively to increase it in a manner that ensures the real value of wages and salaries is preserved. Mr. Norton came here and made, in his customary PNC manner, all manner of wild promises. He read out a list – I think he said it was a list of 20 – of a motley crew and random assortment of 20 initiatives, policies or whatever one wants to call them. They moved across the entire spectrum. I am going to deal with some of them in a minute. It included a 50% increase in public service wages. We have trodden this path before and we have heard this before. They promised this to the public servants in 2015 but only gave it to yourselves. They promised it and knew that they did not have oil money and they did not promise it on the premise of oil money. In fact, there was a very elaborate plan on how it was going to be financed. I know one of my Colleagues alluded to this plan. It was a very elaborate plan outlining how they would finance those initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, I refer you and Guyana to page 46 of the APNU/AFC's 2015 election Manifesto. Those were the promises they made to the people of Guyana in 2015, were they to be elected to Office, which includes the 50% salary increase and including everything else such as rice, sugar and the expansion of rice and sugar. They explained how they would finance this. They had a whole section and an entire team who sat, analysed and studied this. They then wrote a whole chapter on it. The chapter is called “Reaping the Democratic Dividend”. They outlined eight specific measures, a number of general measures and then eight specific initiatives.

“1. Reducing capital flight. This is currently estimated at US\$200 million annually. We expect savings to be between 10 and 20% of this total.”

I invite the APNU/AFC to account to the people of Guyana how much of this they achieved and what they did with it.

“2. Augmenting capital inflows. This is currently estimated at about US\$450 million annually as a result of our improved political environment...”

That is the anticipated improvement in the political environment were they to be elected.

“3. Reducing incentives for the underground economy currently estimated at 20-60% of official Gross Domestic Product (GDP)...”

Sir, they are yet to report to us and the people of Guyana how they measured up against all of these promises.

“4. Reducing procurement fraud...”

They came here and spoke about procurement, friends, family, and favourites.

“4. Reducing procurement fraud...”

They said that is:

“estimated...to be about 28-35% of total procurement...”

In fact, I should go further:

“...of total procurement spending of \$140 billion.”

Let me say it again:

“4. Reducing procurement fraud estimated...to be about 28-35% of total procurement spending of \$140 billion.”

Here again, I invite the APNU/AFC to account to the nation how they performed against this reduction. They had five years. We want to hear how they performed in reaping this democratic dividend and having reaped it, why did you not deliver on your promises to the people?

“5. Tax Reforms...”

The list goes on but I am not going to read all of them. The reality is that the PNC, APNU/AFC, has a long and well-established tradition of selling pipe dreams, of blowing hot air, of bloviating. We were regaled with this for the entirety of the last five days. Mr. Norton also said that they increased public service salaries by... I think he said 70%. That number in itself is questionable but let us set that aside for the moment. They may have increased public service salaries by whatever per cent they want to claim but let us give them the 70%. Imagine a typical public service family, where there are, maybe, two partners in this family who are a couple and they have a couple of children, maybe three, who are going to school. I could use the example that I gave last year. Perhaps one is a soldier or a policeman and one is a public servant. While they may have given what might have appeared to be nominal increases, and like I said the 70%

number is highly questionable and many public servants did not get 70%, they took it back by taking back the grants that we use to give to the schoolchildren. They took it back by taking back the one-month bonus that we use to give to the disciplined services. They took it back by abolishing the salary *in lieu* of leave which we used to pay previously for people who did not take their leave. They took it back by putting taxes on electricity, on water, on medical supplies, on school supplies and on all of the other 195 or so taxes that they imposed on the people of Guyana.

They talked about value-added tax (VAT). He came today and said that they are going to reduce VAT by, I think, 12%. They are going to reduce it by 12%. They promised a reduction in VAT. They came into Office and they reduced it I believe from 16% to 14% – if I am not mistaken – and they then promptly put on VAT on a long list of items that did not... While they moved some items from 16% to 14%, they moved a long list of items from zero to 14%. Electricity and water moved from zero to 14%, medical and educational supplies moved from zero to 14%, heavy equipment for agriculture and industry moved from zero to 14% and the list goes on. This three-card trick that the PNC has been trying to play on the people of Guyana... **[Dr. Anthony:** Now you see, now you don't.] ...now you see, now you do not... Sometimes you would go to the chick-chick board... Is that what you call it, the chick-chick board? **[Bishop Edghill:** The three-card trap.] It is the three-card trap or one would move something under three cups. Is it not three cups? Hon. Members, man of the people as myself should be familiar with this. You know the old three card trick or the chick-chick board – no disrespect intended to anyone who either operates or patronises a chick-chick board – of trying to deceive Guyanese, people are wiser today. They are wiser.

Let us look at Linden. Here again, they speak about their love for Linden and Lindeners. Mr. Speaker, if you are to scrutinise what they promised they would give Lindeners... They said they would rescue and modernise the bauxite...

First of all, the first thing has to be a plan. They love a policy or a strategy or a plan. He mentioned a few actually and I made a note of them. He had a lot of plans, policies and vision too. They love vision too. He mentioned a few such as surveys, which are the favourites of them. They love strategies, policies, plans and surveys. In fact, out of his 20-point plan, most of them were surveys. They would have a survey or they would do a survey or a policy or a plan. As a matter of fact, I think what he outlined was a plan to prepare plans, steeped in theory but void of practice, practicality, and reality. Gone are the days when the people of Guyana are

deceived by one telling them that he/she will come up with a strategy to alleviate and eradicate poverty and a survey for human resource development. Those are big words to convey why Mr. Roysdale Forde or whoever else might be contending for the job. Those are big words to convey Mr. Norton's entitlement to the Office of the Leader of the Opposition. Those are big words like people centred programme, human resource development and a survey. I wrote down the words. He delivered it as a big punch line, 'a survey needs to be done'.

He said this about infrastructure too. Mr. Norton said Guyana needs a sound infrastructure development plan... [Bishop Edghill: Sound.] Sound... linking all the regions – all 10 of them – a sound infrastructure development plan. Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that there is anybody in Guyana who would be incapable of telling you what the infrastructure priorities of this country are. I do not believe there is anybody in this country who does not have a good grasp of what is needed. Mr. Norton's solution is to commission a study and get somebody to prepare an elaborate plan. What would it tell them? Is it that they need a bridge across the Demerara River? [Mr. Ramson: A three-lane bridge.] Would it be a three-lane bridge that they were proposing? He said that we need a sound infrastructure development plan.

I will say that the people of Guyana are watching. My Guyanese brothers and sisters, while the APNU/AFC are promising you a plan, we are promising you the roads;... [Bishop Edghill: We are building them.] ...we are building them; and we are delivering them. He could take his five years or his 10...He had five years. They had five years. Mr. Speaker, they did not deliver a single new piece of infrastructure that you could see. [Dr. Anthony: Except the D'Urban Park.] One cannot even see that. It is overgrown by bush and wood ants. It is D'Urban Park for those who did not hear the Minister, Dr Frank Anthony, the wooden thing that they built. The people of Guyana are impatient. They want things delivered now. In typical PNC style, they are going to prepare an infrastructure plan. What would that tell the people? Is it that they want their community roads to be fixed? Let me say this, I have and all of my Colleagues on this side of the House, travelled the length and breadth of this country. When we go to villages, we would see people's children walking to school. Sometimes they have to take off their school shoes and put them in their book bags or tie them around their necks to navigate a community road that is flooded or has holes or is muddy. We have all been to villages that have backstreets like this and children having to navigate these roads every

morning to go to school. Those parents want their community road to be fixed... [Bishop Edghill: Not a plan.] ...and not a plan. [Bishop Edghill: We are fixing it.] We are fixing it.

5.50 p.m.

[Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.]

Mr. Norton is pontificating with his big words and his plan, the People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) Government is delivering community roads to the people of Guyana. You can make your plan if you wish, Mr. Norton. It is all the plans, policies, programmes, surveys, and Commissions of Inquiry (COIs) that you were doing for five years that the people of Guyana decided that you in the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) are incapable of delivering anything to the people. That is why they consigned it to the opposition benches.

Sir, I could regale you and this honourable House with a very long list. These things are so hilarious. They are so hilarious. He invoked a solitary academic paper. I cannot remember if it was from Columbia University; it was a United States of America (USA) university, I cannot remember. He invoked a solitary academic paper, citing and putting on his academic so that we will be impressed, this University of Guyana (UG) academic, this lecturer, citing this academic paper about how Puerto Rico developed, and delivering it like it was a pearl of wisdom. I just operated Google to see what bloviat means. Anybody could google and find a thousand papers on how Puerto Rico was developed, how Singapore was developed, and how Malaysia was developed. Anybody could do that. *He come with he paper.* I do not know the date of the paper, but if it was Puerto Rico, it is probably several decades old because Puerto Rico went through this decades ago. The Hon. Member came with his Puerto Rico paper, citing it as if it was a solitary pearl of wisdom. This is kind of a comedy. These people want to run a country. [Mr. Ramson: He cannot even run Congress Place.] Let us not get into running Congress Place. I do not want to get into that blank cheque story. I am tempted, but let me not distract myself.

Mr. Norton accuses us. Here is the accusation, the big accusation, the big criticism that he makes of this Budget. He said that this Budget is a "disaggregated set of projects" with no policy. I think Hon. Member Mr. Patterson also said that, and then, in his very next breath, he said, "but y'all are doing our projects". Well, you have to make up your mind. Mr. Norton said that this Budget was a disaggregated set of projects with no overarching policy. He then proceeded to

list his 20 brilliant ideas. They jumped from human resource development to an innovative and people-centred approach—nice words—to a strategy to alleviate and eradicate poverty, to conducting a poverty survey, to the determination—this is another study—of a liveable income. The people want their incomes to rise. They do not want a study to tell them what is a liveable income. The people want, first of all, those who do not have one to have an income. They want a job so that they can earn an income, or they want to be trained so that they can get a job to earn an income. They do not want a study or a survey to tell them what is a liveable income. How does that help a person who is not in work right now?

Another *pearl of wisdom*: educating people in financial literacy. We do not have a problem with that; we agree with educating people in everything. He proceeded with this random list. He then leapt, I think, to public service salaries, to a grant for students to attend the University of Guyana (UG), to reducing of value-added tax (VAT). I think the next one was early childhood education centres, refusing to acknowledge that we are already doing that. In fact, we have in the Budget and the Hon. Minister, Vindhya Persaud, spoke at length. Apparently, he did not hear any of this. He did not hear Minister Persaud's extensive presentation on what we are doing on not only day-care but night care centres, what we are doing about early childhood education, and what we are doing about vulnerable people like the elderly and the homeless. Mr. Norton missed all of that. Then I think he leapt to... A random assortment of initiatives, presented, first of all, which the people of Guyana would recognise as a set of empty promises, but then presented as though these form some sort of brilliant vision for Guyana as an alternative to the People's Progressive Party/ Civic comprehensive Manifesto and our successive budgets. And so, what we were treated to by Mr. Norton was a timely reminder of why the people of Guyana decided that the APNU/AFC belongs in the Opposition.

I want to say this, too, that something else leapt out at me. I do not know, and I would be happy to be corrected if I am wrong. I heard Mr. Norton speak about a wide spectrum of issues: foreign affairs, infrastructure, children, women, and the homeless. As far as I know, they have, like most Opposition, a shadow cabinet structure. During the week, we heard the shadow agriculture minister speak, and we heard the shadow minister of infrastructure speak. Although sometimes it was not clear what they were speaking about, we heard the shadow minister of social services speak. As I listened to Mr. Norton's presentation, I struggled to make a connection between this random assortment of ideas that he was bandying about and the presentations that were made by

his respective shadow ministers. **[Dr. Anthony:** He is a shadow of the shadows.] My Colleague says that maybe Mr. Norton is the shadow of the shadow ministers. I do not know.

This leads me to make the following point, that having spent five years in Government and having lost Government, one would have thought that the APNU/AFC would have spent some time engaging in a little bit of self-examination. One of the widely acknowledged reasons for it losing Government is not only its failure to deliver on its promises but the very obvious, chaotic, fragmented state of its Government, with the left hand never knowing what the right hand is doing and the absence of a coherent policy position. One of them should be doubled. The other one says that wages should be increased by 50%. One of them says that the University of Guyana fees should be removed—which, incidentally, is something we are committed to and something we will deliver by 2025—the other one says to give the UG student a grant. Some of them say cash grants. I remember one of them saying, in a very disparaging way, “cash grants here, cash grants there”. I do not want to even try to replicate the tone of voice. I pride myself in my dramatic abilities, but I would not try to replicate the tone of voice. More than one of them, actually, very disparagingly said that this PPP/C Government is giving out cash grants here, cash grants there. Do you recall? **[Ms. Teixeira:** Capriciously.] Did they say capriciously, too? Yes, that we are capriciously sharing out cash grants. There is no planning. We are just giving out cash grants. Then another comes and says that the cash grant should be doubled, and then another comes and says that the cash grant should not be once a year; it should be once a month. Another one says that it should be once a term.

So, with nothing else to do, because most of them have nothing else to do, this group of 31 persons who claim to be representing almost half of the population. It is claiming to represent; I do not know. Is it still claiming to represent more than half? These 31 persons, Hon. Members, with nothing else to do other than to fight each other about who signed the blank cheque and who did not, could not find the time to sit down and agree on a common position. I heard the shadow Minister of Education speak, and half of what the shadow Minister of Education said was not consistent with what Mr. Norton came to say about education. I heard the shadow Minister of Infrastructure speak. Half of what the Shadow Minister of Infrastructure spoke bore no resemblance to what Mr. Norton said. It is like chalk and cheese. I heard the shadow Minister of Agriculture speak. Did he say anything about agriculture? I cannot remember; it was so eminently forgettable. With so little else to do, these

31 APNU/AFC Members of Parliament, and you will note, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that I did not make the mistake of saying 32. These 31 APNU/AFC Members of Parliament could not find the time to agree, “this is our position on cash grants. This is our position on any other infrastructure. This is our position on food security.” They could not find the time. As a matter of fact, they have a manifesto. I do not even recall any of them referring to their 2020 Manifesto. Apparently, they want that to be quickly forgotten. Did any of them mention their 2020 Manifesto? I do not recall any of them saying, “this is our plan”.

[**Mr. Nandlall:** *Inaudible*] As a matter of fact, Mr. Sinclair, I think the Hon. Attorney General said it well. While we are saying “*Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*”, apparently, the APNU/AFC’s strategy is to share out the money today and, if I am quoting correctly, forget about tomorrow if – “hell” is not an unparliamentary word, to hell with tomorrow.

The nation continues to be regaled by this pathetic display of incompetence, ineptitude, and incoherence for the whole five days. But it was worse, Sir. If it were that alone... It is worse because, beyond shared incompetence and ineptitude, there appears to have been a very deliberate attempt at misrepresentation, distortion, and manipulation, either deliberately or maybe it is incompetence taken to its extreme. We heard this absurdity—and I believe both Hon. Member Juretha Fernandes and Hon. Member Volda Lawrence repeated it—that the non-oil economy in Guyana grew more slowly in the first three years of the People’s Progressive Party being in Government than the first three years of the APNU/AFC being in Government, among the several absurdities. I am not going through point by point because that alone will take me until tonight.

First of all, even if you take 2020...I believe Hon. Member Juretha Fernandes said that the non-oil economy grew by a “paltry”, in her words, 2.6% over the first three years of the PPP being in Government. First of all, I want to point out to her that even if one counts 2020 as a PPP year and one takes 2020, 2021, and 2022, one will not get an average growth rate of 2.6%.

6.05 p.m.

I invite her to explain publicly to the Guyanese people how she arrived at the conclusion, that the average growth rate in the first three years of this Government amounted to 2.6%. I am stating here, Sir, in this honourable House, that I am inviting the Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, to explain to the nation how she arrived at that. Even if you include 2020 as a

PPP year but let me remind the Hon. Members on that side of the House that it could hardly be counted as a PPP year. Sir, perhaps if it understood the meaning of the word ‘democracy’ and respected the results of the Elections in March, 2020, had President Ali assumed Office when he should have, then it might be forgiven. It might perhaps, in the first week of March, 2020, be forgiven for counting 2020 as a PPP year, but not if the Hon. Member and her cabal – is ‘cabal’ an unparliamentary word? [**An Hon. Member (Government):** No.] It might have been forgiven but not when the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change continued to squat illegally in office until August, 2020 and in fact, perpetuated the economic doldrums that have been inflicted on this country, as a result of the no confidence motion. From the time the no confidence motion was passed, the entire economy grounded to a halt. The people stopped investing, they stopped spending, and they adopted a wait-and-see approach. Everybody knows that. By the time we got to 2020, the economy was dead, completely dead. On top of that, the fact that you had Covid-19 in 2020, which was so dreadfully mismanaged by the APNU/AFC, with no plan whatsoever, and 2020 could have been scarcely considered either a PPP year or a normal year.

Anybody who wants to be taken seriously for their analysis must take that into account. Of course, if you exclude 2020, which I think logically and clearly you should, then you are left with 2021, when the economy started to recover. In 2021, real growth in the non-oil economy amounted to 4.6%. In 2022, real growth in the non-oil economy was estimated at 11.5%. I am curious ... One would recall that this very Hon. Member was caught in a similar situation last year and, I think, the year before, playing fast and loose with statistics and numbers. This fast and loose approach was not confined only to the calculation of GDP and growth. There was the example of low-income mortgages, where the Hon. Member cited some numbers. She claimed that a low-income family or a family of modest income could not afford a mortgage. She cited a hypothetical mortgage. What the Hon. Member did not disclose to this House is that the numbers she used related, in fact, not to a 30-year mortgage ... Everybody in Guyana who is going to take a mortgage today they go for the maximum maturity. They go for a 30-year mortgage. There are thousands of young Guyanese people going to the bank and applying for mortgages today to build their homes. Thanks to the People’s Progressive Party housing program. They are all taking 30-year mortgages. What the Hon. Member did not disclose to the House is she deliberately, I should not say deliberately, perhaps accidentally, perhaps

deliberately chose a 10-year mortgage to use for the purposes of calculating the amount of the repayment.

In all honesty, I do not know anybody, irrespective of their age who goes to the bank and take a 10-year mortgage. Of course, it is convenient because it allows you to inflate the amortisation – the amount you have to pay every month to make it look unaffordable. Also, going to the most expensive bank, and not going to the New Building Society (NBS) or elsewhere where you can get a more affordable interest rate, and taking the highest interest rate, taking the shortest repayment period and coming here and regaling this House with her bogus analysis, like all the rest of her bogus analysis, to mislead the people of Guyana. Sir, I could give dozens of examples where the statistics cited, or the reference cited were blatantly either distorted or opportunistically selected. I will confine myself maybe to two or three examples. I know that my Colleagues might be disappointed if I give an abbreviated presentation today. I am going to confine myself to maybe two or three examples. Sir, much ado was made of a certain Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report. They trotted out of here, one after the other. Let me see, almost all of them trotted out of here. Not one of them read the report. They trotted out of here, one after the other, I am not going to name them, including tragically ...

I can excuse the backbenchers, who maybe feel comfortable citing 'Peeping Tom'. I read 'peeping tom'. I was surprised they did not cite 'Dem Boys Seh'. They came here, one after the other, including frontbenchers, including the Hon. Member, Mr. Forde, and the Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, who are senior Members of Parliament, who should be setting an example for the younger Members of Parliament (MPs). These are people who should be setting an example. They bandied this fact that the FAO said that 43% of Guyanese cannot afford a healthy diet. They kept repeating this thing for shock value that 43% of Guyanese cannot afford a healthy diet. This was intended to shock. Half of the Guyanese people are starving. They cannot afford food. Like my Colleague just said, none of them actually went to the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) Report. They were all citing from the *Kaieteur News* article, which indeed states, "43% of Guyanese cannot afford a healthy diet". Indeed, that is what the *Kaieteur News* article stated. If one is to be intellectually honest, if one is to be honest with one's self, and I know they are incapable of that. The Hon. Prime Minister cited, I do not want to misquote him, he made a reference to "knowing yourself". I think another Colleague on my side of the House spoke of knowing oneself. If one were, to be honest with oneself, one would ask yourself this

question – first of all, 43% means almost one in two. Let us say that MPs are not a representative sample of Guyana. Let us take any village, any community, or any part of Guyana. Do we seriously believe that one in two Guyanese persons cannot eat? Do we seriously believe that? [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] It was several of them who said it.

I am not going to get into the fact that this data does not even relate to a period during which the PPP was in Government. I am not going to quibble about whether the data is from 2018, 2019, or 2020. Let us consider, first of all, the logic. Furthermore, let us consider that the FAO reports that even though the Guyana average is 43%, we are actually doing better than the Caribbean. The Caribbean average is 50%, and they conveniently omitted that fact. Let us forget that if we were to examine the structure of Caribbean economies, in particular the Guyanese economy, let us not even get into the statistics about the sample size that was used, the methodology, and the representativeness of the sample, put aside all of those facts that should be considered. If we contemplate the structure of the Guyanese society and the Guyanese economy, we have a large informal economy where a lot of people do not report any income but are self-employed or they are doing unsalaried work. Those people do not report any income. If you ask them about their income, they will say they do not have an income because they do not get a monthly salary. They are all engaged in some form of rewarding economic work or other. If one goes to a rural or Hinterland community, a subsistence farming community that plants crops and breeds animals for their own subsistence and maybe for barter with their neighbours or selling in their local market. If one asks them about their income, they will say they do not work because they are planting something in the backyard, minding some chickens in a chicken pen or some ducks. Now, thanks to the Hon. Minister, Mr. Mustapha, they probably have some giant black chicks. They probably have some black belly sheep in their backyards. They probably collected some citrus seedlings, and they are planting those seedlings. They probably have some cassava growing in the ground. If you ask them what their income is, they will say they do not have an income. They are planting something in their backyard, and they are living.

If one were to survey families in rural and Hinterland communities, one will find, in fact, that their monetary income will have the illusion of either being completely non-existent, that they do not earn an income in the traditional sense of a salary or that it is significantly understated. That is the reality in economies and societies like ours. That is why,

when one seeks to measure certain economic metrics, one has to take into account those realities. They conveniently chose to ignore the year to which the data related, the source of the data, the methodology used, and the comparison with the rest of the Caribbean. They, rather conveniently, also chose to ignore the rest of the report. If one considers the rest of the report, one will see a large number of tables. The report is rich with information. It lists the prevalence of anaemia among women—adult women, the prevalence of obesity or overweight amongst children under five, the prevalence of stunting amongst children under five, and it goes on. It has the whole Appendix that is full of tables. The incidence of food security – they conveniently chose to ignore the fact that in many of these other indicators, which are important indicators of food security, Guyana outperforms many countries in the Caribbean and Latin America.

6.20 p.m.

Let me quote from the report. I will quote. The *Regional Overview of Food Security and Nutrition – Latin America and the Caribbean 2022* report states here on page 22, to give one example:

“Among the countries that managed to reduce the prevalence of stunting between 2012 and 2020, Guyana did the best at 30 percent...”

Here it is. Our children, and reducing the incidence of stunting, in the entire range of countries surveyed in all of Latin America and the Caribbean from 2012 to 2020, Guyana managed to increase, or to reduce rather by improving the prevalence of stunting. They did not see that. I am not quibbling about whether it is the People's Progressive Party/Civic or People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R), I include the whole period. I am happy, we are happy, the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government is happy whether it happened between 1992 and 2015 or 2015 and 2020. We are happy that it happened because it means that our children are better off. We are not quibbling about when it happened. They conveniently omitted this. Instead, were either too lazy to refer to the primary source, the report, or deliberately selective in what they wanted to highlight. There are several other examples of the same. In fact, still on food security, I would refer them to another report that cites a very important statistic that I want to share with this honourable House. In this instance, it will be an achievement made during the People's Progressive Party/Civic, unequivocally, an achievement recorded during our previous stewardship in Government. I

refer here, to the FAO's *State of Food Insecurity in the Caricom Caribbean - Executive Summary Meeting the 2015 hunger targets: Taking stock of uneven progress*. This was a report done in 2015, as we were about to demit Office. I turn to page two which states:

“...prevalence (%) of undernourished people in the Caribbean”

The report indicates that the prevalence of undernourishment for Guyana... Of course, it lists all the other countries. Incidentally, Guyana performs much better than all the other countries. In fact, I will tell you this, it has the statistics for several years. It starts with the 1990 to 1992 period. In the 1990 to 1992 period the incidence of undernourishment in Guyana was at a staggering 22.8%. Meaning almost one in four or one in five persons. They like to compare us with other countries. At that time, there was only one other country in the hemisphere that exceeded the incidence of malnourishment. By the time we demitted office, we had reduced the incidence of malnourishment –according to this FAO report– by more than half the incidence of malnourishment from 22.8% in 1990 to 1992, to 10.6% by the time we left office. This is FAO statistics. I could go on. There are many, many examples that could be given. Like I said I will confine myself to only a few examples. The ones that I consider to have been repeated more frequently.

The Hon. Member Mr. Patterson spoke yesterday... Was it yesterday? I think it was yesterday. He spoke yesterday, and amongst the various points he made, he spoke extensively on the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project (AFHP). He pronounced very boldly, he said Sir, for the record, the Amaila Falls Project was not killed by the Opposition – the then Opposition themselves. It was stillborn. It died from malnutrition, he added, for dramatic effect—a lack of technical and financial sustenance, bad parents. The essence of what he said was that they played no part in killing the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. I wish to take us back to the period when these events were unfolding before our very eyes. I will share with you an article... in fact, I could share several with you. I will share with you first of all, a statement made on 21st August, 2013... I think it may have been 20th August, 2013. Either the day of or the day after the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change voted against the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. I will share with you a statement made by the then President of the National Amerindian Development Foundation, who was also joined by several other Amerindian leaders which was carried in the *Guyana Chronicle* of 21st August, 2013:

“APNU’s brutal axing of Amaila project meant to cripple gov’t’s development strategy...”

This was reported on 21st August, 2023. The previous week we were getting some insights into what would be transpiring because we have here a report that states:

“APNU not budging on Amaila...”

The article states despite:

“A 7:00 am call to the...”

Then...

“...Opposition Leader by the...”

Then...

“...President...”

Who would have been President Donal Ramotar, at the time.

“...on a Sunday morning...”

That 7 a.m. Sunday morning call failed to budge the APNU’s decision not to support Amaila. For us to understand the background of this, I will refer you to the 9th August, 2013 edition of the *Stabroek News*:

“Sithe Global pulls out of Amaila”

I want to read two paragraphs of that *Stabroek News* article which states:

“According to sources, Sithe Global has informed President Donald Ramotar of its decision.”

To pull out of Amaila. The article continues:

“The President is expected to make a statement on Sithe’s walking away from the project.

Sithe Global’s President Brian Kubeck today said that the company will be making a statement in the press on Sunday. In an email to this newspaper...”

To the *Stabroek News*:

“Kubeck said that his company’s position remained the same – that the project was too large to continue without national consensus.

Kubeck had issued explicit statements that unless all three parties in Parliament backed two measures in Parliament for the... project his company... would pull out. At Wednesday’s crucial session of Parliament on the two Amaila measures, the AFC...”

And this is an interesting development which I will elaborate on.

“...the AFC changed its position and voted with the PPP/C...”

But apparently, Mr. Patterson does not remember that or he believes that the people of Guyana have forgotten that. Let me repeat that.

“At Wednesday’s crucial session of Parliament on the two Amaila measures, the AFC changed its position and voted with the PPP/C while the main opposition APNU voted solidly against. This would have tipped Sithe in the direction of quitting a project...”

Et cetera. Let me also share an article so that the gravity and credibility of this matter is fully appreciated or rather the gravity of the matter is fully appreciated and the credibility of the sources is reinforced. Not to cast any aspersions on any of the sources that I have cited already. I believe, if I am not mistaken, in the same week, on 12th August or thereabouts... On 13th August, Reuters international news agency, well known to all of us, carried a story which stated:

“U.S. power developer pulls out of \$858 million Guyana project”

This was carried by Reuters. I want to read what this Reuters story states:

“U.S.-based power developer Sithe Global has pulled out of an \$858 million hydroelectric generation project in the South American nation of Guyana...”

And here are the operative words.

“...citing political wrangling that prevented it from obtaining financing.

Sithe Global, majority owned by hedge funds managed by investment giant Blackstone Group LP BX.N, said the Guyanese parliament had not fully supported legislation needed for the Inter-American Development Bank to provide financing for the 165-megawatt dam.”

The Reuters article goes on. It quotes President Ramotar as saying that:

“...the company’s withdrawal from the project could jeopardize a \$250 million environment protection deal signed with Norway...”

We are all familiar with the Guyana REDD+ Investment Fund (GRIF), and the fact that the GRIF had intended to fund or provide financial support for the project from which the Government had set aside \$80 million to its financing the hydropower project. The Reuters article goes further to state:

“The project cannot move forward, despite 16 years of work and over US\$16 million of independent Sithe Global expenditures and more than US\$15 million of government expenditures,” Sithe Global said in an ad published in Guyanese newspapers Sunday.”

Mr. Speaker, the Guyanese people – my Guyanese brothers and sisters – it would be well worth the time were I to refresh the memories of my Guyanese brothers and sisters, of what was contained in that advertisement.

6.35 p.m.

A full-page advertisement carried on Sunday, 11th August, 2013, in all the daily newspapers carried by Sithe Global Power Limited Liability Company (LLC). Here I have a copy of that full-page advertisement.

[*The Hon. Member displayed documents.*]

With your permission, Sir, let me read some extracts from that full page advertisement:

“Sithe Global thanks the people of Guyana for comprehensively considering the Amaila Falls Hydroelectric (AHP) Project.

The Project was supported by the PPP, AFC and virtually all other non-partisan organizations that reviewed the Project. However, it was not supported unanimously by all three political parties, a necessary prerequisite to the Project receiving international development funds required to complete it.”

There are no prizes for guessing who was the third party? There are no prizes for guessing, no garlands to be given out, no gifts to be given for who... I believe the phrase ‘wrecking ball’ was used during this week. The political party that has now gained notoriety for being Guyana’s wrecking ball throughout Guyana’s history. There are no prizes for guessing who that third party was. It is very interesting, in fact, that around the same time a column was carried on the 8th September, 2013, by the then Chairman of the AFC. I am reading from the *Kaieteur News* a column authored by the Chairman of the AFC titled:

“The AFC Journey...A political road less travelled... a responsibility we must own”

This article was written by Mr. Hughes. I will quote from this article. This article explained why the AFC decided at the last minute to support the project. I am quoting from Mr. Nigel Hughes’s article here. It states:

“The AFC is today rising in the conscience of the Guyanese people, as we say and do what is in their interest. We share and feel the people’s heartbeat for affordable renewable energy security not only from hydro-power but from a portfolio of sources including ethanol, wind and solar power, and co-generation using bagasse and wood waste.

Therefore we have every reason to support the development of hydro-power in Guyana but with the clear caveat that it must be environmentally, socially and economically feasible.”

It was an elaborated explanation of why the AFC decided, at the very last minute, to vote in favour of that motion. Apparently, that entire history is conveniently forgotten by the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson. **[Dr. Anthony: Who was the General Secretary?]** Was he the General Secretary at that time? Who now comes, conveniently forgetting the views expressed by his party at that time. Mind you, I am not saying that the AFC did not collude with the APNU in obstructing this project. Do not get me wrong at all. I am not suggesting that the AFC was not a co-conspirator and did not collude in frustrating and derailing this project, but in this instance, voted in favour of the project.

It may be useful to check who was involved in the setting up of the registration of the local companies for the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project and who the company secretary was and so forth, to get a better appreciation of what some of the vested interests were. That might be a relevant consideration in the matter. It may be a relevant consideration to examine who was being paid to do the Public Relations (PR) for Sithe Global Power LLC. All of those considerations, perhaps, I am not saying that they did or did not, it may, perhaps, be the case that all of those considerations may or may not have influenced the AFC’s position, but suffice it to say and I would encourage the Guyanese public to go back into history and examine where the company was registered, who the company secretary was at the time, who was doing the PR for the company and they might get a better understanding of the AFC’s support, but it supported nevertheless. Mr. Patterson comes now to the

House and conveniently forgets all of that. I am not going to leave the subject of Amaila Falls Hydropower Project quite as yet though. My Colleagues, the distinguished Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and many others have already cited from a Norconsult Report. In fact, I see another article here, maybe I should quote from it. It has Mr. Ramjattan and what did somebody call him? Was it the infamous neemakaram? I see a photograph here of the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, and the man now styled, alternatively, neemakaram and rubber stamp depending on which one prefers. The article was headed:

“AFC support was “lifeline” for Amaila Project – Ramjattan”

“We did this because we felt we had to more or less give a lifeline to the Amaila project because largely we’re supporters of hydroelectricity in Guyana.”

Sir, like I said, I do not want to speculate on what considerations may have influenced their support at that time, but they supported it. They appear now, conveniently, to have forgotten that they supported it. The records are there. It is all in the Hansard. I have the Hansard here. I am not going to regale you. I could read the speeches that were delivered. I have the Hansard here. I have the relevant pages flagged and I am disinclined to read the relevant extracts on this occasion, but if you insist, I would be happy so to do.

I want to also spend a minute or two to explain what they did to Guyana. We just heard an article, the full-page advertisement, where Sithe Global Power LLC withdrew from the project because they did not get universal support in the Parliament of Guyana. The Guyanese people would, understandably, want to know who is Sithe Global Power LLC. Sithe Global Power LLC is a subsidiary of or was at the time, I believe 80% owned subsidiary of the Blackstone Group Incorporated. The Blackstone Group Incorporated is the world’s largest alternative investment firm. The Blackstone Group Incorporated which incidentally is traded on the New York Stock Exchange today, well, in fact, I should say at close of business yesterday, was managing total assets of US\$975 billion. That is the parent group. It owns 80% of Sithe Global Power LLC. Sithe Global Power LLC was a company that had extensive experience in developing power projects around the world. I will cite just a few examples. It developed the Goreway Station in Brampton, Ontario in Canada. That is a 875-megawatts project in Canada. That project, incidentally, was successfully completed and in operation. It built the Bujagali Hydroelectric Project on the Nile River in Uganda, a 250-

megawatts run of the river project. It built the Mariveles Station on the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines, a 600-megawatts project. It built the Dinginin Station also on the Bataan Peninsula in the Philippines, a 1336-megawatts project. We were building 156-megawatts at the Amalia Falls Hydropower... [Bishop Edghill: It is 165-megawatts.] It was 165-megawatts.

Sir, these people were building power plants all over the world. They have been doing this for years all over the world. They had in-house expertise, they brought in expertise as needed. I only cited a few. They have a number of others. Their portfolio included facilities in New Mexico, Nevada, Pennsylvania and around the world, that Sithe Global Power LLC had built around the world. These people knew what they were doing. They were part of a large credible international investment group. Yet, APNU/AFC... and I would welcome them indicating who their resident experts are or were at the time. I do not know if it was the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson. They decided upon themselves that these people did not know what they were doing and that they were going to block and obstruct the project.

[Mr. Speaker assumed the Chair.]

This People’s Progressive Party/Civic, when in Government previously, long before oil, long before Exxon Mobil, had succeeded in bringing to Guyana one of the largest investment firms in the world to invest in hydropower in Guyana. I have two simple points to end my remarks on that particular matter. I still have a few other matters to address, but not too many. One, the Amalia Falls Hydropower Project did not happen as a direct consequence of actions taken by the APNU/AFC in this House, notwithstanding the last-minute change of heart by the AFC. I am saying, definitively, and I will repeat it for emphasis, the Amalia Falls Hydropower Project did not happen because of the direct obstruction by the APNU/AFC.

My second point in that regard is for Mr. Patterson to now come and try to rewrite history as if none of this happened... This is in the parliamentary records, it is in the media. To come to say that APNU/AFC played no role in this at all, I fear that I could not adequately describe what he would have committed in that regard without venturing into the realms of severely unparliamentary language. It is not my inclination so to do today. Suffice it to say that, once again, Mr. Patterson tried to hoodwink the people of Guyana. We all recalled Mr. Patterson boldly saying to the people of Guyana, ‘I wear no jewellery’ and the next day the internet

crashed with photographs of Mr. Patterson wearing all sort of bracelets.

6.50 p.m.

Sir, how could you forget whether you wear jewellery or not? Which one of us could forget whether we wear jewellery or not? Mr. Patterson boldly said, 'I wear no jewellery'. He is on camera saying it. Within an hour, all one had to do was *Google* his name, and every photograph had all manner of metallic adornments on his wrists and the rest of his, whatever else, I do not know what other jewellery he wears. This is the same Gentleman, Sir. I say this really to draw the following conclusion. It is illustrative of all that we heard throughout the week. The APNU/AFC is, I cannot even call them a Coalition any longer, they are a collective of convenience now. I think they have said the Coalition has been disbanded, although I have my doubts about that. They are a collective devoid of any credibility. That is the one thing that they have in common. No, they have a couple others. Nothing that they have ever promised to the people of Guyana did they deliver – nothing. The people of Guyana will not be fooled over and over again. They came here and they said, 'we will do this, we will do that if we were in Government and if we had the oil money. You now have oil money'. Sir, they received oil money. It will be recalled that they very notoriously received a signing bonus of US\$18 million and for months denied its existence. No less a person than the then Minister of Finance said, 'we neither requested nor received a signing bonus'. That was long before. Many years later he would say he thought it was gift. If they would do that with an US\$18 million signing bonus, one has to shudder to imagine... One can only shudder when one considers and imagine what they would do with the oil revenues that we are and will be receiving in the future.

Secondly, in addition to their lack of credibility, what we were treated to over the last five days was a display of their complete lack of competence and capability. This incoherence of their policy positions is not by accident. They are devoid of any competence or capability. I have said elsewhere that apparently the APNU/AFC felt that Government is unskilled labour. That apparently one could cobble together a bunch of buffoons and brigands, put them in Government, give them roles. I withdraw, Sir. Buffoon in not unparliamentary, but I would not use it. Apparently, you could put together, you could bandy around... The words are suitable you know. You could put together a motley crew of people who have no relevant experience, no relevant expertise, no relevant track record, no relevant accomplishment or achievement – none whatsoever – no

inclination to learn, in fact, instead are more akin to, I do not even want to insult the bulls, but as you know we speak of the bull in a China shop.

Apparently, they felt that a motely crew could be put together, thrown in roles of Government and let them loose. That is precisely what they did in 2015. Put together a bunch of misfits, completely incompetent and incapable of discharging their respective roles, charging around *like bulls in China shops*, making up institutional structures, harassing people, penalising and persecuting those who did not fit their mould, and, in the process, wreaking havoc across the length and breadth of the country. It is not an accident that every single industry and every single structure in this country was destroyed in five years. As a matter of fact, one has to wonder how they managed to unleash such a tornado of destruction in such a short space of time. They killed the sugar industry. They killed agriculture. They destroyed forestry. Ms. Volda Lawrence spoke loftily about bauxite production, about what bauxite production was. They were actively complicit, if not the instigators who chased out an international investor from the Berbice River – Russian Aluminum (RUSAL). Thereby, putting more than 1,000 persons out of work. You cannot claim to love the bauxite workers and insight harassment of an investor who is employing 1,000 people.

They were charging around *like bulls in a China shop*, breaking up everything. Unlike the Hon. Minister Benn, none of them is a geologist, licenced to carry a hammer. They were walking around the country brandishing this mallet, brandishing hammers and mallets everywhere – breaking up everything. If you look at all the institutional structures, everything, we moved from 2015... There could be no doubt that 2015-2020 were the lost years. If you consider the trajectory that we were on... As a matter of fact, I will go further, because they were brandishing not only a hammer, they were brandishing, also, a deadly scissors. The neemakaram used to come here, the rubber stamp used to come here, and brandish his fingers like a proverbial imitating metaphorically to symbolise the scissors, cutting budgets everywhere. In fact, it is not only 2015-2020, but Guyana has been struggling from 2011-2020, almost 10 years. [Mr. Nandlall: Once they tasted power...]

That is correct. Having tasted the power of a one seat majority and having abused it in the manner that they did, they went completely berserk, assumed Office and wrought havoc across Guyana. But, I have news for them. Government is not unskilled labour.

Sir, let me tell you, I am under no illusion. If you ask me to go and build even a fowl pen, you would be asking the wrong man. I do not have the competence to build a fowl pen. I am not a builder. [Bishop Edghill: You are not a carpenter.] I am not a carpenter. I know some good carpenters that I could go to if I need to build a fowl pen. [Bishop Edghill: Employ them.] And employ them. If you ask me to fix the pipes in your house, I would tell you I appreciate your confidence in me, but I am not a plumber and I do not know how to fix pipes, but I know some good plumbers. My Colleague, the distinguished Attorney General, knows even more good plumbers than I do. He could refer you to some. If you tell me that the lights are flickering in the building, I will say to you, it might be low voltage. [Bishop Edghill: I do not deal with electricity.] I do not deal with electricity. I will get an electrician to come and fix the light. If you tell me your heart is hurting you and you think you need a stent, I will say to you, again, I appreciate your confidence in me, I know you think that I am a smart and capable person, but I do not know anything about fixing heart, and I do not know anything about putting stent in a heart. I am not a heart specialist, but I know a few very good ones. If you tell me, you get a pain in your head, I will say to you I am not a neurosurgeon. I cannot fix your brain. I cannot go in and fix your head, but I know a few good neurosurgeons who could do that.

We must know what our respective competences are. We must apply our respective competences as we best could and, where we need proper and sound advice, we must seek it and consider it carefully. I am not necessarily saying always accept it, but be guided by it. Take it into serious consideration. What we were treated to was that, not only from 2011 to 2015 and not only from 2015 to 2020, did the APNU/AFC believe that anybody could stand up and pronounce on anything, because all sorts of things they are pronouncing on. To give you an example, if you were to take just the speeches of the Hon. Members Juretha Fernandes, Volda Lawrence and the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I want to explain... I did not give that explanation about plumber and so on just to make joke, just for the purposes of jest. If you listen to them, in one breath they are talking about the size of the deficit. They are talking about expansionary policy and impact on inflation. In the next breath, they rolled out a long list of policies that involved cutting taxes more and in particular spending more on Government consumption.

Mr. Norton read out his long list of 20 items. Sir, none of them involve constraining spending and none of them involved... [Bishop Edghill: Income generation.]

Income generation, revenue generation. Every single item involved surrendering more Government revenue and expending – spending - more Government finances. Every single proposal involved... put aside the fact that he did not cost any of them, he did not talk about what they would do to the deficit. He did not talk about what they would do to the debt. I do not know if he does not talk to Ms. Lawrence and Ms. Fernandes.

[Bishop Edghill: The Hon. Members.] The Hon. Members. I do not know if he does not speak to the Hon. Members, Juretha Fernandes and Volda Lawrence, but he came with his long list of 20... They had just spoken loftily about the deficit and how big it is and the impact on debt, and the impact on inflation. I do not want to get into who is an *English duck* and who is not an *English duck*. As a matter of fact, in their own speeches, if you listen to the Hon. Juretha Fernandes, she has a number of proposals about spending more, a number of proposals about giving additional tax reliefs and then she comes back and says she is concerned about the deficit and debt. The two do not go with each other. Even within their own thought processes, and this applies to everybody... I am only going to focus on, like I said, a few people. A lot of them jumped up with not even internal consistency in what they were saying. They talked about Dutch Disease with no clear understanding about what Dutch Disease even involves much less how to counteract it and minimise its risks. None whatsoever. They speak of promoting agriculture, but then Mr. Ramjattan, who claims to come from a food producing community, lambasts the support that we are providing to the agricultural sector, lambasting sugar.

7.05 p.m.

Sorry he rather astonishingly used the word. I made a comment about it on the side lines of the Parliament, in the heckle. He spoke about rightsizing, and he seems to think somehow that this puts some kind of veneer of decency on his proposal. Rightsizing like one of my Colleague said yesterday, basically means knocking off the people, putting them out of work and putting them on the breadline. It reminded me of another word, it reminded me of a word from the Burnhamite era – retrenchment. This is because in that era, well this, in fact, might have also been the era of President Hoyte because it would be the late 80s, the era of retrenchment. A nice word to dress up, a big word to fool people when, in fact, you are knocking them off, you are sending them home, you are putting them out of money, you are taking bread out of their children's mouths. Yes, a word like 'sagacity', they like big words to fool the people. They like to use big words to fool the people.

So Mr. Speaker, that is what we were treated to for five days. Arguments that made no sense, internal inconsistency, pretending to be concerned about the deficit and debt when, in fact, all that you are proposing is additional spending and in fact, inefficient spending and further erosion of the tax base. Posturing like you are concerned about the Dutch Disease but still objecting to investments in infrastructure that are so critical to ensure the competitiveness of the non-oil economy. Actually, Mr. Norton did say one thing that I cannot resist highlighting. He was speaking about promoting the industrial and manufacturing sector and his solution – this is where he came with the Puerto Rico example. Sir, Mr. Norton's proposal to promote industrial and manufacturing development in Guyana is apparently the 'Puerto Rico Model'. His targeted tax breaks I think he called them. Was it that what he called them? Something like that. Tax-targeted tax breaks, industrial policies stuck in the theories of the 1970s and 1980s. Industrial policies aimed at promoting industrialisation, tax breaks that are targeted and reduction of corporate tax rates for specific sectors. Needless to say, everybody would like to pay less taxes. Nobody is in doubt about that. Every Government would like to deliver to its population lower taxes. It would make us incredibly popular and make us immediately re-electable.

We understand that everybody wants to pay less taxes and as a Government seeking re-election, we would like to win this popularity, but successive PPP/C Governments, not only this one, have refused to mortgage the future of the country at the altar of short term expedients. We are not going to pursue short term popularity by saying to people: 'we are going to reduce your tax rates to zero'. We are a Government for the long haul and we want, we know and we value our credibility and so we are frank with the people of Guyana. We say, 'Look, we cannot reduce the taxes to zero, the Government needs to raise tax revenues. We are going to try over time to be able progressively to reduce the tax rate'. But what was astonishing is how out of touch Mr. Norton was. He meandered all over this 'Puerto Rico Model' and industrial policy and this, that and the other. Then he ended by saying, 'We do not want to wait for low electricity rates, which may never materialise'. Sir, if you speak to anybody in mind... So, he dismissed... Electricity did not feature. In his whole discussion about promoting industrial and manufacturing activity in Guyana, nowhere in that discussion featured the cost of electricity.

Sir, now you imagine, everybody who is in manufacturing is listening and watching. How are they supposed to take this seriously? I mean, obviously, this thing about lower taxes will appeal to everybody, so they will like it, anybody would

like it. If you are not prepared to acknowledge how important electricity is to the cost of doing business for manufacturers, you are living in a parallel universe, you are living in 'la la land'. You are removed from reality. I hear, apparently, he spends a lot of time in a place that is called 'Bam Bam Alley'. I do not know if it is *Bam Bam Alley*, the fictional place that the Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin, spoke of. I do not know if in *Bam Bam Alley* and I hasten to say to everybody else who visits *Bam Bam Alley* that I intend them no disrespect whatsoever, I commiserate with you for having to endure Mr. Norton on a regular basis, but, Sir, I do not know if in this fictional *Bam Bam Alley*, electricity cost is not a problem. But, if you speak to anybody in manufacturing, if you speak to anybody engaged in industrial activity, if you speak to any household in Guyana, electricity is one of the biggest bugbears, one of the biggest irritants, one of the biggest costs that they have to bear. This People's Progressive Party/Civic Government will fix that problem. We are well on our way to that.

Sir, I could go on, but I will conclude by saying, that the nation spent the last five days listening to those of us on this side of the House, articulate the policies of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government and listening to the APNU/AFC articulate what should have been their alternative. Instead they heard an incoherent, inconsistent, for the greater part belligerent because many of them come here you know they like to pretend to be decent and they are the most vulgar and belligerent. The Hon. Member Ms. Catherine Hughes comes up here and pretends to be the paragon of decency and then proceeds to deliver targeted personal insults to people. She thinks people are not watching her, pretending to be this paragon of decency and conciliation, inclusivity and willing to work with everybody. In the same breadth, delivering nasty personal insults to people and she thinks that anybody is affected by her.

Sir, a Minister who was so barefaced. I did not want to go here but you know. I could cite here an article, Ms. Catherine Hughes doled out over \$6 million from the public purse to pay herself. Ms. *Prim and proper* doled \$6 million from the public purse to pay herself, her own company, signing the vouchers herself. Signing the invoice herself, to pay herself, her own company. Causing other Government agencies to hire her company. Look at this here, the Department of Energy, the Director of Energy, a public servant being forced to confess. We did not do due diligence on Videomega saga says Dr. Bynoe. Causing by virtue of her position, other Government agencies, not only her own, this was the Department of Energy, to hire her own company and then comes here, pretending to be the paragon of decency

and then taunt and turn around and insult other people. The likes of the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes, has absolutely no moral authority whatsoever even to sit in this House. You know, it is not an isolated case you know. They talk about family and friends, actually, you are right, it fits nicely. What were they saying? Family and friends and their favourites. Sir, this is not even family and friends, this is paying yourself, Sir. They are judging us by their standards. I could show you hundreds of examples. Look at this, Minister of Housing and Water's husband had contract to build houses for her Ministry. The Minister of Housing and Water husband, Sir. And come here. You know I did not intend to go down this road because this is a road that I could spend the next six hours on. Would you like me to, Sir? If I hear sufficient acclamation from my Colleagues on this side of the House, I will go down that road. All six hours of it.

And so, Mr. Speaker, let me say this, the people of Guyana have not forgotten Ms. Catherine Hughes giving business to her own company and causing Government agencies to give business to her own company. I am just saying having to make excuses to... They have not forgotten. The people of Guyana are not deceived by... I do not want to get into who has what accent and so on. I pride myself on being relatively open-minded on... people should be free to speak however they wish. I speak on how I want to speak. I feel people should be free. If you want to mimic the British aristocracy, that is entirely your business. I do not belong to the British aristocracy. I am only a half-educated Guyanese man from Georgetown. I am not going to go down the road about who speaks how and so on. I believe communication is about getting your message across. Is that right? If she feels she gets her message across by speaking however she does, I think one of my Colleagues said that it resembles closely the accent of the British aristocracy, the Kings English as it is now called. That is her choice, I am not going to [*Inaudible*] all of that. You can speak however you wish, Hon. Member, as do I.

But, to come here and to pretend to pose as some kind of moral authority when, in fact, you are the perpetrator of such vulgarity in public office, is nothing short of shameless. They seem to believe that they have a monopoly on personal insults. They can insult everybody over here, but their skins are very thin. They want to pelt insults, but they cannot take back, the truth hurts them. I did not hear the kind of acclamation that I was expecting in relation to going down that road. I will simply say this: For five days, Sir, the people of Guyana and the world at large were reminded of the true nature of the PPP/C and the true nature of the APNU/AFC. We are not going to come and tell you that we have a big

elaborate plan and a big strategy and we are doing couple surveys, and we are trying to come up with an action plan, and green paper and white paper. We speak to the people, if we cannot come, we do not send any cardboard thing, we speak to the people every day, we listen to the people Sir, we have a fairly good sense of what the people's priorities are and we will deliver on those priorities.

7.20 p.m.

Forget about all the fancy plans, policies, strategies and all of that. We are not shy about saying to the people of Guyana that we have to be careful as we navigate this period. You cannot get carried away... you are an oil producer. All of them said that we now have money. Spend the money. That was their mantra. This Government will be frank with the Guyanese people. Just like a responsible family will spend some of what they are earning on their needs of today but will also be investing and saving for the things that matter in the future, and stash some away for a rainy day, exactly like how a responsible family will manage its own budget, this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government will manage the national budget.

Every day, there are Guyanese families in their homes making budgetary choices. One might be a carpenter and get a job. Your business may be busy now, you may get a couple of jobs and you may make an extra small piece. A lot of people are experiencing that. Some of it, you may consume. You might say that you always wanted to give your children something or buy something extra that they always wanted to consume. Some of it, you will say, do you know what? I want to upgrade my house – I want to invest in my capital stock and I want to enhance the value of my property. So, you will, do you know what? We are not going to eat out all. You are going to maybe buy a couple of nice things to eat because you have an extra job, but you are going to use the rest to paint the house and increase the value of your asset to make it last longer. Or, you will say that you are going to put it down on a vehicle, maybe a truck, so that you could move around your tools and your workmen, or some equipment. Maybe, you could set up a small contracting business. There are families all over Guyana, right now, that are making those choices – striking the balance between consuming today and investing for tomorrow. So, they understand this, and they are not fooled by this thing to spend everything now and share out everything now. They understand. Managing the national budget is not that different from managing a household budget.

So, the people of Guyana were treated to a good display of what distinguishes the People's Progressive Party/Civic from the APNU/AFC – capability and competence. You heard my colleagues. Each one of them, on this side of the House, articulated a clear vision that was inspired by our party's manifesto and the presidential vision that guides all that we do. You heard a single, coherent vision from us. You heard an articulation of that vision and you have seen the implementation of that vision. In contrast, you got this motley crew and this medley of incoherent, inconsistent, and oftentimes, belligerent utterances. Our commitment, Sir, to you, and through you to the people of Guyana is that we will continue to manage the economy of Guyana to ensure that the things that people need fixed now are fixed. That is what *Budget 2023* is all about – fixing the community roads that are irritants; fixing the medical centres so that people can get good quality healthcare; delivering remote medicine – telemedicine; fixing the schools so that all schoolchildren have a place in school, primary and secondary; providing tertiary, technical and vocational education so that people can get the training that they need to participate in the oil and gas or the construction sectors; investing in the public capital stock – the roads and bridges that are critical for generating long-term economic growth to our country; roads, bridges and energy – the things that matter for the long-term future; and creating jobs. They talked about the roads. Every road that we build creates dozens of jobs, whether it is in the delivery of the materials or the workmen. Every house that we build under the housing programme creates jobs for Guyanese people. So, that is our commitment.

I should have addressed another point, Sir, with your permission. I was going to close but permit me because it is a pressing issue. I should have spoken about inflation because it is a good example of how they misrepresented facts – just like how they misrepresented the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project; just like how they misrepresented nutrition; and just like how they misrepresented the economic statistics. The reality is that there has been some upward movement in prices and we, as an honest and credible Government, would be the first to say so. We have reported the inflation numbers. You cannot come and discuss inflation without recognising the global realities that are prevailing. Anybody who wants to be taken seriously has to take account of the fact that fuel prices have been increasing, fertiliser prices have been increasing, and freight costs have been increasing. Those are realities. Everybody in Guyana knows what is happening around the world. Everybody is online now. Of course, inflation is a concern, and we continue to make several interventions. Had we not removed

excise taxes from fuel, fuel prices would have been three times what they are today. We took off fuel taxes to make sure that the Guyanese people do not have to bear the brunt of that increase. That has removed the burden of more than \$17 billion from the Guyanese consuming public. Now, fuel prices still remain elevated, and we recognise this. That is why we are committed to keeping the fuel taxes off.

The reality, too, is that in an economy such as ours, which is growing so rapidly, in addition to imported pressures, there is an expansion in domestic demand. That is the reality. There are more people working and there are more people earning incomes. Therefore, there are more people going to the market and buying the same goods and services. That is the reality. There are international companies that are buying goods and services as well. So, the reality is that, in a rapidly growing economy such as Guyana, some amount of price pressure will unavoidably arise. As a responsible Government – first of all – you have to analyse this issue properly, as we have done, and you have to be frank with people. You have to adopt policies that seek to address, as far as you possibly can, things such as supply-side constraints. For example, that is why we have been investing heavily in agriculture to ramp up domestic food production. It is not an accident that we have been providing fertiliser support to farmers. It is not by accident that we are distributing breeding and planting materials to the farmers. We want to ramp up food production.

The reality is that high food prices, in fact, also present an opportunity for producers and farmers. Minister Benn made the point very eloquently that our agriculture sector actually now has an opportunity to ramp up production and it is one that should be seized. This was yet another issue where the Members on that side of the House came purely for the purposes of political posturing and grandstanding and wanting to pretend that these global realities do not exist. One of them asked – I think he said bora and ochro – what does global inflation have to do with bora and ochro, bora and corilla or something? **[An Hon. Member:** It was cabbage.] It was bora and cabbage. Any farmer who uses fuel, any farmer who uses fertiliser, and any farmer who uses transportation, which is fuel-driven...how is he fertilising the field? How are they getting the tractors or trucks or canters to the backdams? When they cut the corilla, bora or cabbage, how are they getting them out of the backdams to the markets? Do they not have to pay for a truck or a canter? They are so removed from reality and practicality. They have these textbook notions – bora is grown locally, and bora does not have anything to do with global inflation. They are so out of touch with reality and the way things work. You want

to know where these people have been living all their lives that they are so removed from the real world. They are so removed from the real world and the people of Guyana know better. The farmers are watching. Do these people understand that we have to buy fertilisers and fuel? That is the reality.

Let me say, very clearly, that we recognise the importance of containing price increases. You may ask why we are not giving 100% salary increases. Do you know what will happen if we give 100% salary increases? They jumped up and said to give 50% salary increases. If we give 50% salary increases, the salaries, after the 50%, would be worth less than what they were before because of what would happen with inflation. That is the reality. So, a responsible Government has to approach these matters carefully and responsibly. It is easy to jump up and say double salaries and that will solve inflation. Double the cash grants and that will solve inflation. Sir, anybody with a modicum of common sense – and I have great faith in the Guyanese people that they have more than a modicum of common sense – knows the absurdity of what our colleagues on that side of the House presented. So, if I can return now to my conclusion, as I was saying, we were treated and regaled, and the world was regaled, for five days with a display. We had put on full display... We endured. The nation and the world endured, for five days, on the one hand, a display by the APNU/AFC of its abject incompetence, ineptitude and inclination for distortion and misrepresentation. Put simply, the people of Guyana were reminded, once again, why they decided to put the APNU/AFC into Opposition in 2020.

Similarly, the people of Guyana were reminded of why they decided and made the conscious decision, in 2020, to place the governmental responsibility of navigating Guyana through this very challenging period in our country's economic history in the People's Progressive Party/Civic by placing us in Government. We take that charge seriously and we will discharge it faithfully and diligently. With those fewer than usual words, I thank you very much, Sir. I thank my colleagues in the House and the people of Guyana for tuning in and listening to this debate and analysing and considering the issues as carefully as they did. At the appropriate time next week, I will be moving the necessary motions to secure the approval of *Budget 2023*. Thank you very much, Sir. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. Hon. Members, that concludes the general debate. Hon. Members, before we adjourn, we will need to consider

and dispose of the *2023 Report of the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply*. That Sub-Committee considered the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2023 Estimates of Expenditure. We will have to go into Committee of Supply for this purpose.

7.35 p.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I wish to report that the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply met on Thursday, 26th January, 2023 to consider the allocation of time for the consideration of the 2023 Estimates of Expenditure in the Committee of Supply. The Committee of Supply passed a resolution of the matter. Copies of the Sub-Committee's Report, Resolution and Schedule have all been circulated. Will the Hon. Member, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance kindly move the necessary motion?

RESOLUTION OF THE BUSINESS SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY, 27TH JANUARY, 2023 ON THE CONSIDERATION OF ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2023

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

Committee of Supply that –

- (i) the number of Sittings to be allocated to the consideration of the 2023 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure in the Committee of Supply, should be a maximum of four;
- (ii) the allocation of time for the consideration of the Programmes and Agencies of the Estimates in the Committee of Supply should be as shown in the Schedule attached:
 - Provided that any time save on the consideration of any Programme or Agency on that allocated, may be added to any other Programme or Agency, as may be decided on by the Chairman of the Committee.
- (iii) Approval for Ministers to answer questions and vote away from their seats would be sought from the Speaker (Chairman of the Committee).

- (iv) the proceedings at the Sittings of the Committee of Supply during consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure should, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be concluded at the time recommended in the Schedule attached.

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

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Sir. With pleasure, I now move:

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

Thank you very much.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the Committee of Supply has been allocated four days for the consideration of the estimates. The consideration will begin on Monday, 30th January, 2023 at 10.00 a.m. and will continue thereafter on Tuesday, 31st January, 2023 at 10.00 a.m., on Wednesday, 1st February, 2023 at 10.00 a.m. and on Thursday, 2nd February, 2023 at 10.00 a.m. The 2nd February, 2023 is the last day for the consideration of the Budget Estimates. This is accordance with the resolution of the Business Sub-Committee of Supply.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this concludes our business for today. Hon. Prime Minister...

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on 30th January, 2023.”

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I rise to seek your approval for the adjournment of the House until Monday, 30th January, 2023 at 10.00 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Before we formally adjourn, I forgot to offer my congratulations to the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. Congratulations, Sir. Hon. Members, we do have some refreshments prepared and I invite you to join me as we partake, especially applauding the work over the last five days. Hon. Members, the Assembly is adjourned until Monday, 30th January, 2023 at 10.00 a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 7.37 p.m.