



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*

67TH Sitting

Wednesday, 9TH August, 2023

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

Assembly convened at 10.36 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Greetings in Observation of International Day of the Indigenous People

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, on your behalf and on my own behalf, I wish to extend greetings to our Indigenous peoples and the Indigenous peoples worldwide as we observe today as the International Day of the Worlds's Indigenous Peoples. *[Applause]*

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Papers and Reports were laid:

- (1) Annual Reports of the Police Complaints Authority for the years 2020, 2021 and 2022.

[Minister of Public Service]

- (2) The Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (Miscellaneous) Regulations 2023 – No. 12 of 2023.

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

ORAL QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I received two sets of oral questions without notice: one from the Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, and one from the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir. I wish to remind Members that for questions to qualify under Standing Order 18, oral questions without notice that is, it must satisfy the following: (a) permission of the Speaker must be obtained at least four hours before the starting of the sitting – that was satisfied; (b) the question must be urgent and important or it must relate to the business of the day, that is, the business on the Order Paper. Unfortunately, the questions I have received, while important, are, in my view, not urgent and do not relate to any of the business on today's Order Paper. Thus, I regret to inform the Hon. Members that I cannot entertain their questions at this sitting.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[Oral Replies]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there are three questions on today's Order Paper and all are for oral replies. These questions are in the name of the Member, Annette Ferguson and are for the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. For question number one, Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, you may proceed with asking your question.

1. Prices for repossessed lands sold at Peter's Hall, East Bank Demerara.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and a pleasant morning to the House. The question is to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. An article carried *via Stabroek News*, dated 21st May, 2023, reported and I quote:

“Land repossessed by gov't at Peters Hall resold at market prices – AG”.

These words were actually uttered by the Attorney General. Could the Hon. Senior Minister inform the National Assembly at what prices the repossessed lands at Peter's Hall on the East Bank of Demerara were sold and to whom? Thank you.

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance [Dr. Singh]:

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and of course, thank you very much to the Hon. Member for posting the question. In relation to the matter of lands repossessed by the Government at Peter's Hall and resold, the relevant purchasers and respective prices are as follows: one, Jian Fen Yu, the estimated size of the land was 18.07 acres at a sale price of approximately \$617.99 million; two, Construction Equipment Incorporated, approximately 4.65 acres at a price of \$159 million; three, Puran Brothers Disposal Incorporated, approximately 9.94 acres at a price of \$339.9 million; four, Source One Oil and Gas Marine Supplies, approximately 4.6 acres at a price of \$156.6 million; T and L Waste Management, approximately 4.9 acres at a price of \$167.6 million; and Star Imports and Trading, approximately 4.7 acres at a price of \$161.4 million. I might add that all of these purchasers are in fact purchasers who had previously been allocated lands under the A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Administration. I will return to the matter to which the Attorney General and acting Prime Minister was alluding were the circumstances that required me to do so. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Ms. Ferguson, you may proceed with your second question unless you have a follow-up.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, I do not have a follow-up to the first question posed because the Hon. Minister has answered the follow-up question that I had.

2. Procedure used by NICIL for sale of repossessed lands at Peter's Hall, East Bank Demerara

Ms. Ferguson: An article carried *via Stabroek News*, dated 21st May, 2023, reported, and I quote:

“Land repossessed by Government at Peters’ Hall resold at market prices – AG”.

Again, this was the Attorney General. The question to the Hon. Minister is, could he inform the National Assembly, after the lands were repossessed, what procedure did the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) use to select buyers for these lands?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, the record will reflect, of course, that I did indicate earlier that there was no selection by this Government. In fact, we inherited a list of people who had been sold lands, and I add, sold lands, not only without due process but without any transparent process having been followed. In fact, the records will reflect that in 2018 under the APNU/AFC Administration, that Government entered into lease transactions for lands on the East Bank Demerara, including at plantation Peter's Hall, with several defects, including most significantly, that granted these lessees the right to sell and assigned their rights in the respective properties to third parties, some of whom did exactly that making substantial profits. **[Mr. Nandlall: (Inaudible)]** In fact, that was the principal defect, that these sales and assignments of rights could be done without reference to any State approval or State authority. It would also be a matter of public record that this was part of a series of land giveaways as the sun was setting on the then illegal APNU/AFC Government. Eventually, when that illegal Administration yielded to the will of the people of Guyana and reluctantly demitted office, eventually on the 2nd August, 2020, to facilitate the assumption of the presidency by President Ali and the assumption of the governmental office by the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), we then embarked on a process of reviewing these leases and identified these fundamental defects, violations and breaches of processes. We made an effort to regularise these transactions.

I add, too, that one or more of... We engaged with all the persons holding these lands, and some agreed to relinquish, recognising that due process was not followed. In some cases, lands had been vested without a single cent having been paid. There was no reference to Cabinet. We engaged with the holders of these lands; some agreed to relinquish, some opted to go to court and, in fact, one went to court and obtained a judgment. As a result of the engagement, taking into account the proceedings that were ongoing and ensuing in the court and emerging from the engagement that we had with all of the holders of the lands, the names that I have just identified are in fact the persons who agreed to a settlement with the State of Guyana. We concluded those matters in the interest of bringing an orderly closure to these matters. To come back to the question that was asked originally, there was no selection on the part of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. These names were all inherited from the APNU/AFC. These were all people who were granted highly defective lands, due process having been followed. I might add that in some of these matters, there are pending criminal charges currently engaging the attention of the court. Thank you, very much, Sir.

10.51 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, you can proceed with question number three.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I will move on. This is question number three – the percentage of the population enumerated. This question is to the Hon. Dr. Singh.

3. Percentage of Population Enumerated

The Guyana National Population and Housing Census 2022 was launched on 22nd August, 2022, and the National Assembly approved the sum of \$2 billion *via* Supplementary Paper on 8th August, 2022.

Can the Hon. Senior Minister inform the National Assembly what percentage of the total population has been enumerated as of 30th April, 2023? This particular question has been overtaken by time because it gives a period for the information to be provided. In the absence of the National Assembly not meeting on a regular basis, I will proceed to perhaps ask the question and with your leave, Sir, have the period extended as of the 31st July, 2023. This will be done with your leave.

Mr. Speaker: Unfortunately, Hon. Member, I cannot give you leave because it would be unfair for the Hon. Minister to prepare for that particular question. I want to also ask you to be careful with respect to the words you use. You said that the National Assembly does not meet regularly. Now, regularity could be once a year, once a month, or once every two weeks. I do not know what regular is. Apparently, some people seem to have their own definitions for different characteristics of our House.

Mr. Patterson: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, you are shouting at me. That is total disrespect, please.

Mr. Patterson: I have a loud voice.

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Speaker: I am just cautioning you with respect to the words. Mr. Isaacs, please go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, I will proceed to ask the question in its current construct.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. You may proceed.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, I will not fight with you with regard to the comments you made earlier. I will not fight with you. The nation and the people of Guyana know better. That is my opinion – the National Assembly meets irregularly.

Mr. Speaker: You are actually imputing that I am fighting with you. So, please, choose those words very carefully.

Ms. Ferguson: That is good, Mr. Speaker, but you have to remember that we are adults in this House.

Mr. Speaker: Please withdraw that. Please withdraw that.

Ms. Ferguson: We are adults.

Mr. Speaker: Please withdraw that.

Ms. Ferguson: Can the Hon. Senior Minister...

Mr. Speaker: Please withdraw the issue of fighting. I cut you off; please withdraw the issue of fighting with you.

Ms. Ferguson: I am guided, Sir. Can the Hon. Senior Minister inform the National Assembly, what percentage of the total population has been enumerated as of 30th April, 2023?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I read this question with great interest. I want to preface my answer by providing, perhaps, an analogy. With your permission, might I use one of your grandsons in this analogy? Were you to give your grandson a big sack... [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Even his parents are not here; we cannot even consult him.] Let us use someone who is here. Were you to give the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, a big sack of marbles and say to him, please count these marbles; he starts counting the marbles and midway or three-quarters of the way through the exercise you stop him and say, Mr. Mahipaul what percentage of the marbles... [**Mr. Mahipaul:** It is, Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul.] Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, what percentage of the marbles have you counted? Sir, the computation of percentage requires two numbers: the whole, which is typically called the denominator, the number at the bottom of a fraction; and the part, the number at the top which is typically called the numerator. You take the numerator or the part, divide it by the denominator or the whole, multiply it by 100, and get what is called the percentage.

I rather suspect that Mr. Mahipaul would be hard pressed, halfway, or three-quarter way to say I finished 56%, 75% or I counted 56%, 75%, or 86% of the marbles because he would not know how many marbles comprise the whole. The total population would only be known when the census is completed. Therefore, to ask what percentage of the total population has been counted thus far, reflects this particular Hon. Member's persistence in providing amusement to this House and to the people of Guyana. The question is completely absurd and I refuse to dignify it. The census is not complete and the total population would only be known when it is completed. Thank you very much, Sir.

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

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. May I draw the House's attention to page 77 of the Budget Speech by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance? He indicates that of the 10 Administrative Regions, enumeration continues in Regions 1, 4 and 7 because it was hindered by inclement weather, *et cetera*. He went on to state:

“The Census’ first deliverable, the preliminary report which is a quick count of the population, is expected to be produced in the first half of 2023.”

I know that we are just one month past that deadline. I am just going to ask the Minister where we are in terms of presenting that report to the National Assembly.

Dr. Singh: Sir, let me assure the Hon. Member that a team of diligent professionals at the Bureau of Statistics continue to work on the census. That work is advancing; they are doing repeat visits to some regions. In fact, I think another question asked by the Hon. Member might come up at a future sitting. The Hon. Member raised the question of what is being done with homes that were visited and the occupants were not met with for the purposes of enumeration. The team at the Bureau of Statistics is in fact doing that very exercise of going back to homes that were not enumerated. They are going back to regions, including those that were mentioned in the Budget Speech, and I am pleased to say in other regions where additional work is required. That work is ongoing, and the team is diligently applying itself to the task of completing the census. [**Hon.**

Members: (*Inaudible*)] No. So, the report once concluded, will be made available in due course. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister.

REQUEST FOR LEAVE TO MOVE THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY ON DEFINITE MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I did receive from the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul a request to move a motion under this heading. I have carefully considered the motion. Again, applying the Standing Orders, I have ruled the issue here is of urgency and importance. The urgency factor is that this is an ongoing issue. I will give the Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul a minute to say what this urgent request is.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Taking note that in the public domain, the Government indicated that they will be swearing in the Commissioners for the Commission of Inquiry (CoI) surrounding the Mahdia School Dormitory’s fire, the request simply seeks to suggest for this National Assembly to agree on the terms of reference and submit them to the Executive Arm of Government for consideration in the Commission of Inquiry. The request is – in my view and that

of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) – considered urgent on the basis that our National Assembly will not be sitting for the next two months because we are going into recess. Given that the Government has indicated that they will go ahead and swear in the Commissioners and begin the Commission of Inquiry, I believe the National Assembly should be given an opportunity to agree with all stakeholders – Opposition and Government – to propose the terms of reference for this Commission, in the interest of all-inclusiveness and the inclusivity of the entire representative of the nation. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the issue here is, urgency. That tragic incident happened over two and a half months ago. It was signalled that a Commission of Inquiry would be established to look at the particular tragedy. Two and a half months would have been sufficient time for any Member of this National Assembly to bring a formal motion to the House, and have it tabled and discussed. Questions and motions come in with much frequency to the House and to the Speaker. So, unfortunately, at this time, the urgency element, once again, is not met. I will not be able to entertain it.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now move to the consideration of Financial Paper No. 3, current and capital estimates. The House will now resolve itself into the Committee of Supply.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister [Mr. McCoy]: You all go and do a fundraising.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, McCoy, I have no problem with you heckling but, shouting, you are at my right ear. Hon. Members, the House is in the Committee. We will start with item number one of Financial Paper No. 3/2023. Hon. Member, Senior Minister with Responsibility for Finance.

11.06 p.m.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Is this where I signify that Cabinet has recommended the paper for consideration?

Motion

Motion to approve Supplementary Financial Paper No. 3 of 2023

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 3 of 2023 – Schedule of Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling sixty-one billion, thirteen million, one hundred and eighty four thousand, seven hundred and five dollars (\$61,013,184,705) – advances made from the Contingencies Fund for the period ending 2023-12-31.”

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

Motion proposed.

Current Expenditure

Item 1: 02-023 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Subsidies & Contributions to Local Organisations – \$927,741,000

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, I was seeking your leave, prior to you putting the line item, to ask a question of the mover of this motion.

Mr. Chairman: You can go ahead.

Ms. Lawrence: Through you, could the Hon. Minister of Finance tell this House why, having brought three financial papers within three weeks, we have not seen his adherence to the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA), section 24(4), which reads, and I quote:

“The Minister, when introducing a supplementary appropriation Bill, shall present to the National Assembly the reasons for the proposed variations and provide a supplementary document describing the impact that the variations, if approved, will have on the financial plan outlined in the annual budget.”

Presented by the Minister in this House. With your leave, I will ask the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance to respond.

Dr. Singh: The Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence, who posed the question, is a senior member of the APNU/AFC parliamentary team. I have had the privilege of serving in this National Assembly for at least one or two previous terms alongside the Hon. Member, and I know that she is a parliamentarian of vast experience, including by virtue of the fact that she chaired the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), I believe, for at least a full term.

This matter has been abundantly and thoroughly ventilated. The FMAA has been in place since December, 2003, to be precise. It has been implemented by successive People's Progressive Party/Civic Governments, and it has been implemented by an APNU/AFC Government. The format for submission of financial papers has been abundantly ventilated and long settled. The format that is being used today is exactly the same as was used by the APNU/AFC. [**Hon. Members:** *(Inaudible)*] Let me be clear: the fullness of the documentation submitted in relation to supplementary appropriations being sought has been settled a long time ago. The conventions in relation to the documentation to be submitted when supplementary appropriation is being sought have been established, have been debated in this House, and have been followed by a previous PPP/C Government and by the APNU/AFC during 2015 to 2020. There is no innovation in the format of the submission to this House seeking a supplementary appropriation. Our predecessors in office used exactly, the same format and set of documentation when supplementary appropriations were being sought.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, I am very disappointed. I must say that the courts have consistently ruled that this House has the power to regulate its own business, but I want to say here today that this House does not have the power to violate the laws of Guyana. I want to put that on record. I will turn my attention to the first question. Sir, did you not put item number 02-023?

Mr. Chairman: I did.

Dr. Singh: Sir, before you put the question, with your permission, may I respond?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, go ahead.

Dr. Singh: This House did enact the FMAA and it did stipulate the requirements in relation to procedures to be followed in connection to supplementary appropriations. We, during our previous term in office, implemented those provisions. Our successors and now predecessors in office

implemented those provisions. We have resumed implementing those provisions, following the identical formatting and compilation of documentation in relation to the submissions to this House when seeking supplementary appropriations. There is no violation of the law now, just as there was no violation of the law in relation to this particular matter while our predecessors were in office. Thank you very much Sir.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, the requested amount is for \$927,741,000, of which \$663 million is for the Linden Electricity Company Incorporated and \$264,741,000 is for the Lethem Power Company Incorporated. These are very large supplemental fundings, relative to what was budgeted. Could the Minister kindly explain these wide deviations? Could I go on to ask the second question? I do not know who is answering.

Dr. Singh: I will be answering.

Ms. Lawrence: Since Financial Paper No. 3 is for the period ending 31st December, 2023, could we expect that there will be no further supplemental funding for these two entities?

Dr. Singh: The amounts provided, as the Hon. Member indicated, are for the Linden Electricity Company Incorporated and the Lethem Power Company Incorporated. It is well known that the Government of Guyana provides financial support through these two companies, Linden and Lethem, and indeed in other communities, including and in particular hinterland communities, for the support of electricity. The cost that is incurred is a function of both consumption, the number of kilowatt-hours (kWh) consumed by the community, and the cost of delivering that electricity for consumption. The principal driver of that cost is, of course, fuel. In both cases, in Linden and in Lethem, we have been seeing significant increases in consumption and the pass through of the cost of fuel used for the generation of this electricity. And so the variation, or the additional appropriations that are being sought, reflect additional costs that are being incurred as a result of both increased consumption and increased fuel costs, and additional support for things like maintenance of these two companies to ensure that both Linden and Lethem continue to receive electricity as we have committed to deliver to them.

In relation to the question asked about the heading of the supplementary paper, once again, supplementary financial papers are always headed up for the year ended 31st December because they are an appropriation of the fiscal year. What we are seeking is an appropriation for the year

ended 31st December, 2023. I will say that the sums being sought currently represent our current best estimate, based on the information that has been shared with us by these two companies. The amounts that are sought are our best estimates with currently available information as to the financial requirements for the remainder of the year. But, of course, we will remain very closely engaged with the respective companies to ensure that they continue to manage their operations efficiently. We will remain closely engaged with the communities. Were the circumstances to so require, we will come back to this House at the appropriate time. This represents the best estimate of what the additional financial requirements are for the remainder of the year, based on the information available to us as of the day the financial paper was submitted to this House. Thank you very much.

Ms. Lawrence: I have a follow-up on the same question. In December, 2022, the Government came to this House for additional funds for these two electricity companies. According to Hon. Mr. Indar, it was because of the increase in the prices of fuel. The Hon. Member is stated here as saying that we have to buy fuel at a 65% increase in the cost. We were told how prudent the Government is in terms of its financing and its budgeting, *et cetera*, and they have it all wrapped up in a nice package over there. My question is: what was the Government's thinking when they came to this House for a budgeted allocation just six months ago? A budget is supposed to take into consideration future increases, *et cetera*. Why is it we are hearing, again, about fuel prices six months after the Budget – six months after the Budget – when this Budget is for one year? [Mr.

Ramjattan: Make the example of the marble analogy.]

11.21 a.m.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, you can see how the marble analogy hurt them a lot. They are still reeling from it. If you were to put aside the drama and the histrionics injected into the question just now, the reality is when we come to this House with a Budget, we seek appropriations based on financial expenditure estimates that are determined on the basis of the information that are available at that point in time. If during the course of the year, we note an increase in consumption beyond our expectations of the time of the Budget submission and an increase and an adjustment... Prices are moving every day. The world market prices are moving every day, as a result of circumstances that we do not have control over... I said prices are moving. There are some moving upwards and some moving downwards. The reality is that when who is in Government come to

the National Assembly with a Budget, they come to the National Assembly with our best estimate possible, but it is perfectly understandable and natural that if there are new information at the Government's disposal, subsequently, they would come back to the National Assembly to do the proper thing and seek supplementary appropriations, which is exactly what we have done.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, may I ask the Hon. Minister whether the new one megawatt (mw) solar fan to supplement the generation in Lethem that have stopped blackouts in February, we want to know whether the repairs and maintenance that the Hon. Minister spoke of just now, that this Supplementary is going to be used for, how much of it will be allocated to Lethem for maintenance and upgrade, after putting in this fancy one megawatt solar fan?

Dr. Singh: I must say that I am not sure... Was it a reference to a solar? The Hon. Member spoke of a fancy... Was it a one-megawatt solar fan? Was that what the Hon. Member asked? I must admit that is a level of specificity of information that I am not currently in position of. Was the Hon. Member to propose a question before the honourable House, I am sure it will be answered in due course. I do not have that level of specificity of information in my possession currently.

Mr. Patterson: In his explanation, the Hon. Minister attributed the increased cost to delivery cost and consumption increase. Sir, just to start off, could you disaggregate that?

Dr. Singh: I do not have in my possession the disaggregation of that currently.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, obviously, I would expect you as the Chairman, to ask the Minister if he is willing to lay over the disaggregated cost at some point in time.

Mr. Chairman: Is that what you are asking? Hon. Minister, would you lay it over?

Dr. Singh: For that request to be properly put before the House, we would be happy to respond, as we always do.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I am putting it that it is a yes that it would be laid over.

Dr. Singh: Very well, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: In line with the answer, there is no provision in here for... I note how similar subventions and support are given to Mahdia, Mabaruma, Kwakwani and Port Kaituma. Could the Hon. Minister explain if fuel increases for Linden and Lethem, how come there is no provision here for none of the other agencies?

Dr. Singh: Sir, there is no mystery about that. A budget comprises the best estimates of expenditure required for every single entity. At this point in time, the Ministry of Finance is not in receipt of, in the first instance, a request from those companies and we are not in possession of any information to indicate that they require additional resources. Were we to receive a request from those companies, with the appropriate justifications, we will bring them to this House. We have received a request for supplementary appropriation, from Linden and Lethem, which we have reviewed and we have found to be of merit. We have brought those requests to this House. That is simple. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Patterson, then we have the Hon. Member, Mr. Henry and then Ms. Lawrence.

Mr. Patterson: I am coming back to Lethem. The Hon. Minister in the Ministry of Public Works... [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] No, no. I am giving him his props. ...opened the Lethem Solar farm with 1.5 megawatts and waxed lyrically that it will reduce the cost by almost 50% for electricity in Lethem. Could the Hon. Minister responding explain to the House if the solar farm which they installed is operational? Why has it not reduced the operational cost in Lethem by the percentage as projected by the Hon. Minister of Public Works?

Minister in the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]: I refer to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance who has asked me to respond to this question.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Indar: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. To the Hon. Member, thank you very much for that question. I remember when this facility at Lethem was established, commissioned and to provide supplemental power to the Lethem Power plant. Solar power is intermittent power, Mr. Chairman. It does not run on 24 hours. It is intermittent power fed into the generation capacity at

Lethem. It is designed to reduce fuel costs to... [Mr. Patterson: *(Inaudible)*] I am answering, Sir. You had your chance. Will you allow me to answer? Mr. Chairman, there is intermittent power. It means that only some parts of the day you have sunlight. When you have sunlight that power is pushed into the power plant and reduce the operating costs of the power plant. The Hinterland Electrification Company Inc (HECI) which is run by a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and staff who did the analysis of the Lethem Power company and found that it needed extra money to run the plant, mostly because of fuel. Although it has power to offset some of the costs in fuel, there is still an increase in the amount that is used by the generating sets. The sets there are not all new sets. There are old sets there and there are new sets, but it is not all new operating at the highest efficiency, so it burns fuel. Then, there are more demands showing up in Lethem. More people are using power. [Hon. Members (Opposition): *(Inaudible)*] All of you asked for the answer and I am giving you the answer. The question came from the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, and it is a good question. I am providing the answer but like I am hurting them with the answer too.

The answer is clear that there is demand increase in generation at the Lethem Power Plant. The power that is generated by the solar plant is intermittent power and it is not what you call firm power. Firm power is when there is generating capacity. Intermittent power is the solar energy assists with power generation into the grid using a substation there. The same thing goes for the Lethem Power Company. The Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh, answered. The Lethem Power Company is the same thing. Fuel cost is the main driver of operating cost for all of these power plants. The same thing happened for Linden too. It is mainly because of fuel costs. When you sit at the end of the year and create a budget to bring to this House, Mr. Speaker, you work on variables that are known at that time. Nobody in this world has a model to calculate fuel price of how it moves up and down. There are millions of models to calculate where fuel price will go and where it will not go. Nobody has a crystal ball to say what fuel price would be six months out. That is the issue. If it is known at the time of preparing the budget what fuel prices would be because fuel price change during the period, it affects people locally. That is the issue here. I hope that the added commentary by the question of the Hon. Member, which I believe is a good question and a sensible one and does not have emotions in it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Henry: Just to say that a promise was made that we would be paying less for electricity in Lethem and that did not happen. In terms of the staffing at Lethem, is it true that the Chairman of

the board of management is an absentee Chairman? If so, is he being paid? This could be one of the reasons the cost of electricity cannot go down.

Dr. Singh: First of all, let me say very clearly that this People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government delivers on all of our promises. We will be crystal clear about that. I am not in possession of any information in relation to an absentee Chairman or any such thing. I suspect that is more rhetorical politics more than anything else.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence ...

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, ...

Ms. Lawrence: The Chairman did rule that one cannot give the floor to the other. I would like to move on to project code 2610600, but I think my Colleague is still on the same project code.

Mr. Chairman: If the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, has a supplemental on this issue, I will allow it...

Ms. Lawrence: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The question to the Hon. Minister, will these sums, the ones in the budget, as well as the sums being requested now, result in a reduction in the rate of electricity in Lethem in particular? If not, could the Hon. Minister tell the citizens of Lethem when they will see the reductions, Sir?

Dr. Singh: Let me say that the purpose of these supplementary appropriations that are being sought is to continue to ensure that electricity is delivered in Lethem and Linden. It has no direct relationship with the reduction of rates. Having said that, it is well known that this Government is investing very aggressively in improving electricity production, electricity generation, transmission and distribution and delivery to final consumers, including not least with the investment in the rehabilitation of the Moca Moca Hydro Power Plant.

11.36 a.m.

That project is already underway and will ultimately see a significant improvement with the increase in the supply of electricity to Lethem. Improvement in the quality of that electricity and ultimately, we hope, a reduction in the cost of electricity. I may add that is reflective of our efforts in many other communities. It is well known that we are installing solar capability in Linden, including both Regions 9 and 10 that are the subject of the current item. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Senior Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence, you have the floor.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Line item...

Mr. Chairman: If you are going to move on, I have to put this particular line item. I have not put it yet.

Ms. Lawrence: Alright, when you are finish.

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Norton]: Mr. Chairman, may I have the floor?

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

Mr. Norton: Could the Hon. Minister tell us what the price of oil was in January,... [An Hon. Member: It was (*inaudible*)] ...wait a minute, I will get it - 2023 and the price of oil now?

Dr. Singh: Sir, world market fuel prices are readily available in the public's domain. I have absolutely no intention of doing a simple internet search on behalf of the Hon. Leader of the Opposition. I will reiterate that this is not only a question of world market fuel prices, which is one variable. The fuel bill of these companies comprises the unit price of fuel, the volume of fuel, the insurance and freight to bring the fuel to Guyana, the transport and delivery to Linden and Lethem, the efficiency with which those companies operate and use that fuel to generate the electricity that they generate, and the volume of demand. The fuel bills of those companies are influenced by a number of variables including but, not exclusively, the world market price for fuel. If the Hon. Leader of the Opposition is interested in determining the world market price for fuel, I urge him to do a simple *Google* search. There is an abundance of sources on the internet that will tell him what the world market price for fuel is.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, before you proceed, the Standing Orders with respect of questions are quite specific and it refers to information that is readily available. We should not put that in a question. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you may proceed.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, the *Google* he speaks about says that it was US\$82.5 in January.

[Mr. Ramson]: Why did you ask the question? Because I have more sense than you. The present price is US\$80.62 which means that there is a reduction. Could the Hon. Minister tell us what the variables are that caused this increase? The other question I wanted to ask is, could the Minister tell us if they do demand forecasting and what were their demand forecasts at the time?

[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] At least I do not have just a Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) certificate.

Mr. Chairman: Before the Hon. Minister answers, Hon. Member Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, if you are recording, that light is actually in my eye every time. If you want to get my attention, just press the button and the red light will show up. Then, I will note you.

Ms. Flue-Bess: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Chairman: Not yet. Kindly wait a moment. The light in my eye, I think, is a bit disrespectful.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I am trying to read the paper with it.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Senior Minister, you may proceed.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Sir. I do, indeed, appreciate the interest of the Hon. Leader of the Opposition in this matter. In response, let me make the following observations. His specific question was, what were the variables that contribute to the... I am paraphrasing a bit. These are now my words rather than his. Essentially, the variables that influence the amounts that are required. The principal cost that goes into the operations of both the Linden and Lethem power companies – and indeed, any electricity company – is their fuel bill. That fuel bill is determined by, first of all, volume or the amount of electricity produced. Secondly, it is determined by efficiency. The efficiency with which fuel and other inputs are converted into electric energy for supply to consumers. It is also determined by the unit cost of fuel delivered at the gate of the power plant. I add that qualifier because these power plants buy refined fuel products; typically, either diesel or heavy fuel oils. The cost of delivering diesel or heavy fuel oils to the gate of the power

plant in Linden and Lethem is specific to the product being purchased, is specific to transportation and other logistic costs at that point in time, is specific to the cost, insurance and freight (CIF) value of these refined products being delivered to port Georgetown, which is obviously where the products are typically discharged, *et cetera*.

Through the Chairman to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, even in the fuel price itself, the world market price for oil is generally a good proxy but not necessarily always a perfect proxy for a fuel bill because it is refined products that we are buying, we buy that on the open market and, as I said, there are other variables including the efficiency of conversion to electricity and the volume of electricity demanded. Thank you very much, Sir.

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

Mr. Norton: There were two elements to the question. I asked him about demand forecasting and how they arrived at the figures.

Dr. Singh: In relation to the forecasting of demand, I can tell you what we have is... I do not have all of the details here but we have a historical time series of electricity produced and delivered. That provides some predictor of what is going to happen in the future but it is not the sole determinant as one has additional housing areas, additional connections, additional economic activities, *et cetera* in the communities. Historic demand provides one input into the prediction of future demand. I may add that the forecasting of demand in Linden or in Lethem is not done by the Minister of Finance sitting at his desk and coming up with these numbers. Both of these companies have boards of directors and they have technical staff working with them who work with a rich set of information. I would like to think that they rigorously apply themselves to coming up with the best possible projections. They share those with us. At the Ministry of Finance, we interrogate them in engagements with the respective parties concerned and once we are satisfied, we endeavour to make the financial provisions available to them. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Norton: Is the Minister suggesting that when this board does what it does and sends it to him as the person responsible for the budget, he does not check or question to see if it fits into the reality?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, perhaps the Hon. Leader of the Opposition suffered an attention lapse. First of all, I did not say it is the board of directors. I said these companies have boards of directors and technical staff including respective chief executive officers (CEOs) and technical staff. That is the first point. The second point is that I made it crystal clear and the record will reflect, and I am sure the *Hansard* will reflect, that I said when these submissions are made to the Ministry of Finance, we interrogate them. That is the word that I used. I said we interrogate them to the best of our ability at the Ministry of Finance through a thorough engagement with the concerned ministry and an engagement with the respective companies. I think the *Hansard*... I did not use all of those words but I certainly said very clearly that we interrogate the submissions that are made to us and when satisfied, as far as is reasonably possible, we bring these submissions to the House. To completely omit that I said that and to insinuate something different in this House is blatantly disingenuous on the part of the Leader of the Opposition. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, this is my last question. Could you say if, in your last interrogation of them, you pointed out the weakness here?

Dr. Singh: My apologies, Sir. It is now my turn to say I missed a part of the question. Would the Leader of the Opposition be kind enough to repeat his question?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you may proceed.

Mr. Norton: In response to my question, you suggested that you interrogate them. I am asking, in your last interrogation of them, did you point out the weaknesses and the likelihood that their demand forecast was not close to the target?

Dr. Singh: I am not sure what weaknesses the Hon. Leader of the Opposition is speaking about. The Hon. Leader of the Opposition speaks of pointing out their weaknesses. I am not sure what weaknesses, precisely, are being referred to here. There are hardworking people working in these companies diligently every day, first and foremost, trying to keep their lights on in Linden and in Lethem. They try to administer these companies. They work very hard to manage and to ensure the delivery of service to the communities for which they are responsible. They work with available information to come up with the best estimates. They make a submission to us. We include it in the budget with necessary adjustments if needed. They make a subsequent submission based on newly discovered information or new and emergent developments. We engage with them. Once

they make a convincing and compelling case to us and we are sufficiently satisfied after having gone through this process of review and interrogation, if I may use that word again, we include it in the request.

I do not know if the Leader of the Opposition is suggesting that we should beat someone in Linden or in Lethem over their heads because they submitted a number and came back and said they needed additional resources. I am not sure what the suggestion is here at all. I will simply say that there are a lot of hardworking people who are involved in producing these estimates not only in those companies but also in the Office of the Prime Minister, the parent company, the Hinterland Electrification Company (HECI), the HECI as it is abbreviated and popularly known, and a lot of hardworking civil servants in my Ministry as well who are involved in this entire process. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, you have the floor.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I was cautioned just now about the use of my phone. I would like to bring to your attention that the print on these papers is very fine and make it difficult for me to read. That is why I have on my phone light. I do not know if this could be corrected. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, the light was in my direct line of sight. Every time I turned to the left to see who asked a question, there was the light. If the light was down, it would not have been in my eyes. If you want to get my attention, just press the button and I will see the red light. You do not have to shine the light.

Ms. Flue-Bess: That is all right. Kindly note that I was not recording.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Ms. Flue-Bess: There is nothing there to record. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: It is being recorded.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, a little respect. I was speaking. I did not conclude. Yes, Hon. Member Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, the session is recorded and broadcast LIVE. I do not have a problem with recording. I have a problem with the light shining in my eye. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you may proceed and then I have the Hon. Member Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I wanted to add and to get a response as to the size of the fonts. I normally read without reading glasses. I have to go get one to read these. I would like to know if it could be dealt with.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, it is a very valid point. We have to do something about it because...

Mr. Mahipaul: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: The Government has no control over how we reproduce this. This is the Parliament Office. Kindly do not impute, Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul. Hon. Member Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, you have the floor.

11.51 a.m.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a quick follow-up for the Senior Minister. He keeps referring to the new and empirical information that comes to the attention of the technical personnel. I am curious to know in terms of the electricity demand forecast models. Could he give an example of what is this new information that will come to hand that could change in the manner that it does; his projections as to what the costs would be?

Dr. Singh: In the first instance, if a certain level of consumption is projected at the start of the year, this is done in a relatively detailed manner, I do not have all of those numbers with me now. Mr. Chairman, you will observe that during the course of the first three, four, five and six months more electricity is being consumed and intern fuel bill is rising, and other inputs are rising. Then, I could only... I would not say it is an economic resume because I know what the companies do. The respective companies make an assessment whether these are temporary increases, some particular factor that might be contributing to a temporary spike in demand or if there is a more fundamental and underlying reason or justification for the rise in demand. Once they satisfy themselves that this is not just a temporary spike in demand... They might have temporary spikes

in demand if there are perhaps some unusual activities in the area concerned or some unusual development. Once they ascertain that there is a more permanent underlying growth in demand, then they update their projections. I do not think it is rocket science.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I agree with the Hon. Minister that it is not rocket science, which is why it is always very disturbing to see how very far off his projections are. I agree it is not rocket science but, clearly, there is something amidst in terms of budgeting and predicting the demand. I, therefore, would want to encourage that we take a look at the models that we are using to project these demands.

Dr. Singh: It is quite the contrary, Sir. We are in fact coming to this House in a transparent way to say that we have ascertained that additional financial resources are needed. Quite unlike our predecessors in Office who, as history would record, sat and allowed vast liabilities to be accumulated without coming to this House to regularise the obligations that were outstanding. We have come in a transparent manner to say, we have now ascertained that more resources and we are seeking the approval of the National Assembly. Thank you, Sir.

Item 1: 02-023 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Subsidies & Contributions to Local Organisations – \$927,741,000 agreed to and ordered to stand of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 1: 02-23 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Renewable Energy Improvement - Power System Project – \$45,604,000

Item 1: 02-23 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Renewable Energy Improvement - Power System Project – \$45,604,000 agreed to and ordered to stand of the Schedule.

Item 1: 02-23 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Gas to Power Project – \$5,047,755,500

Ms. Lawrence: The voted provision of some \$43 billion was passed in this House. Now, we have a supplementary being requested of over \$5 billion. Mr. Chairman, if you note the supplementary request is very specific, right down to the \$500. Could the Minister provide the details that make

up this figure? Also, could he state whether this funding is coming from the Natural Resources Fund or from other sources? If it is other sources, could he identify them?

Dr. Singh: Through you, Sir, the Hon. Member would be aware that this line item finances a number of interventions associated with the gas-to-energy or gas-to-power projects; including the Engineering, Procurement and Construction (EPC) contract – this is the contract for engineering, procurement and construction of the power plant itself – project management and supervision expenses, components in relation to upgrading the transmission and distribution network in order to adequately and efficiently offtake the powers that would be generated by this project, and associated other interventions. Those are the aforementioned of the main components. The Hon. Member would also be aware that, in relation to several of these components, we have been advancing the procurement of the associated required works. There were some awarded in the latter part of last year and some awarded during the course of this year.

In fact, it is already a matter of public record that the EPC contract was awarded during the course of, I think, late last year if I am not mistaken. The PMC similarity but, in particular, in relation to the Transmission and Distribution (T&D) network those contracts were in fact not so long ago publicly signed. I believe, it was reported in the newspapers and I think the Prime Minister was there, Minister Bishop Edghill and Mr. Indar have been there too. This amount given represents the updated projections of how each of these contracts will advance, such as the EPC contract; the construction of the power plant for which an international company has been contracted and it has already started preliminary work; and the supervision of the EPC contract, again, an international company doing that; and the T&D work – the bulk of that has gone to an international company. There is also a domestic component being done, in relation to the supply of transformers being done by a domestic company. This amount represents what we anticipated will be the additional resources needed, given the pace at which these various components are progressing and payments that we anticipate will fall due. This represents now the latest estimate of what we will require for the totality of the project.

In relation to the question asked in connection whether this is coming from a particular source, the mechanisms regarding the utilisation of the Natural Resources Fund, I think is well known. This National Assembly approves a resolution, and the transfers are made periodically from the fund. This National Assembly approves a resolution in determining the ceiling to be transferred in any

particular fiscal year and transfers are made during the course of the year. Those transfers are made to the Consolidated Fund and expenditure is met out of the Consolidated Fund. This particular intervention is funded out of the Consolidated Fund. I would hesitate necessarily to tie it to any particular source. I would say it is funded out of and from the Consolidated Fund. Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Lawrence: I think the Minister in response to my first question tried to precis in terms of the various projects associated with this line item; how they are accelerating. Minister, I would appreciate through the Chairman, if you would provide this House with a progress report and the projected cost associated with it. That is one.

My second question is: could the Minister provide a status report on the request for funding from the Export–Import Bank of the United States (EXIM) Bank of the USA?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Sir. Both of those requests could certainly be granted.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Minister say how much financing has been put into this project by ExxonMobil so far?

Dr. Singh: In relation to the construction of the power plant and associated investment including the T&D, those investments are being financed by the Government of Guyana out of the budgetary appropriations that are in the budget as approved and now these supplementary appropriations being sought.

Mr. Patterson: Just a couple follow ups to the Hon. Minister. The Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence in her first question asked for a disaggregation. I assumed that maybe it was not clear to the House. Could I ask the Minister for a financial disaggregation? I know that he listed a whole set of activities and areas under which... Could we financial disaggregation of this sum now being requested of \$5 billion?

Dr. Singh: That could certainly be provided. I had anticipated in fact that it would be provided and will be provided in the update that was requested by the Hon. Member. It could certainly be provided. I will say, though, again through you to the Hon. Member, that the predominant utilisation of these resources will be for the purposes of the transmission and distribution project. Further elaboration could certainly be provided subsequently.

Mr. Patterson: Could I ask if any of these moneys are going to the payment of lands acquired? If so, how much? Basically, the lands to be acquired under this project and paid for, were they paid for and accepted?

Dr. Singh: The Hon. Member is in fact quite correct that there will be some amount of land acquisition involved in the project as I have no doubt, he is well aware. I do not believe that process is completed as yet. To the best of my knowledge, it is ongoing. I am advice in fact that process is ongoing. There will be acquisition and compensation for acquisition, but that process is ongoing. Once concluded, those landowners whose land is being acquired will, of course, receive the necessary payments for those lands in keeping with the relevant laws.

12.06 p.m.

I will say that under this provision, that subject to correction when the detailed aggregation is provided, I want to emphasise that I am adding that caveat. Subject to correction, once I provide this detailed aggregation, I will state that, to the best of my recollection, land acquisition was not one of the components that were being proposed. The cost associated with land acquisition will have to be met, but I do not recall that it is going to be met under this allocation. My recollection is that the main utilisation of these resources is in connection with the T and D Project.

Mr. Patterson: Could the Hon. Minister detail or explain to this House the transmission and distribution network which is coming? What exactly is it? How is it going to cross the Demerara River and where is it going to go? Could he explain this to the House and Colleagues? Prior to this a detailed project report would have been submitted to him.

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Sir. It is, in fact, a perfectly valued and fair question that the Hon. Member asked. I highly recognise that it is a very high-level summary I am providing here. In summary, it includes transmission lines, substations, transformers, *et cetera*. We also anticipated that we, the Government, will be putting in place control centres, ultimately a new Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) system as well. The rollout of these will obviously include project management and supervision costs and so on. Those are the main components, and as I said, Mr. Chairman, I recognised that is a very high level, if you like, a highly aggregated sort of gloss over the main components but the details could quite... I mean, there is a detailed articulation of what is involved in this transmission and distribution project. The main T and D Project contract has

already been awarded and has a detailed project scoop. The information is available. I do not have it at my hand readily now, but there is a detailed project scoop that is articulated, including in the main contract or the two contracts that have been awarded already.

Mr. Patterson: I appreciate the Hon. Minister's response. Mr. Chairman, could I remind you that almost two and a half years ago, under this same project, the Prime Minister – he is not here – in response to a notice paper, undertook to provide the House with exactly the same information; the scoop, the studies and agreements, and his response were when he concluded this agreement, he will lay it here. I am sure you can recall that, Sir. That has not been done. Could I ask the Hon. Minister if all of these have been concluded and when will he lay these agreements before the House? Please, I would ask him not to reduce the House and tell me about the Public Procurement Commission (PPC) awards. I would ask him to talk about the contracts negotiated directly with the Government, Exxon Mobil, and these other operators.

Dr. Singh: If I understood the Hon. Member correctly, he is inquiring when this information will be provided. Is that the question that is being asked? **[Mr. Patterson: (Inaudible)]** Right. It would be well known that work was ongoing on finalising the scoop and design of this project. The Hon. Prime Minister certainly does not need me to speak on his behalf, but I have no doubt that he would not have wanted to preeminent the outcome of that technical work by submitting to this honourable House details on the project scoop before that had been finalised and concluded. Now that critical elements have been finalised and concluded, including, as I said, through the award of a large contract for T and D Project and then a couple of auxiliary contracts, I have no doubt there is a clearer picture of the scoop of the project. Equally, as I said, I do not doubt that there will be any reservation regarding providing this honourable House with further details on the scoop of work, et cetera, in the shortest possible time. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Patterson: In connection with this same project code, Mr. Minister, there are several ... This is linked to one of the questions asked by the Hon. Annette Ferguson quite a while ago; the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) has issued several leases which the court has upheld to be valid. Could the Hon. Minister state if any of this money here will go towards those land acquisitions or if any of this work area is encroached by the valid leases issued by NICIL?

Dr. Singh: The short answer to that question is no.

Ms. Ferguson: On this very project code, picking up from a question asked by Ms. Lawrence to Dr. Singh regarding whether Exxon Mobil will be investing or financing this particular project and, Hon. Member responded that the money is coming from the Consolidated Fund, but my research has proved that Exxon Mobil said to the court that it will make no profit on US\$1 billion investment in Gas-to-energy Project then another article is quoting Exxon Mobil to state:

“Exxon to recover investment in pipeline through sale of gas to Gov’t.”

Could the Hon. Member clarify his earlier response to the question asked by Cde. Volda Lawrence, the Hon. Member? Thank you.

Dr. Singh: I do not believe that a clarification is needed. I answered in plain English language. The power plant and the transmission and distribution network and associated works are financed by the Government of Guyana through the national budget. I am sure what confusion there is to what I said. Thank you, very much, Sir.

Item 1: 02-023 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Gas to Power Project – 5,047,755,500 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 1: 02-024 Office of the Prime Minister – Telecommunications and Innovation – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – 648,319,300

Mr. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman noted that the \$648 million requested here represents 26% of the voted provisions from last February. Is the entire amount here going to the National Data Management Authority (NDMA), according to the remarks in the legend here, ‘to expanded work programme’? Before I request the Minister to provide the full details of this expanded work programme, I would like to ask the Minister how much of the voted provisions for 2023 have been spent as of 30th June, 2023?

Dr. Singh: Again, a perfectly valid question. I do not think I have in my possession how much has actually been spent but I would happily provide that to the Hon. Member.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Minister provide a detail of this expanded work programme since it does not have any capital component? All of this money is for current, so please provide the detailed work programme.

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Sir. In fact, what we are doing is... These additional allocations are to facilitate an aggressive build-out of the NDMA. It is for a two-fold purpose. One is to pursue a more aggressive maintenance programme because some of the equipment and network capabilities of the NDMA are somewhat advanced in age.

Secondly, to promote a more aggressive build-out of their connectivity capability across the regions of Guyana. The main component being financed out of this allocation of \$648 million is the procurement of critical spares. Those include general, cellular, solar, and electricity generation spares and spares for satellite dishes and connectivity. If I might go that again, general and critical spares, cellular spares, electricity generation spares, and satellite and remote connectivity spares. In addition to that, additional build-out of dedicated internet access, which refers to, I believe, fibre connectivity, cellular internet, and Asia Broadcast Satellite (ABS) or Very Small Aperture Terminal (VSAT) connection to the hinterland communities. Those are the main components that will be financed from this additional allocation sought.

Ms. Lawrence: Is the Senior Minister saying to this House that in February of this year when the budget was brought that this expansion was no part of the programme of the NDMA? Is this a new programme that now coming on stream and if so, why at this time of the year?

Dr. Singh: In fact, we had anticipated a build-out of the NDMA capability, but that work is progressing with a pace and rapidity beyond our initial expectations. It has been implemented far more aggressively than we anticipated, as a result of which the rollout is considerably more extensive than originally anticipated.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Minister kindly indicate to the House what component of this allocation being sought is for the upgrade and the replacement of the equipment that he spoke of?

12.21 p.m.

Dr. Singh: In relation to the spares, I referred to, the total cost is \$294 million out of the total amount. Through you, Sir, the Hon. Member would recall that there were several sub-components within spares – connectivity, cellular, electricity and so on. I listed those earlier.

Item 1: 02-024 Office of the Prime Minister – Telecommunications and Innovations – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – \$648,319,300, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let us take item 2 before we take the suspension.

Item 2: 03-032 Ministry of Finance – Public Financial Management Policies and Services – Other - \$350,000,000

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, the Minister, is coming to this House six months after the budget for 156% of what he got in the voted provision. He states it is for an expanded programme with other operational expenses. I want to ask the Minister two questions. Minister, how is it that the Ministry of Finance has underestimated the amount allocated or requested of this House during the 2023 Budget in February of this year? That is my first question.

Secondly, could the Minister refresh the House's memory with the components of the expenditure for which the voted provisions were used?

Dr. Singh: In relation to the latter part of the question where the Hon. Member requested that I refresh the memory of the House, I am sure that the Hon. Member is eminently capable of referring to the records of the proceedings of this House for when that matter was considered and the answers that were provided when questions were asked in relation to that item.

In connection with the amount sought, let me say that under this particular line item – in this instance – this additional amount sought includes a provision to meet the cost of the financial assistance that is being provided to the families of the girls who so tragically lost their lives in Mahdia and those who were injured in that tragic incident. I think it has been abundantly ventilated in public that the Government has offered to provide some financial assistance. We have been providing that assistance. We made some emergency interventions at the time. So, a part of this allocation is intended to meet or recoup those costs that were incurred. One would fully appreciate

that they were incurred ... We responded in a timely manner on the spot and tried to deliver and meet the requirements that were needed at the time – as immediately as we possibly could.

Secondly, there are legal judgements in relation to matters that are concluded by the court over which we have no control. As they arise, costs are met in the event that legal judgements are granted, or compensation claims are made. So, that amount is also met out of this sub-heading from this line item from time to time. Those are the main elements of this allocation, Sir. Thank you very much.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, could the Minister kindly indicate what part of this \$350,000,000 represents the total payment package towards the victims' families of the fire in Mahdia? Could he, while doing that, tell this House and the nation what criteria were used to come up with this amount and how much would each family be given?

Dr. Singh: Here again, this is obviously a matter of – justifiably so – great interest and concern. I think, as a nation, we all witnessed the horror of the events that unfolded that night and shared the pain of the families thereafter. Without a doubt, the importance of this issue is not to be questioned in any way whatsoever. Equally so, this matter has been the subject of a lot of discussion in the public domain. Statements have been made by the Attorney General. Statements have been made by at least the Attorney General and the President, no less on this matter. This includes, I think, as recently as a day or two ago. I do not believe there is a necessity, and I have no intention of repeating what has already been said – what is on the public record, as having been said by both the President and the Attorney General in relation to this matter. This includes the financial assistance provided or the main elements of the financial assistance provided to each family. That has already been publicly stated by the Attorney General. Thank you very much.

Item 2: 03-032 Ministry of Finance – Public Financial Management Policies and Services – Other - \$350,000,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: This is a good time to take the suspension.

Sitting suspended at 12.30 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 2.04 p.m.

The House will now resolve itself into Committee to continue consideration of Financial Paper No.3.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Capital Expenditure

Item 3: 13-134 Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development – Local Government Development - Project Development and Assistance & Regional Economic Transformation – \$300,000,000 & \$250,000,000

Project Development and Assistance

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, through you to the Hon. Minister – you received a voted provision in February of this year for \$1 billion. You are back here six months after asking this House to approve \$300 million. Could you kindly tell this House how much

Mr. Chairman: Continue, Hon. Member.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you. Should I repeat?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, please.

Ms. Lawrence: All right. In February of this year, you requested via the budget, \$1 billion, which was received. You are here six months after asking the House to approve \$300 million. Could you kindly inform the House how much of the \$1 billion you have spent and on which projects in the programme?

Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Persaud]: Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the Hon. Member for her question. As I stand before you, I do not have that figure with me, presently.

Mr. Chairman: We did not hear properly, Hon. Minister. I will allow the Minister to sit so he can get closer to the microphone. You can sit and just pull the microphone forward.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, let me, first of all, thank the Hon. member for her question. I am afraid that I do not have that figure, presently. Hon. Member, I am here, through the Chair to discuss the \$300 million that is being sought.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, through you to the Hon. Member – for you to ask the Ministry of Finance to give you additional funds, you had to say what you did with the money that was given to you at the beginning of the year. We keep hearing this over and over again. You come here to ask for a supplementary provision and say that you do not have the information, and I find that very disturbing. That is what you provided – we utilised x amount of money; we have a new project; or we are widening the project, and as a result, we need additional funds. I find it very disturbing. Would the member have that information laid over in the House to state that as of this date, x amount of money was spent from the \$1 billion given?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Minister, would you lay that over at a later date?

Mr. Persaud: Yes, Mr. Chair. I must reiterate a known fact – for five years, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government did nothing with regard to infrastructure in the 10 Administrative Regions. I could probably say that quite a bit was expended in the Local Authority Areas (LAAs), about 60%. This \$300 million is to purchase additional machinery to execute more jobs and enhance the Local Authority Areas countrywide.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, this Chart of Accounts' Description states:

“Project Development and Assistance”

The Remarks states:

“Provision of additional resources to support local authority areas.”

2.11 p.m.

This line item speaks to subventions to Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDC) and municipalities. May I ask the Hon. Minister to disaggregate this \$300 million and say how much will be given to each NDC, how much will be given to each township, and how much will be given to the city of Georgetown?

Mr. Persaud: This \$300 million subvention is to be spread across all of the local authority areas (LAAs). We have never budgeted previously for equipment.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Minister specify how much will be going to each NDC? There are 70 NDCs and 10 municipalities. I know that there is a specific sum that normally would go... The Government would agree on each NDC receiving a specific sum equally across the board. The nine townships would get a specific sum, and Georgetown is treated separately. Could the Minister disaggregate the \$300 million into those three categories, please?

Mr. Persaud: I will lay that over at a later date.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, the Minister said that he will lay it over. He does not have it at the moment.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask how it is that the Minister intends to disburse these funds to the respective ministries? Could the Minister specify how he will do that?

Mr. Persaud: That will be done based on a needs assessment.

Mr. Mahipaul: I heard the Hon. Minister say, “based on a needs assessment”. May I point the Hon. Minister to the Fiscal Transfers Act of 2013, which was assented to by former President Donald Ramoutar. It is Act No. 16 of 2013. This act specifies that there must be a formula that is followed in terms of the distribution of subventions to local authority areas. This act also speaks to the sum being known to each NDC. May I say that section 6(1) of the Fiscal Transfers Act states:

“6. (I) The annual subvention or fiscal transfers, from central government to local authorities... shall be based primarily on a set of conditions and stipulated performance indicators so as to form an aggregate sum...”

Referred to in the schedule. The aggregate sum in this instance is the \$300 million, and the aggregate sum before that was the \$1 billion that was approved in the budget that we had. To get this aggregate sum, it therefore means that needs assessment had to already have been completed. Could I ask the Hon. Minister to lay over the needs assessment of the 80 local authority areas in this country, specifically the 70 NDCs, the nine townships, and the city of Georgetown?

Mr. Persaud: We are already compliant with the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA). This is just an additional for project development assistance in the LAAs.

Mr. Mahipaul: It is the Fiscal Transfers Act, not the FMAA. This act, in its schedule, created a formula that was agreed on in this House with reference to the distribution of these moneys. May I ask, what is the 50% that will be given to each NDC from this \$300 million that is requested? And what is the 50% that will be given to the nine townships? What is the 50% that will be given to the city of Georgetown, referenced to the \$300 million that is requested here, in keeping with the laws of this country, the Fiscal Transfers Act of 2013?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, we are already compliant with regards to the Fiscal Transfers Act. Like I said earlier, we will lay it over later on.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, did I hear the Minister correctly when he said that he will lay over the 50%?

Mr. Chairman: I heard that too.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, if I may ask, could the Hon. Minister say to us what timeframe he is looking at in terms of laying over this needed information to the honourable House?

Mr. Persaud: In two weeks – 14 days.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I wish to yield to my Colleague, Hon. Ms. Lawrence.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you do not have a question. You cannot yield; I have to recognise the speaker.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I will put the question. The very line item under consideration is the new provision being sought for \$300 million, which is a capital expenditure, so I guess it is something new the Ministry intends to procure for the municipality and the NDCs. Could the Hon. Minister provide to this National Assembly the equipment or items to be procured, which will result in the \$300 million? May I also assist the Hon. Member by saying to him that when this new provision was made, obviously, when the information was submitted to the Ministry of Finance requesting the additional sums, you had to provide justifications for the additional sums required. Earlier, my Colleague, Hon. Volda Lawrence, requested the Minister to provide to this National

Assembly what percentage of the initial sums voted for the \$1 billion was expended as of 31st July, 2023. I do not think that is anything difficult for the Hon. Minister to provide to this House.

Mr. Persaud: I think I answered that question already, and my answer was that I will lay it over.

Ms. Ferguson: Could the Hon. Minister say to us what exactly he will be laying over? Is it the percentage on the \$1 billion already expended? And will you lay over information on this new \$300 million being sought.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister...

Ms. Ferguson: This is taxpayers' money, and we need to have accountability.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, if you ask the question and I am putting it, are you now going to comment? I think you are continuing where you left off at the last Sitting. Hon. Minister, what exactly are you laying over?

Mr. Persaud: I think the people of Guyana would have been happy to know, when the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change APNU/AFC was in government, if it did account for the taxpayers' money then. The People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) Government is accountable and your chance will come, not only here but at the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). We have already fulfilled the 50% of the \$1 billion. I will lay over the rest, like I said prior to this question.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Hon. Minister indicate to this House how much of this allocation is going to the Linden Town Council and what it is for, and at the same time if he can indicate what is being purchased for the Eccles/Ramsburg NDC?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, communication. The Hon. Member not understanding what I said is a huge problem. I said before, and I will say it again for the last time, that I will lay over the information.

Mr. Mahipaul: The standard of this particular line item requires the NDCs, the townships, and the city of Georgetown to submit a work programme that will capture the amount of money that is given to them by the central government as subventions. May I ask the Hon. Minister what the total sum for each NDC, township, and city of Georgetown is, referenced to the work programmes

they submitted? The work programmes that are submitted are often times higher than the subvention amount provided. Could the Hon. Minister say what the amount that was requested from these local authority areas is? And what percentage through this \$300 million is satisfying that percentage? And will the Hon. Minister be kind enough to lay over the project that these NDCs, town councils, and the city of Georgetown are seeking to engage in to satisfy this request that the ministry will provide *via* this additional sum in the subvention?

Mr. Persaud: The \$300 million that we are asking for comes under project and development assistance. It has nothing to do with fiscal transfers.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, I agree with the Hon. Minister, project development and assistance. The Legend states:

“Provision of capital subventions for municipalities and neighbourhood democratic councils.”

That is the definition of this particular line item. I go to the Financial Paper. It states:

“Provision of additional resources to support local authority areas.”

It is captured in the same line item that features subventions to these NDCs. When you are giving subventions to the local authority areas, the law that we passed is the Fiscal Transfers Act, which specifies how these resources are to be disbursed to these respective local authority areas. Could the Hon. Minister say to this House if he intends to follow the Fiscal Transfers Act in disbursing this money to the respective local authority areas?

Mr. Persaud: It is the same line item, but this is a project development assistance. As I said earlier, we will lay over how the money will be disbursed.

2.26 p.m.

Ms. Lawrence: I am asking on behalf of the residents of Aranaputa. They would like me to ask the Hon. Minister whether their request for the 4 x 4 would be granted within this allocation?

Mr. Persaud: My information is, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) lost in Aranaputa. They did not even contest. Aranaputa is a Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC). They are being looked at and they will get what is required.

Ms. Philadelphia: Under the same line item, we recognise that this is subvention for the local authority areas. My Colleague, the Hon. Member Mahipaul, would have asked for information specific to all 70 local authority areas. My question: is any of this sum requested being used to do work in Nabaclis because the roads there are terrible? Could the Minister respond to that or probably lay it over?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, has Nabaclis been included?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, like I said we will lay over the expenditure of the \$300 million to this House at a later date.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Regional Economic Transformation

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Hon. Minister indicate to the House which of the projects he is expanding on. This is because that is what the Legend states. How much of the \$1.5 billion you received from this House in February was spent as at 30th June?

Mr. Persaud: I must remind this House that in excess of 7,000 sugar workers were laid off, 1,972 Amerindians were fired and sent home and the Sustainable Livelihoods and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) programme, which was mismanaged by the APNUAFC, where barber chairs were purchased, where the Hon. Member Henry's son received millions of dollars, where the Hon. Member Figueira's brother received millions of dollars, unaccounted for.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you will have to withdraw those. Hon. Minister, those persons are not here to defend themselves.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, to date, \$680,835,000 was spent through the SLED.

Ms. Lawrence: A follow up, Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Minister. Minister, you have not spent half of the money provided in the budget, but you are asking this House to approve another \$250 million. Could you kindly explain that?

Mr. Persaud: I do hope that the Hon. Members on the APNU/AFC side understand what strategic planning is.

Mr. Mahipaul: Under the SLED Programme, as the Hon. Minister indicated, more than \$680 million has already been expended from the allocated \$1.5 billion. May I ask the Hon. Minister to say to this honourable House, from this now requested \$250 million, what is the criteria that will be used to disburse this money to the Economic Transformation projects that come through SLED for residents and citizens of Guyana to apply and receive? Could the Hon. Minister specify what is the criteria, please?

Mr. Persaud: These moneys will be spent on entrepreneurs, persons with small businesses and vulnerable individuals, like single parents, *et cetera*.

Mr. Mahipaul: I do understand that is the essence of the sum allocated and that was also the essence of the sum that was allocated before – \$1.5 billion. Since that approval, I have looked through all the newspapers and I even requested from the media houses as to whether they had an advertisement along the line inviting people to apply and to submit their proposals for the funding of the small projects that they may have and if they were asked to submit a proposal to the Ministry for it to be financed. I have gotten no response to that effect. May I ask the Hon. Minister, in view of the championing of transparency and accountability, what will the Ministry do to enhance transparency and accountability in the field of advertising for citizens to apply for these small grants, to enhance their economic transformational projects, in their respective communities?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government, led by Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali is a proactive Government. We do not wait for the people to come to us, we go to them. It is being done not in an *ad hoc* manner. Forms have to be filled out and these accounts are being audited.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am happy that the Hon. Minister is kind enough to indicate to this House that forms were filled in terms of satisfying the requests of citizens to ...

Mr. Chairman: Did he say that?

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, I heard him say “forms are filled out”.

Mr. Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Mahipaul: Perhaps he can correct me. I did hear him say “forms are being filled out when persons come to the Ministry” or when “they go”. Could I have that clarity before I continue, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister.

Mr. Persaud: Forms are available in the various regions.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, he did.

Mr. Mahipaul: Forms are available in the various regions. Is it that the people go to their respective regions or is it that you and your Government go to them? Which one? You said just now that you go to them.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, both.

Mr. Mahipaul: Okay. From the \$680.8 million that was already spent, would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to lay over the list of the economic transformation programmes that have been funded, thus far; the total sum that was allocated to each of the economic transformation programmes; and the location of these economic transformation programmes, that are intended to be Sustainable Livelihood and Entrepreneurial Development programmes in the respective regions?

Mr. Persaud: Like I said earlier, this SLED programme is properly audited.

Mr. Mahipaul: I do not doubt that it is properly audited. I am sure the Minister has all of the information to present to the Auditor General to be audited. There is no issue about that. I am not asking about audit, Sir. I am asking the Hon. Minister ...

Mr. Chairman: We know what you asked, and we heard what the Minister answered.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir. If you may permit me to ...

Mr. Chairman: If you are going to repeat the same question, I would not allow it.

Mr. Mahipaul: Pardon me?

Mr. Chairman: If you are going to repeat the same question, I would not allow it. You asked and he answered.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am asking if a list can be made available at his Ministry, where I am going to make myself available.

Mr. Chairman: At his Ministry now?

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, to peruse.

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

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, like I said moneys spent from the SLED programme are properly audited. Your time will come, Hon. Member Mahipaul, where you can raise your questions at the Public Accounts Committee (PAC).

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, the Remarks column states “the expansion of targeted initiatives”. Could the Hon. Minister list the targeted initiatives and indicate what factors informed the identification of those initiatives?

Mr. Persaud: All 10 regions.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, I did not ask where they were. I am asking, what are the initiatives. I am asking as a follow up, what factors informed the identification of these initiatives? I wish to add, what do you anticipate will be the impact of these initiatives on the communities?

Mr. Persaud: Because this is the SLED programme, based on the applications, we verify the payments.

Mr. Holder: I must say if moneys were allocated based on the answers provided then this Ministry would shut down. With respect to the sum, the \$250 million, the Legend states, under the Remarks column it is for the “Provision of additional resources to facilitate the expansion of targeted initiatives”. The question is, which targeted initiatives would be advanced through these sums in

Anna Regina, Charity/Urasara NDC and Moruka/Providence NDC. For example, there is a need for a new market in Anna Regina. There is a need for a new market due to the fire in Charity. There is much need for drainage and irrigation in Moruka/Providence in the Pomeroon. Which targeted initiatives would be advanced in these NDCs.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this is the SLED programme – Sustainable Livelihoods and Entrepreneurial Development.

Mr. Mahipaul: I heard just now, in response to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition's question, that the Hon. Minister indicated that this is based on applications. May I ask the Hon. Minister, how many applications they have in the system right now to satisfy the SLED programme requests?

2.41 p.m.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I do not have that information presently. I can safely say that it is in excess of 1000.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I heard the Hon. Minister saying that he does not have the information. Is he willing to lay it over to this honourable House?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, will you lay the information over?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, applications keep coming in all the time and not everyone would be qualified.

Mr. Mahipaul: Will the Minister be kind enough to lay over the total number of applications he has as of the 31st July, 2023?

Mr. Persaud: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I can.

Mr. Holder: For clarity's sake, is there any intent to construct a new market in Charity from these sums?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I think we are speaking about the SLED programme here.

Item: 3 13-134 Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development – Local Government Development – Project Development and Assistance & Regional Economic Transformation – \$300,000,000 & \$250,000,000 respectively, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item: 4 16-161 Ministry of Amerindian Affairs – Policy Development and Administration – Security Services - \$14,839,729

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, there was an approved sum in the House to the tune of \$50 million. We are now requesting \$14,839,729. May I ask the Hon. Minister if there are more areas that will be covered or was there an increase in the charges for security officers at various locations? I know that when this question was asked...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you have asked the question.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Minister of Amerindian Affairs [Ms. Sukhai]: Mr. Chairman, there has been an increase in the cost of security services. One contract came to an end in the month of May. The provisions for open tenders for the new contracting term and the award brought on board a bit higher cost for the new security service.

Mr. Mahipaul: Am I correct to conclude that the security services of the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs will now go for the contract period – which I am assuming will end in May of next year – and will be a total sum of \$64,839,729?

Ms. Sukhai: Mr. Chairman, no. It is up to December, 2023.

Ms. Hastings-Willaims: Could the Hon. Minister say to this House which companies will now take over the security services and what percentage of increase are they asking?

Ms. Sukhai: Through the Chairman, the new security company contracted or awarded the contract for the security of the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs is Hoosein's Security Service Incorporated. In terms of percentage, I do not have it in percentage but what it means is that in the first instance,

with the previous security service, it was more than \$4 million. The new security service is \$5,983,773 per month.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister tell us...

Ms. Sukhai: Let me correct that. The previous security service was \$4,700,000 per month. The new security service is now \$5,983,773.

Mr. Norton: Could the Hon. Minister say to this House what is the rationale given for this increase and was the Minister comfortable with the rationale that was given?

Ms. Sukhai: It was through the process of open tendering. They were the lowest responsive bidder.

Item: 4 16-161 Ministry of Amerindian Affairs – Policy Development and Administration – Security Services – \$14,839,729 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item: 5 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – \$2,969,753,906

Mr. Ramjattan: Hon. Minister, concerning the \$16 billion that was set aside for these three organisations, have these sums been expended already?

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I could give the disaggregation. For example, for the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA), the capital expenditure was \$6 billion. I am just giving him an idea. Yes. We can expend the money – the sum that is now being appropriated. For the capital budget, we would have already spent close to 75% of it. We have a number of other projects with the outreaches that His Excellency, the Vice-President, other Cabinet Colleagues and I, would have gone out and did. We have a number of other projects that people are now requesting and we want to start those projects to ensure that we put the systems in place to continue to improve our infrastructure.

Mr. Ramjattan: Minister, there is a \$16 billion that was a voted provision under this line item. All I am asking is, was the approximately \$16 billion spent out now that you want to come and get some more? That is what the question is.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I just explained. I am saying approximately 75% of that sum has been expended. I just said that. I am saying that we have new projects. Mr. Chairman, if the Hon. Member can listen, I said that we have a budgeted sum for capital projects. We already have approximately 75% of that programme ongoing. We are now coming to the House to ask for more money in the capital expenditure because of the outreaches we have done over the last few months. We have new projects on stream, and this is the money that we are coming to appropriate.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Chairman, what we have here as a supplementary provision has nothing to do with capital. I see it under current – \$2.9 billion. What he is telling me is about the capital and that he is coming for capital. This is current he is asking for. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] Please. Do you understand what he said?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, 75% of that programme would have been expended. I can layover that information on programmes that we have already started to the Hon. Member.

Mr. Ramjattan: Seventy-five percent of the \$16 billion has been spent. You have 25% left... [An Hon. Member: Plus.] Plus, the \$2.9 billion. From this \$2.9 billion, could you disaggregate for me what sums are going to be at the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority and what the \$2.9 billion is going towards?

Mr. Mustapha: The sum of \$2.507 billion for the NDIA; \$437,750 for the National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) and \$25 billion for the Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC) which gives a total of \$2,969,753,906.

Mr. Ramjattan: No, no, no, no, no. That is not what I am asking. Please, listen to me.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, allow him to finish. He was still on the floor.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I will lay over the programmes that entails the \$2.5 billion. I have it here. I can list them. I can go through it. Let me list some of those programmes that we will be doing for the Member's sake – a number of projects. For example, we have the desilting of drains at State Farm in Essequibo, Region 2 for \$3.3 million; repairs to two drainage structures at Providence, Lower Pomeroon River, Region 2 for \$3.5 million; repairs to northern sluice door at Golden Fleece, Region 2 for \$4,055,000; mechanical excavation of drainage and irrigation channel at Charles Garraway, Lower Bonasika, \$13,900,000; mechanical excavation of drainage and

irrigation channel at Rajendra Persaud at Aranaria, Lower Bonasika for \$13.9 million; mechanical excavation of drainage and irrigation channel at Lower Bonasika again for \$13.9 million; and mechanical excavation of drainage and irrigation channel at Free and Easy, West Bank Demerara. I can list them. There are 767 current projects that we will do rehabilitation repairs to.

For the NAREI, I can also speak about what we will be doing there. What we will be doing at NAREI – and I want the Hon. Member to listen. We will rehabilitate the nurseries across our country. What we have now in this country is a demand for planting materials. Over the last three years, we have seen farmers coming onboard in droves. We have seen that food production has improved tremendously. Food production has improved tremendously. All the seven nurseries in our country, we will ensure that we develop them to be more responsive to the needs of the farmers. I have the appropriation here. At the back here we have... Eleven nurseries. My apologies. The sum of \$69 million will go into that to do new nurseries and rehabilitate these nurseries. Places like Timehri, Kairuni, Number 63 – where you come from Mr. Ramjattan. Your family can get proper planting materials, *et cetera*. What we will also do is, we are now embarking on something called tissue culture. We started an experiment with tissue culture, and we are producing just about 13,000 plants annually – tissue culture plants/planting materials. What we are now doing is, we are working with a company from Republic of India – The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) – to develop large scale tissue cultures in Guyana. We will be able to produce one million plants annually for farmers to plant the different varieties. The sum of \$268.7 million has been allocated to this project. In another year or less from now, we will have that laboratory functioning. We have specialists from India. When His Excellency the President and I went there, we had a number of discussions, and they are already in the country looking at our system at the NAREI.

2.56 p.m.

In my budget debate I spoke about the shade house programme that we have. I said that we will replicate that across the country. We have about 150 young people now in Region 4 who are involved in shade house activity. That shade house at Mon Repos has earned approximately \$50 million for this year already. Less than a year and they have already earned \$50 million. I am now looking to take this programme across this country where we will purchase another 100 shade houses; to take them to places like Buxton, Region 6, Linden, Canal's Polder, and Region 2, so that we could have all the young people in our country go into this activity. Remember, I said that

we had a number of agronomists who would have completed their tertiary education and who are now working behind a desk. We want them to get involved in agriculture. We want agriculture to be more attractive, rather than in their opinion, they are seeing agriculture as a menial job, a job for old people who never went to school and so. We want to change that concept. We are having very good results. A lot of young people now are involved in agriculture, and they are now making it their livelihood, where they are putting not only their money, resources, and the help from the Government, but their skills into the agriculture sector. That is why the entire Caribbean today is looking forward for Guyana to drive that system. You are laughing Mr. Ramjattan, Hon. Member, but let me tell you, I sent people to Barbados. Prime Minister Mottley would have called. We sent specialists to Barbados. We have now sent specialists to Trinidad and Tobago, and they are helping to resuscitate the rice industry in Trinidad and Tobago. When you go to Trinidad and Tobago, they now have kudos for Guyanese. They want to work with us. That is the kind of way we have been doing things over the last three years. Guyana is driving this process and we will be successful.

Mr. Ramjattan: Is the Minister confessing to a misestimation in January when he did not estimate for all of this?

Mr. Mustapha: Absolutely not. As I said, when we planned our programmes last year, we had the budget out, now there are new things coming. We are not static like the APNU/AFC. We had a vision, and we have vision, that is why we are moving the sector. You are seeing that the sector is moving. You cannot just be like in a tunnel vision that you have, and just budget for a sum and spend it for the entire year. You have new things coming on stream. For example, if you look in the press yesterday, we have moved production of brackish water shrimp now from 1000 kilogrammes monthly to 120,000 kilogrammes now. We have moved that. That is a new sector. The other day we started the experiment at Lakes Capoey and Mainstay. You saw in the press. Tambaque is the result there. These are new things. I think the Opposition should wholeheartedly support these programmes. This will help the entire Guyanese society to move this process forward. That is why we are not putting all of our eggs in one basket and say the oil and gas sector will bring growth. We have growth in the non-oil sector. That is the point I was making. If one looks at the reports in the country at the end of this year, you will have bumper production in the agriculture sector.

Mr. Jordan: I recognise the Ministry of agriculture through the Minister is coming for another \$2.9 billion under current – almost \$3 billion. The National Drainage and Irrigation authority will receive \$2.5 billion. The Minister stated this expanded programme is as a result of visits from the Vice-President and new works coming on stream. In the month of February 2022, I wrote to the Minister of Agriculture, and these are the conditions of the drainage and irrigation canals in Region 5, to be specific No. 5 and No. 4 villages. Is it then that we have to wait to question the Minister until the Vice-President or the Minister visits No. 5 or No. 4 villages in order for these works to be done? This condition has worsened tremendously. Could the Minister answer that?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, hold a second. The question really should have been after you lay all that, is this area and these projections included in this sum?

Mr. Mustapha: First of all, I want to inform the Hon. Member that he talks to me on a regular basis. I do not know this misconception he is bringing to this House and saying that we have to wait until the Minister, the Vice President or the President go there. I normally go to Mahaica Mahaicony Abary – Agricultural Development Authority (MMA-ADA) in that area on a regular basis. We have our Member of Parliament, we have the regional and Vice-Chairman, we have a number of personnel in that area. The Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, knows that he could make contact. It was only during the last Parliament we had he spoke to me out there. He never mentioned it. Never mentioned that there are clogged canals and drainage in Region 5. I want to tell you, Mr. Chairman, that we have done thousands of rods of canals in Region 5. I do not know where he took that picture because remember he was talking not so long ago. He came to this House and misled it about the abattoir in Region 5, Onverwagt. Again, I am saying I do not know where the Hon. Member received those pictures from. I want to assure him that if there is any condition like that in Region 5, I am willing to look at it and we will ensure that we do it. This is because we take development to every corner in this country, and we have done work in a number of areas in Region 5.

Mr. Jordan: I just want to state that the Hon. Minister, through his Secretary, received this document on the 24th February. That is the first point. Also, I spoke to the Minister right out there, as he is making mention, and I said that you needed to pay keen attention to No. 5 and No. 4 Villages because I sent him a letter, and he said that he would respond to me. I am willing to lay

this over and, also, accompany the Minister on a visit as early as tomorrow morning to this community to see the state of this canal.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, again, this is not a session for making statements. This is a session for asking the Minister questions pertaining to the allocation which is being sought. I will now start using the guillotine about Standing Orders.

Mr. Norton: Cde. Speaker?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I have to give the Hon. Minister a chance to respond to the statement and the implicit question.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I want to say again, I want to reiterate my view that, in every single community, especially Region 5, what we are having in Region 5 is almost all the canals being desilted. As I said, the Hon. Member would have raised the issue and we have been doing work across Region 5. Right now, in Belladrum we are clearing lands and doing desilting of canals for farmers. Lands that were abandon for ages. They were in Government for five years and never did anything for the farmers in Belladrum. When we went there, the farmers told us the lands were abandoned for ages. The five years when the APNU/AFC were in Government they never went there to do work for the people in Belladrum. We have to do it. That is why we are doing the work all across Region 5. I am saying again, if the Hon. Member have those canals and those canals are clogged, we will clean those canals.

Mr. Norton: I just want to comment that a speaker should be... there should be fairness. You said to one of the Opposition speakers that they could only ask questions they cannot comment. It follows *Ipsa facto* that the person answering should only answer and not be able to comment.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I think my time here in the Parliament do qualify me as one of the specialists on the Standing Orders. For you to try and lecture me on that, I would not really take too kindly. What I was coaching the Hon. Minister about, he made two statements without asking that question. I led him into a question, and he repeated the same mistake he made. Be careful how you deal with six terms in the National Assembly.

Item 5 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – \$2,969,753,906 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 5: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – National Drainage and Irrigation Authority – \$4,000,000,000

Mr. Ramjattan: There is another \$4 billion I noticed here for facilities for drainage and irrigation. Is this drainage and irrigation the same body, the NDIA, that is going to spend that money?

Mr. Mustapha: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ramjattan: Could we have – and you do not need to read it out, but just for my purposes – a disaggregation of where in Regions 2, 3, and 4 you are going to spend this \$4 billion?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I am a bit confused. You said do not read it out, but you want a disaggregation. So, what...?

Mr. Ramjattan: No. The disaggregation, if he could lay it over.

Mr. Chairman: Good. I am now going to have to listen very keenly and actually...

Mr. Ramjattan: Sorry. My mistake, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: I am getting lectured on Standing Orders.

Mr. Mustapha: Sure, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Item 5: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – National Drainage and Irrigation Authority – \$4,000,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 5: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Guyana Livestock Development Authority – \$100,000,000

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Minister state what the additional resources are that are needed for the pasture development in Regions 2, 3, 5, and 10?

Mr. Mustapha: We will do these developments across, as the Hon. Member would have mentioned, in those areas in places like Region 5. We will do it at Dairy, Kabawa and Davis; those three areas. We will develop 6,000 acres of pastureland. You know now that we are building a milk parlour in Region 5. We already have a private milk plant built at Onverwagt there. Only yesterday, I delivered to farmers in Region 5 and Region 4, a number of milking machines. We are seeing the population in cattle now increasing, especially in dairy development that we have started.

In Region 5, we will expend \$88.7 million to do pasture development there. In Region 10, 300 acres of pasture will be developed at Kwakwani. I went there about six months ago and the farmers in Kwakwani said they were getting a lot of conflict with cash crop farmers, between farmers and cattle owners. We are developing the pastures. We will fence it and the cattle owners there will have that facility. We will expend \$4.3 million there. In Region 2, 300 acres is earmarked for pasture development at Aurora Zone in the Essequibo at a cost of \$4.3 million. In Region 3, 180 acres of pasture will be developed at Windsor Forest. This year, we have seen the growth in the dairy or the cattle industry by 9%. By the end of 2023, we are hoping with this development coming on stream, we will see the growth in the cattle industry, including dairy and beef by 12.1% approximately. That is the projection that we have.

Mr. Figueira: With regard to Region 10, the development with the cattle and the fenced area, you are going to use some of these resources to provide an area to rear cattle, would it also feature specialised grass to be grown in that same area there? Regarding that, would a water system also be included there?

Mr. Mustapha: Yes. We already imported the grass seed. We have a lot of grass seeds and we are working with the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) to develop these pastures across the country.

3.11 p.m.

Item 5: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Guyana Livestock Development Authority – \$100,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 5: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Contribution to Local Corporation – (GuySuCo) – \$1,510,000,000

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I see there is a provision for additional resources to facilitate the rehabilitation of 1,572 hectares of temporary abandoned lands at the Albion, Blairmont, Rose Hall and Uitvlugt estates. Could the Hon. Minister state if it would and how it would improve or develop the production of these estates and at what rate?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, this is a very important issue. You know that for a fact. I think the Hon. Member knows that the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) was one of the entities that the Opposition was on the verge of destroying. We are now bringing it back. We have seen a 14% increase in sugar production already this year. I am hoping, with the development of these lands, the lands that were abandoned by the A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) at the Rose Hall Estate where there are forests now grown... We have to clear those lands and do re-tilling and replanting to bring up the hectares so that the Rose Hall Estate would have enough cane to grind. I want to report to this Committee that by the end of September, the Rose Hall Estate will start operating and smoke will come out of its chimney once again. That is one of the promises that we have made to the people of our country, and we are now bringing that to reality. We have employed approximately 1,100 workers who were fired by the APNU/AFC. They are now, once again, in employment at the Rose Hall Estate.

Mr. Jordan: I have a follow-up question. I want to ask this specifically of the Minister. If he is going to open lands at these estates, what will be the new production targets? I want to get that out of the Minister and GuySuCo. The Guyana Sugar Corporation will be bringing more canes onboard and grinding more. What are the new targets? Would they be revised upwards, and would they reflect the inputs of the \$1.5 billion we are now putting into what it will get at the end?

Mr. Mustapha: Definitely, Mr. Chairman. If we are putting money to do re-tilling, replanting and getting new canes, we will have to have more sugar. The target for this year is 60,000 tonnes. We are hoping and are very optimistic that we will reach and make those 60,000 tonnes. Next year's

target will be 100,000 tonnes. This will contribute to that target. If I could go to the Rose Hall Estate, 600 hectares are to be rehabilitated. We are looking at 85 tonne canes per hectare. The estimated tonne canes in 2024 might be about 56,100 tonnes, which we are looking to give us another 4,315 tonnes of sugar. I have the breakdown like that for the other estates in terms of the 1,572 hectares of land that we will develop and put under cane cultivation.

Ms. Lawrence: I will begin by asking the Hon. Minister, through you, Mr. Chairman, to disaggregate the 1,572 hectares for the four estates listed.

Mr. Chairman: Do you want it orally or do you want it to be laid over?

Ms. Lawrence: He could tell me. It is only 1,500 hectares.

Mr. Mustapha: At the Rose Hall Estate, we will prepare 660 hectares, at the Albion Estate – 600 hectares, at the Blairmont Estate – 180 hectares, and at the Uitvlugt Estate – 132 hectares, giving a total of 1,572 hectares.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Hon. Minister kindly indicate to the Committee how many hectares he has now brought under cultivation at the Rose Hall Estate?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, approximately 4,000 hectares are under cultivation now. That is why we are starting the second crop of 2023 at the Rose Hall Estate this time.

Ms. Lawrence: Clarification, Mr. Chairman. For these 4,000 hectares which the Minister spoke of, is it land that was not planted that he said he is now recultivating?

Mr. Mustapha: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I heard the Hon. Members over there say that we are in Government for three years. We are in Government for three years and we have been preparing this estate all of the time since all of the lands were abandoned. We have replanted. We have replanted approximately 4,000 hectares and those are new canes. Now, we will be ready to start the Rose Hall Estate next month.

Ms. Lawrence: Minister, in December, when you came here for the additional funds, you said that were putting back approximately 2,000 hectares at the Rose Hall Estate and now you have come for more moneys to put another 660 hectares of land. Are you saying that with the voted provisions in the budget, you were able to put into cultivation the difference?

Mr. Mustapha: Yes, Mr. Chairman. For the Hon. Member's understanding, this is a work in progress. Cane is not a thing that you could plant today and get in another four or five months. It is a ratoon. The ratoon has been going on. The 2,000 acres that the Hon. Member referred to, prior to the end of the year you spoke about, which was December, were the canes before and those were the preparation we started when we started to plan the reopening of the Rose Hall Estate.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Minister kindly say to the Committee how many hectares he has been able to put into cultivation with the budgeted allocation?

Mr. Mustapha: It is approximately 4,000 hectares. It was 2,000 hectares for the last year which we spoke about. Before that, when we got into Government, we started the preparation of replanting and re-tilling at the Rose Hall Estate.

Ms. Lawrence: That is not what I asked but I will go on. Could the Minister kindly indicate to the Committee whether he would be able to provide the Committee with a fund flow or a utilisation table indicating the monthly intake and outflow of resources to the Corporation from all sources for the rest of the year? The supplementary states that it ends on the 31st December. What is it that will be coming into GuySuCo?

Mr. Mustapha: I could get the other funding. I could give, now, the disaggregation of Government funding directly to the Corporation. For the sale of sugar with other funding, I would provide that information at a later date and lay it over.

Ms. Lawrence: I would just like the Minister to layover that fund flow. That is all.

Mr. Mustapha: Definitely, Hon. Member. I will lay it over.

Ms. Lawrence: Based on the output of the first crop, how much is the expected sugar production for the year and how much is the expected earnings?

Mr. Mustapha: I did not hear the last part of the question, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, based on the first crop, do you have a revised for the year 2023?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, as I indicated earlier, the target this year is 60,000 tonnes. We have already made just over 10,000 tonnes, and I am very optimistic that we will make the remaining. For the approximate sales, the projection is about \$12 billion.

Mr. Jaiprashad: I just have a follow-up question for the Hon. Minister. After the land is tilled, what is the flood follow period that will be implemented?

Mr. Mustapha: That depends on the condition of the estate. I do not know if the Hon. Member knows about flood following. Flood following takes six months. In a six-month period, the field is flooded. It depends on the potential of hydrogen (pH) level of the field; it depends on what one wants; and it depends on the age of the ratoon. In GuySuCo, we have young ratoons. These days, we have the ratoons, and we are doing crop husbandry. We are putting in more fertilizer and we are putting in other chemicals to ensure we have proper growth. That is why one would see the tonne cane per hectare has moved from 40 tonne cane, when we took over, to 50 and 60 tonne cane now. The original target that we wanted was 80 tonne cane per hectare. I mentioned it. We are getting there. The yield will increase with the crop husbandry, the money and the agronomist practice that GuySuCo is doing now.

Mr. Jordan: To the Hon. Minister, with the expansion and opening of lands at Uitvlugt Estate, does it have the capacity to grind the volume of cane that will be planted over time with the expansion? With the Uitvlugt Estate failing miserably in the last crop of 2020, only producing just about 66,000 tonnes of sugar during that period, is the factory capable of handling the additional canes that will be planted?

Mr. Mustapha: The Hon. Member would know that prior to the closure of the Wales Estate, there were a number of cane farmers who were put on the breadline and who were supplying cane to the Uitvlugt Estate. The throughput at Uitvlugt Estate now is under capacity with the amount of cane there. The cane cultivation is small. We have put in a new turbine at the Uitvlugt Estate and it has the capacity to grind more than these canes. So, in the future, we will expand cane cultivation at the Uitvlugt Estate and the factory will have the capacity to grind more canes because the hectares will be increased.

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, with these additional funds and all the improvements in the Corporation, are you indicating to this Committee and the nation that the Corporation will be on

good financial footing, after these injections and, hence, we will not see you coming back to this Committee to ask for further funding for the rest of this year?

Mr. Mustapha: I cannot assure the Hon. Member of that because of the destruction that was done in the five years they were in Government, almost the entire estate collapsed. We have to do a lot of work and that is a work in progress. We will continue to rehabilitate GuySuCo because GuySuCo is one of the most important organisations in Guyana. We will continue to do it. When GuySuCo meets its peak, then we will stop.

Item 5: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Contribution to Local Corporation – (GuySuCo) – \$1,510,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

3.26 p.m.

Current Expenditure

Item 6: 31-311 Ministry of Public Works – Policy Development and Administration – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – 309,589,930

Ms. Ferguson: Through you, Mr. Chair, to the Hon. Member. Earlier, in February, the House approved \$1,081,156,000 for Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. I note that the request now is being made for an additional \$300 million. I note that in the remarks, the Minister has provided a disaggregation of the total sum, but could he inform the Committee as to the percentage of money spent from the initial sum as of 31st July, 2023? Also, what will this new provision cater to for the two organisations? Thank you.

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: I thank the Hon. Member for the question. The moneys being sought here are to provide support to the Berbice Bridge Company Incorporated (BCCI). I can indicate to you that the traffic flow at the Berbice Bridge had significantly increased when we did the computations and comparisons to what obtained before. The policy direction is that we continue to support the subsidies to the Berbice Bridge Company Incorporated.

Secondly, for the Transport and Harbours Department (T&HD), there is basically support for fuel. We have practically used up most, if not all, of what was allocated. I think the Hon. Members who

utilise that service would recognise that since we introduced online booking, the number of persons using the service – because of its convenience and predictability – has significantly increased. This is to the extent that His Excellency the President indicated that there will be an additional vessel to service that region. We are putting that vessel on test this weekend as well. As a matter of fact, I have a meeting on the sidelines of this sitting to facilitate that as soon as I am done. Hon. Member, this is just basically because of the increased usage. Due to the improvement of the efficiency of the service, more and more people are using it, so we require the subsidy.

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for his response. In addition to the questions put earlier, can the Hon. Minister assure this National Assembly that the new provisions being sought would suffice until the end of the year and we would not see him coming back for additional sums for these two organisations?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, as you are aware – because of your own professional field – when you are budgeting, you use assumptions that are based upon some amount of empirical data. If things change outside of the data that you are using, you cannot guarantee that things will remain the same. Based on the data that is available to us, the assumptions are that this is what is required to take us to the top.

Ms. Ferguson: I now move to line item 6251, Maintenance....

Mr. Chairman: You cannot move to that line item until I propose it.

Ms. Ferguson: I am sorry, Sir.

Mr. Patterson: If I heard the Minister correctly, he said that \$79 million is a subsidy for the Berbice Bridge Company Incorporated due to increased traffic. With the increased revenues that are being touted every time in the fastest-ever growing economy, is the Government considering increasing the subsidy and therefore reducing the cost of the Berbice Bridge for commuters between Regions 6 and 5? Right now, it is 10%. Is the Government considering increasing that subsidy?

Secondly, could the Hon. Minister say if the order against the Berbice Bridge Company Incorporated, which prohibits it from increasing its fees, is still in place? If so, why?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I could indicate to the Hon. Member that Government's policy is to ensure that it does not add any additional burden to the citizens of Guyana. Secondly, wherever Government intervention can alleviate the pain, suffering and difficult circumstances of people, it will make those kinds of interventions. I would like to remind this honourable Committee that the Berbice Bridge Company Incorporated is still a private company. While there were some interventions, including the takeover of the bridge by the last Government, we respect the fact that private sector investments must be guaranteed. While we manage and make interventions, we do not interfere unnecessarily with the investments of private individuals and companies. The decision about whether we make more interventions or not is one that has to be studied and at the appropriate time, that will be announced.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chair, maybe it is the acoustics in here, but I did not hear an answer. So, I will repeat.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you asked the question and the Minister responded. Do you have a next question? You asked the question and he responded.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I asked a direct question.

Mr. Chairman: Ask another question.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I have a follow-up.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Patterson: The Minister just stated that after the requisite studies have been completed, the Government...

Bishop Edghill: I did not say studies.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you will get a chance to talk. Go ahead, Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson.

Mr. Patterson: I am sure that I heard studies. We could ask the Hansard Department to check. Are there any studies, interventions, or policy documents? Is there anything to increase the subsidies for the Berbice Bridge? We, on this side of the House, also respect the private sector,

Sir. Can he also say if the court order prohibiting that private sector company, which he respects, is still in effect?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I guess the Hon. Member is asking if the actions that he and his Government took as it relates to the Berbice Bridge are still extant. I guess that is the question that he asked but in a different way. The answer to that is that we have, through the legal mechanism, engaged the Chambers of the Attorney General and the company. There were specific matters that were filed in the courts and those are being dealt with at the legal level for resolution and to ensure that we have a functional and manageable environment for the operation of the Berbice Bridge. I would not want to venture further into that since this is a matter that is engaging the courts.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much for that intervention. Could the Hon. Minister say what are the legal matters engaging the attention of the courts? From my recollection, this matter went to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) and was ruled in finality. It obviously would have been filed against him. So, could he say what legal matters are with the court?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, if the Hon. Member knows the details, I do not know why he is asking me. It is already in the public domain as he claimed. As far as I know, since I took office, being the gazetted Minister of Public Works, who engaged the Berbice Bridge Company Incorporated, I requested that the Chambers of the Attorney General engage the corporation, and it has so done. All the matters that were tied up in the court are being handled at the legal level at this time. Thank you, Sir.

Item 6: 31-311 Ministry of Public Works – Policy Development and Administration – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – \$309,589,930, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

**Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Maintenance of Roads
\$500,000,000**

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, through you to the Hon. Member, on this very line item 6251, Maintenance of Roads, we had a voted provision of \$2.7 billion. The Ministry is now requesting an additional \$500 million for additional resources due to an expanded work programme. My first question to the Hon. Member is, in February of 2023, you said that \$14.463 billion will be catered

for in this year's budget for new projects. Could you say to the Committee what percentage of this \$14.4 billion has been expended as of 31st July, 2023? That is one.

Secondly, what additional expanded programme that this new provision being sought – the \$500 million – would be catering for? I do not know if you would want to lay over the list of roads that are to be done in the various areas. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, would you want to lay it over?

Ms. Ferguson: He has to answer several questions first.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, before I even address the issue of laying over, I need to inform the Committee that the Hon. Member may want to relook at what she is talking about. We are talking about Maintenance of Roads, but she is engaging in capital project, Miscellaneous Roads/Drainage. This is the maintenance of roads for which we are asking for additional sums. When we are doing the capital, she will have an opportunity to ask those questions some other time here. We have to maintain the roads. One of the biggest challenges that we have had...and I need to use this opportunity and perhaps all Members of the National Assembly can cooperate. Building roads is one aspect of development. Maintaining roads is a major challenge.

3.41 p.m.

If we continue to have significant incumbrances on the shoulders of roads and the roads are not being drained – the water cannot get off when there is rainfall – people blocking drains and the rest of it, we will have deterioration of roads. We have to do weeding, cleaning, removing of the shrubs, the grass, and the excess waste and garbage that are dumped, unnecessarily sometimes, at the shoulders and in the drains. It is under this programme that we do those kinds of works. Potholes develop for different reasons and in different areas. We have to address that. This is where we do the maintenance of the roads. For the year, we have done a significant amount of work, and all the users of the East Bank corridor would appreciate that significant improvements have been made in maintaining that road. While we are seeking to do the capital work, traffic is flowing much faster than it used to because of those interventions. Persons around the city have seen that the potholes in the city are being addressed. Persons on the Corentyne highway would indicate to you that while there was significant damage that were done to the roadway in the Palmyra to Moleson

Creek stretch, it has been addressed and maintained. It is under this programme. People will tell you that in the Mahaica area where we have had failed culverts, and with some of the difficulties we have had, that maintenance of roads has been ongoing. This is where the moneys are being spent, Hon. Member. This is not a capital project.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the Hon. Member for correcting me. It was an oversight on my part, so I accept his correction. With the information provided earlier by the Hon. Member, would the Hon. Member be kind enough to lay over the information as it regards the expanded programmes that this additional sum will now cater for? Secondly, a number of residents reached out to me. So, I would like to find out, on their behalf, whether there are roads in Sophia, more so 'B' Field Sophia, in this new expanded programme. Also, are there roads in La Parfaite Harmonie to be done? I know for a fact that there is a collaboration between the Ministry of Public Works and the Ministry of Housing and Water to have some major works done on roads. Also, will this \$500 million cater for roads in areas such as the 'red road'? I am asking these questions on behalf of constituents who had reached out to me.

Bishop Edghill: I thank the Hon. Member for the question. The expenditure for the \$500 million is very short, so I can give it to the Committee and all the people of Guyana can benefit. Firstly, it is for the purchase of asphaltic concrete, and we are looking at about \$200 million to purchase asphaltic concrete. There is the maintenance of the road network in Georgetown and Region 4, which have some of the main thoroughfares that we have. There are times when, apart from the Special Projects Unit of the Ministry with its limited capacity, we have to engage other contractors to do some maintenance works. We are looking at \$150 million for that. There is the maintenance of the East Bank public road, to which I just referred. We anticipate that we will spend another \$80 million in works. And there is the maintenance of road shoulders and roadside infrastructure in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10. We will spend an additional \$70 million. That is a total of \$500 million.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Member.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, if you would just allow me, I know the Hon. Member asked about the Sophia area.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, go ahead.

Bishop Edghill: I think it is public knowledge, because I did visit Sophia and engage residents in the various fields, that we have indicated that we are programming about 30 roads for Sophia in 2023. Most of this will be done in concrete. It is not going to be done under this programme. It is capital works.

Ms. Ferguson: I know for a fact that the Hon. Member identified areas in which works are to be covered under this \$500 million and made reference to the East Bank. The East Bank is a very large corridor, so I would like to know exactly which areas on the East Bank.

Secondly, I would still love for the Hon. Member to provide the information to the Committee so we can share with our people.

Thirdly, could the Hon. Member say to this Committee what procurement method will be used to ensure that this \$500 million is properly accounted for?

Bishop Edghill: The entire East Bank corridor is contemplated for maintenance. That means we are talking from the Houston bypass all the way to the Cheddi Jagan International Airport Timheri.

Secondly, regarding the procurement process that will be used for the maintenance of the East Bank corridor, it is the Special Projects Unit of the Ministry of Public Works that has been tasked with that maintenance.

Ms. Ferguson: While I hear the Hon. Member saying that works will be done on the East Bank corridor from Houston all the way up to Timehri, the Hon. Member will agree with me that just a few weeks ago Mr. Blinken was here. I know that massive corrective works were done on the East Bank corridor. Just a week ago, I traversed that area, and I did not see any potholes, amongst every other thing to which the Hon. Member referred. I just need clarity on whether some portion of this money will indeed go to works that were already done on the East Bank corridor from Houston to Timehri.

Bishop Edghill: I think I have made it very clear. Sometimes we miss the big picture which is that safety comes before politics. What we have been doing in the Ministry of Public Works is to improve safety of our road users. You would have seen a new phenomenon, teams of men and women picking up sand and debris off the road. Just recently, we had to put out a statement reminding truck drivers that it is against the law to travel without covering their bricks, sand, loam,

and garbage. It is *the devil's own job* to keep the East Bank and the Linden/Soesdyke highway clean. Right now, a major intervention is required in the area of Splashmin's Hotel and Resort, where there is a broken barranca. You can have about 40 truckloads of sand that need to be scooped up off that road. Vehicles have run off the road as a result of the sand. The potholes are one thing. There are times when we have to go with machines to clear sand, entire truckloads of sand, entire truckloads of garbage and mud that people dump on the corridors of the road. We have to be able to make drainage to get the water off the road. The Hon. Member who asked the question functioned in this Ministry as a Minister within the Ministry, and I am sure the Hon. Member is fully well aware of the challenges, even though they did not address them while they were there. At minimum, I think they should appreciate the fact that this Government is addressing the challenges that exist at this time.

Ms. Philadelphia: I heard the Hon. Minister mention that this \$500 million will be used for road maintenance across. I am asking if any consideration was made specifically for Victoria West sideline dam and Nabaclis in this sum.

Bishop Edghill: The works that we will be doing under capital project will cover the concerns that the Hon. Member is raising.

Mr. Holder: I heard the Minister mention Region 2. I believe the Minister said that there would be some rehabilitation to the road shoulders. Being somebody from the region, critical work is needed to the asphaltic surface of the public road. Just months ago, huge sums were spent to repair the road. [An Hon. Member: How much was spent?] I do not know; the Minister can tell you how much. We are quickly returning to a bad state with regard to the roads. For example, Airy Hall, which was repaired, is back in a bad state. That is an area just opposite I think it is the Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL) outlet. There are bad areas in Queenstown, Aberdeen and New Road. Sections of New Road was done about three times since the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) took office. We also see the road at Charity constantly deteriorating. The Minister would know that because he is often in the region. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible.)] Being in the region and actually doing work is something different. I am asking if there is a provision in this \$500 million that caters for general repairs to the main thoroughfare in Region 2.

Bishop Edghill: I thank the Hon. Member for appreciating that work was done, because we had already executed four sectional repair contracts and we have another four sectional repairs on the main thoroughfare, Supenaam to Charity, that are being executed. The challenges that we have in Guyana with repairing roads, some of it, people might laugh and make fun. To shut down a main thoroughfare to carry out a full rehabilitation would be a huge challenge for the people in that community and the Government. What we have been seeking to do when we have these real challenges... Like what happened in the Essequibo, because we recognised that road has been there for a number of years. It has been heavily used. I guess the volume of traffic is beyond what the design life catered for. We have been doing sectional repairs and are seeking to ensure that at all material times the thoroughfare is safe, and people can traverse within specific times to get about their business. I thank the Hon. Member for raising those concerns. We have already done some work. From these sums, we will continue to execute the others that need to be done.

3.56 p.m.

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

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Hon. Minister spoke about a number of road works to be done in Region 10. Minister, I did mention to you about the \$1.6 billion I have read about that is going to be invested in Region 10, which we welcome, of course. We know that there is a minimal subvention at the local government for the municipal council and obviously they cannot do roads. We welcome these community roads. What I am concerned about Hon. Minister is that in some communities the original size of the road is being reduced to a smaller road.

Bishop Edghill: In Linden?

Mr. Figueira: Yes, Wisroc community, for example.

Bishop Edghill: Okay.

Mr. Figueira: The wider roads are now being reduced, but we do welcome the upgrade in the roads. Is there a reason why those roads are being reduced in size? With regard to the \$1.6 billion investment in community roads, would all of those roads be concrete roads?

Bishop Edghill: We are discussing here maintenance of roads. The roads that are being maintained in Linden are being maintained. We are not reducing any size of any road that I know of. We have expended \$136 million in Region 10 on maintenance work. That means, for example, when we had the big wash away on the Casuarina Drive – I hope I called it correctly – areas like that; when we had to fix in front of the Guyana Forestry Commission, where the trucks were parking and digging in when they were pulling off; and the main thoroughfares we had to make interventions.

The \$1.6 billion that the Hon. Member is referring to is in the capital projects and that is new roads. In the design of new roads, the Ministry's laboratory and design department is engaged in the testing of the soil, water flow and other conditions. Based upon that, they determine what is the design that the road will need to have – if they need to use fabric, how many inches of crusher run, if there is need to put in special drains and all the rest of it. The designs of those roads are being done by the technical people. We are not reducing sizes of roads; we are seeking to expand our road network. The entire programme of the Irfaan-Ali-led-administration is expanding road network, reducing travel time, giving people greater access and ensuring, in some instances, we take people out of the mud and slush that they have been living in for years. Thank you, Sir.

Item 6: 31-312 – Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Maintenance of Roads - \$500,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 6: 31-312 – Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Demerara Harbour Bridge – \$568,705,860,000

Ms. Ferguson: I note we had an initial voted provision of \$600,000,000. Perhaps, the Minister would be kind enough to let the House know, as at 31st July, the percentage expended thus far. For the new provision being sought, \$568 million and change, I note here in your legend you have:

“Provision of additional resources to undertake critical rehabilitation works, specifically the rehabilitation of high span and fabrication and rehabilitation of pontoons”.

I note for a fact just last week you did some work, approximately 72 hours of work on the Bridge. Is the House to understand that this provision being sought will take care of works that were done

or will it take care of new works which are to be done? Thirdly, will this suffice and you will not return to the House for additional sums before the end of the year 2023? Thank you very much.

Bishop Edghill: I thank the Hon. Member for the question. I would have been quite satisfied if the Hon. Member would have started by congratulating the men and women of the Demerara Harbour Bridge for a fantastic job in getting Span 9 replaced within record time, to ensure that the people of Guyana receive the continuous service. Since she did not do that, may I use this opportunity, from us here in the National Assembly, to say to the management, the Board of Directors and the persons who were engaged in that humongous task, who rallied the storm and went beyond the call of duty, in getting the work done ahead of time, our deep appreciation for what they have done. The moneys that are being sought are to ensure that the contracts and engagements continue. We have pontoons that have to be rehabilitated. To answer the question, all the moneys that were allocated, spent; all spent. We have contracts that are ongoing that need to be satisfied. That is why we are here asking for the money. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Holder: The Demerara Harbour Bridge has been around since 1978, I believe, which is a remarkable project done under the People's National Congress Government. It has survived well beyond its expected useful life. Sometime last year it suffered severe damage. According to the Minister, the cost reported, at least in the newspapers, is around \$1 billion. The circumstances then would have given the Government an opportunity to do a major assessment of the Bridge. At the same time, the Government would have entered into agreements to have a new bridge built just nearby. Given these facts, any competent government would have developed a plan for the existing bridge, going forward. A few months ago, we had the 2023 Budget and so one would have expected that with whatever assessment they would have done, whatever assessment we expect them to do, given that there was a major problem with the bridge, the Government would have put forward a proper plan and allocate adequate resources to deal with the bridge, going forward. My question is, what is the plan for this bridge, going forward? Why is it that just a few months later, after the Budget, the Government now returns to this National Assembly asking for practically 100% of the sums that they have just received under the Budget, to do, according to what is labelled here, more maintenance and rehabilitation. Is it the case of a lack of proper planning? **[Hon. Members: (Inaudible)]** I have asked one or two questions already and I am asking yet another question, is it the case of a lack of proper planning or budgeting? Over to the Minister.

Bishop Edghill: The Hon. Member, Mr. Holder, is putting me in a position where I cannot help but to respond and explore. The management decisions for the repair and rehabilitation of the Demerara Harbour Bridge, which was known with its defects, breakages, and issues of safety, was known under the APNU/AFC and they did nothing about it, absolutely nothing. We were putting Guyanese at risk by having them use that bridge in the condition that we inherited in 2020. That is the reality. The documents that came from the bridge to the then Minister, stating what was required and the sums that were required, are available but nothing was done. The issue that the Hon. Member should be saying is, thanks to the PPP/C for improving safety of the Guyanese people by ensuring that Span 9 was rehabilitated and replaced, the damages on the high span were fixed, the proper alignment of the bridge and the buoys that hold the bridge stable are fixed, and the pontoons that are taking in water and rotting are being fixed. That is what we have been doing. I do not think that in this instance that anyone of us in the PPP/C Cabinet would be reckless just to come to splurge. We are not in the splurge mode.

The Demerara Harbour Bridge is a corporation that earns. When we come to this House, it is to supplement what they cannot do with the revenues that they garner. If you look at the Reports of the Demerara Harbour Bridge, which are tabled in this National Assembly, the Hon. Member and other Members would be able to see how the moneys that are collected from Demerara Harbour Bridge are expended. When we come to this House and ask for additional support, it is to ensure that what they cannot do as a corporation, we support from the Consolidated Fund. That is all we are asking for here.

Item 6: 31-312 – Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Demerara Harbour Bridge – \$568,705,860,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 6: 31-312 – Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Miscellaneous Roads/Drainage – \$25,000,000,000

Mr. Patterson: Could I ask the Minister, because this is on capital and it encompasses all the preceding questions, as of July what is the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) percentage in expenditure for the Ministry?

Bishop Edghill: We are dealing here with Miscellaneous Roads. I can disclose to the Hon. Member in this House that we have already, as of 31st December, expended 81% of the allocation under Miscellaneous Roads.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you for that lovely number quoted there, Sir. As you know the Half-Year Report has been done. Maybe the Minister and the Ministry of Public Works is listed as spending only 25% at the end of June. Is the Hon Minister saying that the figures quoted by the Ministry of Finance are incorrect? If not, what are they?

4.11 p.m.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I do not know from where the Hon. Member manufactures his numbers. I have just checked with my Permanent Secretary (PS) and my team here, and his number is way off. I do not want to get into a preamble about PSIP; I am dealing with Miscellaneous Roads.

Mr. Chairman: Is it eighty-two percent?

Bishop Edghill: I think it is 81.2 % of the total expenditure. Mr. Chairman, I could help the Hon. Member by giving a report on what we have been doing in terms of Miscellaneous Roads, because the people in Guyana keeps asking for roads and we have to appreciate that a lot has been done.

Mr. Chairman: We have to appreciate too that we have not done quarter of the business for the day.

Bishop Edghill: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I can indicate to you that in 2020 we did 151 roads; in 2021 we did 198 roads; and listen to this number, in 2022 we did 2,251 roads. For 2023, to where we are right now, we have 378 contracts that are under execution, and a number of other roads at the procurement stage. Sir, what we are asking this additional money for is to do an additional 300 roads on the East Coast of Demerara, an additional 100 roads on the East Bank of Demerara, to make another 300 roads in Region No. 6, to put in another intervention of another billion dollars' worth of capital works in Region No. 2 of which the Hon. Member, Mr. Holder, would know about, and to do that \$1.6 billion worth of work that Mr. Figueira quoted here in the House. That is what we are discussing here at this time.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I will keep making this point because I would like it to be in the *Hansard*.

Mr. Chairman: I would like to ask a question and do not make points.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I am saying that the Minister's percentages on Miscellaneous Roads are commendable. Sir, his percentages overall make it look as if his entire Ministry is just working on miscellaneous and urban roads as well. [**Mr. McCoy:** What is the point?]

Mr. Chairman: And will you give him more money?

Mr. Patterson: He will tell you; he is about 55% on urban roads according to this. Sir, this Ministry, and that is the question everyone has... \$149 billion was allocated for 2023. Currently, as of last week Friday, they only expended 30%. I know the Minister wants to deflect. However, the half year report is here, Sir. They have only expended approximately \$45 billion of the \$149 billion. The people of Guyana would like to know, if you can only spend \$45 billion in eight months, why are you coming for \$33 billion?

Mr. Chairman: I will give the Hon. Minister a chance to comment but we are speaking to specific line items here, and while we will also be seeking the policy generally, I think we have to focus our questions on the specific line items.

Bishop Edghill: I would want to assure the Hon. Member that is asking the question, and all Guyanese, that the Ministry of Public Works and its team of engineers and officers that are seeking to execute Guyana's modernisation and transformation will do everything within its power to deliver like we did in 2020, 2021 and 2022. We closed our PSIP in 2022 at 89%. The Hon. Member that is asking the question has never come close to that percentage while he served as Minister.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, just before I put my question, I want to say to the Hon. Member and this House that the Coalition Government, through the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, surpassed the percentage, other than 2016, Sir. I just want to put that on record.

Mr. Chairman: Put a question on record, please.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I am moving to the question on this very line item, Miscellaneous Roads for which \$25 billion is now being sought. From the initial voted provision in February, the

\$31.9 billion, could the Hon. Member state to this Assembly what amount went to new projects for 2023?

Bishop Edghill: The roll over projects accounted for \$14 billion out of the total sum, the rest went to new projects, \$17 billion.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, did I hear the Hon. Member stating earlier that \$17 billion went to new projects for 2023? If I can help the Hon. Member to recall...

Mr. Chairman: Do not help him, just ask the question and let him answer.

Ms. Ferguson: For the new...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I just gave the floor to the Minister; yes, Minister.

Bishop Edghill: To make it clear, \$17 billion went to roll over projects, because the Hon. Member would recall that late in 2022 we came here for a supplementary, where we went out and we explained a number of new projects, and \$17 billion out of that \$31 billion went to complete those projects that were rolled over and \$14 billion went to new projects.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, if we are to go to the *Hansard* of 31st January, 2023, on page 8898, the Hon. Member mentioned to this house that \$14. X billion were for roll over projects and \$14.4 billion went to new projects. Earlier, the Minister explained that the sum of 2,000 and something roads were done thus far. The *Hansard* will show that the Minister is quoted as saying \$1,085 roads were done for 2023. My question to the Hon. Member, with regard to the \$25 billion now being sought, could the Hon. Member provide to this House a disaggregation of the \$25 billion now being sought? I do not know if he is willing to lay it over or if he is going to...

Mr. Chairman: Say it over.

Ms. Ferguson: ...identify, but I prefer the information to be laid over. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, would you lay it over?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I have already given that. I have already given that. Three hundred roads on the East Coast of Demerara...

Mr. Chairman: She wanted a disaggregation; village by village.

Bishop Edghill: One hundred roads on the East Bank of Demerara, three hundred roads in Region 6, \$1 billion in Region 2, \$500 million in Region 3, \$1.6 billion in Region 10, and \$1 billion in Region 5.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, the very line item, a follow-up to the Hon. Member.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: Three hundred roads whether in Georgetown, in Regions 4 or 5, \$1 billion in Region 2, is not helpful to me, Sir. I need a list of the three hundred roads to be done so that when we go out into the areas to our constituents, we would let them know that X road in Y village will be done. That kind of information I am looking for, Sir. Thank you very much.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I thank the Hon. Member for offering to assist me with my job and our job at the Ministry, but we do that in every community, and we will continue to announce to the people which roads because, when we go into communities, we engage in consultations, about priorities and the rest of it. That is what we have been doing. Thank you.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, from your statement that you just made, am I to understand that there are no provisions for roads in Region 7 under this line item?

Bishop Edghill: The roads in Regions 7, 9, 1, and 8 are dealt with under a different programme that is called the Hinterland Programme. Thank you.

Item 6: 31-312 – Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Miscellaneous Roads/Drainage - \$25,000,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 6: 31-312 – Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Urban Roads/Drainage – \$1,000,000,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member. Hon. Member, I note that in February, the sum of \$1.5 billion was approved and voted on in the House. Could you say to the Assembly what percentage of that amount has been extended as of 31st July, 2023? My other

question to you is with regard to the new provisions being sought, \$1 billion for the provision of additional resources to facilitate the construction and rehabilitation of urban roads. Would you be kind enough to provide us with a disaggregation of this sum and would you be kind enough to hand over the information to us, the Hon. Members of this House?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, as of the 31st December, 59.3% of the sums appropriated by the Appropriation Bill of 2023 was already expended. But the Hon. Member and other Hon. Members would know that even though you would have expended 59.3% contracts that are being executed means that you have sums that are committed. The moneys that are being sought is to deal with additional things and interventions that needed to be done in the urban centres. New Amsterdam has seen a significant amount of work and I am sure all the people of New Amsterdam who cried that they were neglected are now quite happy because they are seeing people from their community executing the work in their community. Residents of Georgetown have seen the same thing and much of the intervention is not only roads, but it is also drainage and there is a continual cry for interventions of drainage in the south of Georgetown. We have been making those interventions, so we have to continue to make those interventions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4.26 p.m.

Mr. Ramjattan: I just want for information, urban roads: what is the average cost per mile for urban roads?

Bishop Edghill: The average price per kilometre is about \$60 million. Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ramjattan would be *au fait* that, depending on where you are doing the work and sourcing material, the price would vary, but it is an average of \$60 million.

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Urban Roads/Drainage – \$1,000,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Bridges \$2,104,546,800

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Hon. Minister tell us, this provision he is seeking here, what additional works it would do? In the budget, you budgeted for this bridge, and you are coming six months after, we have not seen anything – we did not see a sketch, we did not see anything up there – but

you come here and you are asking us to give you another \$2.1 billion. We gave you more than \$3.6 billion.

Bishop Edghill: The Hon. Member would be pleased to know that the moneys that are being sought here are for the four-lane bridge that would link Mackenzie and Wismar. This is moneys for the downpayment, or I should say the mobilisation advance towards that project, estimated. Dr. Singh, when he did his 2023 Budget speech, did mention the fact of bridging, the Wismar/Mackenzie four-lane bridge. There were no moneys for that specific project. Now, we are at an advance stage where we are making final arrangements and we are asking for this appropriation to facilitate the engagement of getting that project moving. This is not money for the Demerara Harbour Bridge.

Ms. Lawrence: Clarification, Mr. Chairman, yes. I did not speak about the Demerara Harbour Bridge. I am speaking about the Wismar Bridge as mentioned here on page 44 of the Minister's budget presentation, where he spoke to the construction of the Wismar Bridge, replacing the old bridge. An allocation here for bridges of \$3.630 billion was voted in that budget. I am asking the Minister now, specifically, this \$2.1, what is it for? What did you use the \$3.6 to do?

Bishop Edghill: Bridges as indicated here is part of a wide programme. We have 32 bridges that are under construction from Kurupukari to Lethem, and another 13 bridges that are under construction from Mabura Hill to Kurupukari. The moneys at the budget time catered for those 45 bridges that were being done along the corridor; plus, other work in bridges that we do in communities and the rest of it. This was the bigger project. At the time of the budget, we spoke about the Wismar/Mackenzie bridge, but there was no allocation that was made specifically for that project. The four-lane bridge, which is what will be called the Wismar/Mackenzie bridge, would be 220 meters long; it would be 13 meters of vertical clearance from the river; it will have a pedestrian and cycle lane; and there will be 550 meters of approach roads and two roundabouts. That is what we are envisaging to engage at Region 10 for the Wismar/Mackenzie bridge.

Ms. Lawrence: Follow up: could the Hon. Minister indicate whether the moneys for the feasibility study and the drawings, *et cetera*, came from the \$3.6 billion or whether that is now included here? I would also like to ask you, Minister, whether there would be any foreign funding for this bridge?

Bishop Edghill: The answer to your question is no moneys from this are being sought for feasibility studies and the rest of it. This is for construction. It is a designed-built project that we are engaging in. At this time, we envisage that this bridge would be built with local funds. The advance is what we are seeking here.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Hon. Minister then tell us what is the estimated cost of the bridge?

Bishop Edghill: The estimated cost is somewhere in the vicinity of about US\$35–36 million.

Ms. Ferguson: I was trying to get my document before standing to my feet. I recall that loan agreements came to this National Assembly. One such loan agreement was specifically for the Wismar Bridge. Earlier, I heard the Hon. Member say, when asked by my colleague, that this bridge would be fully funded by local component. Could the Hon. Minister explain to this House the reason for the loan coming to the National Assembly and why it is not reflected in the legend here under specific? As I am on my feet, Sir, I have two other questions. One, is there a design currently, whether in draft or working on, and whether this design has been made public? What is the duration for the construction of this new four-lane, in the words of the Minister, Wismar Bridge? Thank you very much.

Bishop Edghill: I was looking for the Minister with Responsibility for Finance to deal with the issue of loan agreements and the rest of it. I do not recall a specific loan agreement for the Wismar/Mackenzie Bridge. What I recall was that there was discussion and engagement with the Saudi Fund for investment for possible financing. I think what we would have brought to this National Assembly is a loan agreement for the construction of the Linden Soesdyke Highway, which I think is now a loan of \$200 million. The loan agreement for the East Bank upgrade, which is with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), is \$116 million, somewhere there about. I would leave that to the Minister with Responsibility for Finance to answer that question, because I have no recollection of a loan agreement specifically for the Wismar Bridge.

Ms. Ferguson: If I am to turn the Hon. Member's attention to an article carried by *Guyana Times* dated 5th June, 2023 and the headline reads:

“Govt to sign US\$150M loan with Saudi Arabia for construction of Wismar Bridge”

I know the agreement was laid in this House.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, let us wait until the Minister is able to consult with the Minister with Responsibility for Finance and we will get... because you have him for a few more items. Am I right?

Bishop Edghill: I was just consulting with our Chief Planning Officer – for the purposes of the record his name is Mr. Bernard Lord from the Ministry of Finance – to ensure that we get the answer. We are dealing here with the bridge. I am advised by both my PS as well as the Chief Planning Officer that the bridge is being funded by local funds.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, to the Hon. Member, I am just serving you a reminder to my two other questions: One, the design and when was it made public; and two, the duration for the construction of this bridge.

Bishop Edghill: This is a designed-built contract.

Ms. Ferguson: The Hon. Member mentioned that this is a designed-built bridge. Could the Hon. Member inform the National Assembly who is designing and who will also be building, whether a consultant or a contractor were engaged for the preliminary works to be done? Also, since I am on my feet, the Hon. Member is yet to answer my last question regarding the duration of its construction.

4.41 p.m.

Bishop Edghill: This project is envisaged as a designed-built contract. At the time of the conclusion of arrangements or the engagement of the contractor, the design would be agreed upon. For the benefit of the Hon. Member and all other Hon. Members, we anticipate that this bridge would be finished once we can get a contract executed before 31st December of this year, that is within 18 months or a maximum of two years, we should have this bridge.

Mr. Figueira: Minister, with regard to what you just posited, has the area where the bridge will be placed already been identified?

Bishop Edghill: Are you asking about the location?

Mr. Figueira: Yes.

Bishop Edghill: Yes.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you.

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Bridges – \$2,104,546,800 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works - Public Works – Hinterland Roads – \$1,500,000,000

Ms. Hastings-Williams: I will now redirect my question under this project code 1405200, Hinterland Roads. Is there any provision under this project code for roads in Region 7?

Bishop Edghill: The allocation of \$1 billion for roads in Region 7 is what we are working with. Mr. Indar, not so long ago, had a visit to the area. We have been engaging residents in consultations. We have a number of projects that are already designed. As a priority, however, because of the need, the Three Miles – Four Miles Road is in a bad state now, so that is going to be addressed as well as a number of other interventions. There is \$1 billion worth of work for Region 7.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Hon. Minister, for that good news for the people of Three Miles to Four Miles in Bartica. My follow up question will be, what is the length of the road that is to be done between Three Miles to Four Miles and what materials would be used? Is it going to be an all-weather road, a concrete road, *et cetera*?

Bishop Edghill: We anticipate that we will do, at minimum, 1,000 metres of rigid pavement concrete.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister state what is to become with the remaining of the road because while the residents – I know that persons were out protesting and all of that because of the dilapidated state of the road currently – will be thankful for that piece of the road to be done there that is supposed to be done with concrete and that is just one mile of road from Three Miles to Four Miles? There are significant damages to the road from One Mile right through to Three Miles. I could dare say that the secondary school at Three Miles will be reopening very soon and the

children have to traverse that road. What is to become of that road? When should the people be expecting any work being done there?

Bishop Edghill: Politics as it is in Guyana is that the protest that the Hon. Member just referred to came weeks after it was known that we are making an intervention for rigid pavement concrete road at Three Miles to Four Miles, so that is politics as it may.

The issue that was raised, for the benefit of all the people in Regions 1, 7 and 8, our intent is in a phase manner to build out rigid pavement concrete roads. While we may not have all of the moneys immediately to do five kilometres of roads in one area, at minimum, one kilometre at a time, rigid pavement concrete road... Of course, one would know that when rigid pavement concrete roads are being built there are difficulties in terms of usage of the road while it is under construction as against if one is building asphalted concrete roads. The assurance is that while we are committed to do one kilometre now where that section is, we will continue the rigid pavement concrete road. In Bartica, we are looking to improve the drainage as well as the other interlocking roads. We are continuing to do work at Byderabo, I could tell all of you that... [An Hon. Member: Is Agatash one?] Yes, Agatash. Just recently, I did receive a text from some of the truckers thanking us for the intervention at 21 Miles, so all of you would be pleased to know that. For the Issano main access road, we want to get some work done there. For the Kaburi Village, the internal roads... We want to do some work at Karau to Blue Mountain, Labakabra Creek bridge and the access to the Karau Village – there are going to go be some interventions there, internal roads at Foulmouth and the Five Miles housing scheme network that you were basically talking about in a phased manner. We have other interventions that we have slated that as moneys become available, we will be able to continue to do in Region 7 directly.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, for that breakdown. Hon. Minister, I ask that you understand why I am asking this question because, as I said earlier, the road at the beginning of One Mile right through to Three Miles... I want to know if there is any provision now for work to begin and how soon it may begin so that persons would be able to use that road, particularly, with the reopening of school.

Bishop Edghill: For the Hon. Member, my understanding is that the one kilometre of rigid pavement concrete that is being undertaken at this time will cater for sectional repairs that will see

the entire thoroughfare being addressed but the bad part, which is the majority of the work, is in that three miles area but there will be sectional repairs.

Ms. Fernandes: The second part is, how soon could we expect to see that work beginning?

Bishop Edghill: It is in the procurement stage. We are in the procurement stage.

Ms. Fernandes: I am hearing Mr. Indar saying in a week's time.

Bishop Edghill: We are in the procurement stage.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let us keep it to the Chairman.

Ms. Fernandes: Okay, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Is it in a week's time as the Junior Minister is stating?

Bishop Edghill: We are in the procurement stage, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. It is in the procurement stage.

Bishop Edghill: I cannot anticipate when I will get back the valuation report.

Mr. Chairman: The senior Minister does not want to give a definitive time. It is at the procurement stage.

Bishop Edghill: We want to get it done as fast as possible.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Could the Hon. Minister be kind enough to disaggregate the amount of moneys that falls under this project code for the Regions 1, 7, 8 and 9? Then, could you also state whether all of the roads in these three regions will be concrete and their lengths? You can lay it over or you can state it now.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister could you lay it over, please? That is the question.

Bishop Edghill: It is brief so it would not take much time. It is \$1.4 billion for the rehabilitation of roads in Region 1; in Region 7 – \$1 billion; in Region 8 – \$600 million; and Region 9 – \$1

billion. Except for Region 9, most of the roads that are being done are rigid pavement concrete roads.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, just click the bottom once at least let it catch my eyes and then I will give you the floor.

Mr. Sinclair: I thought that Ms. Hastings-Williams asked part of that question before, but I would be grateful if the Hon. Minister could lay that over to the National Assembly for us.

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works - Public Works – Hinterland Roads – \$1,500,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works - Public Works – Sea and River Defence Works – \$600,000,000

Ms. Ferguson: Project code 1501400 – Sea and River Defence Works: There was a voted provision of \$3.5 billion in February, 2023. My first question to the Hon. Member is if this entire sum has been exhausted as at 31st July, 2023, if not, what is the balance on the total sum? I now recognise that you are seeking an additional... Mr. Chairman, he could answer the question.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Hon. Member. I was waiting for you to sit.

Bishop Edghill: Seventy per cent of the sum that was appropriated has been expended but the total sum has been committed because works are still ongoing in some areas.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you, to the Hon. Member for his response. I noted that the new provision being sought is \$600 million. In the legend, the remarks states:

“Provision of additional resources to address emerging threats along our sea defence.”

Could the Hon. Minister say whether this provision is for ongoing works from the \$3.5 billion or whether these are new works to be undertaken?

Bishop Edghill: For the benefit of the Hon. Member, thank you for asking the question. We are talking here about new works. Construction of rip-rap sea defence at Orangestien, East Bank Essequibo; construction of rip-rap between Essex and Concord, Mahaica, East Coast Demerara; construction of steel sheet pile river defences structure at Grove, East Bank Demerara; construction

of rip-rap defences at Bengal, Corentyne; construction of timber revetment structures along Tucher Park, Canje River; and the construction of rip-rap sea defences at Hope, East Coast Demerara.

4.56 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair to the Hon. Member, for the areas you have just identified where the new works will be executed, could you provide to the House the length of each work?

Bishop Edghill: Yes. These are Orangestien – 130 meters; Essex/Concord – 200 metres; Grove – 160 metres; Bengal – 200 metres; Tucher, Canje – 160 metres; and Hope, East Coast Demerara – 225 metres.

Ms. Ferguson: This is a follow-up for the Hon. Member. Could the Hon. Member say whether these works will actually address the erosion or breaches in these areas? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: That is the only reason we are doing them, Sir.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, to the Hon. Member, since the \$600 million entails new work, could the Hon. Member say to the House what procurement method would be utilised to address the various projects? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: It will be open tender, Sir.

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works - Public Works – Sea and River Defence Works \$600,000,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works - Public Works – Stellings – \$32,700,000

Ms. Ferguson: To the Hon. Member, I note for the voted provision there was \$240 million utilised. Could the Hon. Member say whether the entire sum of \$240 million has been exhausted and, if not, what percentage as at 31st July, 2023?

Bishop Edghill: All have been exhausted and committed, Sir.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, to the Hon. Member, I note that the new provision being sought is some \$32,700,000. The explanation given here states:

“Provision of additional resources to facilitate emergency works at the Kumaka and Supenaam stelling.”

My first question to the Hon. Member is – could he give a disaggregation of this \$32 million for the two projects? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, maybe we should take some responsibility for this. The majority of this money is for work at the Supenaam Stelling.

Ms. Ferguson: To the Hon. Member, since the explanation provided under, Remarks states that the sum will be utilised for emergency works, could you explain to the honourable House what entails emergency works? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: There are a number of things that are in problem at Supenaam. I hope that some of the Members of Parliament (MPs) from that area would tell you. If you want to get an idea of the scope of works that need to be done, these are: the reconstruction of 150 feet of timber deck, along the main approach leading to the stelling; rehabilitation of 13,160 square feet of timber stelling between the Supenaam ferry loading area and the high ramp at Number Two Village. The work also entails the reconstruction of both low ramps, the driving of dolphin mooring piles, fender piles; and the rehabilitation of the catwalk along the Ro/Ro mooring areas.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, to the Hon. Minister, since you have provided the scope of works that this particular project entails, I expected that you would have provided to the honourable House, the cost associated with each. Could the Hon. Minister, do so, please? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chair, I do not know exactly what the Hon. Member wants to know. Does she want to know what will be the cost of this timber; and what is going to be the cost of the steel? I have just given the full scope of work. Contractors have to bid upon a bill, an evaluation will be done and an award will be made.

Ms. Ferguson: To the Hon. Member, perhaps what you could do is to assist me to understand what the engineer’s estimate is.

Bishop Edghill: That is how we arrived at the figure to come to the Committee, Ma’am.

Ms. Ferguson: That is all right, Sir. Since this is new emergency work, can the Hon. Member say whether he will be going out for public tender? What procurement method will be used? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: I think due to the urgency of what needs to be done there and the wide volume of usage, we will have to do restrictive tenders. We will seek the authorisation of the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) to approve contractors who are skilled in this particular field, to do restrictive tender.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, since the keywords in the Remarks here are, emergency works, I know the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) provides for that latitude, could you say to this House whether the works are currently ongoing? Since it is emergency work – based on your explanation, restrictive tendering will be used – are works ongoing currently?

Bishop Edghill: The answer to that is, no, Sir. We would like to get this work done as soon as possible.

Ms. Ferguson: I did not get the clear answer.

Mr. Chairman: The answer is, no.

Ms. Ferguson: Is it, no?

Item 6: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Stellings – \$32,700,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Item 6: 31-313 Ministry of Public Works - Transport – Ferry Vessel and Stellings – \$2,570,504,524

Ms. Ferguson: On the very project code 2700700, Ferry Vessels and Stellings, we had a voted provision of some \$2.1 billion, could the Hon. Minister state whether this entire sum has been exhausted? If not, what percentage as at 31st July, 2023? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chair, the sums that we received at the time of the Appropriation Act of 2023, have been expended. Just for the purpose of clarity and helping everyone's mind, we are

undertaking major works at the Kingston Goods Wharf as well as in Port Kaituma, to accommodate the new ocean-going vessel, the MV Ma Lisha, which will sail tomorrow afternoon for the first time. The sums that are sought here, additionally, are to do a new wharf and facility at Morawhanna and Kumaka. This will complete the four stellings for the operation of the ocean-going vessel and service Region 1 in its expanding role to contribute towards Guyana's development. Thank you, Sir.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I note the new provision being sought here is \$2.5 billion. This is more than what was actually budgeted for in February, 2023. Based on the explanation given here in the Remarks:

“Provision of additional resources to facilitate the advancement of works at Kingston Goods Wharf and the Kumaka, Morawhanna and Port Kaituma stellings,”

could the Hon. Member provide to this House, a disaggregation for the various stellings for this particular remark? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: For the construction of the Port Kaituma Stelling, it is just over \$1.4 billion. The upgrade of the Kingston Goods Wharf is just about \$1.1 billion. The work to be done at Morawhanna is about \$1.95 billion. The work that is to be done at the Kumaka Wharf is about \$2.2 billion. This will take you up to about \$6.6 billion. I am just playing with the whole numbers. What is happening is that this is going to be a rollover project. We anticipate these sums that are allocated will cater for mobilisation for the two new contracts, and take us to about 60% of the work between now and the 31st December. We will have to seek an additional sum for the completion of the other two projects in 2024. We anticipate significant movement. I am sure the Hon. Member from Region 1 would tell you about the work that is being done right now at Port Kaituma and how advanced that work is as well.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, to the Hon. Minister, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance in his Budget presentation on page 45 states to this nation that there was in play:

“Construction of an ocean-going ferry to ply the Georgetown to Northwest route.”

He indicated that the ferry was completed then in February, and it had departed India *en route* to Guyana. My question is based on what the Minister just said to this Committee. This allocation is for new projects. If you knew you had a new ferry coming to ply that route and use those two stellings, why was it not budgeted in the 2023 Budget? Why are you coming here now asking for this additional moneys and saying to us that it is a new project? *You buy a pot, you got to have a stove.*

5.11 p.m.

Bishop Edghill: It was budgeted. When one goes out to tender, the prices vary. At the time of what were appropriated, we were able to manage the start of two of the stellings and make the necessary appropriations. We have come back, because of the prices that these works have come in for with the additional sums to get the other two going. They were budgeted. All the stellings went out and were advertised publicly, calling for proposals and the rest of it.

Ms. Ferguson: A follow up to Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence's question. I noted in the *Hansard* of 31st January, 2023 that this is what the Hon. Member had to say:

“Mr. Chairman, the consultancy services that are at the procurement stage at this time would allow us to have in place a supervisory firm to oversee the construction of the Kingston Goods Wharf, which is being rehabilitated and reset to facilitate the MV MA Lisha that is on her way, as well as the new stelling to be built at Port Kaituma; and there will be continued engagement for the stelling at Mabaruma, as well as Morawhanna.”

When Members look at what is being sought, this \$2.5 billion gives one the understanding that these are new projects. Perhaps, the Minister could clarify what he stated as at 31st January regarding the supervisory consultancy services that were done. Are we to understand that from the initial \$2.17 billion, moneys were utilised towards the consultancy of these projects? If so, what were the sums in a disaggregated amount? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: It is because of the nature of these projects; we went out for supervisory consultancies in two lots. For one lot, the consultants will supervise; two, which were Kingston and Port Kaituma. For the second lot, another consultancy would supervise Morawhanna and

Kumaka. The consultancies that you are talking about are in place. We have been able to get that awarded. We are talking here about civil works, so it is totally different from a consultancy.

Ms. Ferguson: I think the Minister failed to understand my last question. I understand what you just said, Minister. I asked for a disaggregation of the consultancy sums which had amounted to \$2.1 billion.

Bishop Edghill: The consultancy sums are not being paid from this line item. This is for civil works.

Ms. Ferguson: I think the Hon. Member is probably misinterpreting me. The voted sum in February was \$2.17 billion. Based on your explanation then, in January, you stated that the consultancy services will be acquired to overlook these projects. What I am asking you, Hon. Member, from the \$2.17 billion that was initially voted on in February, could you provide the House with a disaggregation? What went to the Kingston Goods Wharf, what went to Port Kaituma and what went to Morawhanna?

Bishop Edghill: I did that already.

Ms. Ferguson: I did not hear that, Sir.

Bishop Edghill: The sum of \$1.4 billion is to Port Kaituma, \$1,056,452,458 for the Kingston Goods Wharf.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we are now repeating ourselves and are not listening to each other.

Item 6: 31-313 Minister of Public Works - Transport – Ferry Vessel and Stellings – \$2,570,504,524 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 7: 40-403 Ministry of Education - Nursery Education – Field Materials and Supplies \$37,356,368

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, a sum of \$94.4 billion was approved for education just six months ago. Of that \$30 billion... [**An Hon. Member:** It is line item 6222, Field Materials and Supplies...] ...in

2022, one year ago received \$15.9 million and in February, 2023, received \$30 million. Six months after that, the Minister of Education is here asking for \$37 million more. Could the Minister explain what the additional resources to be purchased under Field Materials and Supplies for nursery schools are?

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: I think it is nationally known, anyone who goes into communities and addresses, in anyway, education facilities and educators would know, historically, the country has not provided nearly enough that persons need for supplies and janitorial and so on. We are trying to do a bit better here. We are trying, for the first time, to be able to give, as teachers and schools have asked, school grants rather than materials. This would allow us to give grants to the various schools in all three categories, nursery, primary and secondary, in different amounts that should see them doing better with being able to provide for their cleaning as well as materials and supplies. You have teachers amongst you, so they should be able to tell you how that works.

Ms. Lawrence: Minister, in February when you came to the House for the \$30 million, could you tell the House how many nursery schools were you catering for?

Ms. Manickchand: I just wish to remind all of you that the central Ministry only caters for schools in Georgetown. The regional budgets cater for schools outside of Georgetown, respectively. Region 1 will cater for Region 1 schools. What was allocated to the central Ministry at the time was for the nursery schools in Georgetown, which I believe is numbered 27. This allocation is...

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Member... Oh, you are continuing.

Ms. Manickchand: I was. ...coming to the central Ministry but it will not be only for schools in Georgetown, it is going to be for schools across the country. I figure what we would be expected to do, once the policy is finalised about the amount, would be to warrant to the various regional administrations.

Ms. Lawrence: Minister, given your answer, you tried to go ahead of me, on the present request, you are saying now that we have changed the entire status quo with the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development coming here and requesting funding for the schools in the various regions. Between February and now, you changed it so that the Ministry itself is now

asking for the moneys to warrant it to local government, who will warrant it to the regions. If that is what you are saying, could you please explain when this change was made and why?

Ms. Manickchand: No. I am saying that the Ministry of Education represented to the Ministry of Finance that children across the country would be better served if their teachers were to be given more resources. That is a policy decision and a policy position that is unlikely to be taken by any other Minister but the Minister of Education. It is very similar to the cash grant arrangement.

In this particular supplemental, the Ministry of Education is receiving this for one term, assuming the House approves it, and will formulate policies as to how each school will receive. What we have as a draft right now is that the total supplementary allocation is just over \$800 million. The total student enrolment in the country is 196,127. These are figures that can change, because these might be our latest figures but not necessarily the most accurate figures. The total student enrolment in the hinterland and the riverain area would be just over 39,000. The total student enrolment on the coast would be about 156,000. We are playing with to be finalised very quickly, if this were to be approved in the Assembly, would be to have a baseline cost per student in the hinterland at about \$6,000 and on the coastland at about \$4,000. The hinterland students will be receiving 1.5% more than the students on the coast because of various geographical difficulties. If this is approved, we will finalise that based on numbers in every school, what schools are to receive, and then make the allocation. While I do not want to speak for the Ministry of Finance, what would happen is in a regular year, in the next budgetary cycle, you would see this reflected under the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development in the respective areas.

Ms. Lawrence: I have a follow up. I must say, I am very, very taken aback at what you have just said, Minister. Allocations were made to those schools outside of Georgetown that your Ministry is responsible for. My question to you is that since in midair we are changing planes, how did you arrive at this figure? Was it passed to the regions, then the regional authority passed it to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, and then they sent it to you? How did you arrive at this figure...?

Ms. Manickchand: Here is the thing...

Ms. Lawrence: ...to come back to us?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, let the Hon. Member finish and then I will direct you to answer. Go ahead now, Minister.

5.26 p.m.

Ms. Manickchand: Thank you. We could have said we are in the middle of the year and have one term left. The Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, would have real questions on this issue as to why we did not budget right and why it did not come right in 2023. Let us just leave it for 2024. The problem with that position would be that children will unnecessarily go without for an entire term. If we could have made the case, which we did, and the Ministry of Finance understood and accepted that case, why not do it now? There is no change of plane. The concern must be whether we are receiving money, and I say “we” loosely. I mean the State, the government system, and whether we are spending it appropriately. I believe that once that accounting can happen, one should be comfortable, especially when it relates to making children more comfortable in their classrooms. If you want to know why it is that we went centrally, anyone here who goes out could tell you that they will receive, you must have received it too, the complaint that Christianburg Primary School does not have enough to clean the school, it does not have enough cardboards to make aid, and it has to ask parents to bring things. Belladrum Primary School has to do the same thing, but nobody brings back that complaint centrally. I brought it back and went to the Ministry of Finance.

This complaint repeated itself for all the five years that the APNU/AFC was in office, for every visit to every school. Your Headmistress at the back there could tell you that her school does not have enough, although Georgetown has done better than everywhere else across the country. We are trying to give a fixed amount, whether it is enough or not, that would be up for question. What I can tell you is it is going to be significantly more than any school ever got, both qualitatively and quantitatively. Now, schools get to choose. Headteachers would say they have bales of toilet paper already, but they want Fabuloso, chalk, or stapling machines, and they will get to decide how they are grant is expended, of course, keeping within the lines of supplies, janitorial and field and office, whatever it is. This is a good thing, a very good thing. Teachers across the country are going to be clapping. This is an incredibly good thing for schools across this country.

Ms. Philadelphia: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The last time I checked, I recognised that Georgetown has 29 nursery schools if my memory serves me correctly. The information provided or received indicated that our allocated sum grant remained the same. It has not changed. The system remained the same, too, where you do your quotation. It is submitted to the Ministry, and moneys is awarded for you to make purchases. What is of concern, Mr. Chairman, I listened to the Minister who said this money now requested will be catering for the entire country. If my memory serves me correctly, in February of this year, when we were considering the Estimates, it was asked about a specific region, and we were informed that the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development is responsible for it. I am now wondering what may have caused this drastic change.

In addition to that, when we returned to face-to-face teaching in September, 2020, we had the consolidated curriculum. As we moved forward to 2021, we returned to regular classroom practice. My Colleagues in the other regions have not received a cent for purchasing grants, whether for office, field, *et cetera*. Am I to understand that, based on what the Minister just put to us, this sum will change that practice in all the other regions as it relates to grants providing materials for use in the classrooms?

Ms. Manickchand: I said it before but I am trying to reword it so that the Hon. Member would understand it better, but the answer is yes to both questions.

Mr. Chairman: After you had answered, I was going to remind Members about the Standing Order regarding repetition, which I have to start enforcing.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. In the budget that we approved, Region One was allocated \$25 million for Field, Materials and Supplies, under line item 6222. Region Two was allocated \$31,500,000 and all of these are increased sums from its 2022 and 2021 allocations. Region 3 received \$15,525,000, Region Four received \$12,500,000 and I will stop at Region Five, which received \$20 million. Could the Hon. Minister say to this House if she is aware as to whether these regions expended this full sum?

Ms. Manickchand: The way it was done before, as the Hon. Member said, the schools were given supplies. Schools would not have received these sums of money. They received a bale of toilet paper, two cardboards, three markers, a box of chalk, a bottle of bleach, and so on. Their allocation for the term has already been expended. Their communication to us was what they received was

not enough for the period they received it for. If you say this, and I believe you, this was an increase over and above 2022. Imagine how schools were punished in 2019 when they received far less in 2010 because the Budget has changed over the years. Here is a Government... I hope the National Assembly addresses a longstanding issue that is interfering with comfortable classroom learning and teaching. We should be celebrating this. I can guarantee you that the schools are going to be celebrating this. The only objection I hear from you is why here and not in the regions. I am saying to you this is a specific policy change that would have to be dictated centrally – this is how much we will give per child, and this is how we are asking the regions to give it.

The fact that the Ministry of Education has received centrally money that is used in the regions is not new. We did that for furniture because at the time we might have come, all regions may not have been aware of what their furniture needs were. This is part of the disadvantage of decentralisation. We have done it for school feeding, we have done it for exercise books, and book supplies. We have done it recently for the cash grant. This is not something so bizarre that it cannot be accommodated here.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. Allow me to say that the APNU/AFC believes that schools should be cleaned at least every day, given the diseases and all of the different things around, like COVID-19, *et cetera*. Every day they should clean the schools. Our problem here has to do with the procedure of budgeting. I heard the Hon. Minister say, Sir, that in her interaction with various schools, they indicated that they are not receiving enough. The point is taken. The moneys that were budgeted for in this budget was budgeted and allocated to the Regional Administration – Education Delivery Programme that is manned by Regional Education Officers. If schools are complaining about not receiving enough, then I would assume that we hear from the Minister that it is either a short supply in terms of money or the Education Department is failing us. I am asking the Hon. Minister now because this sum that is granted to her had to go to Cabinet for approval, it had to go to the Ministry of Finance for approval, it had to be rigorously defended, as the Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh, pointed out earlier. When regions and Ministries come to the Ministry of Finance, it is well interrogated. That is the word that was used. In that interrogation, the easiest question to ask is whether the Regional Education Delivery Programme exhausted the amount given to them by the National Assembly in the passage of the Budget. The simple question to the Hon. Minister is...

Ms. Manickchand: Let me ...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, just hold. Let him finish and I will put ...

Mr. Mahipaul: The simple question to the Hon. Minister is, has the Regional Education Delivery Programme – Programmes 713, 724, 734, 744, 754 and so on, have those Programmes exhausted the allocated sums, that caused her to request additional sums for this line item for across the country, under her Ministry?

Ms. Manickchand: I will give an example that will perhaps help the Hon. Member. I have to assume that he has a genuine question. The Diamond Nursery School receives \$52,000 per term, and a term is three months. Could you tell me if you think it exhausted it? I cannot and will not sit here and speak for 1,016 schools because I cannot. What I can tell you is that \$52,000 per term simply cannot do. We are talking about \$15,000 per month. We are coming here and asking you to give Diamond Nursery School more than \$600,000 per term, and you are objecting. You are finding all kinds of objections here. This is quite embarrassing. You stand and say how you love children and so on, and you ask all sorts of questions that could interfere with these children's benefit from this money. Are you giving the \$600,000 or not? That is the question on the table. I am here asking for this allocation to be approved so that children in this country can learn comfortably. Instead of giving a Grade A school \$90,000 per term, I am asking to give them \$890,000 per term. That is what we are asking for. It will go to the school. The important issue is if you approve this money, who gets it? [An Hon. Member: The people money.] It is the people's money, which is why I have difficulty with you holding onto it. If you give this money here today, if you vote for this allocation, if you appropriate this money to the schools, the question becomes, "will the schools get it"? That is how you measure accountability. If your answer is yes, then what can the problem be?

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With all of that explanation, we want the schools to have more money. For under 6222 field materials and supplies, we now understand that this money, \$37 million, is not going to be for field materials and supplies but a subvention for our schools. Could the Minister tell us how many schools will benefit from this \$37 million and how much each school will receive?

Ms. Manickchand: Without accepting what the Hon. Member said is true, in fact, it is not but I am not ... The Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson said I am being insulative, I do not want to get into the inaccuracy of the Member. Whatever is allocated here for Nursery is for all the nursery schools under that line in the country. We have about 453 nursey schools in the country. Give or take, one or two.

5.41 p.m.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Hon. Minister, could you tell us how much would be allocated to each school?

Ms. Manickchand: I said to you that we have a general plan. While there is a line item called “Field Materials and Supplies,” and there is one called “Janitorial and Cleaning Supplies,” what we have looked at preliminarily on the assumption that we will get this is more a lump sum. If we have \$800 million and we divide it by the student population, we give a little bit more to the hinterland because of the expensive nature of items in their communities. Then, we are looking at approximately \$ 4,000 per child on the Coast per term and about \$ 6,000 per child in the hinterland per term. Hon. Member, it is difficult for me to tell you how much the nursery school will get. There will be a nursery school with 10 kids and one with 250 kids. You have to do it based on the number of children and teachers, *et cetera*.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, the Hon. Minister, in her response before this one, spoke about the school receiving the money the school ought to receive, and they were receiving a small amount before and now that the Ministry is taking over this particular line item for the particular purpose of nursery schools across the country. With the Minister’s 10 Regional Education Officers and through the Regional Administration, does she believe that there is a need for a review of the manner in which they have allocated sums or requested sums and how they are administering education in these 10 Regions with the sums that are allocated by this National Assembly that caused her to now take the whole programme under her watch?

Ms. Manickchand: This is for a specific purpose of formulating policy for the upcoming term. No one is taking any programme under anyone else’s watch. In your time in Government, as in this time in Government, I know that you did not serve in the Cabinet, so you probably do not understand that. All the time, people request an ideal utopic sum, and they never get that, and they make it work. The people who served in your Cabinet on your side, on your benches, will be able

to tell you that. It is highly unfair to the Regional Education Officers (REDOs) of this country, ordinary Public Servants doing extraordinary work, to come here and say they did not plan properly, budget properly, or do not do their sum wisely. Regional Education Officers are also subject to Regional Administration's Policies. Some regions say, 'we are giving a grant.' Some say, 'we will give it in supplies.' what we are trying to do is to determine what is best for the system for school. As a policy decision from the Ministry of Education centrally to say to all Regional Chairman, all Regional Executive Officers (REOs), all REDOs, this is how we will do it going forward, and this is how you will make that calculation per school. That is why, based on what we get here today, we will then disaggregate into the various regions and warrant that. This has been done several times before. When you bought exercise books under the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) centrally and sent it to regions, that is what you did. [Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] Oh, you did not buy much. That is the problem; you do not understand this thing because you did not give any services. This is nothing new here. Once this policy is formulated and entrenched, you will then see this reflection under the 2024 allocations in the regions.

Ms. Lawrence: Sir, I have two questions for the Minister. Since this allocation is based on the individual pupil receiving a certain amount, I guess there should have been some study as to what the requirement of a nursery school child in terms of the materials would be that they should receive. Could the Minister kindly tell us how many students were used to arrive at this figure? I understand that you said in the Hinterland you would raise the number in terms of the allocation. Let me ask the second question, too. I think you said something just now, and I did not really understand what you were saying, but my question would be: is this a pilot is this a pilot project, and what will we see coming out of it? What are the expectations? Thank you.

Ms. Manickchand: This is not a project. This is us trying to deliver a better service through the schools, in the same way, that we are now trying to give every Grade Six child breakfast, in the same way that we are now giving every child from nursery to Grade Two biscuits, in the same way that we are now trying to give every child a hot meal on the hinterland, we are just ramping up the service that we have. It is not a project; it is not a pilot. This is to be expected in the new way going forward. How do we know what we need? It was a study of all the students in the system, which would amount to close to 200,000 children, but also hearing from over 10,000 teachers and over

1000 school Heads and Administrators and the experience of those teachers in the classroom and the cleaners who are working there about what works and what does not work. I am really glad that we are here because, clearly, your side did not do it. You clearly do not even know that you were not giving enough. [Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] You did not even know that you were not giving enough. We were advocating for more, and we were not getting it.

Mr. Chaيمان: Hon. Members, please, please, we have a long way to go.

Ms. Manickchand: You did not even know that you were not giving enough. You want to know if there was a study to determine that \$2000 a term cannot do a school. Do you need to study for that?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have exhausted the questions on this issue, and we have been repeating each other.

Item 7: 40-403 – Ministry of Education – Nursery Education – Field Materials and Supplies - \$37,356,368,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 40-403 Ministry of Education - Nursery Education – Office Materials and Supplies - \$68,361,205,000

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, I am really hoping that we do not go down the same line because this is not part of the subvention of the grants. Line item 6223 – Office Material and Supplies, in 2022, the allocation was \$5,922,000,000; in 2023, one year after, the sum was \$6.4 million, approved. Sir, that is one year, an increase of \$478,000. Here we are, six months later, the Minister is asking for an additional sum of \$68,361,205,000; some scientific calculation had to go on for us to get the \$205, Sir, an exponential increase. Could the Hon. Minister explain what are the additional Office Materials and Supplies to be purchased for our nursery schools and could the Hon. Minister list the schools that will benefit from these items?

Ms. Manickchand: Hon. Member, the answer is the same. This amount does not apply to the Georgetown Schools. This amount goes to schools across the country and every single school will benefit.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Singh-Lewis, do you have a supplementary question?

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I feel that this information presented to us in writing and the explanation the Minister is giving us is...

Mr. Chairman: Okay, withdraw that please.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, I feel like I am being misled. I want to express myself, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Withdraw, you cannot accuse the Minister...

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Well, I do not know what it is.

Mr. Chairman: Please, are you going to withdraw it?

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, may I explain why I feel the way I do?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I would not listen to the Hon. Member Ms. Singh-Lewis.

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, I would be happy to say that this line buys chalk, playdough, cardboard, markers, crayons, foam board, things to develop fine motor skills, things to make children learn in a fun way, the curriculum... [**Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Now, that is a different issue. The APNU/AFC is asking who says the schools? The teachers will buy those things. That is a different question, and you must tell the schools, you do not hold the view, they should get these grants because you do not think they will spend it on the children. That is what the Hon. Member said.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister...

Ms. Manickchand: Through you, Mr. Chairman, through you, the Hon. Member said “who says they will buy these things? That is a different question. [**Ms. Lawrence:** Who said that? I did not posit my question.] The People’s Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) believes and will put systems in place as we do in Georgetown right now to make sure that the grants given will be applied to the benefit of the children. This is a typical example of, “*thief man don like see another man with a bag*”.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, Hon. Minister, withdraw that for me.

Ms. Manickchand: Perhaps, the Hon. Member cannot trust herself and applies that sort of thought to the good and decent teachers of this country. [**Ms. Lawrence:** Mr. Chairman, where is this

going, where is this going, Mr. Chairman?]

The People's Progressive Party Civic Government believes that teachers in this country are responsible human beings who will spend this money on their children in any event. Like any other public expenditure, there will be measures in place to determine that the money is applied as we say it was intended. We cannot begin by saying "well, we do not know if they will spend it like that so do not live them." That is not the way, Sir.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, you have given me the floor, I thought you would have given me some protection. I must ask the Hon. Member if she is okay. I did not ask a question. However, Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Minister of Education, could the Minister kindly say whether this \$68 million that she is asking for here has anything to do with the increase of prices for the materials?

Ms. Manickchand: No Sir, no Hon. Member. This money is to give things that were never given before or not given in adequate supply before.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, follow-up question: given that allocations were made for all of the schools in the Ministry of Local Government's Budget, could the Minister indicate whether this allocation would be more than what they would have gotten for a term or whether it would be the same amount that would have been allocated in the February Budget for 2022 that she is providing now from the central Ministry to the various schools in the outlying districts?

5.56 p.m.

Ms. Manickchand: I will give the example of the Diamond Nursery School again, not unlike other nursery schools across the country. This year, the Diamond Nursery School received the best that it has ever received, \$52,000 per term divided by three per month. Do you get how much is that? Diamond Nursey is going to get over \$600,000 per term. We are increasing from say \$50,000 to about \$200,000 per term. You are going to get four times more than what was given for the whole term for a month. Again, whether it is enough is relative. Could we do more? Do they want more? I expect that 10 years from now, this will not be enough, but it is not enough now. The question you asked is whether the school would be getting more monetary cash now than it received in value. The answer is yes.

Mr. Figueira: Minister, I believe when I say, we on this side of the House are not in opposition to what is being requested. I believe what we seek to find is the rationale and the reason behind the request being asked by the Ministry given the fact that we had a national budget and we expected that the budget would have catered for these mishaps. Nevertheless, as a teacher in the profession and who experienced many shortages of the very things that this...

Ms. Manickchand: Have you ever stolen any child's money?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, allow him please.

Ms. Manickchand: I did not realise...

Mr. Figueira: In my class, you would have been disciplined. Hon. Minister, I understand the plight of teachers who go way beyond the call of duty to ensure that those students are satisfied in the classroom, and because of many lack that exist, I think what is being requested could assist. It is the clarity that we on this side of the House seek. It is not that we are in opposition to it. I trust that the Guyanese public could understand that the...

Mr. Chairman: What is the question Hon. Member? What you are going down, I have heard from three other presenters from your side.

Mr. Figueira: You are not allowing me to finish. Hon. Minister, my question is, this request that is being asked, was it informed by your engagement with teachers and the respective schools across the country; even the Regional Executive Officer and the Regional Education Officer to make you come to the National Assembly asking for an additional sum to help alleviate the plight that teachers in the respective school's face? Thank you.

Ms. Manickchand: As I said before, I am patently aware of this issue through numerous engagements with teachers, parents, students, visits to schools, and the Guyana Teacher's Union. I believe that this might be one of their written requests for us to relieve the burden of teachers who usually, as you know, would have gone into their own pockets to get some of these supplies by making the supplies available. I rather suspect that anyone who dealt with teachers does not have a former Education Minister in the House, but anyone who dealt with the system prior to today would be very clear that the supplies were not enough and that this could only ensure the benefit of the schools, the system and in particularly our children in the classrooms.

Mr. Figueira: Hon. Minister, I am happy that your engagement with teachers and other stakeholders in the education profession provided you with the opportunity to make representations on behalf of schools. Given the fact that you engaged many teachers, I believe you are very much aware of the additional plight that teachers face with regard to the need for increases in salaries. This, in itself, allowed the Ministry to be more engaging with the Guyana Teacher's Union to ensure that teachers are properly enumerated.

Ms. Manickchand: We are dealing here with supplies, janitorial and office needs.

Mr. Chairman: Particularly, we are dealing with the office materials and supplies for nursery schools.

Ms. Manickchand: Right. This is not about salaries for teachers. That is a different discussion. I could tell you this. The fact that you would not have to buy chalk will leave you with more disposable income as a teacher. For that, you are very welcome.

Mr. Chairman: Before I take the Hon. Member Ms. Flue-Bess, over the past two charter of accounts that we have done, I have heard the Minister repeat literally the same answer over and over. I have also heard the Opposition say they agree with the increases. I think we are now at the point where I am almost forced to put the question. Let me take my good friend and neighbour, Ms. Flue-Bess.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister, how would be these moneys be disbursed; monthly or termly to the schools?

Mr. Chairman: This is the first new question.

Ms. Manickchand: Georgetown that currently gives a cash grant, does this termly. That seems to work. However, I think we could be opened in hearing what may suit particular schools given their particular locations.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Just a follow-up. If you do termly, would it be at the beginning of the term or in the middle of the term? The reason for me asking is that I know that when you have these supplies or grants, sometimes they are very late; you get them to the latter part of the term when we already spend our moneys to run the programs. I would like to have an idea of how early the schools could

expect these moneys. Before I sit, would this include anything in terms of technology, if it is computers or anything to assist?

Ms. Manickchand: I think you would be the first being in the system to accept and shout from the rooftop that this is the most efficient the education system has been. I think you would be very happy to tell your Colleagues that. We would try very hard to make sure this comes at the beginning of the term. Those are some of the kinks we could take out of the system when we are not buying materials and supplies. We could warrant money over to schools in a more efficient way.

Item 7: 40-403 Ministry of Education - Nursery Education – Office Materials and Supplies – \$68,361,205 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 40-403 Ministry of Education - Nursery Education – Janitorial and Cleaning Supplies – \$19,657,459

Item 7: 40-403 Ministry of Education - Nursery Education – Janitorial and Cleaning Supplies– \$19,657,459 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 7: 40-403 Ministry of Education - Nursery Education – Nursery Schools – \$180,700,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: I just lost sight a bit. Comrade Chairman, just a reminder, please see if we improve the size of the font. I am having problem reading this thing.

Mr. Chairman: We are at 40-403 the same agency, chart of account, the last one under nursery education, 1215300 – nursery schools and the sum there is \$180,700,000.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you. I see provision of additional resources to facilitate urgent rehabilitation and upgrading of nurse school facilities. Does this include any schools from the East Bank corridor?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes. The Cabinet took a decision that every place that needs teachers' quarters and repairs to teachers' quarters, dorms, and repairs to dorms, and repairs to schools will, over a period of time, be attended to. I know this entire sum is disaggregated into nursery, secondary, and

primary, but the answer relates to all three lines which is to cater for the rehabilitation, maintenance, repair...

Break in the audio due to technical difficulties.

Ms. Ferguson: “Provision of additional resources to facilitate urgent rehabilitation and upgrading of nursery school facilities.” To the Hon. Member, I know that the nursery schools, St. Gabriel’s Nursery a recently constructed – two storey... Could I get from you whether, from this sum here, there is provision for Air conditioning (AC) units? The current construction of that building seems to me like a layman’s pen to put little animals in, and not realising there is no ventilation on that building, I do not know how those little God angel children will make out come September in a few weeks. Could you advise whether there are provisions for AC units and when these units will be installed in this sum? What portion of this sum will go towards procuring the AC units for the St. Gabriel’s Nursey School at Albert and Crown Street, Queenstown? Thank you very much.

Ms. Manickchand: It is not the policy of the Ministry of Education right now to provide ACs to entire school populations for a number of reasons. One, there are a large number of children who cannot exist, learn, and be – the Head Mistress (HM) at the back of you is shaking her head– in an AC environment because of health reasons. We have noted the public commentary on the design of the St. Gabriel’s Nursery. While I am very grateful for the public servants who designed that school and went after building it, considering the dilapidated and broken-down state we found it in, we are happy to look at whether there is indeed poor ventilation. Once we find that, we will have to find solutions, but to answer you directly, there is no provision here for AC units in the St. Gabriel’s nursery.

Ms. Philadelphia: Project code 1215300: “Provision of additional resources to facilitate urgent rehabilitation...” Recently, we have been experiencing severe rainfall. We recognise that quite several nursery schools have been affected by flooding as a result of this rainfall. One would recognise that schools also had to be aborted on more than one occasion. Mr. Chairman, may I ask the Hon. Minister if any provision is in this sum to take care of lifting the walkway at the Headstart Nursery School and, also, to build the shed that is needed at the Winfer Gardens Nursery School? Thank you.

6.11 p.m.

Ms. Manickchand: I do not want us to get caught up. This sum is a national sum, so I do not want us to get caught in believing that Georgetown is Guyana. It is not. We love Georgetown, but it is not. I am happy to tell you that every single nursery school in Georgetown has repairs – the first time – that they asked for and upliftment where repairs were not necessary, by that I mean painting and so on. This sum does not cater for the raising of the walkway, but we are repairing the Parishara Nursery School in Central Rupununi up to a sum of, I think, \$14 million. We are rehabilitating the Kaicumbay Nursery School in Central Rupununi, which is in Region 9. We have repaired roofs, walls, stairs, and ceilings and did painting, plumbing and electrical works for 31 nursery schools in Georgetown, which would be all. Those are some of the schools. Once we get this, we are then able to look at what we can do based on how we would be able to do it and not interfere with the education of children going on. So, that is one of the little tricky issues, once this is appropriated to us, about how we get to do these repairs as school is going on. Somethings we could do. We can do a fence, for example, while school is in session. On the weekends, we could repair a roof, fix a tank and so on. Those are things we are now filtering through. We could not do it without the money. We have to wait on the money.

Ms. Flu-Bess: Referring to the said project code 1215300, Nursery Schools – I see rehabilitation and upgrading of nursery school facilities. Does your upgrade plan involve fire safety prevention measures, whether it be putting in emergency doors, fire extinguishers or anything of such to these buildings?

Ms. Manickchand: We are talking currently about nursery schools and a standard building practice which, if we are to be honest, the country, whether under the People's National Congress (PNC) or the People's Progressive Party/Civic might not have been as vigilant in doing. So, now all our new buildings and repairs, like I said over a period, will look to the fire service and the cooperative and proactive Minister Benn to make sure that the schools are assessed and equipped accordingly.

Ms. Flu-Bess: I do not think I got the answer. There was no provision made here for fire safety in this sum.

Ms. Manickchand: I did not state that. I said that is some of our doing. You specifically asked for doors and so on. I am not sure that any nursery school needs a door. So, that is what I am stating,

we are working with the Guyana Fire Service. It is assessing schools and then reporting to us what is needed and how we are going in to attend to those schools for fire. We have done it at all the dorms, currently. I know we are on nursery schools, and we are coming to secondary schools just now. We have already made some significant changes at every single dorm.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Hon. Minister, based on what you said thus far, the moneys that are being requested are going directly to schools, but this is a capital project. Not in this project code but the line items before. For this particular project code, I understand it is a capital project, what I am wondering is whether the Ministry of Education will be doing all of the capital projects throughout the country or whether or not the moneys will be warranted to the regions for them to facilitate the capital project.

Ms. Manickchand: It is not capital. This is not capital. This is not under the capital feature.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, is rehabilitation and upgrading of facilities not capital works?

Mr. Chairman: Just let the Hon. Minister and her staff peruse the project code.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Sure, no problem.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Chairman, I will defer to the Minister of Finance. We have been given different lines where capital is, for example, the raising of a walkway and the construction of a school, repairs, maintenance, refurnishing and so on. They have parameters that one has to cross to get into another one or that he/she stays out of one to stay in one. I want to be very careful because I am on record, and I understand what that means, not to misrepresent that. My understanding from both the Minister of Finance and Mr. Bernard Lord, who has perhaps the best experience in this area, is that this is not capital.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister the provision is reflected in the estimates as a capital expenditure.

Ms. Manickchand: It is capital then. I would be happy to answer you. Sorry, I just did not want to mislead you. If it is reflected as capital and I have the same problem that you have, I cannot read this. The question was whether we are doing it centrally or if it is being done in the regions. What we have done so far, for example, the central Ministry procured, in accordance with the Procurement Act, the design of the repairs needed at the Santa Rosa Dormitory. I believe the

procurement also began for the persons who would go in and fix whatever the designers state and that could be done either through the region or centrally. The answer is, there is no particular policy now that states it will be done either by the central Ministry or by the region. For example, the plan is to warrant to Region 9 \$200 million for the works that it has done because it procured in the region. Some regions just seem slower than some and so we have gone ahead centrally to do the advertisement and get that process started, anticipating this House would be happy to give us this money. For Region 3, we warranted the money to repair the Zeeburg Secondary School. For Region 6, we will warrant moneys to repair the J.C. Chandisingh Secondary School and the Skeldon Primary School. We will warrant the moneys to them when we get it. However, if there is a region that is particularly slow, I do not think that we would want to wait, given that we are close to the end of the year, so we would do it centrally. I just want to be clear that all of this would be procured in accordance with the Procurement Act.

Item 7: 40-403 Ministry of Education – Nursery Education – Nursery Schools – \$180,700,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have education primary and education secondary, basically the same line items. The Minister has said the explanations are almost similar.

Current Expenditure

Item 7: 40-404 Ministry of Education – Primary Education – Field Materials and Supplies – \$345,085,960

Item 7: 40-404 Ministry of Education – Primary Education – Field Materials and Supplies – \$345,085,960 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 40-404 Ministry of Education – Primary Education – Office Materials and Supplies – \$156,635,038

Item 7: 40-404 Ministry of Education – Primary Education – Office Materials and Supplies – \$156,635,038 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 40-404 Ministry of Education – Primary Education – Janitorial and Cleaning Supplies – \$45,040,851

Item 7: 40-404 Ministry of Education – Primary Education – Janitorial and Cleaning Supplies – \$45,040,851 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 40-404 Ministry of Education – Primary Education – Dietary – \$511,000,000

Item 7: 40-404 Ministry of Education – Primary Education – Dietary – \$511,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 7: 40-404 Ministry of Education – Primary Education – Primary Schools – \$400,830,000

Ms. Lawrence: For capital works, I want to go back to the question asked by the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, and that is to ask the Minister whether there is a building code for schools in general. I am not talking about the security measures in terms of fire and all of that. I am talking generally, in term of the physical building. Is there a building code?

Ms. Manickchand: We are trying to get to that place. We have always had, over the years, non-academic standards and those have been renewed and revised. Whether they are as current as they should be, with Guyana's realities today, the heat, climate change and all of that, is something I would like us to have a relook at. We recently had the minimum standards defined for dormitory facilities and that would be standardised across the country. If we are to build a dormitory facility now, it would be in accordance with these minimum standards that we had designed. In about 2009/2010, we also did minimum standards when I was at the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security for orphanages and care homes so that everybody would know now that it is X number of bedsheets or beds to a student. We are trying to define some of these parameters now as we move along in our progress trajectory. The problem that we have is that some of the schools and so on that were built simply cannot accommodate some of these minimum standards that are now there, so we will have to do extensions. It is just simply space considerations, ventilation considerations and so on.

6.26 p.m.

Ms. Lawrence: Minister, in the interim I know you have engineers who would go out and check the works, *et cetera*. I would like to know whether these engineers that look at the drawings, *et*

cetera, are responsible for that; whether there are any discussions with them in terms of the numbers of students that will be in a building and what is expected. This is because these are not adults, these are children, they run, they come back in hot and so on. I should have sent you a notice about the St. Agnes Primary School. The reason I asked is — I was at the traffic light by the court, and I saw that they were rehabilitating that school. The wind comes from the northern side, and it has two small windows such as this on both sides of the door. The fact that we see this very often tells us that consideration is not being given in terms of enough ventilation for the children. This is across — even at the school right next to me, if one goes to certain parts of the building one wants to know how the children exist there during the day. I am just asking whether you have any talks with the engineers or any person who can give them guidance.

Ms. Manickchand: I think you are asking for a standardised sort of document that speaks to the proportion of children per square footage, the number of windows for ventilation, and so on. As I said, I think it is a good opportunity for the country, given the new weather patterns, the shifting of wind directions and so on, to relook at if it is current with what it is offering. As I said, one of the challenges has been continuing to utilise schools that existed when these realities were not present, and reforming and rehabilitating those schools accordingly. It is a useful contribution and I think that it has a lot of value. As I said, we are looking at what our new non-academic norms and standards should be. We have that fairly well defined for 2023 going forward for dormitory facilities and we are currently using that as our guide in any design.

Mr. Patterson: This is a follow-up to the last question. Could I ask the Minister or maybe her staff if they are aware that the then Ministry of Public Infrastructure, in collaboration with the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA), produced and distributed to all the ministries a quite comprehensive and distinct model with designed criteria for ventilation, wind direction, construction, maintenance of light. Could I ask if she is aware of that, if they are in receipt of that, and if that design done independently with consultants is being used? It was comprehensive and included energy-saving technologies and those things like that.

Ms. Manickchand: No. I am not aware of it. The persons who prevailed from your administration to mine — the professionals in the Ministry — are not aware of it either. The answer is no. I am not *[inaudible]*. As I said, I would like to see if that is still current because St. Agnes existed when you did that. I could tell you that in 2013 we almost fully rehabilitated St. Agnes and it was fine then.

It was one of the better schools in Georgetown when we did that. If it is no longer appropriate, then depending on when your document was done, I am not sure if it was used. We do not know about it at the Ministry of Education. We will ask for it and probably use it as a base.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, we are dealing with the same line item. I would like to ask the Minister whether this facilitates the rehabilitation of the dwelling space for the Headteacher at the Kwakwani Primary School. A person who was appointed in May has not been able to take up their appointment because of the current condition of their living quarters in Kwakwani. I am just wondering if that would be facilitated under this line item.

Ms. Manickchand: Currently, I know what we want to do in Linden is – the foundation in Region 10. What we have from the Regional Executive Officer (REO) of Region 10 is a general cost for a duplex and quadruplex and the Bills of Quantities (BoQs) for those that would accommodate teachers, like headteachers and so on, in the riverain areas. Once we can build without disrupting a school, the money will be applied to that once it is appropriated here.

Item 7: 40-404 Ministry of Education – Primary Education – Primary Schools – \$400,830,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 7: 40-405 Ministry of Education – Secondary Education – Field Materials and Supplies, Office Materials and Supplies & Janitorial and Cleaning Supplies - \$25,706,183, \$86,331,941 and \$24,824,995

Item 7: 40-405 Ministry of Education – Secondary Education – Field Materials and Supplies, Office Materials and Supplies & Janitorial and Cleaning Supplies – \$25,706,183, \$86,331,941 & \$24,824,995 respectively, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 7: 40-405 Ministry of Education – Secondary Education – Secondary Schools – \$918,470,000

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Cde. Chairman, I would like to take you back to when we were examining the nursery allocations. You asked me to withdraw the word, misleading and you did not give me the opportunity. I want to do so now. I want to withdraw the word, misleading. I am guided.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Member. Do you have a question under these project codes?

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I will allow my Colleague to go first.

Mr. Chairman: Apparently, they want you to go first.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Sir. Project code 1215500, states:

“Provision of additional resources to facilitate urgent rehabilitation and upgrading of secondary school facilities.”

There is a two-pronged approach to this question. Firstly, is this across the country? Is this sum for across the country?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes. It is.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Secondly, is there any provision in this sum to attend to the dormitories at Mahdia?

Ms. Manickchand: As you know, there is one dormitory standing at Mahdia. Regarding dormitories across the country, the latest Cabinet decision on the issue of making dormitories ready to house and accommodate children is that all dormitories will have working and adequate washroom facilities; adequate beds and linen facilities; adequate house parents and security; and, as determined by the Guyana Fire Service, adequate firefighting and fire prevention equipment, tools, and materials. That is currently happening. As you know, except for one dormitory which the Central Ministry has responsibility for – President’s College – dormitories fall under the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. The two Ministries have responsibilities for various dormitories.

Post-Mahdia, Minister Mr. Benn, who has the responsibility for the Guyana Fire Service and the Ministry of Education, has collaborated closely with the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development to make sure that particular Cabinet’s decision is carried out. We are in the

process right now of collecting from REOs, under each stated item that I just mentioned, what is outstanding to do. They have reported to us in writing, and we are now going through that report to see where there may be gaps so that we could fill those prior to the 4th September opening that we expect.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Cde. Chairman, I have a follow-up. I just want to be clear in my mind. Come in September, we still have to accommodate our students in Region 8. Is there any plan in place to have them housed until that Cabinet decision is implemented fully?

Ms. Manickchand: I expect that the Cabinet decision will be implemented fully before the 4th September. That is the plan, which is why we are helping to monitor the REOs, to see how they are implementing this. If necessary, we will provide funding from this – once we get it – to do whatever rehabilitative works may be needed to get those things done.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Cde. Chairman, just for guidance. This is project code 1215500.

Mr. Chairman: Exactly.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Did you put project code 2607500?

Mr. Chairman: Not as yet. It is coming after this.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, I have one question under Secondary Schools, for this \$918,470,000. The unfortunate incident at Mahdia where the dormitory burnt and we lost 20 young children, is there a sum in this amount for the rebuilding of this dormitory?

Ms. Manickchand: No. Our consultations with the community and all the stakeholders have produced a reluctance to build another dormitory at the location.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, forgive me if I repeat a question that may have been asked. Is there any sum in this amount for the rehabilitation and improvement of dormitories across the country?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: I think we have 23.

Ms. Manickchand: As I said earlier, this sum is being sought pursuant to a Cabinet decision that stated dormitories, teachers' quarters, and schools will, over a period of time, be repaired, fixed, and built.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Hon. Minister, based on the responses that you just gave to the question, the question arises as to what will happen with the students who normally go to school in September and utilise the dormitory. Since no dormitory would be built by the time school reopens, what would happen to those students? Would the school not start as other schools in the regular school term?

6.41 p.m.

Ms. Manickchand: We hope that by the 4th of September... There are two categories of repairs that are needed at dormitories. There are some that are so heavy in terms of the quantity and quality of work – roofs that have to come off, walls have to come off, *et cetera* that they cannot be done while students are in the dormitories. Some of them cost as much as two hundred and forty something million dollars, for example the Paramakatoi dormitory. That is the bill of quantities that we got. For the Three Miles Secondary, we got \$154 million. That is what it is estimated to cost. Then there are dormitories where there was the Cabinet decision that there would be adequate and proper washroom facilities, bed facilities, security, dormitory parents, firefighting and fire prevention equipment. All dormitories are expected to have the latter category of facilities in before 4th September. For most dormitories, we will do as many repairs as we can between now and then.

There is a possibility, which the Ministry is going to announce, if it has to, that some schools will have a delayed re-opening, given when this paper is being laid in this House. If there is a delayed re-opening, what we have to do is, we have to measure the facility in the dormitory versus children being absent from school and the risks that come with that in those particular communities. One of the major risks is early school leaving or dropouts. We have to weigh whether it is sensible to delay school re-opening and fix the dormitories or if the dormitory, while not in its premium condition, could facilitate these children living here to accommodate their learning. That will be what we have to wait on, dormitory by dormitory.

Mr. Jaipersaud: Could the Hon. Minister indicate to us when schools across the country, nursery, secondary, and primary, will receive exercise books?

Ms. Manickchand: It is not in this Legend or is not being made provision for.

Mr. Jaipersaud: It is a question that should have been asked under supplies for Nursery, Primary and Secondary.

Ms. Manickchand: No, it is a question that should be asked under Print and Non-Print, and we are not dealing with that today. But I will answer it. We are in the process of procuring exercise books, currently. Most of it are in the schools already. I am very happy to tell you that, for the first time, you are going to see composition type books, which secondary school children can use because the smaller books were really inconvenient for them. Those are being delivered now, as we speak, to various regions. They should be there for the September opening.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Sir, I am not trying to belabour the point, but the Hon. Minister, in response to my question, went all over. I was trying to get clarity on, given the situation in Mahdia, where there was a fire and the dormitory no longer exists, what has the Ministry decided to do to accommodate the students, given that schools are about to be reopened in about five- or six-weeks' time. Has there been a decision as to what will happen? Or will the schools not re-open this semester?

Ms. Manickchand: The Hon. Member did not ask that question. Perhaps the Hon. Member intended to, but she did not ask that question. It is a good thing we have records here. You can go back to the record. The male dormitory is going to be re-opened as per usual. The decision of the Cabinet was to build a secondary school at Micobie, which would take care of the Micobie students who were in the dormitory as well as those who are now leaving Grade 6. The girls who are now in Grades 9, 10, and 11, who were in the dormitories, will be housed at the President's College. Everybody is going to start back at the curriculum level beginning at Grade 10, which is Form 4, even those who were in Grade 11. This is because of the terrible, tragic disruption.

Item 7: 40-405 Ministry of Education – Secondary Education – Secondary Schools – \$918,470,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 40-405 Ministry of Education – Secondary Education – Secondary Education Improvement Project – \$587,825,662

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, \$587,825,622 – could the Minister disaggregate this sum and tell this House how much of this would be used to acquire additional textbooks? The other question is: could we get a date as to when the Hope Secondary School will be completed?

Ms. Manickchand: The Hon. Member had me a little worried there. For these textbooks, these moneys were already spent under a foreign funded project. They were spent on secondary textbooks. The plan is, and we have advanced very well with this, that all secondary school students will have all the textbooks they need, except for foreign languages right now and for A levels – well the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE), beginning September. It is a foreign funded project. It is something we can spend under, apparently. Schools have already begun to receive these books. They will be giving them out in September. I think some have already been given out. Some schools have already begun to distribute their books.

Regarding the Good Hope Secondary School... There is no Hope. I am assuming the Hon. Member meant Good Hope. Regarding the Good Hope Secondary School, His Excellency commissioned that school in or around June, and we were very happy to do it, especially given the fact that it was struggling for completion for about five years, and it was unable to get completed. If you recall the story about the Good Hope Secondary School, the PPP/C Government secured funding, a drawing and everything, and it began and was never finished under the APNU/AFC. In fact, that is not the only school. In five years, not a single secondary school began and was finished under the APNU/AFC. This year, the PPP/C Government has commissioned the Good Hope Secondary, the Yarrowkabra Secondary School, an extension at the East Ruimveldt Secondary School, a full reconstruction at the North Ruimveldt Secondary School, an extension at the St. Winefride's Secondary School, an extension at the Queen's College, an extension at the Bishop's High School, the completion of the St. Roses High School, we are going to complete the North West Secondary School, and we have begun building secondary schools all across the country.

Ms. Lawrence: I heard the Minister just mention several secondary schools that will be finished. Could the Hon. Minister tell this House whether the expenditure for those schools is facilitated by this loan?

Ms. Manickchand: No, it is not.

Item 7: 40-405 Ministry of Education – Secondary Education – Secondary Education Improvement Project – \$587,825,662 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister and staff for taking us through the Ministry's estimates. As we await the arrival of the Minister and his staff of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. The question has been, when are we going to have the break? We will break after we complete this Financial Paper. I did not say adjourn. We will have a suspension break at that time. The Hon. Chief Whip (ag) for the Opposition has indicated to me that we will have swift progress as we consider the remaining items on the Financial Paper.

Capital Expenditure

Item 8: 44-444 Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport – Sports – Ground Enhancement Programme - \$500,000,000

Mr. Figueira: I am going to be very brief. I do not want to keep the Minister hotting up the benches. Before I pose my question, I would like to seize this opportunity to congratulate all of Guyana's athletes who represented Guyana overseas and did exceedingly well for our country. I would like to single out athlete Emmanuel Archibald for winning Guyana's first gold medal at the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) Games; and, today, Ms. Springer for doing exceedingly well at the 400 meters, gaining a gold medal for Guyana; and all of the other athletes who were at those games representing us. We are very much proud, despite the many shortcomings from their subject Ministry. I recognise an additional \$500 million, half a billion dollars, is being requested for ground enhancement after two budgets where \$1 billion was already expended. This seems to be the Ministry's flagship project. Could the Minister indicate to us, of all of the moneys that were spent on ground enhancement, how many grounds have been upgraded to all-weather facilities to cater for the rainy season?

6.56 p.m.

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]: I would also like to take the opportunity to congratulate our athletes on their stellar performances. They have shown the country that Guyana has the talent. The people of the country have always believed that we had the talent to

show the world, and now we are able to see the fruits of that talent manifesting itself. I am extremely proud of all of them. We received an allocation, this year, of \$250 million, of which we have already spent or committed 80%. I am glad that the Hon. Member mentioned that this is essentially our flagship project, even though, in essence, we have many big projects. Currently, we are building five stadiums. During the course of this year, we will be announcing the commencement of several bigger projects as well. Those additional, really big expenditures fall as part of our flagship projects.

Community grounds is one of the areas that is dearest to the Ministry. That is one of the reasons we are getting close to exhausting our funds already from the allocation that we were given earlier in the year. We will also be looking to exhaust this sum before the end of the year. The fact of the matter is that Guyana is such a big place that every village is in need of support for capital expenditure and maintenance expenditure. The Ministry does not do the maintenance, but we do the capital expenditure. Every village is in need of that type of support and investment for communities so that young people and people of all ages could have safe spaces for them to use.

I had made the announcement in the budget presentation that we have done and invested in over 100 grounds since my tenure, and we have also lit over 25 community grounds as well. A number of those grounds have been able to get all-weather types of infrastructural development. For example, some may get basketball courts or football courts, or a combination of both. Not all of them are able to receive that based on the allocation. That is why we have come for additional moneys. For example, you can get a typical basketball court that is 105 feet by 60 feet. When you go to tender it will come up to about \$7 million just to put in the basketball court, which is an all-weather court. That is using the minimum specifications that would be durable, but at the same time, not over designed. That one project, if we were to do it on 10 grounds, that would be \$70 million. If we were to do 100 grounds, that would be \$700 million. That does not even take care of fencing work. That does not take care of the pavilion work. That does not take care of the drainage or the lighting work. There are a lot of additional projects that require the investment to be made from the Government's side. That is the reason for the additional expenditure. To answer your question on the specific number, I am unable to say with that definition at this point in time.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you for your response. We support the idea of all sports getting the necessary requirements to facilitate our athletes. When I speak specifically to all-weather facilities, I want

you to condition your mind to the most popular sports that are played, particularly in Guyana, which are cricket and football. Like I said, we do appreciate the fact that other sports disciplines are being catered for with regard to an all-purpose basketball court, for example. With regard to cricket, which is predominantly played in all of Guyana, and football, the Ministry after, receiving so much moneys in the past budgets' allocation...has there been any ground upgraded to facilitate the playing of cricket and football, given the fact that we have sunny and rainy conditions?

Mr. Ramson: I am glad to hear you say that you support the allocations and the large expenditure on the allocation for sport. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change's (APNU/AFC) record in Government does not suggest that. [Mr. Mahipaul: We did not have oil money.] I am glad that you said that too. When I examined the record... [Mr. Mahipaul: And the (*inaudible*) year under us (*inaudible*). The staff served under us also.] You asked a question, and you are going to get a response. Your allocations during your tenure in office do not suggest that. For example, 2016, it was \$150 million, in 2017, it was \$146 million, in 2018, it was \$58 million, and in 2020, it was \$54 million. However, you said that you did not have oil money. I can take you to prior – 2011 to 2015 or 2011 to 2014. In 2011, it was \$100 million, in 2012, it was \$300 million, and in 2014, it was \$300 million. We did not have oil money then, but we were spending larger sums.

The answer to your question, which is about the creation of all-weather conditions for sporting grounds: If you are going to have the design of the infrastructure to create grounds that are capable of being used in the rainy season as well as the dry season, you have to put in the underground pipes and drainage. That is what we are doing in Linden, that is what we are doing in Anna Regina, and that is what we are currently doing in Albion. Those are three additional grounds that will be, as I have said in the public already, as fast drying as the National Stadium. As you know, that is also the fastest drying ground in the entire Caribbean. If you are asking specifically for that type of infrastructural civil works, then those three will have those capabilities. Two are on the verge of completion and the other will be finished before the end of the year. For the others to be given that type of intervention, it is a far more costly exercise. A community ground is not necessarily capable of having that at this time, but it can be overtime, maybe with some additional, innovative techniques.

Mr. Figueira: You mentioned, Hon. Minister, that you have upgraded 100 grounds across the country. I would ask if you could lay over to this Assembly the information with regard to all of those grounds that you said you upgraded. With regard to Region 10 specifically, could you say how many football grounds as well as basketball courts have been upgraded?

Mr. Ramson: We have not specifically upgraded a ground for a particular sport, even though, for example, the community might be more predisposed to or has a predilection for playing a particular sport. For example, we have recently started work at the Retrieve ground. We also started work at Spikeland ground. We also started work at the West Watooka ground. Those grounds still have additional work to be done. We are never making any specific ground enhancement work for either football or cricket. We are looking for community grounds to be used for all types of sports – cricket, football, volleyball, hockey, you name it. They should be able to be used for all different types of purposes. Those are the three grounds that we have started works on in Linden.

Mr. Figueira: The evidence does suggest that the very ground that you mentioned is overgrown with bushes in West Watooka. The fact of the matter is that in Region 10, the playing of football, in particular, has been at a halt since 2019. Moreover, the venue where the synthetic track is being built...and the centre of the synthetic track is supposed to be an area to facilitate a Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) standard football pitch. I am happy that you mentioned putting down underground pipes, *et cetera*, to cater for drainage. The fact that the track has already been laid, how will the Ministry facilitate the building of the football pitch? I am trying to understand how is it that you have already completed the track and then machinery would have to go and dig up the area to put underground pipes and such like.

Mr. Ramson: The pipes have already been laid, Hon. Member. There is no need to dig up any kind of infrastructural work of that nature. The only work that has to be done in relation to that facility for that ground is the top surface work.

Mr. Figueira: That area in itself catered for four of the 10 registered clubs under the Upper Demerara Football Association, which could not have accessed any facility to play football. Could you say to this Committee when that would be completed? During the Local Government Election (LGE) period, you made a public announcement indicating that you would be handing over the

synthetic track to the community even though it is not completed. The completion would entertain the completion of a football pitch. Could you give some clarity with regards to this development?

Mr. Ramson: I am glad that you raised that. On Sunday, I had a big meeting with the community there. I should say mainly with the coaches and the athletes. If you check my *Facebook* page, you will see pictures of the persons who attended, along with us doing the site visit, to choose the entry points they would use and to determine the system by which we can monitor and supervise the access while work is going on. Obviously, you know that there is a huge stand that is being built at the moment. We have additional civil works to be done, additional construction works and projects to be done, about which I will make an announcement during the course of the year or in another month or so. We ironed out the specific entry point and the method of supervision and access with the athletes and the coaches representing the various athletic clubs. In addition, I forgot to mention that we have also gave the secondary school in Wisburg, the driving lawn mover tractor, as well as the brush cutter, so that they can keep their field in good condition, so that the footballers can use there. Since I was there on Saturday as well to start the 10K marathon race, I took the opportunity to visit West Watooka and Christianburg, since there was where the game ended. The West Watooka ground is not overgrown with bushes, but it needs additional work to get it to a much more decent condition. It is currently being used as well as the Christiansburg field. They are both currently being used.

7.11 p.m.

Mr. Figueira: With this new allocation that you are requesting, could you say if any additional ground would be upgraded within the community? Moreso, would Kwakwani, which produces some of the best footballers and the nation's best youth basketball players...would any of this allocation be put towards the development or enhancement of the football ground at Kwakwani? There is need for an upgrade in Ituni as well. With regard to the basketball court in kwakwanai, which needs some additional upgrade, would that be facilitated with this requested application?

Mr. Ramson: I took the opportunity to visit Kwakwani, particularly the basketball court and I saw that the swimming pool area is in a really bad condition as well. The Kwakwani court is not in bad condition, but the hoops could be upgraded. It is something that we are looking at. I am not going to give any commitments on the new expenditure because it has to go through a process as well as

a Cabinet approval, but it is on the radar. Having said that, just so that we are clear about what I am saying, our intention is for all of the communities across the country to benefit from the expenditure from the Government, especially in relation to our community grounds and our sports facilities.

Mr. Figueira: I am double backing on the previous question. You did not give a date with regard to when the football pitch would be completed. I would like to crave your indulgence to ensure that this allocation... Given the fact that I have mentioned that Kwakwani basketball players are the best youth players in the country and the fact that you have visited, as you have indicated, and you saw the need for the court and the rims to be upgraded, this should not be a matter of Cabinet discussion. We are talking about the best athletes with regard to basketball in the country and the fact that you as the Minister with responsibility have visited the community and saw the need for a proper basketball hoop and probably better lighting, which is very minute in my regard, it should not be difficult to make a decision when you are asking for half of a billion dollars to invest in the nation's youth. Would that be done? With regard to the deadline for the completion of the football pitch at the synthetic track, could you say when in totality the completion of the football pitch and the official handing over of that facility will be made?

Mr. Ramson: I answered the first part of the question. In relation to the second part of the question, we are going to commence that process, based on the discussion that we had on Sunday. Regarding the handing over of the facility, all of the facilities where we have that kind of investment being made are always going to be run under the supervision of the Government of Guyana. It is for the benefit of the people of any part of the country where those facilities exist, but it also has to be an arrangement where the supervision is maintained so that the people of the country can be satisfied that there is maintenance, that there is order and that there is protection of the facilities. Despite what is being done, and you can see it in many instances, even with the best of intentions, public facilities are destroyed. I see it many times when I go to community grounds when sometimes there are community management committees. Even with the best of intentions, the public facilities are destroyed and that is not something that will be beneficial to anyone especially when we consider the large amounts of moneys that we are putting into that particular facility or any of the major stadiums that we are building.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you. I do not believe you have answered the question about when the football pitch would be completed. Moving on, I spoke about the handing over of the facility based on what you would have said during the campaign, but I could care less about who is manning the facility. I am more concerned with it being properly furnished with all of the necessary requirements to enhance the performance of the athletes. In that regard, could you say if some of the said allocations here would be used to ensure that the synthetic track is furnished with lights so that athletes and residents of the community can access the facility after work or extend their training during the nights? As it is, no lights are available.

Mr. Ramson: No, this is...

Mr. Chairman: Allow him to finish and then I will put it to you.

Mr. Ramson: I apologise, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much. Forgive me for my hastened response. I understood the question that he was asking. This is the ground enhancement line item. Any kind of project allocation for that facility would not come from this line item. Having said that, you should know and you should be aware that we made the announcement that we are installing FIFA standard lights at the facility to match and may even surpass what exists at the Leonora facility. Since I have the opportunity to state here, in a matter of weeks, you will see the instillation of the new lights at the Mackenzie sports facility. During this year, you will start to see works for that. To answer your question, it is not from this line item that deals with any expenditure coming on that facility.

Mr. Figueira: The facility to house spectators at the synthetic track that is being built, can you say what is the seating capacity that that facility would hold?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let me just pull us back to the line item. We have focused on the Linden Facility and facilities in that area, which could better be directed through questions to the Minister. I guarantee you that if such questions come, they will be dealt with to get on the Order Paper expeditiously.

An. Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*).

Mr. Chairman: It is because they are not in order.

An. Hon Member: *(Inaudible)*

Mr. Chairman: The Speaker does not write to people; the Clerk does. We are asking questions pertaining to the line item. Even if it all pertains to one facility, ask the question, ‘in the end, is this catered for under this line item?’

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. Minister, you have indicated that in your ground enhancement, you would have catered for 100 grounds. Will some of this said allocation be put to the very said grounds for additional upgrading and what would those upgrading features look like? Added to that, could you also indicate if other community grounds will be included across the region to move the 100 grounds that you said were upgraded to a large number?

Mr. Ramson: That is not what I said.

Mr. Figueira: Did you not say that you upgraded 100 grounds?

Mr. Ramson: That is since I came into Office.

Mr. Figueira: Right. So, I am asking...

Mr. Ramson: No. You said with this allocation.

Mr. Figueira: Yes, I am speaking about the \$500 million that you are now requesting.

Mr. Ramson: No, you cannot...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, the Minister was speaking about the 100 grounds since he assumed Office, if I had it correctly.

Mr. Ramson: That is correct.

Mr. Chairman: This allocation deals with some others.

Mr. Ramson: That is correct.

Mr. Figueira: That is what I am asking.

Mr. Chairman: The Minister said he upgraded over 100 grounds coming into Office. The remarks speak to the provision of additional resources to facilitate an expanded work programme. My question is, would some of these moneys be put to those 100 grounds for additional upgrade to those facilities to make them more conducive for the athletes? Added to that, would more grounds be added for upgrade with this allocation?

Mr. Ramson: Yes, to both.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Could the Hon. Minister say if this sum will cover the completion of the Mocha/Arcadia Community Centre ground which started since last year September? We are almost in September of this year. I would like to know if the cost will cover the completion of that ground. Secondly, could you say if Timehri red ground, Grove Football Ground and Diamond Community Ground will also be covered in this cost?

Mr. Ramson: Significant work was actually done at the Mocha school ground and there are some minor projects to be done and some remedial projects to be done as well. We will be having another visit to the community, in the very near future, just to tidy up the additional work that is needed for that ground. The ground at Grove is being done currently. I am not sure if you are aware of that, but I am telling you now that it is being done currently. In fact, some of the allocation that came out of the \$250 million for the year has already been expended on that ground already. We are also currently doing a ground in Diamond and another one is programmed. Obviously, you are aware that there are several grounds in Diamond because of how big the Diamond area is, but there are quite a few on the radar.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, for the Diamond Community Centre Ground, I know that the Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) has put a management committee and a project document comprising some \$60 million to do everything has been developed. I happen to know because I am like a trustee on the management committee. I am sure we are going to reach the Hon. Minister with the proposal.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you for the information. Cde. Minister, I am asking this question because, as you know, September to December is sports term and, somehow, I feel as though the grounds project is not touching the East Bank enough. The schools along the East Bank find it challenging to get a ground to do their sports. To get to the stadium is challenging and costly for persons to

have to leave all the way from Timehri or the highway to come down to the stadium. I would like to know if any works would be done in time for the schools to be able to use their community grounds to have their inter-house which takes place during September and October. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, before you answer, the project document that is coming to you is here. She can have a look at it.

Mr. Ramson: We will be working very closely with the Ministry of Education to see that it happens.

7.26 p.m.

Ms. Philadelphia: If my memory serves me correct, \$250 million was allocated in the budget for ground improvement. Could I ask the Minister how much of that sum has been spent as at 31st July? How much of this sum now being requested would be used to enhance grounds on the East Coast and could those grounds be listed so that I have an understanding of them? Thank you.

Mr. Ramson: The answer to the first question is that it was already answered and so I would just revert to my former statement. The second part has also already been answered and so I will also revert to my former statement.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Could the Hon. Minister indicate to the Committee the position for bound yard, Ankersville, Port Mourant community centre, Block 4, and Tain? Three years now moneys were expended and still it is not in a state so that children could have access.

Mr. Ramson: It is incredible that I could get a question from an Hon. Member in this House to say that three years now that moneys have been expended and up to now the children cannot get access. We have barely been in office three years, first of all. Second of all, for those locations, there had been no allocations until last year. Almost all of the projects for some of those grounds which he mentioned, I do not recall... not all of those grounds' commitments were made, or allocations were made, or projects were done. For those grounds for which projects were done last year, all of the projects were completed.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Could the Hon. Minister indicate to us the position of the grounds that were identified and the amount of work that was done there in Port Mourant particularly?

Mr. Ramson: That has nothing to do with the allocations of this year. If you want a detailed explanation of it, the projects were executed through the region. You could get that information from them.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, I trust I did not miss you in any way, shape or form. I know for a fact that the Ministry had started some work in West Ruimveldt on the west ground. My question to you is, from this new provision, do you have any provision catered for the ground in East Ruimveldt. If so, what amount will be allocated for that project?

Mr. Ramson: The Hon. Member would know that we just installed lights at the East Ruimveldt ground. The answer to your question is that it is likely. I am not going to give any commitment on the new allocations. Having said that, what I am saying is that we have started the work at East Ruimveldt. Those lights that we have installed there are 50-foot concrete poles with Light-Emitting Diode (LED) stadium lights as well underground lighting. It is significant.

Mr. Norton: Could the Hon. Minister tell this Committee what criteria they used to determine the grounds that they will do enhancement work on, and if that criteria was applicable in the choice of the Retrieve ground? The Minister, in his presentation, pointed out that there is really a deficit in the capabilities to manage these grounds after enhancement. Around the world what happens is that you train community-based people in ground management so that they could manage the grounds. I do not believe it is a practical possibility that Government will manage all the grounds as they enhance them. Could the Minister say to this Committee if they have such a programme? If they do, in which areas have they implemented it? If they do not, do they intend to improve the capacity of communities to manage their own grounds?

Mr. Ramson: For the first question, it is the Government's intention to do essentially all of the grounds in all of the communities. Having said that, the locations, generally, are chosen based on the population density and additional criteria such as how many children would have access to that ground. The Retrieve ground is surrounded by three schools. Just so that we are clear, when I did the recce in Linden, the person who was present at the location, amongst other members of the community, and the person who was present at my public meeting who made a request for that ground to be done was none other than the Regional Chairman, Mr. Deron Adams. Before we get into the politics of what was said during the campaign of Local Government Elections...and I

heard what was being said about how we spent \$15 million to do some party. We have not even spent \$5 million. Here is what I know. The persons representing the APNU/AFC who were going around the place saying that would not retract their statement. They will not make a public statement, even though they have been going to every single political community meeting and saying that we spent \$15 million for some party. We have not spent \$5 million. When that representation was made, it was made in 2022 when I had that meeting.

Mr. Norton: I do not understand why the *non sequitur*. I asked a simply question. I did not ask who suggested to you. I asked a straight question. What criteria was used? You gave one, population density.

Mr. Ramson: I gave two.

Mr. Norton: What is the other one?

Mr. Ramson: Access to children.

Mr. Norton: You did not say that. You said there is...

Mr. Ramson: I did say that.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you would get a chance to answer. Let the Leader of the Opposition speak.

Mr. Norton: The Minister said there were schools in the area. I want to ask the question, if it is population density, how was the Retrieve done ahead of Christianburg ground when one of the most populated areas as Mr. Figueira would know is Christianburg? You are still to answer the other question I asked.

Mr. Ramson: If you go to Christianburg right now, you will find a tarmac, you will find a pavilion, you will find a field, you will find football goals, you will find a driveway and you will find toilet facilities in the pavilion. What will you find...? I am speaking.

Mr. Norton: On a point of order.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, please tell me what is the point of order.

Mr. Ramson: You cannot have a point of order during the interrogation of our supplementary. There are all of that existing infrastructure at Christianburg. What is there at Retrieve? At the time when I visited Retrieve – keep in mind that I said they are three schools surrounding this ground and hundreds of children – the bush exceeded probably my height at that time. **[Mr. Figueira:** That is gross exaggeration.] Alright. Maybe, it was half; maybe, it was about three feet or four feet. It had no infrastructure work, maybe with the exception of a dilapidated fence, and no access; nothing. If you are asking why I chose... I do not really have to make a... This is not a very difficult decision for anyone to make. You asked what some of the criteria were. I gave some of the criteria. It is not strict criteria, but in this situation, if anyone were in my shoes, they would have chosen to help this ground first. This is because there are so many schools that have access when compared to another ground that currently has a lot of facilities that has a lot of investment already and a lot of kids already use it.

Mr. Norton: Firstly, let me say that the Minister did not answer the second question. The second question dealt with the improving of the capacity of people to manage the grounds.

Mr. Ramson: I was searching for that existing programme on managing facilities that the APNU/AFC left when they demitted office. That programme, for which the Hon. Member was an advisor of some kind, did not leave that programme for the Ministry or for any of the local community grounds. Having said that, we have in a programme that is being used, which is different and which will be implemented through the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development.

Mr. Norton: The question I asked him was if there was such a programme. I did not ask him if the APNU had one. I asked him if there is going to be such a programme. I would not mind hearing the elements of the programme. It is the Minister who stressed population density. I have no problem with population density. The point I am making is if you are looking at population density, then Christianburg ground should have been completed.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, should Christianburg ground have been completed based on population density?

Mr. Ramson: Mr. Chairman, I have answered the question already.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much.

Mr. Figueira: I could appreciate the Minister's criteria for population density. In that regard, Ameila's Ward has the largest concentration of young people in the entire of Region 10. It has no suitable facility to facilitate the multiple disciplines in which young people in the region participate. I believe your consideration from the Ministry's level if your criteria that you set out for identifying the investment in grounds...then Amelia's Ward definitely should be considered a priority with regard to making the necessary investment to cater for that community that has so many young people. Additionally, Mr. Chairman, the Retrieve facility that the Minister identified was catered for by the Mackenzie sports club facility. The fact that it is being upgraded, we welcome it. If we are looking at an area that should have been given priority, based on the Minister's own criteria with regard to the density of population of young people that do not have any facility, then that priority should be given to Ameila's Ward.

Mr. Chairman: The question is, is Ameila's Ward being considered in this allocation?

7.41 p.m.

Mr. Figueira: Yes, is Amelia's Ward going to be considered?

Mr. Ramson: The answer is, all of the community grounds are on the radar. What I could tell you is, I was searching for whether any allocation was made to Amelia's Ward during the time of the APNU/AFC Government and I was struggling to find any. The Hon. Member was a Member of Parliament then for the region and one would have expected that given this was and is a very strong support area for the APNU/AFC, and the PNC in particular, the investment would have made during your time, and your colleagues would have been inclined to accept your advice. Unfortunately, the record does not show that. Having said that, what I will say is that all of the community grounds are on the radar. The Government intends to invest in every single one of them. It has been an aggressive programme already. It is probably, if not the most, one of the most important programmes that exists under the Ministry, which has gained a lot of public attention and participation. I would like to thank all of the communities for the support they have shown to me, the Ministry, and our team. I would also like to say that Amelia's Ward, along with all of the others, will be given attention. It is our intention to make the investment in all communities. One would see as well that for the Amelia's Ward Basketball Court, there was recently some investment

done there. We just completed some additional infrastructure and civil works there. We also are looking to complete there with some new basket hoops and pro hoops as well.

Mr. Norton: Could the Hon. Minister tell us, in the development he spoke about in question about the basketball courts, if the sanitation facility, the building and fencing, were done from these enhancement funds?

Mr. Ramson: I am unable to say.

Mr. Figueira: The fact the Minister is unable to say, I could say no, it was not done by you. Those representations that the Minister spoke of while we were in Government were made for the Amelia's Ward community to be given such a facility, but the fact of the matter is that the APNU/AFC Government catered for the entire Guyana with limited resources. This is not a back and forth issue. The issue is that young the people in Region 10, the region that has the best athletes in this country, deserve facilities. I am saying, and putting to the Minister, that Region 10 and more so Amelia's Ward which has the largest concentration of young people, has to be given priority for them to be given an opportunity to continue to represent Guyana in the highest regard. No other region has presented more international medals than Region 10, so do not bring this pity politics into this [*inaudible*]. Give the young people what they deserve.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, we are asking questions based on this allocation; the Minister answered. We are making representation for particular areas, that is your job, but now we are dealing with the project code in front of us. We have more than exhausted the questions pertaining to the use of these funds. Hon. Minister, you have a chance to answer.

Mr. Ramson: I would only answer by saying that we allocated more money in our budget during the 2011 to 2014 period when there was not even a sniff of oil. When one examines what was done during your period, there was a much lower allocation. In fact, it had fallen by half. Having said that, let me just address the point of investment in sport. Region 10 is getting more investment in sport per capita than any other region in the country – shocking and factual. In fact, I will also say that during the APNU/AFC tenure, they did not get the most allocation in sport than any other region.

Mr. Norton: Could I ask the Hon. Member to outline for us, per capita, what every...

Mr. Chairman: Not under this line item. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you can ask him to itemise what is being done by this allocation. For the question that you were going to ask, you could send in a question to him for oral or written reply.

Mr. Norton: The other question that I asked was not answered. Could the Minister outline what is the Government's plan to develop the capacity and the capability of communities to manage their own grounds?

Mr. Ramson: I answered that question, Mr. Chairman, and I would revert to my answer.

Mr. Chairman: Again, it does not relate directly to a line item.

Mr. Norton: Hon. Chairman, it relates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, please allow me to speak.

Mr. Norton: Hon. Chairman, it relates. If you are saying to me... This is what the Minister said, that the Ministry is upgrading these grounds and it is going to hand them over to the Government. It is on that basis I asked the question because if it is upgrading them and is a proper manager...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, if you were listening from the start of the Minister's presentation, he told the House of the management concept for this ground; he did.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, you did not listen to what I am saying. Hon. Chairman, I am saying that the Minister said that the Ministry is going to hand it over to the Government. Is that a point of fact that I am saying what the Minister said?

Mr. Ramson: I did not say that.

Mr. Norton: What did you say when you were referring to the Mackenzie Sports Club Ground?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we cannot go back and forth about what was said and what was not said. We do have a project code in front of us and I would not put... If you make a statement, I will give the Minister a chance to respond with a statement.

Mr. Norton: I put a question.

Mr. Chairman: If you asked a question with respect to this project code, I would put that also, and we could stay here for the next two days.

Mr. Norton: The question is, is there a plan by the Ministry to ensure that it improves the capacity of the people in these communities where it does ground enhancement to manage the ground?

Mr. Ramson: I answered that question. I will revert to my former response.

Mr. Holder: Cde. Chairman, through you to the Minister, is there any allocation or sums from this \$500 million that caters for the upgrade of the Good Hope Ground in Region 2? The ground was developed by the previous Government based on a request from the residents and youths there. The previous Government installed lights, a pavilion, did the fencing and ground development, *et cetera*. Over the last three years, it has been left, I will put it, in the wilderness, overgrown with bushes, and the residents, the youths in particular, continue to complain, so much so that they complained to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and other ministers who had visited that community at different intervals. Additionally, is there any sum to cater for the ground at Westbury, which services Dartmouth and the Westbury community? Like Good Hope, the same obtains there. Thirdly, for the Danielstown Community Centre, I had asked this question in this very House at least once or twice before, is there any amount in this sum here to deal with the community centre? It is in a very dilapidated state. There is an urgent need for works there to be done.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, again, I am prepared for you all to make the statements and I am prepared to give the Minister a chance to make his statements also.

Mr. Ramson: Mr. Chairman, I have answered that question already. I will refer to my former statement. We have taken note of the points that the Hon. Member has raised.

Item 8: 44-444 Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport – Sports – Grounds Enhancement Programme – \$500,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister and your staff. Hon. Members, we will now ask the Hon. Minister of Housing and Water and his staff to get into position. But before we take the Hon. Minister, let the Assembly resume.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have to perform two functions here. First, call on the Hon. Attorney General performing the functions of the Prime Minister to move the Standing Orders so we could go beyond 8 o'clock. Today we started at 10.00 a.m. Then he has to move that Standing Order No. 9 be suspended so we could conclude the business of the 67th Sitting of the National Assembly. Hon. Attorney General, one at a time, go ahead.

Prime Minister (ag), Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: I did not hear the first one; sorry, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: The convention is that once we start at 10.00 a.m. we are supposed to finish at 8.00 p.m., so we have to move the Standing Order to be suspended to go beyond 8 o'clock.

Suspension of Standing Order No. 10(1)

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Order No. 10(1) be suspended to enable this sitting of the National Assembly to be extended beyond 8.00 p.m.”

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

Mr. Nandlall: Acting under the relevant Standing Order, I moved that the sitting of this National Assembly be extended beyond 8.00 p.m. this evening.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: Now, for the second Standing Order, Standing Order 9, which states that the recess starts, basically, from the 10th August. We have to suspend that Standing Order also because in a couple of hours, we will reach the 10th August. We have to suspend that Standing Order to complete the sitting, the business of the 67th Sitting of the National Assembly.

Suspension of Standing Order No. 9

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Order No. 9 be suspended to enable the business of the 67th Sitting of the National Assembly to be completed.”

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

Mr. Nandlall: Sir, I moved that Standing Order No. 9 be suspended so that we can complete the business of the 67th Sitting of the National Assembly.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

7.56 p.m.

Capital Expenditure

Item 9: 45-452 Ministry of Housing and Water – Housing Development – Infrastructural Development and Buildings – \$500,000,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, before I put my question to the Hon. Member, since I am on my feet, allow me to draw to the Committee’s attention information concerning the loan with regard to the Wismar Bridge. Earlier when we were considering the Ministry...

Mr. Chairman: Ask the question; I will give you an opportunity. We will ask the Hon. Minister of Public Works to consult with his colleague, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. I will give you a chance.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes, Mr. Chairman. I just want to let the National Assembly know that the Loan Agreement was actually tabled and laid on the 20th July.

Mr. Chairman: I told you to delay that and ask the Minister of Housing and Water the questions since I have put that. I will give you an opportunity after.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Could the Hon. Member state for the National Assembly what percentage of the initial voted sum has been spent as of the 31st July, 2023? If that sum was not fully spent, has it been exhausted?

Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Croal]: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The answer is just over 50% on the \$50 billion, the voted provision.

Ms. Ferguson: Therefore, if just over 50% of the initial voted sum has been expended to date, then why come for an additional \$500 million?

Mr. Croal: That is what you should have asked first. The additional resource of \$500 million, which is 1% of the voted provision – minimal – is being asked for because it is part of an inclusion, as is stated in the profile there. In Region 3, we have a number of areas such as Tuschen, Zeelugt, Zeeburg and Belle West. If you look at Region 4, in areas on the East Bank from Herstelling all the way up – including Farm, Covent Garden, Friendship, *et cetera* – you will see there are a number of vulnerable persons living along those banks or even in the communities that are considered irregular in the sense of where they are living. This is a specific fund that is intended to be expended both in Regions 3 and 4 as a start – as I said, \$500 million is not much – to address some of those persons.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, through you to the Hon. Member, I am just seeking clarity. Will work be done on roads or houses? Just clarify it for me, please.

Mr. Croal: It would be both the buildings and the areas which are to be established.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, through you to the Hon. Member, what criteria were used to determine the communities that will be benefitting from this additional allocation?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, the communities identified were examples. I have given the cluster. As is stated right in the profile, there is a particular bracket that we are addressing. This is addition to our normal housing programme which is being addressed through that same \$50 billion provision, but now, in a fast-track way. For example, if you go to the East Bank, on the river dam, the corridor, you will find that you have another challenge. Sea defence would tell you the challenge based on the environment in which some of those persons are living. It is basically to address this in a faster way. I am sure you should be happy that we are doing this to help our citizens live a better life.

Ms. Ferguson: Through you, Mr. Chair, to the Hon. Member, could you advise this National Assembly if the additional works will be advertised? What procurement procedure or method will you use to have these works executed?

Mr. Croal: For the three years I am at the Ministry and continuing, I have always adopted public open tenders.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, through you to the Hon. Member, could the Hon. Member assure this Assembly that the Ministry will not return to the House for additional sums when it comes out from recess?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, I am here to seek some additional resources for a particular activity. That is what I am here for.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I think I have exhausted my questions to the Hon. Member. I do not have any further questions for the Hon. Member.

Item 9: 45-452 Ministry of Housing and Water – Housing Development – Infrastructural Development and Buildings - \$500,000,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister and staff.

Ms. Ferguson: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: I did not hear you. There is only one project code.

Ms. Ferguson: There is only one project code, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: There is only one project code and we just put it.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes. That is good.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. We now invite the Hon. Minister of Health and his staff.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I just want to seek clarification on the earlier question I asked.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. We have to do that.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. We have to do that. Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Hon. Minister of Public Works, there was a question with respect to the financing of the Wismar Bridge. The Hon. Member had information that conflicted

with what the Hon. Minister of Public Works said. In deference to her, I told her to let us put the question and then I will give her an opportunity to ask about where the financing is coming from. So, I now invite her to seek that clarification. Go ahead. Hon. Member.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Earlier when we were considering the supplemental for the Ministry of Public Works, under the Wismar Bridge, I asked the question of whether the project has funding from any foreign company. I think the Minister was unsure. I have the information before me here. There was an article carried by *News Source* dated... I am trying to get the correct date, Sir. The *News Source* article carried that the Saudi Fund for Development (SFD) Chief Executive Officer, Mr. Sultan Abdulrahman Al-Marshad had signed two development loan agreements worth \$150 million with the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Hon. Dr. Singh, in order to support the housing and transportation sectors in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. The deals are intended to fund the infrastructural development works for the housing sector project and the construction of the Wismar Bridge project. Before me, I have a list of approximately 11 loan agreements that have been laid in this National Assembly. This particular loan agreement:

“... No. 2/797 signed on 16/11/1444 A.H., corresponding to 5/6/2023 A.D. (June 5, 2023), between the Co-operative Republic of Guyana and the Saudi Fund for Development for an amount of Saudi Riyals 187,500,000 (US\$50,000,000), to assist in financing the Construction of Wismar Bridge Project, 2023.”

The document was laid in this National Assembly on the 20th July, 2023. Therefore, Sir, with that being said, my question to the Hon. Member is to clarify whether the Wismar Bridge will be funded by the Saudi Fund for Development of some US\$150 million. Out of the US\$150 million signed for the housing sector and the bridge, can you say what moneys will go toward the financing of the Wismar Bridge from this particular loan that was signed? Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. To add, the Minister had said that the bridge was going to be funded locally, as far as he knew.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I think we are still in the Committee. At the time that the issue came up, regrettably, I was attending to other matters of the state just immediately outside of the chamber. On my return, I was alerted of this issue. Let me say that there is in fact

no great mystery surrounding the matter. The Hon. Member correctly recalls that financing agreements totalling US\$150 million were signed with the Saudi Fund For Development. Those financing agreements were tabled in this honourable House. The language in and surrounding the financing agreements did make reference to both housing developments and the Wismar Bridge. All of that is factually correct. The agreements have been tabled in the National Assembly. The Hon. Member clearly has the records, *et cetera*.

Let me just point out that the Wismar Bridge project comprises of not only the actual construction of the bridge but associated civil works as well, including access roads. The Hon. Member, the Minister of Public Works, perhaps might be better placed to describe in detail the ancillary civil works. I am aware that there are access roads to be built on both sides in addition to the actual construction of the bridge. So, it is a fact that we have secured financing to support the construction of the bridge and associated works. We are in the process of negotiating and concluding a contract with the engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contractor for the actual construction of the bridge. The Hon. Member, Minister Bishop Edghill was absolutely correct in saying that the actual civil works contract in connection with the construction of the bridge, is anticipated to be financed out of local resources, hence the supplementary provisions are being sought now. Having said that, there are ancillary works that will be needed, including, as I said, access roads and supportive infrastructure.

8.11 p.m.

I want to say too that we want, as a Government, to move forward as quickly as possible with the commencement and completion of this bridge. And it is for that reason that we are moving with the alacrity with which we are moving. We have already identified a top ranked international company and we are in the process of discussions. We have just commenced the process of discussions with that company with a view the concluding contract with them. There is no great mystery here. As I said, the Hon. Member's memory is not playing tricks with her at all. In fact, the Hon. Member remembers accurately the events and circumstances surrounding those particular financing agreements. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the clarification now has been given. I am not going to allow a supplemental on that. We promised that we will give you an opportunity to clarify because the Minister had said yes.

Capital Expenditure

Item 10: 47-474 Ministry of Health – Regional and Clinical Services – Buildings – \$1,000,000,000

Dr. Cummings: There is only one item that is scheduled for supplementary provision under this health sector. The voted provision at the last budget was \$1.7 billion for chart of account 1216200. An extra \$1 billion is being sought, which is an increase of 60% of the original voted provision. According to the remarks in this column:

“...additional resources to facilitate urgent rehabilitation and upgrading of health facilities.”

We on this side of the divide are in support of any improved health facility and enhanced service delivery, but I am just wondering if the engineer did not do a good estimate. Why the increase at this point in time? Of the voted provisions, has it been exhausted? What percentage has been used up?

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, for that question. The \$1.7 billion that was allocated, we have used that money to allocate approximately \$1 billion to various regions to fix health centres in those regions. We have done about 132 different facilities in the various regions. In addition to that, we had \$109 million as roll over projects from the previous year. Then, we had set aside approximately \$220 million to upgrade mortuaries across the country at various hospitals. Plus, we had some works that we were doing at several hospitals – at Karasabai; we did some work at Sand Creek, and some other places. That amounted to the \$1.7 billion. Approximately 60% of it has already been expended. We are on our way to completing the sum that has been allocated. The additional \$1 billion that we are seeking would help us to do work in about 153 different facilities. Apart from fixing additional health centres from across the different regions, we are also doing works to fix living quarters for doctors and nurses in these various regions. That is what the addition \$1 billion would do.

Dr. Cummings: According to the legend, that money was, should I say, specifically for Mibicuri Hospital, Port Maurant, Linden, Aishalton, Wakenaam, Kwakwani, and an extension of the Northeast La Penitence Poly Clinic. These specific facilities, have they been covered? Have they been completed? Have they been rehabilitated?

Dr. Anthony: Again, those were rollover projects from the previous year, all of which have been completed. That amounted to \$109 million.

Dr. Cummings: Do you have the same contractors that are working to the completion of this extended work you are talking about?

Dr. Anthony: Let us say we give \$100 million to Region 1. The regions would go for local contractors, so there would be a multitude of people doing these types of jobs.

Dr. Cummings: Just two more questions. Could we have a disaggregation of this \$1 billion for the different health facilities? Could it be disaggregated? Maybe you could lay it over for us.

Dr. Anthony: Which ones, the new ones or the ones we had earlier?

Dr. Cummings: You said those that were already finished. We are talking about this \$1 billion.

Dr. Anthony: Just to give you a summary, there are 153 facilities that we will be working on: eight of them in Region 1, 30 of them in Region 2, 16 in Region 3, 24 in Region 4, 19 in Region 5, 13 in Region 6, 11 in Region 7, nine in Region 8, six in Region 9, and 17 in Region 10. I can give you the names of the places and so forth.

Dr. Cummings: You can lay it over. Lastly, it has come to my attention recently that some roof has caved in at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) and has damaged some equipment. Is part of this \$1 billion going to repair that section of the GPHC that has been damaged?

Dr. Anthony: I am not aware of any section of the GPHC roof that has caved in. I do not think that has happened. I do not know anything about that; that was not reported to me.

Dr. Cummings: No further questions, Sir.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I listened to the Hon. Member stating that there will be 24 projects in Region 4. Would that include any works for the Diamond Hospital?

Dr. Anthony: We are not doing any particular work at the Diamond Hospital *per se*, but we are doing work at the Diamond SMART centre. This is a health centre that has been built within the community of Diamond. We will be spending \$12.4 million to construct a driveway, to do some work in the yard, and a pharmacy bond. We are also going to be refurbishing the living quarters for doctors at Diamond. For that we will be spending about \$7.9 million. And then there are some other rehabilitation works for living quarters for nurses; we will be spending about \$7 million on that.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I have been frequenting the Diamond Hospital of recent because of reports I have been getting of an incident that took place there. When I saw that there was an upgrade to health facilities, I was wondering why no consideration was given to Diamond, because I know that a number of the air conditioning units are not functioning there. You go and you see fans plugged in and all of that. That is what I am really concerned about. Is the Diamond Hospital not supposed to be a SMART hospital too? I do not know.

Dr. Anthony: I want to thank the Hon. Member for the question, but I must say that she is very non-specific. I went to Diamond just one week ago and I had a very thorough tour of the Diamond Hospital, and I can tell you that nobody reported to me that there is any air conditioning unit in that facility that is not working. Unless the Hon. Member has very specific information that I can do something about, then I do not think what the Hon. Member just said is of any consequence.

Mr. Henry: I would just like to ask the Minister about the Annai District Hospital. We received reports that it was in a very bad position, although work was being done there. There is no water, no electricity, no comfort for the patients that are coming in, and more things which may not be part of the budget.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, is Diamond included in these allocations? Sorry, not Diamond, Annai.

Dr. Anthony: For Annai, we have set aside from the \$1.7 billion that I spoke about earlier, that we had from earlier this year... Annai is listed as one of the facilities that we will be doing major

works at. These include putting in a new accident and emergency department, a new outpatient department, a dental department, and we have a rehabilitation section that will be going in. There is also a whole section where there will be an operating theatre, a recovery room, and a preoperative room. All of that will be going in. I think the sums that we have allocated to Annai are probably about \$80 million or thereabout. I am quite aware, because about two weeks ago we had gone through with the engineers very detailed drawings for Annai. I know that works should be starting there very soon.

Item 10: 47-474 Ministry of Health – Regional and Clinical Services – Buildings – \$1,000,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Minister of Home Affairs and staff. Hon. Members, I have been asked to put the current items together.

Current Expenditure

Item 11: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Field Materials and Supplies, Office Materials Supplies, Maintenance of Buildings, Maintenance of Other Infrastructure, Local Travel and Subsistence, Equipment Maintenance, Other and Dietary - \$50,000,000, \$50,000,000, \$50,000,000, \$50,000,000, \$200,000,000, \$40,000,000, \$50,000,000, \$80,000,000

Field Materials and Supplies

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Mr. Chairman, I am going to deal with the first item, which deals with field materials. There is a voted provision of \$160 million and the Hon. Member is seeking an additional \$50 million. Could the Hon. Member give us a detailed breakdown or lay over to us why this provision is being sought? What analyses or assessment was done to determine that you actually need \$50 million more? You are requesting \$50 million for field materials. Is this premised on the fact that the crime statistics that you have released are misleading and that crime is indeed on the rise? Is that why you need additional field materials? I also want to know what the unforeseen circumstances are and why these were not included in the budget.

8.26 p.m.

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would like to in any event thank the Hon. Member for her question. I will prefer to lay over the details that the Hon. member is interested in. First off, I would like to disabuse the Hon. lady's mind and Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul's mind that the crime statistics are misleading. Just to say that for the past two years, we have had a reduction in serious crimes, I did say this before in the honourable House, of 20% for each year – 2022 and 2021 compared to the previous years. In total, the 20% reduction that we had in the first year of 2021, reflects on 2020 and the year 2022 reflects on 2021. There is an accumulative reduction in total violent crimes over those years. At the moment, even though we have a number of, which we call the “Hickens number” indeed in discussion, a target of a minus 35% for this year based on last year's numbers, we have had the unfortunate situation in respect to the serious and tragic matter at Mahdia, which has impacted negatively on the statistics. We have had an upsurge in gun crimes. These two particular issues are what are driving the statistics in the direction which we did not want it to go at the present time. The current statistics is -14.8%. to date compared to last year. There is still a continuous reduction in serious crimes in the country, resulting from the work of the Guyana Police Force (GPF) under the guidance, direction and facilitation of the Ministry.

In respect of the materials, I would lay over to which the Hon. lady referenced. The fact of the matter is that we have had extensive operations in terms of the Guyana Police Force in support of other agencies. Also, we had their recent Tradewinds Exercise in our country, which resulted in more expenditure and more resources being brought to bear, with respect to materials which are needed for the work of the Guyana Police Force. I am reminded that we also had Local Government Election (LGE) with regard extensive mobilisation and deployment and inlining of the Guyana Police Force, alongside other agencies in support. I think those are the particular reasons which we could reference at this time, in respect to the question asked by the Hon. lady.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Before I proceed to another line item, I just have a follow up. In terms of the upsurge of gun crimes, could the Minister not only disabuse my mind or that of Mr. Mahipaul or Member of the House, but rather the entire, what steps is he taking, as the Minister who has responsibility for this sector, to address this upsurge in crime? Could he also let us know whether the Operation Tradewinds activities and the Local Government Elections were impromptu

activities or were they planned? Was he not aware of them when he was preparing and planning the budget?

Mr. Benn: In respect of the Local Government Elections and the Tradewinds exercises and other exercises, the detail and the effort which required more efforts and more usage of materials. I think we are all aware of that with respect to the Local Government Elections. The numbers and issues in relation to the Operation Tradewinds and other supporting activities depended in the final analysis on the total number of people who would be impacted or involved in policing activities.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: There was a first question that dealt with the steps that would be taken by the Minister to address the upsurge in gun crimes.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, before you answer the question, again you have to relate it to the line items. To me, that is a broad policy statement.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Sir, with the greatest of respect to you, this is an answer that emanated from a specific line item question that was addressed to the Minister. I asked him specifically on line item 6222 and out of that answer emanated the answer of an upsurge in crime, so I merely asked a follow up question.

Mr. Benn: We continue to make vigorous efforts in respect of recovering, finding and dealing with issues in respect to gun crimes. We are having successes in relation to this matter. I think just last night we recovered three weapons. Of course, I would not want to be the one to answer for certain missing weapons which occurred or the excesses in the granting of weapons in a particular period before the People's Progressive Party/Civic came back to power. We are aware that we are dealing with issues of transnational organised crimes and that the question of drugs and other issues related are questions we are working on. We are working hard at these. Every day in the newspapers and on the social media, there is information in relation to our successes in relation to gun crimes.

Other

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Line item 6284 – Other: \$200 million is the voted provision. The Minister is now seeking an additional \$50 million. Could the Minister indicate how much of these moneys will go to the operational expenses of the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU)? Will

the specific operational expenses go towards the Community Development Programme and also the Ministerial Task Force on Trafficking in Persons?

Mr. Benn: None of these moneys are intended for the SOCU. On the question of the Ministerial Task Force on Trafficking in Persons, I think you would be aware that we are having particular successes in relation to trafficking in persons and the interdiction of traffickers and persons. We have had work in relation to additional events under the Guyana Police Force. We have had the Second Police Officers Symposium. We have had Inspectors and Sergeants Symposium in July and October. We have had seminars, workshops and sensitisation sessions for road users. We have had public and community outreaches, fairs for both health and career. We have had the Police Exposition and we related to all of that. We have had details in relation to the rental of tents, generator, chairs, portable toilets, bins, projectors and so on, which accounts for the \$50 million that you are enquiring about.

Local Travel and Subsistence

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Line item 6261 – Local Travel and Subsistence: could the Minister indicate to us the specific regions/stations that will benefit here? Could he also indicate to us whether a study or an analysis was done to ensure that all the police stations across the stations are fully staffed?

Mr. Benn: On the last issue with respect to the staffing of police stations, we have just brought in, I think some 50 policemen, in relation to traffic and other issues. We are working at the training and the development of policemen in respect of the new police college which will be accredited. If we speak specifically to the question of Local Travel and Subsistence, we have had the Independence Work Exposition and the parade which were held in Lethem. We have had issues in relation to the Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) squad. We had them on an exercise with the Joint Services in relation to the escape of certain wanted persons who escaped from the Mazaruni Prison. That required a great deal of deployment and work in the fields to get that situation brought under control. We did, of course, have the issue at Mahdia. There were quite a number of flights which were paid for by the Guyana Police Force under its accounts, in relation to providing the support and investigations in relation to that issue, which in itself is not at an end yet in respect to the work of the Guyana Police Force.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Chandan-Edmond, I will exhaust all the questions from one person and then we will move on to the next.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you, Sir. I just have one final question. Through you, Minister, could you indicate to us whether this amount here under Local Travel and Subsistence will include the entourage of police who have to accompany Government officials as they go across the country?

Mr. Benn: I find that as a very strange question. If policemen are on duty and they are providing security for Government officials throughout the country, as they go around doing their official duties, they have to be fed. They have to be fed. I do not think there should be any questions on that matter.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir, I have one question. Under this line item, Local Travel and Subsistence, this \$200 million, would this assist the police in tackling all of these vehicles that are on the roadways with this red and blue lights that are causing a lot of traffic hazard around the country? Will it enhance the police presence to fight so that at least we can bring back some law and order on the roadways with these blue and red lights, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, the red and blue lights nuisance.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, for his question, although I think it is a bit misdirected. Anything under this head will support the police in performing their functions. Of course, the public transportation area is burdened by the necessity to move large number of construction materials to places where much building is going on, in terms of infrastructure and buildings. We are under some difficulties and the police have been told on the number of occasions to respond to the challenge we have right now, in relation to traffic incidents, misbehaviour, incorrect or the misuse of lighting and other issues. We talked about the blue lights but there are other lights too. They are required to take account of this situation. Much of it has simply not to do with enforcement but also in counselling, information being given to the public, putting into effect the training that they have gotten in relation to being licensed as road users. It also has to do with personal dysfunctional choices in respect of public behaviours.

8.41 p.m.

Ms. Lawrence: To the Minister on the lines put by the Hon. Chairman, you received some \$3.5 billion six months ago and you are here again asking for approximately \$560 million. According to the remarks, you said it is for an expanded work programme. Could you state specifically what the programme entails?

Mr. Benn: I am not sure what exactly the Hon. Lady is referring to. I have said that we have programmes and projects. The programmes and projects, in spite of the best estimates which were put in the Budget, we have come for additional appropriation to deal with issues which were not foreseen at the time that the budget was done, in terms of the detail and extent and deployment of the Guyana Police Force for those issues. That is what it is. Yes, we did our flag raising in Lethem. We had escaped persons who were a danger to each and every person in this country as far as I and everyone else was almost as concerned. We dealt with that issue and we had to deploy. We had to respond. We responded to the situation in Mahadia. There are still issues relating to that which we have to work at. We are working hard in relation to the training and the further improvement in efficaciousness of the Guyana Police Force, and in terms of the total integrity of the force.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, since the supplementary before us, which is the third supplementary within six months states that the period ends on 31st December, could the Hon. Minister inform this House whether the projections made now for the moneys being sought has taken into consideration any unforeseen programmes for the rest of the year?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I thank the Hon. Lady for her question. Nevertheless, there are expediencies which may occur in the work of policing and security. I would be happy to be held by any person on the other side who may have notions in their heads as to what the police may have to do but, this is our best approach to the issues that we have now in relation to thing. We expect that given the encouragement; people will be rational, will behave better and that we do not have the expenditure and problems that we have at the current time. It is intended that we will rise to the level where we will deal with these issues and to arrive at our targeted reductions or better than our targeted reductions in spite of the challenges we have. Much of this relies on the messaging that comes not only from this side of the House, the PPP/C, but also what is said, the ideas and the suggestions which are given from the other side of the House in terms of political and other messaging.

Ms. Fernandes: This is just a follow-up to the Minister's last response, if I may.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Through you, Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister say specifically what is being done within these allocations that is going to be addressing, for example, we are seeing here for the Guyana Travel Advisory through the United States Department of State, it states that our Country Summary:

“Violent crime, including murder and armed robbery, is common, especially at night. Local police often lack the resources to respond effectively to serious criminal incidents.”

It went on to list:

“Be extra vigilant when you are visiting banks and or Automated Teller Machines (ATMs), be aware of your surroundings, avoid walking or driving at night, do not physically resist any robbery attempt, do not display signs of wealth, such as wearing expensive watches or jewellery.”

I do know the Hon. Minister is saying that we have the reports and the statistics coming out from the Ministry that we have some reductions but then, when we are seeing Guyana at level three, that is saying reconsider travel, it begs the question as to what are the data that we are actually looking at. We have been told in the National Assembly, time and time again, to refer to information in the public's sphere. In the public, we have noted comments from persons such as the former President of the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce – Timothy Tucker, who is on a roll right now speaking about the level of crime challenging the data. Specifically, what would the allocations being requested here today do to assist in these areas?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the Hon. Member for her questions.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

[Mr. Seeraj, Presiding Member, assumed the Chair.]

I would say that the questions relating to the advisory relates specifically to the advice that a foreign country gives to its state, to its citizens in Guyana or in relation to what risks they may

face, if they go to certain areas or if they comport themselves in a way which brings risk to them. I would suggest that if I go to certain cities or areas in the United States of America (USA), we do not give advisories but we face as much or more risks that you could be shot up by people at schools, markets, shopping malls and so on.

I do not want to go there but I am saying that we are aware of the areas which have difficult policing issues and problems. The state which referenced the issue naturally has a duty to warn its citizens on how they should move around the particular countries or particular areas in a country or a city in which they go. We do as much as we can to patrol those areas and the fact that we are coming for these appropriations relates to us getting better control of the situation for areas which are either crime ridden or have particular risks to persons. I think we have to take it in our stride while we deal with the issue. We have had high profile crimes and issues which are unfortunate, but the fact of the matter is that we have for three years running dramatic reduction in violent crime in Guyana. The fact of the matter is that the clear up rate for criminal activity violent crime has never been as high as it is now. It has never been as high as it is now.

Presiding Member [Mr. Seeraj]: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Fernandes, please let us get straight to the question.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, my specific question is based on the response of the Minister to my question. Is the Minister challenging the level three status that the United States of America is providing for its citizens? Is the Minister challenging this or is the Minister in agreement with this status?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I never suggested that I was challenging the position that the United States of America has taken on the matter. I said that every state has the responsibility to warn its citizens in another country on how they should comport themselves to avoid being at any particular risk and the level of awareness that they should have in relation to a particular risk. If I go to different countries, there are places I am told that I should not go or be or whatever. Even in this country, there are some places where we should not be or should not go until we get a better control of the situations.

Presiding Member: Members, we are dealing with Agency Code 51-512, it is Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force, Chart of Accounts 6222, 6223, 6242, 6255, 6261, 6282, 6284 and 6292.

Item 11: 51-512 – Ministry of Home Affairs – Field Materials and Supplies, Office Materials Supplies, Maintenance of Buildings, Maintenance of Other Infrastructure, Local Travel and Subsistence, Equipment Maintenance, Other and Dietary – \$50,000,000, \$50,000,000, \$50,000,000, \$50,000,000, \$200,000,000, \$40,000,000, \$50,000,000, \$80,000,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 11: 51-512 – Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Police Stations and Buildings, Land and Water Transport – Police, Equipment and Furniture – Police and Equipment – Police – \$400,000,000, \$400,000,000, \$358,000,000 & \$317,353,637

Mr. Mahipaul: No, Mr. Chairman, Point of Order. The agreement we had is that all the current line items will go together but, when it comes to capital, we will do them individually.

Presiding Member: I would not go against any agreement. Thank you very much but that was not my understanding.

Item 11: 51-512 – Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Police Stations and Buildings – \$400,000,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Mr. Chairman, through you, could the Hon. Minister indicate to us what is the status of the Aviation Unit of the Guyana Police Force?

Mr. Benn: I am not sure which project code the Hon. Member is referring to.

Presiding Member: Hon. Member Ms. Chandan-Edmond, will you be kind enough to direct the Minister's attention to the particular project code that you are referring to?

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Certainly, Sir. I am dealing with project code 1216800 that deals with, "Provision of additional resources to facilitate the upgrade of police stations, quarters, and other facilities to boost operational efficiency of the Guyana Police Force."

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the Hon. Member again for the question. I am not sure that there is a particular item that relates to the status of a [*inaudible*].

[*Mr. Chairman resumed the Chair*]

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Mr. Chairman, would that not qualify under “facilities to boost operational efficiency of the Guyana Police Force”?

8.56 p.m.

Mr. Benn: I will answer since the question is raised. We are making efforts to identify for the Guyana Police Force the considerations are in respect of setting up an aviation unit. The Guyana Police Force did have an Aviation Unit many years ago. We are relooking at the matter. We have been looking at particular types of aircraft. Even though while we have the support of the Guyana Defence Force, even with that we are burdened sometimes to have quick movement to move policemen around the country to various stations. That is being looked at. We have a number of policemen who are being trained as aviators in Guyana and overseas, both for planes and helicopters. In any event, we see all of this may be integrated with the work of the Guyana Defence Force. However, much of the issues under capital relate to police stations and buildings, Ekareku, Weldaad, division six headquarters and so on. It more relates specifically in the appropriation that we are seeking. it has to do with the reconstruction of police stations and so on.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Hon. Minister tell this House how much of the \$2.2 billion he has already expended from the budgeted allocation of February, 2023? If I may go on, could he disaggregate this \$400 million that he is requesting now?

Mr. Benn: The expenditure to date is \$801 odd million. This is the sum that we are running at some 26%, thereabout. These are appropriated sums and the moneys that we are looking at are for specific purposes in relation to other particular issues.

Ms. Lawrence: May I remind the Hon. Minister through you, Sir, that I asked for a disaggregation of the \$400 million. My follow-up question is if you have only spent more than \$800,000, which is approximately 26.5%, why are you here asking us for \$400 million when there is more than \$1 billion remaining?

Mr. Benn: The breakdowns in relation to the expenditure so far, we could lay it over. The items which they relate to are particularly larger items which some are still being awaiting tendered out awards. As I am saying, some of the items are particularly large; such as the Brickdam Police Station. Some of the items have had supplied and logistical constrains. The payments which will be made against those will be fairly large as we get towards the end of the year. The expectation or the need anyway is that we have to, in relation to the total programme, continue to pay attention to the proper replacement and rebuilding of the policing infrastructure in the country, so that the services of the country to the people could be continued at the requisite level.

Ms. Lawrence: There is another part of the question, Sir; the disaggregation of the \$400 million.

Mr. Benn: Sorry, Ma'am. In respect of the \$400 million, there is reconstruction of the Ekareku Police Station with a fence – \$60 million; Weldaad – \$120 million; Police Station, of course, and reconstruction of the division six headquarters – \$180 million. There are a number of retrofit containers for police outposts at various places for the West Bank Demerara – \$29 million and work at the Lethem Police Station compound which is usually flooded when the Takutu River overflows – \$10 million. That amounts to \$400 million.

Ms. Ferguson: I am happy to hear of the many living quarters for the police who are expected to be rehabilitated. Though the Minister did not make mention of it, may I ask the Hon. Member, when consideration will be given for the living quarters of the Albertain Police Station to be done? As you know, that area is a high area of activities now and the sight of that living quarters is an eye sore.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, is the living quarters at Albertain Police Station included in this sum?

Mr. Benn: We will get around to the issue of the Albertain Police Station. The Albertain Police Station is not simply a police station but also a fire station. There were issues when the engineers looked at it in relation to how we see that conjoining of the two will go forward. That will most likely be dealt with properly in next year's budgeting, except if there are any moneys by savings which could be vired.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Minister kindly tell this House at what stage we are in terms of the rebuilding of the Brickdam Police Station? Have we done design? Have we given it out to a consultant? Where are we? How much moneys have we expended so far?

Mr. Benn: We did have designs done. We did have geotechnical work done by the Ministry itself in relation to facilitate the type of design for a 12 or 13 story building. We did go out to tender which was not satisfactory originally. We had to go out again. That brought in delays. Right now, we are awaiting evaluation and awards.

Item 11: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Police Stations and Buildings – \$400,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 11: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Land and Water Transport – Police, Equipment and Furniture – Police and Equipment - Police – \$400,000,000, \$358,000,000, \$317,353,637

Land and Water Transport

Ms. Lawrence: Under project code 2405900 – Land and Water Transport – Police, the Minister is asking for \$400 million to buy boats and vehicles. Could you say how many boats you are going to buy? Where will they be placed? What mode of transportation are you buying and for which department and which region?

Mr. Benn: We have decided that it is necessary that we have to buy a crime scene vehicle. There is some \$20 million allocated with that issue for the Criminal Investigation Department (CID). The boats are assigned to all the major regions with costal and riverain waterways. We have to provide improved marine capabilities and the boarder management in relation to materials that are coming across the borders. This is 15 boats. The design is called Pantera. The appropriation we are seeking is for \$380 million. These are boats with trailers and each with 200 horsepower engines for the type of rivers that we have at the particular areas where they have to work on.

Ms. Ferguson: If I could draw the Hon. Member's attention to the voted provision of \$500 million. Could you say, as of 31st July, 2023, how much of this voted provision has been expended? If not, what percentage has been expended as of to date?

Mr. Benn: We have only spent about three per cent of the sum requested – say \$17 million. We are awaiting awards under this line item.

Equipment and Furniture

Ms. Lawrence: I would like the Minister to turn his attention to Equipment and Furniture - Police. You received \$35 million in the budget six months ago and you are here asking for \$358 million. Could you kindly disaggregate whatever you are purchasing? More than that, could you tell this House why are you asking for this astronomical increase? Six months after the budget: what sort of projection is this?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank you for the opportunity for me to make a reply on this matter. It has been, perhaps traditional, by way of some oversight in terms of what is needed. A number of new police stations have been constructed and a number of new police stations have been significantly rehabilitated. We have had police headquarter buildings established in various divisions. What has been occurring – inherited or otherwise – is that the station would be built new or the building new but, in terms of accommodating the people in the station, it was not accounted for in the appropriation which was approved. We have to put furniture in the buildings. They are new buildings and they have things. I will call some of them out; Fort Wellington; Mahdia; Police Force Academy, which is under renovation; Mahdia again, the police headquarters; Diamond; Anna Regina which is a completed police station but not fully furnished; Charity; Lethem; Providence; Ruimveldt; McKenzie; Blairmont; Albion; Whim; Rose Hall; and Kamarang. For some reasons, over the years, the police furnishing has been decrepit and not adequate. There has been expansion, there are new buildings and they have to be furnished.

9.11 p.m.

We have adopted a position now that as we put in the engineering and the designs for a new building, at the same time, we will deal with it in the particular requisition appropriation request that we also put in for furnishing at the time that the request is being made.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, I would just like to ask the Hon. Minister to lay over that document with the purchases for this \$358 million.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, would you lay it over?

Mr. Benn: Of course, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, equipment, the Hon. Minister got \$450 million and he is asking for almost the same amount of \$317 plus million, six months after. I am wondering whether he is going to tell us that this equipment would be for these police stations that did not have furnishings and were not catered for.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member. We have identified that one of the critical issues in relation to the forensics crime laboratory is that we need, based on the regional Police Division's Headquarter buildings, that there is essentialisation is needed and that much of the equipment in relation to these and some other issues were not attended to or requested at the time of the budget. We have crime laboratory equipment for the fingerprint branch and the photographic branch. You may be aware, of course, Hon. Member, that we have set up certain rooms concerning domestic violence, children being brought into the stations and particular issues. Our police stations are now designed to have a more welcoming situation and to have a better separation between issues in relation to those that may come to a police station, and much of this equipment is related to that. There are also issues in relation to the protection of the policemen. You may have seen too that there are situations where policemen have been assaulted on the streets. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] Yes, police assault people too as is one, properly to enforce law and order. For all of these things, we have to make sure that both for the policemen and the persons who may be in a situation with the police, there is a response. Now, we are also buying non-lethal equipment in relation to those situations.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chairman, let me first say that I am extremely happy to hear that the Ministry is moving in a direction to provide that space for persons there to make reports about domestic violence and children, crimes against children, and so forth. More specifically, my question is, for the facility of Kamarang, did the Ministry make provisions for female quarters there? If so, do we have female police officers there? Because I know that there was a period when there were no female officers there, what is the position of that? Were those facilities provided, as you explained, for persons going in who are reporting domestic violence, and so be provided for there? Also, at the Bartica Police Station, were any provisions made there?

Mr. Benn: In relation to Kamarang, there is a new police station building that is being just about completed. The living quarters for the police persons there are being attended to. They are very unsatisfactory. I am told, of course, there are a few policewomen there, and, of course, they normally would get the best of quarters and facilitation, but the living quarters are already tendered out for. The contract has already been signed, and so on. In relation to Bartica, its new police headquarters building is supposed to be built there at Bartica. I cannot remember the street. Anyway, at Bartica, a new police headquarters building away from the police station that is there now and the living quarters and so on along with that new headquarters building will be done in Bartica.

Item 11: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs - Guyana Police Force – Land and Water Transport – Police, Equipment and Furniture – Police and Equipment – \$400,000,000, \$358,000,000, \$317,353,637 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 12: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force - Defence and Security Support – Drugs and Medical Supplies, Print and Non-Print Material, Fuel and Lubricants, Local Travel and Subsistence, Other Transport, Travel and Postage, Other, Dietary & Other – \$12,000,000, \$6,000,000, \$340,065,000, \$10,000,000, \$40,000,000, \$50,979,000, \$315,840,000 & \$150,623,000

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister explain to this House what is the expanded work programme that was unforeseen in February of this year?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister you can sit because the microphone would not carry your voice.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Let me, first of all, say that I have heard repeated references to this question of unforeseen, and I rather suspect, Sir, that some of the Members of the other side of the House are perhaps confusing straight supplementary appropriation requests from Contingency Fund advances that are granted. In the current instance, Sir, these are additional activities that are now being undertaken and or expanded operations. It is a well-known convention in this House, Sir, that as it relates to the operations of the Guyana Defence Force (GDF), both sides of the House are circumspect in approaching the examination of the GDF activities and the

financing of those operations. If the Hon, Member, Sir, wish to ask a question about a particular line item, I would be very happy to provide an answer. Thank you very much.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, I thought as you put all of the line items, we could summarise the questions but we could go through line for line if the Minister desires that. I will look at line item 6284 and ask the Minister, what in this expanded work programme would require an additional \$51 million having received \$96 million six months ago.

Dr. Singh: Certainly Sir. With due regard to the comments, I made earlier in relation to being circumspect in connection to the GDFs operations. I would say that under this line, there are essentially two or three broad categories of operations and activities that account for the supplementary appropriation being sought. The first is in relation to upgrading the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) capabilities of the force.

The second and third Sir are in connection with the completion, transport, and delivery of the offshore patrol vessel being procured. There are certain recurrent costs that are being incurred in connection with that. It is well known that there are appropriations provided in this year's budget as they were last year in connection with the acquisition, all for the first time, an offshore patrol vessel (OPV) as their call. We anticipate that the OPV will be delivered to Port Georgetown during the course of this year, in fact, very shortly. We anticipate that by early October, I am advised that the OPV should be delivered, and there are certain costs that are to be incurred in connection with its delivery to Port Georgetown. Those are the main elements of this item, Sir.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Minister said three items relate to the increase sought here this evening, but he only gave two. I am going to ask him to now give the disaggregation of this amount being sought for these three items.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, if I recall correctly, I think I said two or three, and in elaborating if I remember correctly. Forgive me if I am inaccurate; I do believe I said two or three, and I did, in fact, when I listed them, aggregate subcategories in connection with transporting and delivering the OPV to Guyana. Mr. Chairman, in keeping with the established convention, I would respectfully decline to provide the disaggregation that is the subcomponents in connection with this item. Thank you, very much.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do now understand the Minister's response. After giving me the information and then saying that you cannot disaggregate the amount of these two items, something is wrong. I do not know what the Minister is trying to hide, but I will move on to Buildings. A sum of \$500 million was appropriated to this agency for Buildings, and it is now seeking some \$563 million. This is more than 100% of what it received. Could the Minister kindly tell this Committee how much of the \$500 million has been spent so far and what is the so urgent and costly infrastructure work this new amount is being sought for?

9.26 p.m.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Before I endeavour a response to the question, I feel obliged to respond to the statement made in connection with my answer to the previous question. I made very clear to the Hon. Member – through you, Sir – the components that make up the request for line item 6292. At no point in time did I indicate that I was unable to provide the disaggregation. I indicated that in keeping with the long-standing convention of this Committee, detailed information provided in connection with the operations of the Guyana Defence Force is not provided in this manner. If the Hon. Member wishes to have a bilateral in this matter, I am more than happy to do so. The Hon. Member is an experienced Member of Parliament (MP). In fact, she is one of the most experienced on her side of the House. She is well aware of this convention in relation to respect for the operations of the Guyana Defence Force.

[**Ms. Lawrence:** *[Inaudible]* This is not special services.]

Mr. Chairman: The buildings....

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I have said what I had to on that matter. I will repeat once again, in keeping with the long-standing convention in relation to respect for the confidentiality of the operations of the Guyana Defence Force, this is not a question of what is being hidden. It is a long-standing and highly respected convention. I would expect better from a Member on that side of the House with such experience. Anyway, I am moving on to the matter of buildings. There are a number of them that we are proposing to do additional work on. These include the building facilities that we have at Eteringbang, the Air Corps at Timehri, the hangar at Ogle, the accommodations at Base Camp Ayanganna, several buildings at Base Camp Ayanganna, the

lecture hall at Takama, and other...For Buildings, earlier, I said those at Base Camp Ayanganna, the parking lot and internal drains at Base Camp Ayanganna, and the lecture hall at Takama.

Ms. Lawrence: There is the other part of the question; I asked about how much of the \$500 million.

Dr. Singh: Yes. Certainly. You have my apologies. Mr. Chairman, I am advised that approximately 20% has been expended to date.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Minister tell this House how the agency will go about garnering the contractors for this \$563 million? Will it be open, single-sourced, or restricted tender?

Dr. Singh: The Guyana Defence Force will procure the goods and services required to execute these works in the manner it always does – that is to say – in accordance with the Procurement Act.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Minister indicate to this House for which buildings is the \$75 million under Furniture and Equipment being sought?

Dr. Singh: Through you, Sir, the furniture, and equipment will be for the living accommodations and the multi-agency building at Eteringbang, Base Camp Seweyo and Base Camp Ayanganna. All of this is with the aim of upgrading the capacities, capabilities, and qualities of accommodations in the said buildings.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chair, I would like to go back to project code 1200100. Since only 20% of the \$500 million has been spent as of August of 2023, could the Hon. Minister indicate to this Committee, whether this additional sum of \$53 plus million would be spent in this year or if this will be a rollover project?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Sir. Might I clarify – notwithstanding that 20% has been expended, the remainder of the voted provisions has in fact been substantially committed. So, we anticipate that it is not only the original voted provision that will be fully utilised. Similarly, we anticipate that this supplementary appropriation will also be fully utilised before the end of the fiscal year.

Other Transport, Travel and Postage

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair – through you to the Hon. Member – may I turn his attention to line item 6265, Other Transport Travel and Postage? Hon. Member, the initial sum voted was \$250 million. Could you say what percentage of this amount has been expended to date? May you also explain what constitutes, other transport?

Dr. Singh: I am advised that under line item 6265, 65% of the originally voted provision is expended to date. For this line item, the predominant drivers of the additional allocations required here are the operations and other work being done in Eteringbang. This requires the significant delivery of supplies. As a result of the terrain and the inherent, current, and inaccessibility of this location, additional costs are involved, including the riverain cost for some parts of the journey.

Dietary

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, the Hon. Member, has explained – I guess – the additional sums now being requested. I will now turn the Hon. Member’s attention to line item 6292, Dietary. I note for the budget provisions that the sum of \$1.6 billion was actually approved in this House in February. The department is now requesting some \$315 million more. The question I want to ask the Hon. Member is – I know that the Guyana Defence Force would normally have its garden at the Garden of Eden. Could the Hon. Member state whether portions from the initial sum or the sum now being sought are actually injected into the operations at the Guyana Defence Force to ensure its sustenance so that it could at least grow its crop and also rear its poultry?

Dr. Singh: The Hon. Member is, in fact, absolutely correct in recalling that the Guyana Defence Force does have a farm at Garden of Eden. So, That GDF farm is still very much in operation. It does have the capability to supply some amount of dietary items to the Guyana Defence Force. Might I add, in fact, that we are constantly looking at ways to increase and improve the capabilities of the farm to produce more dietary items required for the army’s various kitchens across the length and breadth of Guyana? The outputs of the farm are, in fact, very modest relative to the total dietary requirements of the Guyana Defence Force. The farm continues to be in operation. We continue to invest in maintaining and upgrading its capability to supply dietary items for use by the Guyana Defence Force. In addition to the output of the farm – as has historically been the case – the Guyana Defence Force also procures significant supplies of dietary items. The amount sought here is, in fact, for the procurement of dietary items for utilisation by the Guyana Defence Force.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, through you to the Hon. Member, could the Hon. Member say to the National Assembly, of the \$1.6 billion approved in February, what percentage has been expended as of the 31st July, 2023?

Dr. Singh: Well, Mr. Chairman, I can say what percentage has been expended as of today and that is approximately 70%.

Fuel and Lubricants

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I thank the Hon. Member for his response. I now turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6231, Fuel and Lubricants. I note that in the month of February, you had a voted provision of \$720 million. You are now seeking, perhaps, 50% of that amount as a new provision. Could the Hon. Member provide to the National Assembly: one, the fleet of vehicles the Guyana Defence Force has; secondly, the reason for this increase; thirdly, what percentage of the initial sum of \$720 million was expended as of 31st July, 2023?

9.41 p.m.

Dr. Singh: If I might perhaps take them in reverse order, in relation to expenditure that has been incurred to date, I report that we have, as of today, expended 72% of the original voted provision. I am working my way backwards up the question.

Secondly, it would be widely known that this Government has been investing very heavily in expanding the asset base of the army, in particular, expanding the capabilities of both the Air Corps and the Coast Guard. In fact, the Hon. Member would be well aware that during her government's term in office, the army spent significant amounts of money to purchase four aircraft. In fact, it is a matter that now enjoys some amount of notoriety, given that out of those aircraft, one has never flown and will probably never fly. Another one, I gather, has never flown to date, but we are now trying to inject some life into it at a significant cost. The other two are limping along. This is a matter of substantial notoriety. Since we came into office, we have been investing and have been expanding the Coast Guard's capability with additional marine craft. Significant investments are also being made in the Air Corps as a result of the expanded fleet in both of those wings and increased operations, coastal patrols, aerial patrols, *et cetera*. Thirdly, in relation to the delivery

during the course of this year of the offshore patrol vessel, additional fuel requirements exist and will be met out of this allocation.

Item 12: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force - Defence and Security Support – Drugs and Medical Supplies, Print and Non-Print Material, Fuel and Lubricants, Local Travel and Subsistence, Other Transport, Travel and Postage, Other, Dietary & Other – \$12,000,000, \$6,000,000, \$340,065,000, \$10,000,000, \$40,000,000, \$50,979,000, \$315,840,000 & \$150,623,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 12: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Buildings & Furniture and Equipment – \$563,190,000, \$75,000,000

Item 12: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Buildings & Furniture and Equipment – \$563,190,000, \$75,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 13: 72-721 – Region 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam– Regional Administration and Finance - Security Services – \$5,125,070; 72-722 – Agriculture – Security Services – \$5,124,067; 72-723 – Public Works – Security Services – \$2,212,882; 72-724 – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$12,000,000 and Security Services – \$7,780,845 & 72-725 – Health Services – Security Services – \$13,240,638

Fuel and Lubricants

Mr. Holder: Agency code 72724, line item 6231 – Fuel and Lubricants: Could the Minister explain why they are asking now for this additional \$12 million catering for fuel and lubricants, given that they had a voted provision of \$38 million? Also, could the Hon. Member say to this House what percentage of that provision has been expended? I will leave it there for now.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, security is one of the main priorities of this Government.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, it is line item 6231, Fuel and Lubricants.

Mr. Persaud: Under line item 6232, Fuel and Lubricants, \$22 million will be spent on 14 boats for the transportation of school children in the riverain area of the Pomeroon river.

Mr. Holder: Just for clarity, is the Minister saying that \$22 million has already been spent on 14 boats?

Mr. Persaud: No.

Mr. Holder: Hon. Minister it is because you are asking for \$12 million.

Mr. Persaud: It will be spent on fuel. Hon. Member, you mentioned fuel.

Mr. Holder: For fuel, \$22 million has already been expended.

Mr. Persaud: No.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, please talk to me.

Mr. Holder. Sorry, Mr. Chairman. I am trying to seek some clarity. The question was how much of this voted provision has already been expended, the \$38 million. I am trying to get clarity.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, how much of the \$38 million that was allocated in the budget was already spent?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, \$27,382,396.

Mr. Holder: Thank you. Cde. Chair, listed here is:

“Provision of additional resources to cater for transporting students to schools in the riverain areas.”

Could the Minister confirm that the fuel and lubricants is actually for boats to transport the students? I am just trying to set the ground.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, yes.

Mr. Holder: I heard 14 boats. Could the Minister say what the average consumption per boat is?

Mr. Persaud: There are different sizes of boats and engines, and the amount of fuel that will be utilised varies.

Mr. Holder: I understand that it varies, that I why I said “average”. I can move on. Could the Minister say how many boats will this \$12 million provide funds for fuel and lubricants for?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, which \$12 million is the Hon. Member speaking of?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, the sum being requested is \$12 million under Fuel and Lubricants.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, let me apologise. We asked for \$22 million and they gave us \$12 million.

Mr. Chairman: Please repeat the question Hon. Member.

Mr. Holder: You asked for \$22 million but you got \$12 million. You are requesting \$12 million from this House. How many boats will this \$12 million serve in terms of fuel and lubricants? We are talking about purchasing fuel and lubricants here.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, 14 additional boats.

Mr. Holder: This \$12 million is now for 14 additional boats, additional to the 14 you already have.

Mr. Persaud: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Holder: So, you have 28 boats now all together.

Mr. Persaud: This amount is for 14 new boats. We have to confirm the amount we have remaining presently. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** *(Inaudible)*] Some are not working.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the Minister is quite clear. A total of 14 additional boats will be serviced with fuel and lubricants.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Cde. Chair. Could the Minister say which areas these 14 boats will be assigned to?

Mr. Persaud: In Region 2, Pomeroon and the riverain areas.

Mr. Holder: I beg of the Minister to be a little more specific. The riverain area in the region, when you talk about the riverain area...

Mr. Chairman: You have asked a question. Is there any specific area, Hon. Member?

Mr. Holder: How many boats will be assigned to the lower Pomeroon and how many boats will be assigned to the upper Pomeroon, and any other area deemed as “riverain area”?

Mr. Persaud: I will provide that information at a later date.

Mr. Holder: Could the Minister be kind enough to say to this House what the fuel consumption for one or all of the boats might be? I am trying to get to the point as to how they arrived at the \$12 million, because the Minister explained that they were asking for \$22 million and they got \$12 million. I am trying to understand how they arrived at this \$12 million. Mr. Chairman, this, based on my calculation is equivalent to over 250 drums of fuel. This is a significant amount of fuel. Given that the provision is for... [An Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*)] Alright, I will leave it...

9.56 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, ...

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, at this point in time, because the 14 boats are not in operation, we do not know the consumption because of the various distances that they would travel.

Mr. Holder: That is very interesting, Cde. Chairman. Are there no other boats of similar sizes, similar engine sizes or similar specifications working along these routes that you can make a reasonable estimate?

Mr. Chairman: A reasonable question would be if that could have been telegraphed earlier to the Minister. This is because you are now asking him to check other boats of similar sizes, of similar distances. Hon. Minister, please.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I think it is an established fact that a new engine will burn cleaner, better and less fuel. As you get wear and tear on an engine, it will consume more fuel and lubricants.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Holder, you have the floor. Is that it?

Mr. Holder: I will just ask that the Minister lay over the specifics because there are a number of things that are unclear here. I would ask that the Minister lay over the specifics on the 14 boats and whatever other specific information he has so that I can go through it and forward any other questions to him.

Mr. Persaud: In due course, Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. The Minister indicated that from this allotted sum of \$38 million, which is what was given to the Ministry for the region in the Budget of February, that \$27 million had already been expended. That means that there is \$11 million still in that account. Schools are out right now. We are going to have schools back again from September, for September, October, November and December. That \$11 million is there. They are now requesting an additional \$12 million. Sir, that gives you \$23 million. If you spend \$27 million from January to June, July and August are out, four months now you are looking to spend \$23 million. Could the Hon. Minister provide some degree of clarity there, please?

Mr. Persaud: Out of the \$12 million, 14 new boats will be purchased, and fuel will also be utilised.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I need some clarity. We are dealing with current expenditure, fuel and lubricants, I heard the Hon. Minister say that he is going to purchase 14 new boats under this current expenditure that caters for fuel and lubricants. Would that not have been fitting for a capital expenditure, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: No. I understand that the Minister said the fuel and lubricants are for the 14 new boats that will be purchased.

Mr. Mahipaul: He indicated just now, Sir, and I am sure the *Hansard* can agree with me that ...

Mr. Chairman: I have had to put the sentences into proper syntax for many people. Hon. Minister, did I hear you right when you said the amount will be used for fuel and lubricants for 14 additional boats?

Mr. Persaud: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, with your leave, one other question and, hopefully, I do not have to have follow up.

Mr. Chairman: We have had those three times. Is that correct?

Mr. Mahipaul: I hope I do not have to have a follow up based on his answer. The Minister indicated that he requested \$22 million, and he was only given \$12 million. That is a shortage of \$10 million. This is a very important consideration. We are talking about provision of additional resources to cater for transporting children to schools in the riverain areas. Does the Minister foresee that perhaps these boats will have to stop working during the course of the term because of not having adequate funding to purchase fuel and lubricants?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, do you foresee the boats stop working?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, when schools are out and even when schools are in, these boats will do additional work for the communities in the various regions.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, you have the floor.

Security Services

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am looking at line item 6281, Security Services, where a provision was given in February of \$450 million. I see an additional amount of \$7.7 million being sought as additional resources to cater for increased security charges. Could the Minister kindly indicate to the House whether they went out to tender and whether these are new charges, and by which security company?

Mr. Persaud: As I started out when I first came to this desk, I said that security is a priority for this Irfaan Ali-led Government. I can recall there was a mantra in the 2000s when the PNC ... This mantra was '*mo fyah, slow fyah*' and that is the reason why security is important to us. I want to inform this House and we must remember the burning of the North Georgetown Secondary School, Christ Church Secondary School ...

Mr. Chairman: North Georgetown? I think it is ...

Mr. Persaud: North Georgetown Multilateral School, St. George's School and a school in Mabaruma. That is why security is important to us. To answer the question, line item 6281 went to public tender. There was an increase rate from \$400 per hour to \$526 per hour. The company was N & M Trucking and Security Service.

Ms. Lawrence: A follow up. I am not going to go into cane fields being burnt and so on. I am going to stick with line item 6281 and ask the Hon. Minister, under the provisions voted for in the budget, how many schools were catered for there?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I will have to lay that over.

Ms. Lawrence: When the Hon. Minister lays that information over, could he also lay over the cost at the time of the budget in February, that they paid for the security services per hour?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, ...

Mr. Persaud: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Item 13: 72-721 – Region 2 - Pomeroon/Supenaam– Regional Administration and Finance - \$5,125,070; 72-722 – Agriculture – Security Services – \$5,124,067; 72-723 – Public Works – Security Services – \$2,212,882; 72-724 – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$12,000,000 and Security Services – \$7,780,845 & 72-725 – Health Services – Security Services – \$13,240,638 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 14: 72-731 – Region 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara – Regional Administration and Finance - \$26,558,819; 73-732 – Agriculture – Security Services – \$6,712,153; 73-733 – Public Works – Security Services – \$4,347,367; 73-734 – Education Delivery – Security Services – \$472,220,731 & 73-735 – Health Services - Security Services – \$178,409,089

Mr. Mahipaul: I have one question and I hope there is no follow up to it.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Mahipaul: All of these increases, do they cater for the increase in rates, and, if so, is it one company that is going to deal with the services of each programme in Region 3? Could the Hon. Minister say, what is the new rate and what was the old rate and the name of the security company?

Mr. Persaud: I think by now the Members of the Opposition would understand why we came here for a supplementary. I want to bring to the attention of this honourable House, when the APNU/AFC was in Government, they took a loan for \$40 billion for GuySuCo and until now, it is unaccounted for - \$40 billion in a loan and until now, it is unaccounted for. We have come to this honourable House for supplementary because of the rapid pace of development that is taking place in this country. The RKs (Guyana) Security Services and Security in Action Guyana Inc. were awarded this contract, and it was an open tender.

Mr. Mahipaul: Unfortunately, I have to have a follow up, Sir, notwithstanding I am not asking anything about GuySuCo. The Hon. Minister was kind enough to say the RKs (Guyana) Security Services and Security in Action Guyana Inc., would he be specific in terms of which programme is RKs (Guyana) Security Services assigned to or was awarded, and which one for Security in Action Guyana, Inc. Would he be kind enough to tell us what were the old rates and what are the new rates?

Mr. Persaud: I must apologise once again, this is for Region 3. The companies that I mentioned just now were for Region 4. For Region 3, I would have to provide that information.

Mr. Mahipaul: Just for clarity, all the information I asked for, do you have to provide or just for the name of the company because I still want to know about the rates – the old rates and the new rates. Will you provide all of that information? If you will provide all of that, I am very comfortable with that.

Mr. Persaud: The old rate was \$495 per hour and the new rate is \$702 per hour, throughout, for all.

10.11 p.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: Is it one company that is dealing with all five or two?

Mr. Persaud: Yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: One company – would you provide that name later?

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Minister, in his response on the rates, said that it was \$400 plus and it is now moving to \$700 plus. A mere \$300 increase per hour. When I look at the sub total here for security for all five agencies, I am noting that the voted provision was \$743,321,000 and the current request is for \$688,248,159. It does not add up. So, I would like to ask the Minister to lay over this figure because it does not match what he is saying. Lay it over for us.

Mr. Persaud: Yes, I will, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you.

Item 14: 72-731 – Region 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara – Regional Administration and Finance - \$26,558,819; 73-732 – Agriculture – Security Services – \$6,712,153; 73-733 – Public Works – Security Services – \$4,347,367; 73-734 – Education Delivery – Security Services – \$472,220,731 & 73-735 – Health Services - Security Services – \$178,409,089 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 15: 72-741 – Region 4 – Demerara/Mahaica – Regional Administration and finance – \$17,809,374; 74-742 - Agriculture – Security Services – \$8,124,465; 74-744 - Education Delivery – Security Services – \$192,204,257 & 74-745 - Health Services – Security Services – \$55,733,550

Ms. Philadelphia: Under Education Delivery, in excess of \$848 million was voted for and we are now requesting \$192, 204, 257, which is about 22% or 23 % increase or thereabout. Could the Hon. Minister explain what may have been responsible for this increase? Thank you.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the Hon. Member for her question. This is due to the increase in the rate from \$455 an hour to \$606 an hour.

Item 15: 72-741 – Region 4 – Demerara/Mahaica – Regional Administration and finance – \$17,809,374; 74-742 - Agriculture – Security Services – \$8,124,465; 74-744 - Education Delivery – Security Services – \$192,204,257 & 74-745 - Health Services – Security Services – \$55,733,550.

Item 16: 75-751 – Region 5 – Mahaica/Berbice – Regional Administration and Finance – \$12,055,789; 75-754 - Education – Security Services – \$79,482,317; 75-755 - Health Services – Security Services – \$25,100,367

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I am of the opinion that all of these Security Services for all of these remaining agencies have to do with the increase that happened because of the companies. I want to ask this specific question for here. Could the Hon. Minister provide the name of the security firm that has won the contract and is this the same security firm for all three of these programme heads? What was the old rate versus the new rates?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, Region 5 – Super Graphics Security Services, open tender, the rate was \$492 per hour, and it has moved to \$606 per hour. Mr. Chairman, I should go through the rest of agents.

Mr. Chairman: Let me just close this off then I will propose as the Hon. Member said for all of the rest and then we could take the rest.

Item 16: 75-751 – Region 5 – Mahaica/Berbice – Regional Administration and Finance – \$12,055,789; 75-754 - Education – Security Services – \$79,482,317; 75-755 - Health Services – Security Services – \$25,100,367 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Following a suggestion by the Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, I will now put the remaining Item Numbers 17, 18 and 19. With your indulgence, I will have to read out all of the line items or related to Chart of Account 6281, but the Agency Codes are different. The first ones are Agency Codes 77-771, 77-773, 77-774, 78-781, 78-783, 78-784, 80-801, 80-802, 80-803, 80-804.

Item 17: 77-771 - Region 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni – Regional Administration & Finance - \$25,694,249; 77-773 - Education Delivery - \$173,147,622 & 77-774 - Health Services - \$20,669,560

Item 18: 78-781 - Region 8 – Potaro/Siparuni – Regional Administration & Finance - \$5,711,524; 78-783 - Education Delivery - \$24,150,137 & 78-784 - Health Services \$3,126,325

Item 19: 80-801 - Region 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice – Regional Administration and Finance - \$14,360,000; 80-802 - Public Works - \$8,967,056; 80-803 - Education Delivery - \$204,502,243 & 80-804 - Health Services \$41,677,361

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, I am at item number 17. I note that the total provision given six months ago via the budget was \$215, 025,000. The Minister is here now asking for \$219, 511, 431. Minister, could you kindly tell this House why there is such a huge increase five months after the budget allocation and, also, whether there are additional places that have been added to the list for the three agencies listed here. If there are additional places, how many additional security personnel are you having?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this was an open tender for Region 7, RK Guyana Security Services. The old rate was \$355 per hour Monday to Saturday and \$533 an hour on Sundays and Holidays. The new rates are \$625 per hour Monday to Saturday and \$938.00 an hour Sundays and Holidays.

Ms. Lawrence: Let me bring to the Minister's and the people assisting him attention that the voted provision in February was for 12 months. We are at the fifth month after February.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I agree with the Hon. Member. The expenditure to date is \$89,425,902.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, firstly I have Ms. Hastings-Williams, then Ms. Fernandes and then Ms. Ferguson. Ms. Hastings-Williams, you have the floor.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I heard the Minister saying that it was because of the increase in the charges or rates. The amount that we are seeing here \$219.5 million. Is it that all the health centres, nursery, primary and secondary schools in Region 7 are now having access to security services?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, not all of them but the majority.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Follow up: Could the Minister be kind enough to lay over to this House the number of schools that are receiving the security services, which schools are they, which communities and the number of health centres and which communities are receiving the security services? I would be happy if you could lay it over to the House.

Mr. Persaud: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Fernandes: Looking at the same item, Region 7, I did take note and the Hon. Minister said that the contract was awarded through open tender to RK Guyana Security Services. Could the Hon. Minister give the contracted period of the contract? That is the first question and I have a follow up after that.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is from June, 2023 to May, 2024.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you for that, Hon. Member. Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Member explain to this House what is the rationale given by a security company for increasing their rate from more than \$300 to more than \$600? Mr. Chairman, I just want to note also that, based on my understanding from the Minister's answer as to the rate, it would seem that it is not because of additional security services being given in these areas, but more so because of the rate. This is because the Minister gave the rate as moving from more than \$300 to more than \$600 per hour. I want to know the rationale given by this RK's Guyana Security Services for this increase.

10.26 p.m.

Mr. Persaud: Complying with the minimum wage and increase in operational cost.

Ms. Fernandes: Am I to understand by that response that the company was not complying with the minimum wage requirement prior, and now they are? I was not too clear on the response given. Again, I am aware of four additional security guards being placed within Region 4. I beg to be corrected if there is any additional. I am only aware of four additional security guards, and I believe it is in the Middle and Upper Mazaruni areas. When we are talking about the minimum wage, or wages altogether... The specific question is...

Mr. Chairman: You have one specific question: if they were not complying with the minimum wage. That is the first one. You are asking a next one.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir, for that clarity.

Mr. Chairman: Do not try to confuse the Minister.

Ms. Fernandes: My question is: Did the RK's Guyana Security Services increase the wages being paid to the security officers in Region 7?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, two questions.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I only heard one question. It is because of the increase in minimum wage.

Ms. Fernandes: I am a little confused. If we are saying that it was because of an increase in the minimum wage, there was no point in time from the period given here did we have any minimum wage increase of 100% or over 100%. It does not make mathematical sense.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have to listen also to the answers.

Ms. Fernandes: I am trying, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: When he said initially an increase in the minimum wage, he also said operational cost. You are dwelling on one thing alone. If I put that to him, he will answer you back the same way. Do you want the same answer? Hon. Minister, please answer.

Ms. Fernandes: No. I am not asking the very same question.

Mr. Persaud: I said the increase in the minimum wage and operational costs.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you for the repetition.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister kindly say to this House what proportion of that sum is given to operational costs increase?

Mr. Persaud: That is a management concern.

Ms. Fernandes: I am not sure. I would just be guided by you, Mr. Chairman, as to whether or not we are allowed to have the answer for that in this House, given...

Mr. Chairman: You asked a question, the Minister presented an answer. I cannot tell him to answer how you may want to hear. You asked a question, he answered it.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, it is not an answer. I am trying to...

Mr. Chairman: He answered, and I am not going to put the question again.

Ms. Ferguson: I heard the response given by the Hon. Member, with regard to operational costs and increase in the minimum wage. Could the Hon. Member provide to this National Assembly what is the strength of security in the region?

Mr. Persaud: I am very sorry, Mr. Chairman, but I do not understand the question.

Ms. Ferguson: Alright. Let me just simplify it for the Hon. Member. I am asking how many persons then, whether male or female, what is the total number of persons providing security in the region?

Mr. Persaud: Now I understand the question. I will have to lay that over.

Ms. Ferguson: I just need to make an observation here.

Mr. Chairman: Ask a question.

Ms. Ferguson: The initial sum was more than \$215 million voted for. Then, six months after, we are asking for \$219 million. Something is off with the figure. This is because if the Minister is saying that one, the operation cost went up, and secondly, there was an increase in the minimum wage, there is no way one would get this close figure. Something is definitely wrong. Perhaps, the Hon. Minister would need to relook these figures provided. The other observation is that throughout the regions, for which security services or provisions are being sought for security services, you keep hearing this constant thing about increase in the minimum wage and, also, the operational cost. Is it that all the security firms that are providing these services across these regions, have just awoken one morning and decided that their rates have now increased? I do not even think...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, the question is: did the security companies just wake up and increase their costs?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I speak on behalf of the PPP/C Government. I do not speak on behalf of the APNU/AFC where sticky fingers are involved. This was an open public competitive bidding.

Mr. Mahipaul: For Region 8 and Region 10, could the Hon. Minister provide the name of the security...

Mr. Chairman: Do you have a Region 10 here?

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Minister provide the name of the companies for Region 8 and Region 10, the old rates versus the new rates?

Mr. Persaud: For Region 8: RK's Guyana Security Services. The old rates were \$355 per hour weekdays, \$625 per hour weekends and holidays. The new rates are \$625 per hour weekdays, \$938 per hour weekends and holidays.

For Region 10: Home Safe Security and Domestic Services, bear in mind that these were all open public tenders. The old rates were \$480 per hour weekdays, \$570 per hour Saturdays, \$720 per hour Sundays and holidays. The new rates are \$650 per hour weekdays, \$975 per hour Saturdays, and \$1300 per hour for Sundays and holidays.

Ms. Lawrence: Item 19 – 80-803: Hon. Minister you received an allocation of \$350,718,000 in February for security. You are here now asking us to allocate to you another \$204,502,243. Could you kindly inform this House, how much of the voted provision have been utilised? Could you also state whether there are additional educational sites? If there are, could you kindly indicate how many additional security personnel you are employing?

Mr. Persaud: The question brings me back to the '*slow fyah, mo fyah*' mantra. Do you recall the burning of the Brickdam Police Station and the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) Chambers? To date, the amount expended is \$210,566,000 and four new sites have been added. Personnel – I will have to lay that over.

Item 17: 77-771 - Region 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni – Regional Administration & Finance - \$25,694,249; 77-773 - Education Delivery - \$173,147,622 & 77-774 - Health Services - \$20,669,560

Item 18: 78-781 - Region 8 – Potaro/Siparuni – Regional Administration & Finance - \$5,711,524; 78-783 - Education Delivery - \$24,150,137 & 78-784 - Health Services \$3,126,325

Item 19: 80-801 - Region 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice – Regional Administration and Finance - \$14,360,000; 80-802 - Public Works - \$8,967,056; 80-803 - Education Delivery - \$204,502,243 & 80-804 - Health Services \$41,677,361 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: This completes consideration of all the items on Financial Paper No. 3 of 2023. I will now put the motion.

Question

“That the Committee of Supply approves of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 3 of 2023 – Schedule of Supplementary Provision on the Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$61,013,184,705 for the period ending 31st December, 2023.”

Put and agreed to.

Assembly resumed.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I now wish to report that the Committee of Supply has approved of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 3 of 2023 and I now move that the Assembly doth agree with the Committee in the said Resolution. Thank you very much, Sir.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: This completes consideration of Financial Paper No. 3 of 2023. Now we have to deal with the Appropriation Bill.

10.41 p.m.

Dr. Singh: It is recommended that Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2 for 2023) Bill...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I think we have to move the suspension of Standing Order 13.

Suspension of Standing Orders No.13(n) and 54

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Orders No.13(n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2 for 2023) Bill 2023 – Bill No. 17/2023 to be introduced at this stage.”

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

Dr. Singh: Might I, in that case, Sir, move that the relevant Standing Orders be suspended so that we might consider the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2 for 2023) Bill 2023 – Bill No. 17/2023 in all three of its stages without interruption? Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, the question is that Standing Orders No.13(n) and (54) be suspended so that we can take all three stages of Bill No. 17/2023.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I now stand, therefore, and signify that in accordance with paragraph 2 of article 171 of the Constitution, Cabinet has recommended the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2 for 2023) Bill 2023 – Bill No. 17/2023 for consideration by the National Assembly, and I now present the said Bill to the Assembly and move that it be read the first time.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING:

The following Bill was introduced and read the first time:

Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2 for 2023) Bill 2023 – Bill No. 17/2023

A Bill Intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2023, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the

appropriation of those sums for the specified purposes, in conformity with the Constitution.”

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

Question put and carried.

Bill read the first time.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2 for 2023) Bill 2023 – Bill No. 17/2023 be read a second time.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Bills – Second and Third Readings

Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2 for 2023) Bill 2023 – Bill No. 17/2023

A Bill Intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2023, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for the specified purposes, in conformity with the Constitution.”

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

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I now move, Sir, that the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 2 for 2023) Bill 2023 – Bill No. 17/2023 be read the third time and passed as printed. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Question put and carried.

Bill read the third time and passed as printed.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. Hon. Members, we had a marathon session. Let us take a 45-minute break and come back to deal with the Bills before us.

Sitting suspended at 10.44 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 11.37 p.m.

Petroleum Activities Bill 2023 – Bill No. 16/2023

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to repeal and replace the Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Act Cap. 65:04 and the Petroleum (Production) Act Cap 65:05; to provide for the exploration, production, storage, and transportation of petroleum in Guyana; and for related matters.”

[*Minister of Natural Resources*]

Minister of Natural Resources [Mr. Bharrat]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise to move that the Petroleum Activities Bill 2023 – Bill No.16 of 2023 – published on 2nd August 2023, be now read a second time. It is no secret that Guyana’s oil and gas sector is moving at a very rapid pace. As a matter of fact, we are moving at an unprecedented pace. Our discovery rate in exploration well as has been unheard of around the world, especially in deep water. An 85% success rate at exploration well in deep water has never been heard of anywhere in the world, whether it is deep sea or on land.

I will give a brief background on our petroleum sector. As we know, oil was discovered in Guyana in May, 2015 and we moved to first oil in December, 2019, producing from the Liza Destiny in the Liza Field. To date, we have two floating production storage and offloading (FPSOs) producing at almost 400,000 barrels per day with a third FPSO, The Prosperity, being commissioned presently, and set for production in the last quarter of 2023. This will take our daily production to over 600,000 barrels per day. With the production licenses already signed by the Government and

the operator and the joint venture co-ventures, those are the Yellow Tail and Uaru, we are poised so that by 2027 Guyana will definitely be producing over 1 million barrels of oil per day equivalent. As we report these successes in the oil and gas sector offshore Guyana, we speak only of the Stabroek Block. Of course, there are significant exploration activities being carried out in the Corentyne Block with a recent discovery of the Wei-1 well and also in the other blocks surrounding the Stabroek Block. With the 14 blocks that are currently up for auction and with the Government and the country looking for a very rigid work programme and a strong time-bound work programme, if I may say so, exploration activities are set to increase tremendously offshore Guyana. I am saying this because in the oil and gas sector, the opportunities, meaning the business opportunities for Guyanese and Guyanese companies, lie mostly in the exploration phase and not so much in the production phase.

We have already seen Guyanese and Guyanese companies reaping significant benefits as a result of the passage of the Local Content Bill in the National Assembly in December, 2021 and enforced over almost a year and a half now. Already, we have seen over US\$400 million benefitting local businesses or local companies in Guyana as a result of this. We meet with investors almost on a daily basis and it has shifted so much since the local content legislation. Before the legislation, investors were coming to our country to set up operations. After the local content legislation, investors are coming to our country looking for local partners. As a result of that, we have seen a number of local companies and businesses entering into joint ventures and partnerships with international companies across almost all of the different areas or services that are required in the oil and gas sector. Even though the local content legislation is limited the 40 services in Schedule 1 – and we have made a commitment that we will review those 40 services based on capacity – already we are seeing our capacity being built locally, which will warrant a review of those services to either increase the targets or to add more services to that list of 40. Over the last three years, as a Government, we set out to build out the framework or the architecture to manage this very important sector. We all know the importance of the oil and gas sector in the context of the development and the growing of our economy. We all know that the oil and gas sector will benefit the other sectors, once it is managed in a prudent manner, as we have seen over the last three years. The oil and gas sector will continue to grow, but we are faced with challenges too. As a result of that, we must update the Petroleum Exploration and Production Act of 1986. All of Guyana will agree, and I am sure we have unanimous agreement on this in the House, that a 1986 Act managing

our oil and gas sector must be updated. Hence, we are here tonight to seek the support of the House for the passage of this very important Bill – the Petroleum Activities Bill 2023 – Bill No. 16 of 2023.

This Bill seeks to do a number of things and to also strengthen the current system that we have in place, bring more accountability and transparency to the sector and also bring a new dimension to the oil and gas sector as it continues to grow. The oil and gas sector as we know it, not only in Guyana but around the world, is faced with a big challenge. That is the challenge of emission, the challenge of climate change, and the challenge of ensuring that we can use the revenue from our oil, over the small window that we have, to build out a country that will benefit all of Guyana and to incentivise the other sectors. From where we sit – and I mean from where all of us sit – oil and gas will not be in demand forever. There is just a short window. It was mentioned by the Hon. Vice-President that our decommissioning strategy should be to get the oil out of the ground as fast as possible and use the revenue to build out our country and to use the revenue to incentivise the other sectors, which provide far more employment and opportunities to our people than oil and gas. That is the challenge we are facing as a country and as an industry.

The question must be asked, is it that there is a problem with the use of fossils or is it the emission from the fossil that is a problem? There are some extremists in our society, locally and internationally, who may want to say that we do not want fossil fuel at all. Is it that fossil fuel is the problem or is it that emission from the fossil fuel that is the problem? We need to determine which one is the problem. In my view, it is the emission. There are a number of measures being taken around the world by countries and companies to deal with the emission. In our Bill, we have included a new permit which this Bill can actually give power to issue. It is what we call the geological permit or, simply put, the Carbon Capture and Storage Permit. Most countries, especially those countries that do not possess a forest like Guyana, are already moving towards carbon capture and storage. Even though it is a bit more expensive, it is necessary, and it is required. Most of the countries in the Middle East – United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait, Saudi Arabia – are already moving towards carbon capture and storage. It means that the industry and countries that depend heavily on fossil fuel are working towards getting rid of the emission so that we can help to safeguard the environment. However, in Guyana, we are lucky. I like to say that we

are a blessed country because what we possess as a country, there are a very few oil-producing countries in the world that actually possess that. That is our forest.

11.48 p.m.

Our forest is no longer a national asset. Our forest has now become more of a global asset. We, as a country, people, and Government, are committed to keeping our forest standing. Today, it has been shown that the forest is worth more standing than dead. Our Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) speaks clearly about keeping our deforestation rate down to below 0.07%. We are doing way better than that as a country. As a matter of fact, we have one of the lowest deforestation rates in the world – 0.036%. I do not think there is any other country in the world with a deforestation rate of 0.03% and yet has a viable forestry sector. We, as a country and as an oil and gas-producing nation, want to say to the world that we are serious about our environmental credentials. Among oil-producing countries, we probably have one of the best environmental credentials. That is something of which all of us must be proud. That is something that all of us must boast of because this is our country, and this is what we possess.

The new Bill caters for the issuance of a geological permit. This would allow oil companies to now reinject carbon dioxide into reservoirs that are available, which would take care of the emission that may cause destruction to the ozone layer and, as a result, climate change. We are already seeing the effects and impact of climate change around the world. We have seen it so much that I think the world has already started to move away from looking at mitigation. Now, we are more looking at adaptation which, of course, is very costly and essential for us to extract our oil resources and use that revenue to prepare for what is to come. The point is that oil will not be in demand for an extended period of time. Unfortunately, as a country, maybe we discovered oil at a difficult period of time. When there is a conversation on climate change, and when we are witnessing so much impact of climate change, we discovered oil. Many countries discovered centuries and decades ago and they have benefitted significantly from this resource. It was very necessary for us as a Government to put in place a strong regulatory framework. This is something that was promised in our manifesto. Over the last three years, we have set out to ensure that we put these systems in place.

I can remember, clearly, two campaign promises on the 2020 General and Regional Elections campaign trail. One was that we would ensure that we put a proper framework and mechanism in place to ensure that there was proper accountability and transparency in the oil and gas sector. I believe we have delivered on that over the last three years, especially with the amendments to the Natural Resource Fund Act, which also was passed in December, 2021. I know that night is a bit infamous. Of course, it was passed after the no confidence motion by the previous Administration. It was strengthened in 2021 to ensure there is proper accountability and transparency. The inflows of revenue into the Natural Resource Fund can be seen by anyone, inside or outside, of Guyana because it is gazetted. At the end of the year, the 31st of December, 2023, anyone can go online, add all the revenue that we received during the course of 2023, have a total of all revenue – it being the share of oil or royalty – and know how much was collected in the year. That is the kind of transparency that we brought to the oil and gas sector through the Natural Resource Fund Act. It is there we also state that if the Minister of Finance does not declare in the National Assembly revenue collected, he can be jailed. It is in the Act. I know he was in bangles previously. Those are some of the mechanisms that we put in place to ensure that there is proper oversight.

What do you want as proper oversight of the oil and gas sector? You want every Guyanese or anyone to know how much money is collected in any given year. You want people to know how much revenue flowed into the Natural Resource Fund. Mr. Mahipaul, it is not like the \$18 million.

[**Mr. Mahipaul:** It is Hon. Mr. Mahipaul.] Hon. Mr. Mahipaul. That is transparency and what Guyanese want to see. They want to see how much money goes into the Natural Resource Fund. A simple formula would show you how much would flow into the national budget, which is presented to the National Assembly, which is debated in the National Assembly, and which is scrutinised in the National Assembly. That is the kind of transparency and accountability we have brought to this sector. The second promise that I can clearly remember us campaigning upon in relation to the oil and gas sector was that we will use the revenue from the oil and gas sector to ensure that it benefitted every Guyanese. Whether you live in Region 6 on the Corentyne Coast, whether you live in Rupununi or whether you live in Linden or in Georgetown, you must benefit in some way or the other from the oil and gas sector. My friend, the Hon. Mr. Henry, I am sure your children or grandchildren are benefitting from the \$40,000 cash grant. We have set out to do that. We have set out to do that by a number of measures.

I mentioned one very important one, the local content legislation that was passed. It is creating so many opportunities for Guyanese today to be directly involved in the oil and gas sector. Today, we boast about over 5000 Guyanese working directly in the oil and gas sector. That is quite significant, knowing that we only discovered oil in 2015 and we had the first oil in 2019. To have over 5000 Guyanese working directly in the oil and gas sector, I must say, is commendable. Are we satisfied? No. We are not satisfied because we believe more of our people can be employed in the sector. How will they be employed? They must be trained. That obviously has been an issue in a new oil-producing country that had no previous experience. Our university was not offering these courses in the past because nobody knew that Guyana would become an oil-producing nation. Many Guyanese were not going overseas to study in this field because there were no opportunities in Guyana. Today, we, as a Government, are working towards building capacity in our human resources to ensure that more of our people are employed in the oil and gas sector. That will happen through the Guyana Technical Training College in Port Mourant, Berbice and through many other joint ventures and partnerships that we are overseeing and supporting as a Government – privately as well. These are all steps being taken to ensure that our people benefit directly from the oil and gas sector.

The oil and gas sector, as we know it, will never be labour-intensive. It is more capital and technology driven. So, at the same time we are developing the oil and gas sector, it is imperative too that we continue to build out the other sectors – to incentivise the traditional sectors using resources from the oil and gas sector and to create new sectors such as Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and develop our tourism, which has great potential in Guyana. These are the sectors that will create the bulk of employment and opportunities for our people as a spin-off from the oil and gas sector. Added to what I have mentioned, in continuing to build out this new framework to manage the oil and gas sector, we had promised a model production sharing agreement (PSA) and we have delivered on that. Today, we have two new production sharing agreements – one for shallow water and one for deep water – which is directly related to this Bill that we are debating here tonight. As promised, in this new PSA, we said that we are going to ensure that once we have a new production sharing agreement with any new company, our take or the benefit for Guyana must increase. We can boast of that today because the new fiscal regime in the PSA – it is linked – speaks towards.... Instead of a 2% royalty, it has increased to a 10% royalty. I have seen the suggestion from my friend, the Hon. Mr. Patterson, of not less than 10%

but not more than 15%. Unfortunately, we only got 2% on the Stabroek Block. As a matter of fact, in the new PSA, royalty will move to 10%. There is no tax in the old PSA. There will be a 10% tax in any new production sharing agreement signed with any new company from now. We have moved the cost recovery from 75% to 65%. What does that mean? It means that from start-up, we will enjoy a greater share of oil which translates into revenue. The present PSA is a 75% cost recovery ratio. This means that 25% is only allocated to the co-ventures and Guyana. In the new arrangement, from start-up, 35% will be allocated. It means that from day one, we will be benefitting more than we are benefitting today from the agreement for the Stabroek Block.

Our position is clear. I noticed that in the speaking lineup there are a number of speakers from the Opposition, including the Hon. Leader of the Opposition. Of course, we would like to hear from the Hon. Leader of the Opposition the position with regard to the Stabroek Block. We have made our position clear that we are not going to renegotiate the existing PSA for the Stabroek Block. The fiscal regime that I speak of now will cover any new production sharing agreement that we sign from now into the future, regardless of whether it is the Corentyne, the Canje, the Kaieteur, or the 14 blocks that are up for auction. It will be faced with that new fiscal regime and not the one that is in the Stabroek Block PSA. These are all mechanisms or frameworks that have been built over the last three years to ensure there was proper oversight and management of the oil and gas sector. I spoke of our environment earlier. We have also moved towards strengthening the environmental permits that were offered. I recall that a 20-year permit was issued by the then Government, which we changed because it was illegal. It is actually illegal to issue a 20-year environmental permit, as a five-year permit is required. That has been changed, and we have changed a number of measures in that permit, for example, the cradle-to-grave management of waste.

12.03 a.m.

How do we deal with flaring? When we took over in August, 2020, there was an issue – and I think all of us know that – with the flash gas compressor on the Liza Destiny FPSO vessel. It continued for quite a few months into our government as we tried to work with the operator to get it fixed. Thankfully, today it is fixed, and we have not had any issues. For maybe two years, or more than two years now, we have not had any issues with that flash gas compressor on the Liza Destiny. The Liza Unity is producing now, and we have not had an issue with flaring. Of course, we know

that there will be routine, minimal flaring during startup and during maintenance. That is a routine part of any oil and gas operation. Nevertheless, because we realised that the problem was festering on the Liza Destiny, we introduced a flaring fee into the environmental permit to say to ExxonMobil Guyana that if it was flaring, it had to pay US\$50 per every tonne. For every tonne of carbon dioxide that goes up into the air, ExxonMobil had to pay that to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It was not a gateway for ExxonMobil Guyana to continue flaring, because nobody wants to lose money. It was used to ensure that they got it fixed and got it fixed quickly so that they did not have to pay any money. It was not put into place to gain revenue out of flaring but to force the company to ensure that they fixed the issue so that they did not have to pay money to the EPA. Today, it has worked, because we do not have the issue of flaring on any of the two FPSOs in production. The Prosperity is already on trial, and we have not had an issue with it either.

In the treatment of water, we have also strengthened how we deal with water. Hon. Mr. Patterson would know that the best model is to reinject the water with the gas to optimise production. However, we need to look at the cost too. We need to look at the economics as a country, because we are paying for part of it too. Do we want to pay to reinject water into the well or do we prefer for them to treat it to international standard and then dump? It is 5,000 ft deep water we are talking about. We chose the second option, that is, to treat to international standard and then dump. The question might be asked: how is it that we know they are actually treating the water to international standard? We have inspectors from the Guyana National Bureau of Standards (GNBS) as well as from the EPA on all of the FPSOs, including The Prosperity. It is computerised and so it is recorded, and it is seen at the EPA almost in real time. There is actually no way that we can be misled or fooled by the operator with regard to how they treat water before dumping into the ocean. These are some safeguards that were put in place to ensure that there is proper management in the oil and gas sector if we really want to be an oil and gas producing nation and, at the same time, maintain our environmental credential. We do not want to be seen around the world as a new country producing oil and gas and that we have forsaken or neglected the care of our environment.

Something that we must be proud of is not only that our deforestation rate is low, but we have committed, as a Government and as a country, to increase our protected areas by 30% by 2030. Today, it is probably close to 10%. We have made a commitment to increase that to 30% by 2030.

We have also made a commitment that we are going to restore our biodiversity by 30% by 2030. These are important facts to note because they show how serious we are, as a country and Government, with regard to maintaining our environment. It is critical. You cannot go to any oil and gas conference in the world, and they do not speak about the environment or carbon capture and storage. It almost goes hand in hand around the world today. I know the insurance is an issue that has been in the public domain for quite a while. It has been ventilated a lot, not only by the Opposition but by commentators in and out of the country. I am happy to say that we have signed a deal with the operator for that \$2 billion coverage. I know that it was being negotiated in the past but there was no solid agreement. We have solidified that agreement and we have signed the \$2 billion agreement with the company, and also the parent guarantee, which is important, added to the \$600 million they set aside in the event of any oil spill.

Also, we have always prided ourselves that we were going to improve every single production licence as we issue them. We have seen that in the Yellowtail Petroleum Production Licence there is provision for a capping stack in country. This is important, and it necessary and significant for a small new oil-producing country like Guyana, because there are many countries that have been producing oil for decades and they do not have a capping stack in country. We will probably be one of the first small countries around this territory that will have a capping stack in country from next year. That has been included in the Yellowtail Petroleum Production Licence. It is in the Yellowtail Petroleum Production Licence, but it can be deployed to any development in the Stabroek Block.

What is this capping stack? For the benefit of the people listening to us – not in here because I know we are aware – and who may not be too *au fait* with some of these terms, the capping stack is to ensure that if there is any blowout or spill from any well, we can deploy that capping stack almost immediately from Port Georgetown to the Stabroek Block 100 miles offshore. We can do that almost immediately, as against mobilising and bringing that capping stack from Houston, Texas. This was the practice before the Yellowtail. It was that we pay subscription for a capping stack that was stored in Houston, Texas. That is why I mentioned that it is significant that as a small and new oil-producing country, we can manage to have a capping stack in country in the event of any unfortunate incident offshore Guyana. It is not something that any of us pray or ask for, but it is for just in the event. These are some of the safeguards and some of the mechanisms

that we have put in place to manage the sector over the last three years. We know that this sector is important, and it must be managed properly, otherwise we can go down the road that many other oil producing countries went down.

The Petroleum Activities Bill, which will replace the Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Act, Chapter 65:04 and Chapter 65:05, provides significant improvements in the governance of activities related to petroleum exploration and production, as well as expands the scope of the Act to include midstream activities. These are some of the new implementations. These are some of the new areas that are added to the Bill that did not exist in the 1986 Act. Transportation and storage of hydrocarbons. The 1986 Act speaks mostly towards exploration and production. Now, we are adding a new dimension in the form of storage and transportation of hydrocarbons. As I mentioned earlier, the geological storage licence for carbon dioxide is also included as a new feature in the Petroleum Activities Bill.

Also added to this Bill is the G&G survey, that is the geological and geophysical survey permit, which this Bill will now enable us to issue if there is need to do those surveys, whether offshore or onshore, like we did for the gas-to-energy project. This Bill will also enable the smooth implementation and the smooth operationalisation of the gas-to-energy project with the issuance of permits to transport and store hydrocarbons. Other than that, there is no provision that caters for the transportation of gas from offshore Stabroek Block to 200 kilometres (km) to the Wales development area. This new Bill will now cater for the transportation of hydrocarbons in pipelines, and also the storage of liquids, as we move to that stage from the gas coming into the Wales developmental area. It is important because that project...and I think we have mentioned that over and over. Guyanese especially need to understand the magnitude of this project, and need to understand that this single project will change the landscape of our country. This single project will decrease the cost of living and improve the standard of living for our people. This single project will build out our manufacturing sector, our industry, which we have been lacking for so long.

That is a reason we have never really realised the true potential from our natural resources. It is because we have always exported primary products and have never really moved towards value added or downstream processing, mainly because of the high cost and the reliability of power generation in the past. This project will address that. If we can produce more, it means that we will

import less. It means saving foreign currency. It means creating opportunities for Guyanese to develop businesses, industries, manufacturing, agro processing; all of these. That is why the Wales area was chosen. It is because we have the land available there, it is away from the residential area, and there is access to the Demerara River. I know that when the previous administration was looking at this project, there were a number of other sites, as was mentioned by Hon. Mr. Patterson during previous debates. They were looking at other sites at Mahaicony, Mahaica, Ogle, and Vreed-en-Hoop. Those were some of the sites, based on reports that I saw too. We decided that we were going to go 15 kilometres more into an area that will be away from the residential area and where we can build out maybe one of the largest manufacturing, industrial complexes in the Caribbean or in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), right in that zone where there is cheap power available and also steam. That project will be the most transformational project in the history of our country. It will transform the landscape of our country.

This Bill is important to facilitate the implementation and the functioning of that project through the new implementation in the Bill, that is, the transportation and storage of hydrocarbon and the geological and geophysical survey permit that can be issued with this new Bill. I cannot overemphasize the geological storage licence, which is critical. It may not be so critical for us now, at this point in time in Guyana, because we have this wonderful forest that stores 19.5 gigaton of carbon per annum, but at some point in time, we may still have to look towards carbon capture and storage.

12.18 a.m.

Most of the countries that do not have forest and are producing oil, they are already involved in carbon capture and storage; and I mentioned a few earlier. At some point in time, we may very well have to cut our emission even further. Speaking of emission, the gas to energy project will cut emission for power generation by another 70%, which is important especially in the context of our environment and emission level. We know today that we are using heavy fuel oil (HFO) diesel, and we know it is high in emission as compared to gas which is seen more as a transitional fuel moving towards renewable.

What this Bill will facilitate, too, is the utilisation and monetisation of our gas reserves. We must be honest to ourselves. Over the last few years, both administrations have focused a lot on oil and

the production of oil, but we have not actually focused so much on the utilisation and monetisation of gas reserves, and we do have. By saying that, I am not only referring to the gas to energy project – we have already been guaranteed through an agreement that we will get sufficient gas for the 300 megawatts power plant that is being built presently; we have already been guaranteed, through an agreement, that we will get gas coming through that pipeline, from day one – I am speaking of the gas reserves that have been discovered from offshore in a few of the pure gas fields and also in the other projects like Whiptail, Yellowtail, Payara and the others. This Bill will facilitate or will enable us to move towards developing our gas reserves, which is important, because gas is now seen as a transitional fuel. When the demand for oil reduces, in my view, the demand for gas will increase, until we can get close to 2050, where most of the countries in the world committed to, moving towards 100% renewable by 2050. A lot of people are optimistic about it, but it costs a lot of money to move towards renewable by 2050, 100% renewable by 2050. Gas may very well be the new goal.

Also, in the Bill, it speaks towards decommissioning. Decommissioning is something that we have to look at seriously because fields will become depleted. Of course, they will become depleted over a period of time. It is not something that replaces itself overnight. It will be depleted over a period of time, and we have to ensure that the operators, bear the responsibility of the decommissioning process. In this Bill, a decommissioning fund will be set up that the operator will have to put money into two years before the end of life, to ensure that funds are available for the clean up after the reservoirs would have gone dry. Also in the Bill... Mr. Speaker, I know you have indicated my time, if I can go through one or two more areas quickly, if you permit me because I know it is Thursday already.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy that the Attorney General just spoke to me because when we were doing the Payara Licence, one month after taking Government, in August, 2020, we were in quite a dilemma when the operator asked us for a unitisation agreement. We did not know anything much about the unitisation agreement because we were never faced with quite a situation like that before. We decided that we are going to include it in the Petroleum Activities Bill so that if the situation arises again, where we have to do a unitisation agreement, whether it is across fields, whether it is across blocks, or whether it is across countries, it is catered for in this new Bill as to how we will deal with it. If I may quickly explain what it means, for Payara for example, there was one well

that was in the Liza Licence area, but it was not producing in the Destiny or the Unity FPSO. It means that if Government did not allow ExxonMobil to pull from that well in the Liza development in the Prosperity FPSO, that resources would have been stranded there. So, we had to agree that yes, Payara can pull from one well in the Liza development or under the Liza Licence. That is a unitisation between fields, the Liza field and the Payara field. The block now, and the good thing is, we were not faced with a challenging situation because it is the same block, and it is the same operator.

However, it can become challenging when you are dealing with two different operators and two different blocks. For example, if there is the Corentyne Block and the Stabroek Block and we know we have reserves close by, one of the companies may very well want to produce from the other block and that is where the negotiation will take place, and government will have to issue a permit so that maybe CGX can pull from Stabroek or Stabroek can pull from CGX. Then, it goes further. If the Corentyne Block is adjoined to Suriname and then there are reserves on both sides, but they can be developed easily and quickly in Guyana, then the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation would have to engage the Government of Suriname to ensure we have an agreement with them. All of that is catered for in this new Bill. It is quite a very comprehensive Bill that touches almost every single aspect of the management of the oil and gas sector, even with regard to feedstock coming in for our refinery. At some point in time, we have to move towards that.

I just said that for too long we have been exporting primary products, and then we buy back the finished products. We sell the cherries and the oranges, and we buy back orange juice and cherry juice; we sell our logs, and we buy back the furniture. We cannot sell or crude and buy back petroleum products forever. At some point in time, we will have to set up a refinery in Guyana so that we can benefit even more from these resources. In this Bill it caters for that. It is actually saying that the Government can say to the operator or the co-ventures (Co-Vs) that if we need the feedstock locally, and it is not available from government share, then they will have to sell us. It means that in no way we will have a refinery in-country, but we cannot provide the feedstock for it. That is very important because no one would want to invest in a refinery in your country when one cannot guarantee the feedstock. These are some of the areas that we would have improved on

in the Petroleum Activities Bill 2013, to ensure that we continue to build out the framework that will manage the sector in the future so that it can benefit every single Guyanese.

Mr. Speaker, I ask, from my colleagues on our side and my colleagues on the Opposition side, that while we deliberate on this Bill tonight, that we see some good in it and we have the successful passage of it this morning. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Speaker, when I started out this morning, of course, I did not expect to be presenting at 12.28 a.m. I rise to make my contribution to the Petroleum Activities Bill 2023. Let me say from the outset, and let the records reflect that we on this side of the House welcome the introduction of the new legislation, since, when enacted, it will repeal and replace the existing Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Act and the Petroleum (Exploration and Production) (Amendment) Act which were passed in this National Assembly more than three decades before Guyana became an oil producing country.

As the Minister said, oil was first discovered in 2015 and production commenced in late 2019. During this period, the country has discovered several challenges associated with being an oil producing country. During the last eight years since the discovery, there has been spirited discussions regarding such topics as signature bonuses, royalties, ring-fencing, insurance coverage, environmental protection, accountability, transparency. and a petroleum commission, plus, of course, the PPP/C's 2020 Manifesto commitment to renegotiate the existing Petroleum Licence. **[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** No mention in this, and, of course, they like to say the Manifesto is their contract with the people and that they are a Party that keeps its promises. In this light, we on this side of the House as well as the entire country fully expected a revised Bill that would address all of these thorny issues to the satisfaction of the people. Sadly, this proposed Bill falls well short of that expectation since it fails to shed any light or lend any weight to the challenges that the country now faces or will be facing in the future. The Petroleum Activities Bill concentrates all the power and decision-making into the hands of the Minister with no oversight from any other agency, not even the National Assembly. This is problematic from a government perspective.

With regard to the National Assembly, the Petroleum Activities Bill before us, refers to the National Assembly only on four occasions, twice of course on page 1 which obviously is the introduction which states:

“The following Bill which will be introduced in the National Assembly...”

And after that the Clerk of the National Assembly, which is on the first page; and, of course, on page 58, under the administration of the tax laws which empowers the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance to place orders with regards to income tax, value-added tax (VAT) and corporation, and in the Explanatory Memorandum section which also refers back to the tax law. I took the time to highlight this fact because the Minister assigned with the responsibility for petroleum is listed 336 in this Bill, the National Assembly four times just in the introduction... Of these 336 times, nowhere directs the Minister to lay a single report in this National Assembly, the highest forum in this country. There is no obligation whatsoever to provide this House or anybody with any updates; no directions to seek parliamentary approval for a single item with regard to petroleum activities. We have passed several Bills in this House which contained provisions for the Minister to report back to this Assembly. The Natural Resource Fund Bill, the Minister is obligated to come back here and present an annual report. The Local Content Bill which he mentioned, he is obligated to come back here and present a report, The Single Window System Bill, he is obligated to come back here and present a report.

12.33 p.m.

In fact, all Bills that we have passed in this Twelfth Parliament under the People's Progressive Party/Civic and our previous... placed an obligation to the Minister to be the conduit between his sector, the National Assembly and the people. Nowhere in this Bill is that obligation there. This Bill can be renamed from Petroleum Activities Bill to a proclamation Bill since it is more about the coronation of a Minister rather than the safeguarding of our natural patrimony. The previous Bill which will be repealed, the Petroleum Expiration and Production Act included an entire section on the administration of that Act whereby public officers or employees of Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) could have been designated as the chief inspectors and inspectors for the administration of the petroleum sector. That was the Bill that we passed in 1986. That has

all been removed – absolutely nothing on the administration of this sector in this Bill other than the Minister, the newly anointed king and emperor over all things petroleum in this country.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to highlight some additional areas where this proposed Bill is completely silent, not a single word on the preservation of our Amerindian lands and their enshrined right to free prior and informed consent – not a single word, Sir. In fact, the words Amerindian or Indigenous do not appear even once in this Bill. One would have expected that with the challenges facing our Amerindian brothers and sisters in Chinese Landing and the damning report and recommendations of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) that this Government would acknowledge where there will be conflicts between mining activities and Indigenous communities, and at least have the minimum respect for our first peoples, by affording them the opportunity of some sort of consultation and consent. This is a Government that claims it respects the Indigenous communities yet brings Bills to this Assembly which excludes them.

[**Mr. Henry:** All the time.] You are right. I am sure that my colleague, Mr. Vincent Henry, will bring you the sentiments of the Indigenous peoples on this disrespect. [**An Hon. Member:**

(Inaudible)] That is some of the simplistic explanations that we would get, and I would expect from the colleagues over there. They think we are making a Petroleum Activities Bill for offshore only; this is petroleum activities for the entire country. I have no doubt that there will be onshore discoveries at some point in time. If you come here and start from scratch you have to take all of that into consideration. The Auditor General's comment is just simplistic at best. [**An Hon.**

Member: *(Inaudible)*] You can ask yourself that. [**An Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*]

The Minister mentioned it, but nowhere in this Bill mentions anything about labour and local content. Guyanese would have expected a caring government to ensure that, enshrined in this Bill was a section reinforcing our drive for the local content in the application and approval process for petroleum licences. The section on training does not even require the licensee to adhere to our labour and local content Acts and laws.

The Government will of course claim – and this is exactly what they are doing – that these issues are covered under the existing Local Content Act. However, no adherence to our local content laws should have been listed as one of the grounds for possible cancellation or revocation of a licence. Not a single word on the depositing of funds into the National Resource Fund. Granted that there is an entire Act, one would have expected that there would have been at least a clause

stating that all revenues garnered under Part VII of the Bill must be deposited in accordance with... Sir, that is why we legislate it and we enshrined it in legislation. I heard the Minister speak about carbon capture. A fact, that Guyana is the highest emitter per capita of scope three greenhouse gases in the world – per capita. That is only from two wells. We always hear the nice fluffy one that we have the most oil reserve per capita. Consequence to that, we are the highest emitter, per capita, of scope three greenhouse gas. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] Sir, you can challenge me. This is coming from a Party that has been led by the Champion of the Earth. This is shameful and unacceptable. I know my colleague, Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop, will address that as well.

The PPP/C Government by virtue of bringing this Bill for approval with such significant omissions, is signalling to the world... Sir, I am now quoting because I know that you are very particular on these things. I am quoting from the words of the late, great Bob Marley, that Guyana is now a ‘pimper’s paradise’; a ‘pimper’s paradise’ so operators can come and do as they want. Thankfully, democracy requires an Opposition. Therefore, while not addressing all the issues, since that will require a complete rewrite of this Bill, something that we strongly recommend, we have submitted some amendments. Even if these amendments are approved in their entirety, they would only go a small way in curing the defects in this Bill. However, with these proposed amendments, we on this side of the House are confident that these changes would ensure that there are greater mechanisms to ensure transparency, fiscal responsibility, as well as environmental safeguards. My colleagues will expand on the various aspects of these amendments.

It is my task to present to this House and the country, the Opposition’s amendments. I start off from the very first, the inclusion of a national petroleum commission. No mention, whatsoever, of this in the Bill. A national petroleum commission would be the body that would provide technical and administrative support to the management of the petroleum sector. That commission, if established, would receive and process licences and it will provide advice to the Minister. In other extractive sectors, we already have these sorts of commissions in place – the GGMC for example, for the gold mining; the Guyana Forestry Commission and even the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission. These bodies, by virtue, submit annual reports to the National Assembly. This amendment that we are putting here, seeks to remedy this defect. The establishment of a national petroleum commission takes away, affects no rights of the Minister. They submit to him technical,

sound recommendations, on which he would be enabled to act. There is no mention of that. The Minister got up and spoke for over 45 minutes. I hope I am given that luxury as well. I thank you for the extra bit of time. He made no mention of the petroleum commission.

We have amendments including newer, amended clauses 6, 12, 19, 29 and 33. These are all amendments seeking to outline the function and the operations of a national petroleum commission. Importantly, nowhere in these amendments reduce the responsibilities or the duties of the Minister. We have made an amendment of clause 29 (2) which seeks to remove the sole... There is enshrined in this Bill, the sole discretion of the Minister. We are saying that that is unacceptable in this day and age, and we would ask that we would have to, at least, seek the opinions of the petroleum commission. We have asked to have clause 7(1) amended. Under clause 7(1), it allows the Minister to conduct direct negotiations for granting a licence and it gives several reasons including national interest, *et cetera*. We acknowledge that may become the case, but we are moving an amendment for the purposes of transparency and accountability. After the Cabinet gives approval for these direct negotiations, the Minister has to come to this National Assembly and explain to the National Assembly the reasons why and the conditions under which these direct negotiations happen. We did not put this here flippantly.

Notwithstanding the murmurings on this side, I want this Assembly to recall that, in 2020, a Saudi Prince arrived in Guyana to look at – and this was publicly stated – agriculture, housing, and infrastructural projects. After three days, an Arabian Prince, if he was not Saudi, a Sheikh... He left after three days with a US\$50 million contract to supply the Coronavirus disease-2019 (COVID-19) vaccines with the approval of the Cabinet. When challenged, the same clause here, national interest and emergency... We are putting in this clause to prevent another Prince arriving here to go visit an eco-resort and leave here with a petroleum licence under Cabinet's approval for national interest, *et cetera*. If he comes, and you decide that you are interested in him nationally, you have to come back to this National Assembly and tell the people the conditions under which you have awarded the contract. That is transparency in the 21st Century. We have asked for a time limit for appraisals. Despite, as the Minister gloatingly said, we have 32 commercial discoveries, our reported proven reserve still remains at \$11 billion. International agencies, under 27, have said that our proven reserves should be higher. If the country is aware and we increase our proven reserves, the calls for renegotiation, the calls for better management, the calls for better conditions

for the people will increase. Since 2020 when we left Office, our proven reserve was \$11 billion. Three years after... [An Hon. Member (Opposition): (*Inaudible*)] Three billion barrels. Thank you very much. After three billion barrels, it still remains... Eleven billion barrels. My apologies. Eleven billion barrels. It would be a public relations (PR) nightmare to this Government and the call for renegotiations would become even louder if our proven reserves are increased.

12.48 a.m.

We have clause 29 (4), the retention of recovers. I would not go into that. We have asked for clause 32(3)(b) to be deleted. This clause states that if we have a well that has being appraised and has proven commercial qualities, it has been appraised but the operator decides that he cannot continue, the Minister is empowered under clause 32(3)(b) to sell this asset off either by public tender, which we agree, but also by direct negotiation. In other fact, you have a proven national asset. The Minister under this Act is now empowered to go and have direct negotiation with someone to dispose of this asset. Our Procurement Act requires national assets, national patrimonies, to go through a process. We are asking and we are demanding that that be removed. If you have such an asset, it goes to public tender.

We have amendments on the signature bonus. Most importantly, clause 49(1)(6), we are asking to put a time limit on audits. We are saying that cost recovery audits should be done annually and completed in nine months. The Auditor General produces our annual report for the entire country. He does that in nine months, he lays it, and he submits it to you, Mr. Speaker. We do not see any reason why annually – and which is done in all other countries – we cannot do our audits. Once we start to do it annually, at the end of the fiscal year, we would be able to get better. I suppose too that we cannot even get the audits that were started and completed under the Coalition. They have not been laid here, three years after they were signified completed by the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA). Earlier on last year, this same Minister came in this National Assembly and said that the second audit for the \$7.6 billion would be available in this Assembly by March, 2023. It is now August, 2023, and not a sight of that report, hence we are asking that. We have clause 49(1)(7) and this is ring fencing. We have included a provision for the strict separation of exploration and recovery expenses, in the sense that an operator cannot reclaim exploration expenses under cost recover oils.

Training: there is clause 52(3). We have set a minimum training fee of US\$1.5 million for development. We currently get \$300,000, which represents .004 of the Liza Destiny's annual production. We are thinking that is absolutely ridiculous. We acknowledge that sum was put in under the Coalition, but we all know better now. We are insisting that if we want to get all this local content, we want to train our young people, we want to be able to service the industry locally, we are insisting that is there.

The Minister mentioned decommissioning funds. We are asking – and there is a particular reason why we are asking – that the decommissioning fund, which we support, be placed in escrow. What is currently in the Bill is that the operator retains the fund but he must put it in two years before the exploration. Right now, in California and other places in United States of America they are having issues with the decommissioning fund. What normally happens or what could happen in the industry is that an operator, towards the end of a field, normally farm out the well, or the operation, because of the economy of scale. As you know, the production of Liza Destiny, in 15 years, will drop from 120 just by natural projections as the oil depletes. It may go down to a very small number of 40,000 barrels per day. It does not benefit the economy of scale of ExxonMobil and those big things that have large tankers to continue running an FPSO vessel with such a low number. What they normally do, they would farm it out to a smaller operator. In California, as we speak, as the end of the useful life of these fields come about, there are issues on the decommission fund. We are saying that it should be put in escrow. Therefore, even if they farm it out, that money is there all the while.

We have an issue with the Bill. The Bill permits drilling up to 200 meters away from a town or a village. In particular, our Indigenous communities, if oil is found onshore at the Takutu basin, you cannot permit drilling 200 meters away from a village – Annai which is the closest village there. Fishing lands: we put in proposals to ensure that the Amerindian title lands are included in the Act, that consent must be given before a licence is issued. We have in there, fishing land. We know, despite all the lovely conversations by the Minister of Agriculture, fishing lands or fisher folks continue to suffer. There is a clause 82 which speaks about fishing. We have now asked and demanded, and we would like enshrined in this legislation, that the operator must conduct a baseline study to see what fish and fauna there are in this fishing and navigation areas. So, in the

event the fishing stock is affected by the operations, our fisher folks can make a clear claim. This must be monitored for the duration of the petroleum activities.

Finally, on our proposals – I did not go through all – we have included a new clause 99. We acknowledge that clause 98 preserves the right of existing licences. We agree with that. However, we have included a new clause 99 which states, seven years after the operation, coming into effect of the new Petroleum Act, this Act, that all new production licences are subjected to this Act. What that means – as the Minister said, there are five licences already – by 2030, which is seven years from now, there may be 10–12 licences. The conditions under those 10–12 license remains the same. If there are 12, from the 13th the new conditions under this Act here... this we find is a suitable middle ground; it recognises the pioneering inputs from current operators. We recognise that they took a risk on Guyana. However, what the Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) has should not be never-ending and open-ended for the rest of the natural life. There are 33; ExxonMobil alone has 33 discovers and there is one in the Canje Block. We are acknowledging it; if you do not want to renegotiate this is a way whereby, they can recoup their funds under whatever licences you issue between now and 2030. However, from 1st January, 2030, we are saying that all new license come under this Bill.

Those are the proposals that we would like to have and that we would like enshrined. The Government has already indicated, I was going to dinner or lunch when I heard their commander in chief giving them instructions not to accept a single amendment, which is a pity. There are six other speakers behind me, I would love to be proven wrong. I would love to have to eat humble pie for one of the speakers there to get up and say that MP Patterson is incorrect, we will accept all of these amendments. We put these on the records because one often hears, coming from that side of the House, that the Opposition never comes with proposals. We have. Sir, I would also like to put you on notice, all of those who are sleeping, including the commander in chief, that we will be going to a division on our amendment. It should be enshrined in the *Hansard*, so that in future generations, should the perils and the issues which we know will ensue come, your name shall be attached to it. Tonight, we draw a line in the sand with petroleum activities. From tonight on, it shall be, the burden shall be, on your backs and in your court.

With those few comments, I thank you and I await, particularly the Attorney General, when he gets us to say that I am absolutely wrong and that I should apologize to this House, that he will be supporting any and all of these amendments. With that, I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Indar: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to give my two cents on this legislation. I know we are on the graveyard shift, but this piece of legislation here, I believe, is one of the most modern pieces of legislation that could address a modern oil and gas sector. I will make my points to support that just now. Because we are in a debate, and I heard a number of things from the Hon. Member Patterson, I have to answer, I have to rebut, simply because what he said does not reflect that reality of the past years that they were in Government and this legislation that is before the House.

1.03 a.m.

The first thing that I would like to point out, the Honourable Member said local content is not mentioned nowhere in this legislation. He says “nowhere”. It is in the definition here. If it is in the definition, it is in the law. One does not put something in the definition without putting it in the law. We are all lawmakers in the House. It is right here. [**Mr. Patterson:** (*Inaudible*)] You want to check it look... Turn the page, I am going to circle it for you, Mr. Patterson. That is the first thing.

The second thing is that these amendments that were put forward here are not seismic changes to this legislation. These amendments that are put forward here, the lying share of these amendments refer to a National Petroleum Commission. They are commissioned, the Petroleum Commission legislation will follow in due course and then you will have all of these things to talk about. What is here is a Petroleum Activities Bill. It is a different story.

In his amendments, he spoke about revenue, rents and royalties should go into the Fund. We have an entire legislation; a National Resources Fund legislation will be passed right in this very House that deals with all manner. It encompasses the entire universe of revenues that comes from the petroleum sector. We do not need to put it in this legislation when there is an entire legislation that deals with it. The other thing the Honourable Member said is that this legislation does not have enough to speak to training. The Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) had US\$300,0000, the one that their government signed and that this legislation does not have enough to cover for the

operations of ExxonMobil because if the resources exceed \$11 billion, we should have more in it and we should get more out of it. I just beg to the question, I do not know if the Honourable Member forgot that he was part of the Cabinet who signed that production share and agreement with the operator ExxonMobil. They forgot that they were the ones who signed it and they sit around the room. What; Did you not read what you were signing? Did nobody show the rest of the Cabinet what was signed? I just have the question to ask, if you are coming to this House, portraying a position that you are some genius kit in a corner, and that you have all the brightest ideas to come to now put into this year; it is not fair to this House and to the people of the country. That is because when they were in Government, the Honourable Member and some of the other Colleagues that were in the past Government had a chance to do these very things and they did not do them. The 1986 Petroleum and Exploration Act is what this is dealing with. They had five years in there and they did not do it. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) did not do anything. All of you had a local content legislation that we went to three draft; they did not do anything. Yet, all of you come and try to lecture on what we should put in some amendments here but, in my view, these amendments are text smitten.

The other thing the Honourable Member made is that three hundred and something times the Minister is mentioned in the legislation. Everywhere and every jurisdiction in the region, the Minister responsible for natural resources energy and whatnot normally oversees the sector. The Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, look at right next door, they discovered oil. The first commercial year of production in 1908, which is more than 100 years. They do not have the sort of legislation that we have in Guyana. They do not have a local content legislation. They do not have those things. Guyana in a short period under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government has put in place local content legislation, the Natural Resources Fund Act and now we have the Petroleum Activities Bill. Three major legislation to govern this sector.

I now want to turn to this Bill. I want to talk about this Bill. Mr. Speaker, if you allow me to, before I go into this Bill, I see the Honourable Attorney General (AG) walking back. His drafting staff are sitting somewhere at the back. There is Mr. Kiran Mattai, Ms. Shoshanna Lall, Bobby Gossai. These are the people in the drafting department of the AG's Chambers who put together this piece of legislation. This legislation is a reflection of what is happening on the ground and how we have to deal with it. I will show you. I remember a drill ship called the Deepwater Champion. The

Deepwater Champion was the first drill ship that was out there when we first had exploration. It had three primary support vessels (PSVs) around the Deepwater Champion and we discovered oil. When we discovered oil, it was Liza Well system which was the first well system that was discovered. It is 1.2 billion barrels of recoverable oil. They called that in the oil world ‘an elephant’ and they say elephants do not travel alone, which means that if that sort of reserve is found with that kind of size, it is not an isolated incident. It means that around the periphery of that block more will be found. That reality came to pass from the first find and there are more than 33 counting different finds in the Stabroek block alone. It will continue to grow because the basin is one that is prolific.

Now, these legislations that we have put in place have to come early. One cannot wait until the sector has matured while the sector has already matured. This oil and gas sector has matured elsewhere on Earth. If you go to Newfoundland and Labrador, it has legislation there to deal with managing its sector – the Atlantic accord. It has a petroleum commission and so on. If you go to Norway, it has its own. Most oil-producing nations have legislations to govern and their Ministers who are the energy Ministers, the Petroleum Ministers or Natural Resources who normally manage this sector. It gives oversight. It gives responsibility to a ministry and a minister. One will know who to go and ask when he/she has a problem or if the sector is not developed who to go and blame. It puts the responsibility on the Minister. I do not know if the APNU/AFC and some of the Members of Parliament (MPs) who are here now who were sitting in the last Government believe that we should go and ask the friends of fish shop to manage this sector or some man on the street to go and manage this sector. This sector needs to be managed by a Government official who is senior in the ranking because there is a reason for that. It is when Members go overseas to these conferences that the Honourable, Mr. Vikram Bharrat, spoke of, people who are aged in the sector, who developed skill or knowledge of the sector, they look at who is representing the country. When you turn your back, they say well “you know, those people know what they are doing” or they could do the opposite and say, “well those guys do not know what they are about and we could wrap rings around them”. These legislations and the provisions of these legislations will say that we know what we are doing. They are not borrowed from anywhere. These are modern legislation, and they have the provisions inside. I will go to couple of them or some of the main ones.

The first thing, it has the administration of authority enshrined in this law. The second thing, it deals with the entire exploration and all of the activities under exploration. Apart from exploration, it speaks to the development of well systems and the production side of the operation. It also deals with unitisation, which is a term that is new but a term that we never dealt with in Guyana as the Minister said. It deals with cross-border oil wells when there are different countries. Remember Friends and Colleagues; the engineers and geo-technicians draw the lines on the maps to give you the boundaries of maps and blocks. Geological formations do not work with engineers who draw lines around maps. Geological formation, oil can be in different straths of the earth of different sizes and that is a reality on the ground. This legislation speaks to how you deal with that. Whether it is in Guyana national borders or whether it is traveling one border into another country's land or waters.

The legislature speaks to how you deal with that, every aspect of it; if it is an ex-licensee, if the land is not owned by anybody or the waters are not owned by anybody. If it has travelled to a next country, how do you operate? How do you go about doing it? It speaks to that and this is the reality of the current situation that we have offshore. I am saying that I will point to the areas in this legislature that speaks to the reality on the ground, so the legislation is living. It is not something that deal with airy-fairy stuff. The other thing is that it talks about revenue and financial guarantee. That is an entire section and there is one on decommissioning but it also talks about transportation and storage. One of the big things that we have in the world today is the fight between renewables and the fight between fossils. Using gas as a bridging fuel deals with that. This legislation deals with that. It also deals with carbon dioxide storage. Two years ago, I had the privilege of representing Guyana at the World Petroleum Congress in Houston. At that Congress, every single operator, every Government official, everyone who was there spoke about renewable and how one can deal with carbon capture and its storage. How do you deal with that? Every single person who was there had something to say about carbon capture. The people in Alberta are already putting it in cement. [Mr. McCoy: *(Inaudible)*] Carbon capture. This legislation deals with that. That is what we are dealing with. There is a country called 'Guyana' who has natural resources in the earth and offshore that we have found so far. It has natural resources that are in the forest that sequester about 154 million tonnes of carbon dioxide (CO₂) every year. The two have to be made sure that they are balanced. We have a Gas-To-Energy Project that we are dealing with that will utilise gas from the production systems offshore that we are piping. We have to balance all of these

moving parts and this legislation deals with that. It recognises the reality of the ground and it recognises our commitments that we have in the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) and our commitments that we make globally as a leader in energy but we are finding the midground.

Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about one specific thing in this legislation that talks about relinquishments. Now, relinquishments in the PSA that was signed with ExxonMobil by the APNU/AFC, when a person or a licensee does not explore particular areas that he/she was granted the licence for, the person has to relinquish that under the 1986 Act. In the PSA that was signed, if persons go and read it they will find that the entire arrangement of a relinquishment went lopsided. It was messed up. The person had to give up this block and this portion because it was not the 20% that was in the Act. The model PSA that we now have which the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, was talking about which I think he failed to even read because they did not... When the PSA went for consultation, no commentary came back – none came back. Yet, you come to the National Assembly and take a position as if you are a genius sitting in a corner and you have this wise knowledge that nobody else has and that is not so, because a single comment did not come back on the model PSA that we have, which deals with deep water operations and shallow water operations.

On clause 24 (1)-Relinquishment area upon renewal, in this clause, it speaks to that original position and it is tied to the PSA that is developed by the Ministry that went out to consultation that we now have in place. That PSA does four things: one: the new PSA for the 14 blocks cap the expense for a single year at 65%. It was at 75% so more expenses cannot be rolled over into a new year. That is the first criticism of the PSA that the APNU/AFC signed. Two: The other thing is the royalty of two per cent that they signed. Now, this model PSA moves it to 10%... [Mr. Mahipaul: *(Inaudible)*] Hold on, I raised an ants' nest over there when I talked. That is not a normal ants' nest, that is a cop-cop ants' nest.

1.18 a.m.

There is a 10% tax on profits. The PSA that they signed had no tax. It had no tax. If a person checks paragraph 25 of that PSA, he/she would not find anything about tax. There is nothing. They cannot come here and lecture us about PSA modelling. The last one is the profit share of 50% each. The other thing that the PSA dealt with is ring-fencing. The Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, spoke about

ring-fencing. By the advent of the sizes of the 14 blocks that we have out now, it is ring-fencing in nature. The blocks are smaller; they are not the 6.6 million acres that ExxonMobil has. They are small blocks. In the advent of them being small that acts as a form of ring-fencing. It addresses five separate areas which were the downfalls or major criticisms of the PSA that was signed by the APNU/AFC.

This Petroleum Activities Bill that we have in the House... Sir, the last time we had the Planning and Development Single Window System Bill and now we have this Bill debating it at the graveyard shift and the country cannot see the benefits of putting together a framework that will govern the sector. For the last thing that I want to say, I will take the track as the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, did in quoting Bob Marley by saying, *Pimper's Paradise*. I will take a similar track but I will quote the wise and knowledgeable Nikki Minaj:

“Give dem di roller blades, tell dem fi skate.”

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. It is now time for the Hon. Member, Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Speaker, esteemed Members of Parliament (MP) and fellow citizens – I believe three-quarters are probably sleeping by now – today, I rise before this august Assembly to express my deep concerns regarding the Petroleum Activities Bill 2023.

Before I go, I would like to respond to my good Friend who seems to have regurgitated what the Hon. Member, Mr. Bharrat, said in his presentation. I want to mention one particular point. He mentioned that local content policy was in the definition in this Bill. He then went on to say that the petroleum commission will come after but, nowhere in this Bill was anything about the Petroleum Commission mentioned. It is nowhere inside. How can you say that the local content policy is mentioned and you are going to bring a petroleum commission? I want to address a few points that the Hon. Member, Mr. Bharrat, mentioned about the 14 oil blocks that are up for auction. It is my suspicion that whilst we are pushing for this Petroleum Activities Bill, there is something *up the sleeve of the Government* to have these 14 blocks auctioned. I want to address

another point based on this small window that the Minister spoke of to extract all this oil. I can understand the rush to extract our petroleum products but I will address during my presentation the sustainability of this industry that can go on for decades. While I recognise the significance of our nation's oil resources and the potential benefits to the whole, it is my firm belief that the current form of this Bill presents several significant flaws that must be addressed before we move forward. We have presented to this National Assembly about thirty-something clauses that should be included in this Bill. The Petroleum Activities Bill states:

“AN ACT to repeal and replace the Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Act Cap. 65:04 and the Petroleum (Production) Act Cap 65:05; to provide for the exploration, production, storage, and transportation of petroleum ... and for related matters.”

One's first impression or expectation when a Bill is repealed is that it must have modern amendments, cater for the inclusiveness of all Guyanese, and must include transparency and accountability. These must not only be mentioned but must be included. Allow me to express my concerns in support of the proposed amendments that my Colleague, the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, submitted. The first one is a lack of adequate environmental safeguards. My primary concern with the Petroleum Activities Bill lies in its apparent lack of sufficient environmental safeguards. As we venture into offshore oil exploration and production, we must prioritise the protection of our delicate marine ecosystem and coastal areas. Without robust provisions to address potential oil spills, pollution and the long-term impacts, we risk irreversible damage to our environment and the livelihood of countless Guyanese who depend on it. The Bill must have an environmental protection clause. One cannot isolate the Environmental Protection Act from this Bill. It must have an aspect inside that reflects or adds to that safeguard. We must strengthen the Bill with comprehensive environmental safeguards, including strict regulations for oil spill response and mitigation, Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and provisions for ecosystem restoration in the event of environmental damage.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot have a Petroleum Activities Bill in isolation – as I mentioned – from the Environmental Protection Act. The petroleum sector can cause serious hazards to our environment. Mr. Speaker, allow me to expound on this issue because, apparently, the Government has no clue or memory shortage when it comes to Guyana's environmental commitment. I want to repeat that – ‘when it comes to Guyana's environmental commitment’. Guyana is a net emitter of Green

House Gases (GHG) because of its surface gold mining and timber logging. We are far from having policies and activities to reduce the emissions of Green House Gases from mining and logging. Guyana is responsible for failing to control the scope one emissions from the flaring of offshore associated gas. A small and fiscally ineffective penalty is levied on gas volume declared by oil producers but unverified by any Government agencies, commissions, or independent auditors. Guyana has no control over the scope two emissions from tankers carrying away its oil or scope three missions from the combustion of fuel derived from the country's oil. The rapid development of our oil field in this south-east corner of the Stabroek track results in Guyana being by far the country with the largest per capita emission of Green House Gases, as was mentioned by my former Colleagues. This unenviable status contradicts the claim made in the context of Guyana's nationally determined contribution, the Low Carbon Development Strategies (LDCs) to mitigate the heating of climate change under the Paris Agreement of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

This is what I want to remind the Government of – what it signed on to. The principal shareholders in the Stabroek Block Production Sharing Agreement are Esso Exploration & Production Guyana Limited (EEPGL) with a 45% share and Hess Guyana Exploration Limited with a 30% share both have company commitments in relation to mitigating climate heating. These commitments include a net reduction in the emission of Green House Gases. Guyana has not insisted that the technological improvements to reduce Green House Gases during oil production be incorporated into the Stabroek Track operation, although, this is entirely possible through the revision of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) operating permits. Perhaps, the best win-win situation to fit both oil companies' commitments and the obvious interest of Guyana in prolonging the income from oil and gas production is through a national petroleum depletion policy. Guyana must recognise that the global trend is to decarbonise economies by moving from petroleum-based fuel to electric and hydropower transport. At the same time, the value of petroleum as usually imported, industrial raw material for chemical synthesis is rising. ExxonMobil, at least, is a major player in such refineries and synthesisers.

Yesterday morning, the Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Republic of Dominica to have a refinery with a capacity of 50,000 barrels. I recall, there was an article in the *Guyana Chronicle* newspaper and one person stated it had an agreement for a refinery

in Guyana. The very afternoon, the Vice-President made a statement that nobody was issued a refinery licence or permit. Two weeks after, there was an expression of interest for refineries and four were short-listed. My question is – what happened to those four refineries? What happened with the four refineries? Somebody is showing us who is really the boss and we are going to see. There is one person who signed an MoU, whilst others shortlisted four refineries. We are waiting to see the result.

There is, therefore, mutual interest between Guyana and the petroleum producers in a depletion policy that prolongs the life of Guyana's offshore petroleum as an industrial raw material and contributes to the reduction of Green House Gas emissions as an element of Guyana's LDC. Therefore, Hon. Minister Mr. Bharrat, it can be sustainable. You do not have to rush to extract all the oil. I know our intention is to set up 10 platforms but with four we can create a win-win situation for Guyana so every Guyanese would benefit. [Mr. Nandlall: That is the policy man; deal with the Bill.] It is part of the policy of the Bill. This is what the Bill should address, Hon. Attorney General. It fails to address what I am saying here. It must be known that the People's Progressive Party/Civic rejects the oil and gas Depletion Policy Guidelines of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Yesterday was one year. You can check *Kaieteur News* online for 9th August, 2022, or the Inter-American Development Bank's website and you will see it. As proposed by my Colleagues, we must have a petroleum commission that will have the overarching management of the petroleum sector. This commission will have two policies: one, the national petroleum policy; and two, the petroleum depletion policy. The national petroleum policy will act as a guide for the longevity and sustainability of this natural resource, just as we have one for the forestry sector – the National Forestry Policy Statement and Plan. That is how we manage that natural resource. The Hon. Member has a report from the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC), also, which was done by a Jamaican firm to restructure the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission.

1.33 a.m.

I want to mention that the similar way the Guyana Forestry Commission and the GGMC are set up is the same way we are proposing that this Natural Resources be set up. This is so that you can have inclusive management, accountability and transparency of the natural resources. I want to add, under the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change Government, when it comes

to governance of this petroleum sector, we had a plan from 2017 to 2019. [Mr. Hamilton: What happened with the plan?] The report is with the Minister; you can have a look at it. The Ministry of Natural Resources, the policy development and implementation oversight body, the Ministerial responsibility in accordance with the petroleum legislation and regulatory regime, and other related requirements and structure... We also had the Petroleum Commission of Guyana, which we implemented in 2018. It was a regulatory oversight of the stream of activities. Then, we had a petroleum scientific institute from 2018 to 2020, which supported the regulatory oversight through the provision of an archiving technical research training, and related service activities and processes. Then, we had a national oil company for 2018, which had oversight of the commercial activities and the Government's commercial interest. Then, we had the institutional oversight, which is the Ministry of Finance, the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and the Bank of Guyana (BoG). Those were for the revenue, taxation policy and management. Then, we had the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, which has the Guyana Energy Agency (GEA) and the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL Inc.), which deals with the Gas-to-Energy project. Then, there was the Ministry of Business, under the Guyana Office for Investment (GO-Invest), which had the development of the local content policy, which was drafted and it was mentioned. Then, we had the Ministry of Presidency, the Department of Energy and the sea defence, which deals with the overall residual authority. This is all that were in the pipeline to help manage the resources. It was an overarching framework, not coming here and bringing a Bill that excludes all this here and tell us about management of our natural resources. That is what we have. My Friend, I do not want to mention it, but you did a very good study that wanted to manage these resources, but we will talk after this.

In addition, the Petroleum Commission of Guyana Bill, where a draft was already done was critiqued by the commonwealth and was sent to the World Bank for input. This Commission would have established a board of directors to manage the affairs and the composition of this board caters for inclusivity. It has six members made up of persons from the civil society, a minimum of two women, the parliamentary opposition in addition, the chairperson, and the commissioner, who is an *ex-officio* member. This is what inclusive governance is called. I would like to remind this House that at the last Sitting, the 66th Sitting of this National Assembly, we passed the Real Estate Agents and Brokers Bill and it is a private sector driven business. Here we are talking about natural resources, which is the biggest one of Guyana, and we cannot have a commission or a management

body to oversee these operations. Everything, three hundred and thirty thousand something, were mentioned for one person to manage this sector and we are not too sure if it is the Hon. Minister. This brings me to the depletion policy that I spoke of, which will have a section within the Petroleum Activities Bill. Our petroleum resources are not renewable. National interest requires that we provide a legislation for optimum rates of depletion and to maximise the socio-economic benefits. Almost all the national discussions in the media are driven by a consideration of petroleum only, or mostly, and liquid fuel to be consumed until alternative fuel becomes cheap and energy efficient. We must look beyond this relatively brief historical period of oil combustion and provide petroleum as an industrial base. It will still be exhausting, but the policy will both satisfy our direct international climate mitigation obligation and our national income generation. **[An Hon. Member (Government): (Inaudible.)]** Ricky Ramsaroop. Accordingly, our policy requires the Petroleum Commission to be responsible for engaging, at the earliest practicable date, with global specialists to identify and propose timelines for future major petroleum-based products which can be synthesised through a refined process, especially from the light, sweet crude oil proven in Guyana's offshore deepwater fields.

A far-sighted policy, based on the best available information and specialist advice, is the APNU/AFC alternative to the oil companies. Our focus on the petroleum mainly as liquid fuel whose combustion is uncontestably a major cause of destabilising climate heating. The effects of climate heating are obviously detrimental to the coastline and majority of the coastal population of Guyana. Increasingly, the thermal expansion of the ocean and overwhelming *[inaudible]* of our sea defences. Focus, Boy, focus. The argument that Guyana should support and encourage maximum production of petroleum for fuel to prevent standing of these assets is short sighted. Our existing production greatly exceeds national consumption and is mainly resulting in rapid inflation of the economy and the acquisition of huge national debts for unplanned vanity projects. That is what we will end up with.

Let me bring revenue management and accountability here. The Bill's current revenue management framework raises concerns about accountability and transparency. We must ensure the oil revenues are just judiciously to benefit all citizens, rather than falling into a pit of management or corruption. Without stringent checks and balances, there is a risk that our nation could squander this opportunity for the betterment of all Guyanese. To instil public confidence,

the bill should establish the petroleum commission, responsible for the monitoring of oil revenues and ensuring they are allocated to a critical sector such as education, healthcare and infrastructural development with regular public reporting. Right, Mr. Patterson. **[Dr. Singh:** What about being given away in a secret account?] Is that at the Bank of Guyana? The social economic disparities and local content. While the Bill mentions local content development, there is a lack of concrete measures to ensure the fair participation of Guyanese workers and businesses in the oil industry. Failure to address this issue may extrapolate existing socioeconomic disparities and hinder the growth of local businesses. The Bill should promote local content by setting clear targets for the hiring of Guyanese workers and the procurement of Guyanese workers and the procurement of goods and services from local businesses. This will create a thriving ecosystem, homegrown talent, and companies.

My final point on this is the resource curse and economic vulnerabilities. The Petroleum Bill must address the potential for the resource curse, a phenomenon where resource-rich countries experience economic instabilities and governance challenges. If not adequately managed, oil wealth can lead to overreliance on a single sector stifling diversification effort and exposing our economy to volatile oil prices. We have seen, as mentioned by the Hon. Member in her last presentation, the decline of the non-oil sector. We must incorporate the provisions to encourage economic diversification and long-term planning beyond oil revenue, and ensuring a more stable and resilient economy that benefits all the citizens.

In conclusion, while I acknowledge the potential benefit that the Petroleum (Activities) Bill of 2023 might bring to our nation, I cannot, in good conscience, support it in its current form. We have a moral obligation to safeguard our environment, protect the interest of our citizens, and ensure that the exploitation of our natural resources is done responsibly and sustainably. I urge my esteemed Colleagues to join me in calling for the necessary amendments to address the concerns raised and ensure that the Petroleum Bill aligns with the best interest of all Guyanese. Together we can forge a brighter and more prosperous future for our nation, while protecting the values that define it. I thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Now for the Hon. Minister of Labour, Hon. Member Mr. Joseph Hamilton.

Minister of Labour [Mr. Hamilton]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Anytime we are discussing the oil and gas sector in Guyana, the APNU/AFC Members of Parliament (MPs) should not speak at all on the matter. The APNU/AFC has no moral authority to discuss, in good faith and good conscience, oil and gas and the interest of the people of Guyana.

It is important for us to understand that our Colleagues across the aisle are always able to give us all the necessary advice in Opposition. When they were in government, all the advice they can now find to give this Government, they could not have utilised it for them to stay in government. Mr. Speaker, when you hear our Colleagues across the aisle speak, it is useful for us to do some reminders and then contrast what they did with the oil and gas sector with what we have done – Remind and contrast. We are not at a place where we were in 2016. As Guyanese, we had a PSA that was signed. It was not just signed but it was signed and hidden for the Guyanese people. Mr. Ramsaroop has the gall to talk about transparency and accountability. I recall, when this matter was raised, the then Minister of Natural Resources' and the Minister of Finance's advice that they gave to the Guyanese people was that they should have gone to the Registry to check. This document was lying in the Registry for several years and was never made available to the Guyanese people. Again, another reminder. The amount of US\$18 million, one time, where the Minister at the time said to the Guyanese people, firstly, that they never requested neither have they collected a signing bonus. Then, the Minister went on to say that he thought that it was a gift given to the Government of Guyana. We were not sure whether it was the Government of Guyana or whether it was a gift that was given to the APNU/AFC. We are still to confirm whichever one.

1.48 a.m.

The Opposition had a bad PSA, a hidden PSA and it had a signing bonus that was hidden. The person who signed the PSA on behalf of the government just a couple of weeks ago indicated to the Guyanese people that if he had to do it again, he would do it differently. Further, he said he was instructed to sign. We are still waiting to know who instructed him to sign. That is the reminder for the Guyanese people at this hour of the morning. Mr. Ramsaroop talked again about transparency and accountability. The Minister of Finance then took a Natural Resource Fund to the National Assembly when it had already lost to the no-confidence Motion. If that was not bad enough, he made himself the Minister, the Board, and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). In the event that you do not have a CEO, he becomes the CEO. In the event you do not have a Board, he

becomes the Board. When we contrast what the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) did regarding this sector, what we have today, within three years, we have a Natural Resources Fund that can stand scrutiny, where every dollar we take out from there comes to the National Assembly, *via* the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. When you talk about accountability and transparency, we are the ones who have effected accountability and transparency regarding the oil and gas sector.

We are discussing the Petroleum (Activities) Bill. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramsaroop, is suggesting that we collapse all the other legislation into this. That is what he was saying. He was talking about the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and that it should be here. He was talking about the Guyana Forestry Commission and that it should be in here, and the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) should also be in this Bill. Even though we have a Local Content Act, he said it should be in here. Now, we brought to the National Assembly the Petroleum (Activities) Bill, which will be passed today. Let me make this point because Mr. Patterson spent a lot of time, [Ms. Ferguson: Hon. Member.] Hon. Member, counting how many times the word “Minister” is mentioned in the Bill. Who do you want us to put here? Is it the Leader of the Opposition? He does not qualify to be in the Bill. Who do you want to be in here, the Leader of the Opposition? Who do you want us to put in here? It can only be the Minister of Natural Resources, and presently, his name is Hon. Vickram Bharrat of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. The Leader of the Opposition will never go in here because he does not qualify to be in here.

The other important point before I take my seat that I want to speak on quickly is the APNU/AFC five years in government. In all the conversations it has now, and an important matter regarding this sector, it never paid attention to health and security. It is in this legislation it never paid attention to the matter. It is like it does not exist like it did not exist under the APNU/AFC. We are fixing that. For your information, people on the other side of town where you will stay forever and ever, amen, the first time an Occupation Safety and Health Officer went to inspect a Floating Production Storage and Off-loading (FPSO) is under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government, and even before this legislation. That will continue. Just last week, we had an engagement with ExxonMobil, paying attention to the matter and indicating to them that this must be a quarterly activity where we can regulate and properly oversee the sector. The APNU/AFC

and Mr. Patterson, Hon. Member, with all his “gaff,” never even consider that you need regulation and oversight regarding occupation safety and health in this sector. This legislation takes care of that. Let me read for your information; I am sure it did not even consider it. Not one of its speakers will speak to this matter because it is not important to it. It is not important. [An Hon. Member: They concerned with the (*inaudible*)] Yes. They are concerned about how often the word “Minister” is in there. [Mr. Mahipaul: 336 times.] Yes. The Leader of the Opposition will be in here zero time.

PART XIII of this legislation speaks to Safety, Security and Emergency Response, Mr. Ramsaroop, Hon. Member. Clause 73 (1) states:

“The Minister shall make regulations to govern the safety of petroleum operations carried under this Act”.

They were in government for five years. Oil and gas, it never paid attention to it. There was not one piece of safety regulation to govern oil and gas. It had an expert, a guy that used to be at the EPA. It ended all of this matter and it never considered this matter to be important. Clause 73 (2) (a), (b), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (g) state:

“Notwithstanding the generality of the foregoing, the Minister ...

Mr. Ramsaroop, Hon. Member,

... may make regulations for –

(a) protecting the health, safety and welfare of persons engaged in oil and gas operations and communities.

In your state of incompetence, you never even comprehend that this should be there.

(b) securing the safe design, construction and operation of all facilities.

(c) securing safe and environmentally sound decommissioning operations.

(d) maintaining a high level of safety at all facilities.

- (e) promoting orderly exploration, appraisal, development, and production of petroleum.
- (f) preventing damage to or waste of any natural resource, property, or the environment
- (g) promoting a safety culture ...”.

The APNU/AFC did not understand... [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] You understood it. Okay. Yes.

“... and continuous improvement of safety measures in compliance with this Act, applicable laws related to health safety and environment, and best international industry standards and practices.”

Before I take my seat, that is what is wrong with over there. What is wrong with over there is, if we are discussing... The last time we discussed the Single Window Systems Bill, we heard from over there, “we had it to bring if we had stayed in government.” If you talk about the bridge across the river, that is another plan it had – a feasibility for a three - lane bridge. Everything you speak about, and if you talk about the Infectious Diseases Hospital that was a shell, “if we did not get thrown out, we would have finished it. Two things it is good at. It is always able to advise when it is not in a position to operationalise. It is always good at that I could say. It is bad at a lot of things, but good at that. [Mr. Mahipaul: *(Inaudible.)*] Accept your advice. One could not even advise oneself to stay in government. Why would we accept your advice?

Tonight, as we discuss the Petroleum (Activities) Bill 2023 that will be passed this morning, I will hope that our Friends across the aisle board the programme and board the train because the train of development of Guyana, which is called the People’s Progressive Party/Civic will not stop and wait for it. The train has left the station. This is one other piece of legislation to indicate to the Guyanese people that the People’s Progressive Party/Civic will continue to manage and regulate the Oil and Gas Sector to their benefit and to ensure that we utilise the resources for the development of this country. [*Applause.*]

Mr. Henry: *Halika Jakob*, on behalf of the Guyana Action Party (GAP) and a member of the Coalition, I hereby stand to make my presentation on the proposed Petroleum (Activities Bill)

2023. However, please allow me to firstly, in a belated manner, express greetings to all and especially to my Indigenous brothers and sisters on the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples'. Like I said, it is somewhat belated. It is no secret that the Indigenous peoples' are and have done so much for Guyana and the world at large.

2.03 a.m.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

[Mdm. Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.]

We are known, and that is no secret, as the safekeepers of the health of the world's environment. Mdm. Speaker, kindly also allow me to express condolences to the family and friends of the 20 Indigenous children who perished in the Mahdia School Fire. I further beg your indulgence, if you so agree, to allow this noble House to pay respect to the memories of the 20 Indigenous youths who perished, by leading us in the National Assembly in a minute of silence. You may deduct that time from the amount of time allocated to me. **[Hon. Members (Government):** We did it before.] Mdm. Speaker...

[Mdm. Deputy Speaker in aside with the Clerk.]

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I am being advised that this was already done. Kindly continue. Thank you.

Mr. Henry: Mdm. Speaker, when was this done? Did the Members of Parliament (MPs) on the opposite side stand and observe it? To my knowledge, only those on our side – the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) – stood and observed it. I cannot recollect those on the opposite side...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, it is being verified. Could we kindly continue until it is verified?

Mr. Henry: Thank you, Mdm. Speaker. According to our Indigenous beliefs, we have to pay respect to those who depart or deceased, so that their souls may rest in peace. The Petroleum (Activities) Bill 2023 provides for the exploration, production, storage and transportation of petroleum in Guyana and for related matters. Before I delve into that, as a rebuttal to the last

speaker who focused a lot on a US\$18 million bonus, I would like to mention that that bonus was in the account of the Bank of Guyana (BoG). If it was somewhere else – and I know the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) – it would have charged someone and put them before the courts. It did not do it. Therefore, one knows it was in the bank. To further say something about it, all Guyanese know that that money was used to defend Guyana's integrity. It was there to defend us. One may not want to stand how we, the Indigenous people, feel who live in Essequibo to have that sort of defence and to keep us safe. We are the frontline to danger and one comes and mocks us here? Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank the APNU/AFC for safeguarding the Indigenous People when we were facing the devil and danger.

Mr. Speaker, further, I would like to... Since one mentioned the \$US18 million...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Speaker has taken a break. Mdm. Deputy Speaker is in the Chair. Thank you.

Mr. Henry: My apologies, Mdm. Speaker. I am so accustomed. I wish the speaker who mentioned the US\$18 million bonus could tell us about the US\$214 million that was there from the first oil audit. Where is that money? The sum of US\$214 million. One is crying for moneys that are there to defend us – tell us about that.

This Bill in its current form, contains some 85 clauses. I am hearing about the Minister being mentioned over 300 times. Almost one time for every day of the year. But it does not give justice to the representation and respect of the rights of the First Peoples of Guyana. It does not. This Bill seems to focus on petroleum activities that occur off the coast of Guyana. However, the exploration, production, storage and transportation of the petroleum in Guyana and its related matters will not only happen in our maritime space but may also occur in any part of Guyana. This brings to mind the Hunt Oil Company's petroleum activities that resulted in high-quality crude oil being discovered in the Rupununi. It must be noted that this discovery, though halted, can or may in the future be considered for further exploration and possibly getting active. It must be noted that the Hunt Oil Company's reserve is located in an area identified as one of the environmentally important wetlands in Guyana. This wetland naturally connects to the wetlands of northern Roraima in the Federative Republic of Brazil during the rainy season, and it allows nature to replenish itself with the intermingling of the fauna from Guyana and Brazil. It is also situated

relatively near to the 14 Indigenous villages of North Rupununi. The Rupununi River and its tributaries meander in proximity or within the rich Hunt Oil Reserve's location. It must be noted that the Rupununi River supplies the North Rupununi villages with fresh water and related resources that are vital for the survival of the Indigenous Peoples and others who live in that location.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, before you continue, when you are ready, I will allow one minute of silence in observation of the children that passed away.

Mr. Henry: Now?

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: We may go ahead now.

Mr. Henry: Let us kindly do it now. Thank you. You will guide us.

[Members stood for a minute of silence for the lives lost in the Mahdia School Fire.]

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members.

Mr. Henry: Thank you very much, Mdm. Speaker. Thank you very much. Many of us, Indigenous People, cried bitterly when this happened. Today, you are helping us to heal our hearts. Mdm. Speaker, the International Labour Organization in its ILO 169 decree, the *Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169)* stated of the Indigenous Peoples, and I quote:

“Article 7

1. The peoples concerned shall have the right to decide their own priorities for the process of development as it affects their lives, beliefs, institutions and spiritual well-being and the lands they occupy or otherwise use, and to exercise control, to the extent possible, over their own economic, social and cultural development. In addition, they shall participate in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of plans and programmes for national and regional development which may affect them directly.

2. The improvement of the conditions of life and work and levels of health and education of the peoples concerned, with their participation and co-operation, shall be a matter of priority in plans for the overall economic development of areas they inhabit. Special

projects for development of the areas in question shall also be so designed as to promote such improvement.

3. Governments shall ensure that, whenever appropriate, studies are carried out, in co-operation with the peoples concerned, to assess the social, spiritual, cultural and environmental impact on them of planned development activities. The results of these studies shall be considered as fundamental criteria for the implementation of these activities.

4. Governments shall take measures, in co-operation with the peoples concerned, to protect and preserve the environment of the territories they inhabit.

Article 15 states:

1. The rights of the peoples concerned to the natural resources pertaining to their lands shall be specially safeguarded. These rights include the right of these peoples to participate in the use, management and conservation of these resources.

2. In cases in which the State retains the ownership of mineral or sub-surface resources or rights to other resources pertaining to lands, governments shall establish or maintain procedures through which they shall consult these peoples, with a view to ascertaining whether and to what degree their interests would be prejudiced, before undertaking or permitting any programmes for the exploration or exploitation of such resources pertaining to their lands. The peoples concerned shall wherever possible participate in the benefits of such activities, and shall receive fair compensation for any damages which they may sustain as a result of such activities.”

Mdm. Speaker, it is somewhat disheartening that Guyana is not a signatory to this treaty – ILO 169. I encourage this Government, on behalf of the Indigenous Peoples of Guyana, to ratify the ILO 169 as soon as possible.

This petroleum Bill does not allow for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). Part II of the Bill which deals with administration and authority, places the centre of power squarely in the hands of the Minister of Natural Resources. In this section of the Bill, the Minister identifies the areas or blocks – whatever one calls them – for potential exploration, invites companies to apply for

permission to explore and issues approval for the granting of the licence. If this licence is for exploration to be done in the hinterland, there would be no opportunity for the people who live there to be consulted or allowed to give their Free, Prior, and Informed Consent. I repeat that this current Bill that is before us this morning, does not allow for Free, Prior, and Informed Consent by Indigenous Peoples and Guyanese as a whole, for petroleum activities to be done within or near to their communities. According to the *World Rainforest Movement*, Article 262 dated 12th September 2022 states:

“Zúñiga and León have systematized information about oil spills in the Peruvian Amazon, showing that environmental authorities have recorded up to 474 spills from oil infrastructure between 2000 and 2019 (12). They have also shown that the total amount of oil-produced waters dumped into rivers, soils and wetlands in the northern Peruvian Amazon reached 7.09 billion barrels between 1974 and 2009. These produced waters contained thousands of tons of different highly toxic chemical compounds (13). It is worth noting that the Peruvian State has had official information since at least the early 1980s, when lead was first reported to be found in sediments, water and animals consumed by indigenous Achuar communities in the Corrientes river basin...”

2.18 a.m.

Mdm. Speaker, both surface and underground oil spills have potential to contaminate soil sediments ground, service waters and air due to the many volatile compounds emitted in the air when there is an oil spill. According to Isglobal.org organisation, and I have the contract there, Indigenous People living in the Peruvian Amazon near oil fields have high levels of mercury, cadmium and lead in their bodies. It must be noted that serious contaminants are left behind after resources are extracted. This Petroleum Act, which is the subject of the current debate, spells out in detail that the subject Minister has all the powers to make unilateral decisions related to this industry. Of course, he or she will have to report to the Cabinet. It is not right that one individual should be allowed so much authority over such an important facet of our lives. This is why we ask that the powers mentioned be placed in the hands of a broader body called the National Petroleum Commission. For us the Indigenous peoples of Guyana, this Petroleum Act No. 16 of 2023 in its current form is a move by the People’s Progressive Party/Civic to continue the erosion of the rights of the Indigenous Peoples of Guyana and Guyanese as a whole. There are many instances in this

Act in which the need for Free Prior Informed Consent has been ignored or have been ignored. In part six, under the heading unitization, clause 44 (7) states:

“Where the holder of a petroleum licence identifies a reservoir that extends beyond the boundaries of the licence area, into an unlicensed area within the national territory... the licensee must submit an application to the Minister to incorporate the unlicensed area that contains part of the reservoir identified by the licensee under this subsection.”

Let us suppose the Hunt Oil block becomes activated. Just an example, there could be one at Sawariwau also, from what we have been hearing. A large petroleum reservoir is found in the title lands and land contiguous to the indigenous villages of North Rupununi. According to this Act, the Minister will have all the powers to direct the licensee to submit an application to the Minister to incorporate the unlicensed area within the land titled or contiguous to the Indigenous villages of the North Rupununi. This example and many others in this Act deliberately throw the consent of Free Prior Informed Consent out of the window together with the baby's water. This example of bypassing the FPIC is a continuation of many examples of this Government not wanting to treat the indigenous with the respect they deserve or desire.

A glaring example of this is the Government selling the carbon credits of the indigenous peoples without FPIC and then unilaterally giving them a contribution of 15% of the proceeds. Where in the world would it be acceptable for anyone to sell your asset without your Free Prior Informed Consent and then contribute 15% of the moneys that they receive back to you? To make it worse, they deliberately misrepresented the Amerindian Act of 2006 by saying that the National Toshaos Council has the authority to give consent for this eye pass to happen. The world knows that only the village general meetings of the Indigenous Peoples have the legal authority to give such consent, and this must be done *via* the process of Free Prior Informed Consent. The call for FPIC in matters related to indigenous development is serious. Recently, we saw the death of 20 of our indigenous youths by fire in Mahdia. Were the indigenous and other people consulted on the design of the dormitory? Did they agree for the designs to include grills? Did they agree for the children to be kept as if they were prisoners? To make matters worse, why is this PPP/C Government allegedly forcing the parents of the deceased indigenous children to accept a meagre \$5 million as a final settle for a state-sponsored death even before the Commission of Inquiry (COI) is properly constituted? Under part 14...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, could we please stick to the Bill?

Mr. Henry: Mdm. Speaker, I am speaking to the Bill. I will observe what you have said. Under Part 14, Restriction of rights on license states and I quote 78 (1) (b):

“A licensee shall not exercise any of his rights under this Act or his licence—

(b) except with the written consent of the lawful occupier thereof, in respect of—

(i) any land which is the site of, or which is within two hundred metres (or such greater distance as may be prescribed) ...”

Of the boundaries of any village, or any land set apart or required for a village, a new village or a village extension, except with the written consent of the Minister. The Minister. The Minister. The Minister. How many times; 300 and 30 something times. Here again, this Act does not bind the all-powerful Minister to follow the Principles of Free Prior Informed Consent before actually catering and making a decision of the granting or non-granting of a license. In its current form, this Act is certainly not Indigenous People friendly.

Clause 81 (3) condescendingly states that the lawful occupier of any land in a development and production area shall not erect any building or structure in the area without the consent of the holder of the petroleum production license. Even we have to get permission from the people with the license now...

Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, excuse me. You have two minutes. Please start wrapping up.

Mr. Henry: Yes. I am almost finished. However, in clause 81 (3) states:

“The lawful occupier has the right to graze livestock upon or to cultivate the surface of the land, except in so far as such, uses of the land may unreasonably interfere with petroleum operations...”

We do have rights, but rights that are superseded by the rights of the developer. In closing, I repeat that this Bill is condescending and unfriendly to the Indigenous peoples of Guyana. It is unfortunate that this Bill is being debated on the world Indigenous People’s days. This morning, we were to have done it. This Bill gives the Minister dictatorial powers that could see the further

trampling of the rights of the rights of Indigenous peoples and Guyanese as a whole. One only has to look at how the people at Chinese Landing are currently being treated by the PPP/C. One must note that it took the intervention of the IA [*inaudible*] to make it act. Even now, they are being told that they have to be careful because representing themselves puts the minuscule amount of cash grants that this benevolent PPP/C gives from the Guyanese people's coffers of US\$200 for one year in jeopardy. The Bill opens the door for more under-the-table exploits by the PPP/C by giving absolute power to the Minister, power that should be residing in the hands of a petroleum commission. The Amerindian Act though it is in need of revision, we ask it not to be superseded by this Petroleum (Activities) Bill. With the aforementioned facts, I now request that this Bill be sent to a Special Selection Committee. Thank you for your patience. [*Applause*]

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mdm. Speaker and Hon. Members, for the opportunity to make a short presentation on this question of the Petroleum (Activities) Bill 2023. First, I wish to strongly object to a statement just made by the Hon. Member speaking before me where he said that the deaths of the 20 youths were state sponsored. I think it is highly offensive. The Hon. Member was not there when I was there at 2.30 in the morning and dealing with the issue. The Hon. Member, I am not sure what role he played in anything had to do with it but at the personal level, I am registering my strong objection to that statement.

I wish to clearly point out that Bill No. 16/2023 refers simply, perhaps, to petroleum activities. I have to say that somehow I found my way here at this present time, perhaps being at the recent beginning of the expiration of oil in Guyana, both as a Geologist shooting seismic out there, both in the Takatu basin, which was just spoken of, both as Commissioner of Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, also as the one who signed with the courageous Janet Jagan, the first documentation which brought the ExxonMobil Esso Exploration and Production Guyana Limited (EEPGL) into exploration and discovery of oil in Guyana. I have to say that at various times since leaving the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, and particularly at the time when we finally found the oil that we knew we would have found at some point in time, this was after we had gone to Houston and had a quarrel with ExxonMobil about the pace at which it was doing the exploration and the fact that wanted to have the discovery much earlier than it occurred. We were insisting on three dimensional seismic to be done to push the discovery much faster and with more

efficaciousness than the way it was doing it at that time when it was quarrelling with Venezuela with the Chavez Government in relation to its occupants and developments there.

When I sit here and hear some of the discussion, much of which is from the other side, I get the feeling that we are still not ready. That this former Coalition partnership was in power and where there were many references to the missteps. **[Mr. Mahipaul: Legally.]** I am not going into the question of whether you were legally in power in 2015. I have great doubts about that. I would not get into that now. However, we are carrying on debates and discussions not only in the newspaper but also on social media. In certain newspapers, where the discussion is, in too many cases, reckless, in too many instances insulative, like what we saw in the *Kaieteur News*, I think yesterday about ExxonMobil and what the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of ExxonMobil in Guyana is purported to have said because it was open and close exclamation marks after referencing him.

2.33 a.m.

I think that we run the risk that if we continue the debate in the public and in this House where we engender reckless and irresponsible criticisms, approaches and perceptions in relation to the oil and gas and other resources in Guyana. The *Kaieteur News* article yesterday referred to who the new slave masters are and, here we are, this morning, debating this Bill which aliases, but for certain nuances, many other forms of similar petroleum activities Bills in many other countries. This is no miracle. This is not something that is pulled out of the hat. This could not have appeared here in the way that it has appeared here without having the careful consideration of the drafters who are here, of persons who have had insight and information in relation to *[Inaudible]* issue. In relation to the fact that we are still evolving, in terms of what the ultimate legislation and supporting the issues have in relation to petroleum activities, its development and its exploitation, I hear the drum beat and sometimes one gets the impression that the feeding frenzy we have seemingly, irrationally, over the development of the sector of this industry, new still in itself, is one which is for carrion crows. It is a carrion crow frenzy.

One gets the impression from the other side that they do not want it to develop. One gets the impression always that you want to put a stop to any activity, any initiative that is what these amendments suggest. You do not want the Minister, the person responsible, to have the waiting,

the responsibility, the knowledge and the legislation in relation to making sure that the activities related to oil and gas are developed in a structured programmed way. You want to have now a new Petroleum Commission in a certain way and only because you do not want to have... You believe that if the PPP/C puts anything in place, good or bad, that it is something to be opposed. You do not want the Minister to have the power which the Minister should have. That you do not want the development to occur. That irrationally, without considering the matters, you want to put up all kinds of disagreements, irrational arguments in relation to these developments. There is no mystery in this Petroleum Activities Bill, there is no mystery. The suggestion of all of these amendments and the fact that the Bill refers to the Minister, who is responsible, in how many number of times in this Bill is of no relevance. If any one of the persons on that side of the House were in the same position as the Minister, it would not have been different. It perhaps would have been much worse, falling on the issues related to the signing bonus and other issues, all of which, we have not spoken of in this House. There are other things which he could speak about in relation to the matter.

Mdm. Speaker, I want to *sound a warning* that there are other countries that have had experiences where, in some instances, there has not been a fair share of the resources and which we have to take account for. The Hon. Member speaking before me spoke about the questions in Peru and, I think, in Ecuador in relation to the expiration and exploitation of oil in the Amazonian Forest there. There are some countries which have run off the rails in respect to the extraction of petroleum and other energy resources. The most recent issue, of course, has been the problem in and amongst those Europeans who always seem to be finding reasons to fight and kill each other just now. Having now forgotten everything in relation to the Paris Climate Accord, the Germans have come off from the issue of where they said they were only going with renewals, wind power and all the things. They have gone back [*Inaudible*] brown pole. The United Kingdom (UK) Prime Minister, Mr. Rishi Sunak, a couple years ago, talked about a windfall tax for the oil and gas sector because they were earning a lot of money and then I think last week he went out to the North Sea in Glasgow or somewhere and was talking about encouraging more drillers in the North Sea. They have found themselves in a reversal in relation to the Paris Climate Accord and what should have been done in relation to the overall question of energy.

Overall, we are still in dangerous waters – just know. There is still the question of what opportunity we have, the window of opportunity. The Hon. Minister Vickram Bharrat spoke about the time

period we may have to make the best gains and use of this wonderful discovery of oil in Guyana. Something that, for generations, was wished and wanted and wondered about. Now, everybody is interested but too many people are interested in a negative way. They are only interested in a negative way and the discussion and the debate for persons who should otherwise know better and who claim to be leaders in the society and have constituents, will not bring us to any good or gain in the country. In relation to putting in all of these amendments, which the Hon. Member Patterson has drafted out here, there are in relations to other.... I do not know. Is there an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Act? Are there other Acts which have a direct relationship to this thing? Do we have to put every other Act that is out there and make a big thing like this so that we could debate and that we do not have to go to a Special Select Committee... [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] Well, exactly. Sterile debate, useless debate designed to put a stop, out of maligned interests, in the development of the country and its people. That is what it is about, and I wish this really was not so, Mdm. Speaker.

Guyana has one good shot now at this development. One good shot given the window of opportunity that is there, given the issues relating to climate change and global warming, given the question we talk about utilising the benefits from the forest, which have already been shared with our Amerindian brothers and sisters. We have one good shot and this one shot that we have, it has to be successful. It could not be that the Hon. Members, who have stood up here and read long things from wherever about whatever on this matter, really have a sense in fact and in truth and in information that is out there, written down here, that what they are saying makes any sense at all. It does not make any sense at all. I have said before that we waste a lot of Parliamentary time, good Parliamentary time. There are lots of staff and facilitators wasting on us. The country listening to us. It has gone out there in the *Hansard*. It goes out there on social media to be repetitiously put out again and again for people to hear. We have school children, young persons who are coming up to take over from us and to run our issues going forward and this is what we do. Perhaps, in some circumstances, debates which come from this House, particularly from that other side of this House, will form a storehouse of some kind of knowledge for a great wonder of a negative time and for really wondering and thinking how we have come to what we are coming to here in this House. We have to put an end to this.

Some countries have had troubles in relation to resource use. We have talked about the resource curse. In the neighbouring Venezuela, there was a time when Petróleos de Venezuela, S.A. (PDVSA) gave 95% or more of all the money coming into the country, provided all of that in terms of foreign income. It created problems in terms of the usage of the money, the question of whether the elites were using too much of it for himself. What about the poor, deprived, underdeveloped and the Indigenous too? Those issues came forward and there was the Chavez Revolution and the results thereof. We are seeing the fallout of that great disagreement now here in Guyana. These are the things we have to be worrying about, working against to make sure that we do not make the same mistakes, but we cannot start out on the basis of amendments, on the basis of continuing... Well, I got to say there is some superstition in it. On the basis of thinking that any and everything, which comes here and which could be checked against other legislation in other countries – if we look at Ghana, the Petroleum Activities Bill, if we look at Angola, if we look at British Columbia, if we look at Norway, it is essentially the same things in here – the amount of research. It seems that people are standing up at that podium over there and reading from long things. Reading things which they have exerted – I would not say plagiarised – from other places would suggest that the simplest thing was to go and look at what other countries have and see where we fall, where we meet in that space. So, I do not want to go too much into issues of exploration, the question of whether the deposit goes over into unlicensed territory and all those things. All of those things could be worked out easily and dealt with. There is nothing new there. I have been looking at these things for many years and I am sorry that... [Mr. Henry: Have you read it (*Inaudible*)?] Do you want me to read it again like you have been standing up there reading stuff? Do you want me to stand up and read again like how you have been reading long paragraphs of stuff? I did not want to say that things were being plagiarised and put into the record here.

Mdm. Speaker, I want to, again, sound the warning about our approaching matters of serious national development where we are required to take initiatives to bring our people along, where we are required essentially to hand over a better life to our children that we need to have a better approach, a more reasoned and rational approach to these matters. That is what we need to do. The little work I and others would have done to bring us to this point where we could quarrel over these things is of no use if it comes to naught. It is of no use if it does not progress the issue. It is of no

use if we cannot have consensus on these fairly simple issues otherwise. We do not have to vote for it ourselves only on this side.

2.48 p.m.

You do not need to be silent on it on that side of the House. You too could stand and say – yes, we agree; it is rational; it has aliases; there are no miracles there; and let us go together. Here, a Gentleman brought a whole set of stuff designed to create trouble, quarrel, and feed for newspapers that have no real interest in progressing the matter and have us in a continuous state of turmoil. That is what we are in, in relation to these critical debates and discussions in our country. So, that is what I want to say on this matter, Mdm. Speaker. I fully support the Petroleum Activities Bill in the form it is in and without amendments. That is my position on the matter. It comes from particular, peculiar, and valid perspectives on this matter. Thank you very much, Mdm. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Holder: I rise this morning to make my contribution on what was expected to be a ground-breaking piece of legislation – the Petroleum Activities Bill 2023. This piece of legislation, its core is what is expected to determine the way our petroleum industry will be managed and governed for a significant period of time. It comes at a time when we are just about to approve new oil fields and merely weeks from an auction that will see agreements being made for the exploration and production of 14 new oil blocks.

While the Bill attempts to update our Petroleum (Exploration and Production) laws, the process of arriving where we are today, unfortunately, was not executed in the spirit of genuine inclusive democracy. This proposed Bill consists of 18 Parts and 98 clauses, some having multiple sub-sections. For this Government to lay this Bill in an attempt to ram it through the National Assembly *via* its one-seat majority, demonstrates its unwillingness to work with the Opposition in the best interest of the people and frankly speaking, its contempt for all Guyanese. Further, it goes against the fundamental principle of transparency and democracy. Let me say from the onset that, this Bill, in its current form, is grossly deficient and illustrates the People's Progressive Party/Civic party's thirst, yet again, for total domination and control. When one reads this Bill, if one does not know better one would believe that the Minister is the alpha and omega, the omnipotent and the omnipresent. I had my daughter count the number of times the word Minister is mentioned. My

Colleague said 300 and something. My daughter counted over 435 times. **[Hon. Members (Government): (Inaudible) cannot count.]** It does not matter who can count and who cannot, the point is being made.

In their defence, the Government's side, as usual, will tell us and continues to tell the nation that they were elected so they are responsible and that is the way of the Westminster-style governance framework. That is a sordid attempt if one considers the norms of modern democratic societies, especially, as it relates to the oil and gas industry. **[An Hon. Member (Government): (Inaudible) What word is that?]** I could tell you what the word is, you know. I could tell you, but I would not. There is an absolute over-concentration of power in the hands of the Minister. I believe we understand fully as a nation what power does, especially in the petroleum industry, how it corrupts Governments and its devastating impact on the country and its people. Under this PPP/C Government, the country always finds itself moving one step forward and then two steps backward.

The current Act, which this Bill seeks to repeal, since it was passed into law over three decades ago, provides for the Minister to delegate responsibility to various public officers in areas of the Act which require technical assistance. Clause 3 of the Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Act, for example, explicitly states that the Minister may designate a public officer or any employee of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) as the Chief Inspector. This was done since 1986. The Government at that time recognised that the governance structure of the oil and gas industry required some decisions to be made by technical experts. Those officers must be given an instrument of authority to be able to operate and make decisions without political interference. While this Petroleum Activities Bill signals the delegation of power in clause 5(3), it does not identify any of the officers or their designations. Further, it emphatically states in the very next sub-section 4:

“Notwithstanding any delegation...the Minister may continue to exercise any power or perform any duty of the Minister in accordance with this Act.”

So, the Minister can override any officer that powers are delegated to, at any point. The next two sub-sections go on to declare:

“Any delegation any act done in pursuance of that delegation, may be subject to review and variation by the Minister...”

The Minister can revoke any delegation. This reminds me of what was obtained with the Police Service Commission (PSC) members when they were suspended. I must say, simply because the Government did not agree with the direction of the PSC, it suspended the Commission to get rid of the members, and decisions were made thereafter. It is clear that if any delegation is made and those technical decisions do not see favour with the Minister, then he will unilaterally change them and/or revoke those powers given to the technical officer. This is the definition of domination and control politics. The PPP/C always has to feed its obsession with power.

Perhaps, the most disappointing issue of this Bill is the absence of the National Petroleum Commission. There is absolutely no reference to it. The APNU/AFC share the view that our oil and gas sector should be insulated from politicisation. As such, the sector should be managed by a competent and multi-disciplinary group that will comprise the Petroleum Commission. The Coalition, after just two years in Office, attempted to do just that through the Petroleum Commission of Guyana Bill of 2017. *[Interruption]* Hold on. Hold up. This Bill sought to establish the Petroleum Commission to oversee and manage the oil and gas industry; to deal with compliance for policies, laws, agreements, safety, health, and environmental standards; and research safe, efficient, effective, and environmentally responsible exploration and optimum production methods; *et cetera*. It is the advisory body to the Minister who in turn would be responsible for the policy direction. This same PPP/C, then in Opposition, complained. Listen – you complained bitterly about the powers vested in the Minister.

Mr. Benn: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I am complaining bitterly that he keeps calling you, Mr. Speaker. He wrote it down in his speech. I am complaining bitterly about that.

Mr. Holder: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, forgive me.

Mr. Benn: Everything that you said should be expunged.

Mr. Holder: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I beg your protection. I beg your protection since the Minister is not standing on any established Standing Order. Cde. Deputy Speaker, it is this same PPP/C Government, the Cde. who just stood, was a part of. The Members then in Opposition, complained

bitterly, Cde Benn, about the powers vested in the Minister even though the Minister at that time, Cde. Trotman, had declared prior that he believed some of the powers have to be delegated and committed the Bill to a Special Select Committee. No less a person, than the then Opposition Hon. Member of Parliament, the Hon. Dr. Irfaan Ali, argued on the floor of the National Assembly. He complained that the Minister had too much power – that he was not only allowed to provide policy guidance but also give direction to the Commission. Hon. Member Dr. Ali went on to tell the *Guyana Chronicle* and, yes, they were allowed to give their view to the Government's news apparatus and have it reported fairly at that time – that the Minister can approve, amend or reject plans, proposals, reports, analyses and data, *et cetera*. He said they we do not support it; that they believe that the Minister should not have that amount of power; and that the sector should be depoliticised. It did not end there. The current Minister, Hon. Member Mr. Bharrat, who now seeks all this power in this Bill, in that very debate on the Petroleum Commission of Guyana Bill, as an Opposition MP, only a few years ago said that while reading the Bill he was confused. He was confused to the point that he was wondering whether we actually needed a Commission and why not just allow the Minister to control the sector. [*Interruption*] Hold on. Hold up. Hold up. Hold up. Judging from the amount of power the Bill will give to the Minister, I want to ask the very Hon. Minister Vickram Bharrat if he is confused now. Are you confused now, Cde.? Are you confused now with all the powers that you now seek for yourself?

If we look at clause 14(1), just look at the Bill, or look at clause 39(1), the powers they complained about while in Opposition are essentially the identical powers they seek to give the Minister in this Bill. It is a travesty. This is the greatest manifestation of hypocrisy and utter shamelessness. The PPP/C, now in Government, brings a Bill absent of any reference to a team of experts, as in the case of the Petroleum Commission, but hands all the power in a direct way to the Minister. Hypocrites who are set to deceive this nation. You cannot trust them. [**Hon. Members (Government):** (*Inaudible*)] I am not saying that the PPP/C are hypocrites. I am saying that hypocrites who set to deceive the nation, you cannot trust them.

3.03 p.m.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member.

Mr. Holder: I am not making a direct reference to the PPP/C.

Ms. Teixeira: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I stand on a Point of Order. The Hon. Member seems to think he is at a congress meeting instead of the National Assembly. The Hon. Member cannot, under Standing Orders 40 and 41, be imputing and calling Members of this House hypocrites. It is not allowed, it is unparliamentary, and the Hon. Member should withdraw it. If the Hon. Member wants to keep that language, let him talk at the general council meetings of the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R).

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, please withdraw.

Mr. Holder: I am guided, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. Let me move forward.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I need you to withdraw, please.

Mr. Holder: I am guided, Mdm. Speaker. I think that say that I withdraw.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: For the record.

Mr. Holder: I withdraw. If I had not, I would have said that it was hypocrisy in them not holding their congress for many years as well. But I will not say that. I will withdraw. They said one thing in Opposition, when it was politically convenient for them, but do the total opposite when they get power. They are now totally against the establishment of a petroleum commission. I will tell you why, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I will produce more evidence from their own record as to why you cannot trust the People's Progressive Party/Civic with the oil industry. The same Member of Parliament who was harping to the *Guyana Chronicle*, who now holds the highest office in the land, while in opposition, stated emphatically to the media on 10th August, 2020:

“We will also establish a petroleum commission to ensure that the oil-and-gas sector is not subjected to undue political interference.”

They have to be ruffled by it because it is their own words. It is what they said, it is their record. Three weeks later, the confused PPP/C MP, now turned Minister of Natural Resources, Hon. Vickram Bharrat, he is right there, on 1st September 2020 told the *Guyana Chronicle*:

“THE government is working towards the re-tabling of the Petroleum Commission Bill... within a timeline of four to six months.”

Thirty-six months have elapsed and there is not a word on the Petroleum Commission, even as they bring a new Petroleum Bill. This is how power and oil money sometimes corrupt those in Government. The PPP/C has essentially shifted its position from opposing the powers of the Minister, while in opposition, to fully endorsing it when they got into power. The PPP/C has shifted from supporting the establishment of an independent Petroleum Commission, while in opposition, to re-tabling the Bill within six months of getting power, to its current position of complete absence from the Petroleum Bill. The Vice President (VP), Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, has boldly said recently to the media that it is not a priority. Here is a fundamental difference between the PPP/C and the Coalition. The PPP/C does not care about good governance. Even if the Petroleum Bill was not perfect, the fact that the Coalition tabled it and was willing to send it to a Special Select Committee just after a mere two years in Office indicates our commitment to transparency and democracy and our commitment to govern the oil and gas sector in a manner that is in the best interest of our people and our country. It is evident from the contents of this Bill, or lack thereof, that the PPP/C has surreptitious motives and bad intentions with regards to the present and future management of our oil industry. As we did in 2017, the APNU/AFC Government, in waiting, commits to the people that when we form the next government, the establishment of a Petroleum Commission will be one of our top priorities.

I now wish to turn your attention to clause 49, which speaks to the payment of royalty. This clause is clearly defective. Except for declaring that the oil company must pay a royalty, it fails to set out any limit or range in which those payments must fall. Instead, it was purposefully left for the Minister to negotiate. There is a reason for that. Before I go there, let me back track a bit. The issue of royalty has long been a contentious one. In 1999, the PPP/C Government, under Presidents Jagan and Bharrat Jagdeo – they like to blame Cde. Jagan, but we forget that Cde. Jagdeo was, I believe, the Minister of Finance at that time – agreed to a mere 1% royalty. They can argue that the conditions did not permit asking for more at that time. In 2016, the Coalition Government subsequently doubled it. At that point, the PPP/C, in opposition, lead the charge criticising it, mischievously disregarding the context of the negotiations. There was a lack of human resource skill, knowledge, and experience existing locally in the sector, the state of our territorial dispute and the past and current aggression by our neighbours, our economic standing, capital investment required and the associated risks, *et cetera* had to be considered. With our oil industry now booming and on a path of such rapid increase in production, being classified in the upper brackets

of oil producers around the world, such minimal levels of royalty are simply unacceptable. At this point, we believe that a minimum baseline must be fixed in law *via* this Petroleum Bill, rather than to leave it to negotiation through the production sharing agreement (PSA).

In 2017, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), in its own assessment of the Petroleum Act being repealed now, labelled as “deficient” the discretionary nature of the fiscal provision, such as royalty payments, the specifics being dealt with at the negotiation levels of the PSA rather than through rigid legislation. The Opposition believes that this is an amendment that the PPP/C will not consider and will prefer to vote down while making frivolous excuses. In fact, we will be surprised if the PPP/C does support it. The PPP/C would naturally prefer to determine royalty rates through negotiations, thereby creating opportunities for backdoor and under the table deals. The APNU/AFC, through the relevant amendments submitted, intends to limit the possibility of corruption and guarantees a reasonable rate of royalty payment, all done in the light of transparency, accountability, and in the best interests of our people. There is so much more in this Bill that I would like to comment on, but time does not permit. We cannot leave this at the discretion of the Government with a track record of a series of failed projects, and one that is constantly accused of corrupt practices. The PPP/C already reneged on their promise to establish an independent Petroleum Commission to manage the industry but seek to grab every ounce of power in their quest to dominate and control the industry. We cannot leave this to be negotiated in the living room of the Hon. Vice President through middlemen like Sue, as suggested by the Vice Media video recordings. No, we cannot afford that.

What is even worse is that the Bill lists a string of measures to be taken if the royalty is not paid at all or according to the timeline set by the Minister. The Bill fails to explicitly declare any royalty paid as non-recoverable. The oil companies will have no problem paying any reasonable sum, since they can simply recover it as an expense from cost oil. Maybe the Vice President may call it a no-brainer at his press conferences that royalty cannot be recoverable, so the Opposition does not know what it is saying. As an alternative government, we want it to be explicitly stated in rigid legislation that it is non-recoverable, the same way the very next clause, clause 52, which deals with training fees, declares the training fees as non-recoverable. The same way that clause 47(4) declares all signing bonuses as non-recoverable.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, if you peruse this Bill, you will find, other than training fees being non-recoverable, the only other fees that fall into this category are signing bonuses and programmes in the production licence of financial support for the environment, *et cetera*. What about projects in the category of oil companies' corporate responsibilities, like advertising? What about an oil company, through its own advertising initiative, for example, sponsors the Amazon Warriors? While all Guyanese will be elated, it will be equally disturbing if those huge sums are recovered at the expense of our people. I will try to close here, notwithstanding that I was obstructed and lost some time through the intervention of the Minister. Rather than have these *non-recoverables* in an *ad hoc* manner, clumsily placed across the Bill, we believe that a list of all non-recoverable expenditure should be clearly encoded in the law. Do not try to confuse or hide anything from the Guyanese people.

Finally, I want to say that clause 32 should be struck from this proposed Bill. Clause 32, under sub-section b, seeks to allow the Minister to negotiate... I want to find it here. It deals with the exploration area...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, your time is up.

Mr. Holder: Could I just wrap up, given that I was obstructed, Mdm. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Mahipaul: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I move for the Hon. Member to be given a five-minute extension to complete and wrap up his presentation.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: How long?

Mr. Mahipaul: Five minutes. It is the agreed time we have here, 20 minutes plus five minutes.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: The Hon. Member is at 25 minutes now.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, but Mdm. Deputy Speaker, with the fullest of respect to you and your Chair, the Chief Whip on the Government's side and myself agreed to twenty minutes plus five. The practice in this House is when the 20 minutes are up, a mover will stand and request an extension.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: The Hon. Member had 20 minutes. I indicated five minutes to him, and the Hon. Member had an additional five minutes. Twenty-five minutes were granted.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, what I am simply saying is that all speakers in this House, as customary, when their 20 minutes or 30 minutes are up, whichever we agree on, are told such and then are given the opportunity for an extension. I am simply asking.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Shurwayne Holder, I will give you one minute to wrap up.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Holder: Much can be done, and much has to be done, to produce a Bill that will be satisfactory to all stakeholders. I say to this House that much is at stake here. The future of our oil and gas industry now rests with this Bill, soon to become law. And so, it will need as much input as possible. While there is a need to approve it quickly, we must be careful to not rush it over and produce a set of laws that will be counterproductive and against the interest of the people of Guyana. I urge the Government to do the right thing. Practice what you preach; show the Guyanese people your true commitment to the *One Guyana* mantra. Let us demonstrate that we can be a responsible Government and a responsible Opposition. Let us come together and produce a Bill that is truly in the best interest of our country and our people. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, Mr. Ramson.

3.18 a.m.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I have to say that it is a very special breed of people who performed so poorly in their management of the oil and gas sector in their time in power, just a few years ago, that could come with all of the suggestions, pontifications and glowing descriptions of their disillusioned time in government. I remember, while I was doing a presentation in 2015, the Hon. Prime Minister, Mr. Ralph Gonsalves, introduced me to this term called “g-n-o-s-t-i-c-s” – the all-knowing; it is not “ad gnostics”. The APNU/AFC group becomes all-knowing when they are in Opposition, circumstances that we lived leading into the 2015 Elections. But when they assumed power, their record in oil and gas was a tragedy. Some of my colleagues were able to describe some of the events that transpired during that period of time. I want to take this House through that period very clearly. I also will take the opportunity to describe

what transpired leading into oil discovery during the People's Progressive Party/Civic's tenure in government.

First of all, I would like to deal with our time in government – 1992 to 2015. It was during that time that ExxonMobil came into Guyana. It was the People's Progressive Party/Civic that brought them here. It is important to note that in that 1992 contract, the fiscal terms which formed part of that contract, where the 1% royalty was captured...what people in the country needs to be aware of is that never had the world experienced US\$100 a barrel oil price in the history of oil production. When that contract was signed in 1999, oil prices were hovering around US\$19 a barrel. You on the other side may not know this. A royalty tax is a regressive tax. It disincentivises investors. When you have a low oil price or a low oil price environment, which was extended during that period, if you did not have the attractive terms, considering that we were a new player, an unproven area...You had to have attractive terms. What was also important was that when the exploration started, in the year 2000 in our offshore basin, gun boats from Suriname came to seize the boats of the persons who were exploring and claimed the territory as theirs. Which government was the government in power that took the matter to International Court of Justice (ICJ) under that dispute resolution mechanism under international law under UNCLOS – the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea? It was the People's Progressive Party/Civic that took it there and secured 93% of the disputed territory. What is also important and for the record is the government which also ratified the International Convention of the Law of the Sea and brought it into force in our domestic legislation. It was the People's Progressive Party/Civic in 1993 or 1994.

Once the area was in dispute, no exploration activity or drilling and production activity could have occurred. In fact, ExxonMobil would have enforced its *force majeure* clause in its provision so that they did not have to relinquish acreage. Then, the discovery was made. Incidentally, I also want to mention that it was not ExxonMobil alone that came to the country as an investor in our oil and gas market during our time in Office. Repsol was here; CGX Energy Inc. was here; and the discovery happened just before we exited Office in 2015. That is the record. That is our record from 1992 to 2015. On the other hand, this is the record of the APNU/AFC in Government. First of all, they renegotiated a contract with ExxonMobil without publicly declaring that the negotiation was happening. They negotiated without the experts to advise them. So, there was clear asymmetry of information/unequal bargaining position. After the contract was signed, the contract was hidden

for almost two years. Despite public pressure, constant and daily public pressure, it was hidden for almost two years. They proffered reasons as to why they should not disclose the contract to the public.

Firstly, they said the contract contained a confidentiality clause. That turned out to be false. The confidentiality clause pertained strictly to data or if there was any kind of patented type of information.

Secondly, they said that there was a change in the law in 1997. There was a change in the law, but it was not to prohibit the disclosure of contracts. It only referred to any kind of data.

Then, they said it was a threat to national security, even though it was subsequently discovered that the document was filed in the Deeds Registry, a public space. Having been disclosed to the public, no one could have ever explained how it was a threat to national security. What it turned out to be was that they were hiding a big secret. They were hiding the signature bonus, which famously when the former Minister of Finance was asked, he said there was none; there was no US\$20 million signature bonus. [Dr. Singh: He neither sought nor received.] He said that he neither sought nor received. I am guided by the Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh. He then gave an interview where he said that he thought it was a gift that came...not to us... He said, coming to ‘rus’, like how there is Toys R Us. After it was disclosed, after they could not hide that they received a signing bonus and that it was the worst fiscal terms negotiated for the most attractive basin the world, they then turned and said to the public that there was no re-negotiation. Their own advisor, Mr. Jan Mangal, had to come out and make a public statement and say that there was a re-negotiation. ExxonMobil also said that there was a re-negotiation. This is all part of their record. The Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, as part of the AFC or APNU/AFC press conference, made a statement at that press conference and said that the PPP/C had given out all of the oil blocks. The Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) had to issue a statement along with a map to show that what the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, said was false.

We subsequently discovered that Total had farmed in an option at the Eco-Tullow Block around 2016. We learnt that Tullow Oil was able to receive a block from the APNU/AFC Government in 2016, without there being any awareness by the public that the block was being given out. It was only until Total made a public disclosure that they were farming in on that interest that Guyanese

were able to know that that block was available and was given out in a unilateral and direct engagement. They like to say that they moved royalty from 1% to 2% under the ExxonMobil contract. In that Tullow Block, what do you think was the royalty? Having already discovered that this was the largest oil discovery in recent history, what do you think the royalty was? It was 1%.

3.33 a.m.

What is important is that the block was never auctioned. The Guyanese people were never aware that it was even available to other companies. The then Hon. Minister, Raphael Trotman, made a public statement and said he was ordered to sign the agreement. [An Hon. Member: By

whom? Who ordered it?] He never said who, but he said publicly that he was ordered to sign the agreement. When all of the scandal came out, after two years, the public was finally able to put a question to former President, Mr. David Granger. He said that he was unaware of the situation and that he was going to look into it. Two years had gone by, after hearing all of the scandal, and he was not aware of the fiscal terms of the contract. In that Tullow Oil agreement, there was no signature bonus. It was very light on any additional fiscal terms that would be beneficial to us. I want to say something about fiscal terms, as I have heard a number of the Members ask about where the fiscal terms appear in the Bill. The fiscal terms will appear in the production sharing agreement. For our geology, that is the best place for where the fiscal terms should be placed, keeping in mind that what this Bill does is outlines the criteria for a competitive bidding process for our blocks. That was never done before. That was a commitment we made in our manifesto. Since the Hon. Member mentioned re-negotiation, I want to state very clearly what our manifesto states. You are a man of the robe, so I know that you are supposed to be familiar with the language. Here is what it states in the manifesto:

“Immediately engage the oil and gas companies in better contract administration/re-negotiation.”

The forward slash captures an ‘or’. So, better contract administration or re-negotiation. There is no delphic meaning in the expressed terms that are contained there. I have attended or have watched every press conference that we had while we were in Opposition. The Leader of the Opposition had said multiple times, and even I said it when I was questioned, that we would not re-negotiate the ExxonMobil contract. That is when that was specifically expressed in that term. I

know that I am running short on time. Despite all of the public disapprobation of the APNU/AFC's record and their re-negotiation and not getting the best terms for Guyana in our fiscal terms, leading into the election this is what the APNU/AFC published in the newspaper, captioned, *Truth and Facts*. They took a graph from Rystad Energy, which captured a number of other countries, and they situated Guyana somewhere in the middle. It placed Guyana with a 60% share for government take. That is where they placed it. In there, this is what the advertisement stated:

“In the current fiscal regime, the government collects its share through a 2% royalty and a 50% profit oil levy. Rystad Energy estimates that this will give the government 60% of the profit from the various projects (government take), while the remaining 40% will go to international E&P companies.”

They relied on a study from Rystad Energy, even though they knew that the profit share was 50/50 and the royalty was 2%. Now, *how in heaven's name* can one take 2% plus 50% on your production sharing and have that equate to 60%? Then, Mr. Ramjattan went to a press conference or did a LIVE on *Facebook*... [Mr. Mahipaul: Hon. Ramjattan.] Hon. Ramjattan did a LIVE on *Facebook* immediately after and said that anyone who was criticising this deal was ill-advised.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I wanted to add clarity to the context of our oil and gas industry. A number of things have been said in relation to our Bill that we are proposing, which I contributed towards and which I support entirely. It has my and our full support. When it comes to taking the advice or suggestions from a special breed of people, who have failed so miserably in the management of our oil and gas sector and who betrayed every patriotic responsibility that they had when the time was there, they are not people who are deserving of the opportunity to speak and to give suggestions in this honourable House on this subject. I would like to conclude by saying that all of the shortcomings that we spoke about while in Opposition are captured in this Bill. The Petroleum Commission of Guyana Bill, which they never allowed to *see the light of day*... [Dr. Singh: But they pushed through the Natural Resource Fund Bill.] They hastily pushed through the NRF Bill, despite losing a no confidence motion. I am confident that the Petroleum Commission of Guyana Bill will be passed by this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government because we are committed to every promise and commitment that we have made.

I believe that I stand with many people in this House who have stood in the interest of Guyana's rights in many areas, including our democracy. I also want to acknowledge some of the hardworking technocrats from the oil and gas/petroleum sector and ministry, and the Ministry of Legal Affairs, some of whom I share my university *alma mater*. I have taken the privilege of wearing my cuff links of my university, which Dr. Gossai had brought for me, on a gift that I requested. I would like to congratulate them, and I would like to take the opportunity to commend this Bill to the honourable House because we believe that it is important for the continued transformation of the oil and gas sector and the country that we love so much. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul, kindly proceed.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I rise on this side of the House, in this wee hour of the morning – it is now 3.44 a.m. on Thursday, 10th August, 2023 – to make my contribution to this Bill. At this hour, I am not going to play *tit for tat* politics, notwithstanding me documenting some of the points raised by my colleagues on the opposite side. I recognise that I have a time imposition that was understandably imposed on me.

I want to say that this is perhaps one of the most important pieces of legislation that we are debating in this House at this hour. It is very important for us to recognise that what we decide here will basically determine the future of this country, especially with reference to the development of our country and the betterment of our people. I believe that in the interest of transparency and accountability, it is prudent for the Government's side of this House to take very seriously what we are suggesting as amendments to this piece of legislation because it has a direct impact on our population. We are sitting on this side of the House representing the largest portion of people in this country. I say that with confidence because I know that there are several persons in various communities who are very disgruntled with the manner in which the People's Progressive Party/Civic is handling the country's finances, rules and regulations. They have signalled their unwavering support for the APNU/AFC. As I have said countless times, I have no doubt that at the next elections, they will re-elect the APNU/AFC to office. When one looks at this piece of legislation and one compares it to what was said in the manifesto of the People's Progressive Party/Civic, it makes one wonder if this Government, this Regime, really and truly has the best

interest of the Guyanese people at heart. I would like to quote from the manifesto of the People's Progressive Party/Civic, which I have here in my hands. On page 22, the manifesto spoke to:

“Securing The Benefits Of Oil And Gas For All Guyanese”

What was stated in this manifesto was:

“The PPP/C will approach the oil and gas sector in a national, non-partisan manner.”

3.48 a.m.

My simple question to my honourable friends on the other side is, how is this piece of legislation non-partisan? You, in your manifesto, indicated that you would approach the oil and gas sector in a non-partisan manner. I do not understand if that means to completely exclude the Parliamentary Opposition which represents the largest portion of people in this country. Again, I say that with confidence. It goes on to state:

“Oil and Gas will bring not only significant financial resources and enormous transformational opportunities, but also many challenges. There are many examples around the world where developing countries have obtained windfalls from oil and gas but have eventually ended up poorer than before. Central to our strategy in the sector will be the following three critical areas:

i) A Framework for proper management of the resource.”

How is this piece of legislation a framework for proper management of the resource, when you have all of the powers placed in a single individual as opposed to a commission, which is what the APNU/AFC is articulating and has articulated many times before? The manifesto goes on to state:

ii) “Transparency and accountability.”

One person from the People's Progressive Party/Civic, a Minister, has all the powers in this piece of legislation. Yet, this Regime stands here at this ungodly hour to tell us that it is transparency and accountability, with one single individual having all the authority surrounding our oil and gas resource. They said:

iii) “Securing benefits for Guyanese.”

We cannot believe that. Because of all that has happened within the three years that they have been in Government, we simply cannot believe that. Another part of the manifesto stated “immediately” ... They have been in office three years, squatting albeit. They said that they will:

“Immediately engage the oil and gas companies in better contract administration/renegotiation.”

They said that. Three years after, apparently, we have a new definition for the word immediately.

“Establish a regulatory framework which is independent of politicians.”

This is what the People’s Progressive Party/Civic said in its manifesto. Important to note is this particular line. They stood before the Guyanese people, and they said that for this oil and gas sector, they were going to establish a regulatory framework which is independent of politicians. Hon. Vickram Bharrat, you are not a politician, are you? I think that alone is enough for the Guyanese people to see who really and truly have two faces. That alone is enough for the Guyanese people to draw a conclusion as to who really fooled them. You, again, I reiterate, said you were going to ensure that it was established in such a way that it was independent of politicians. It goes on to say:

“Training of thousands of Guyanese at every level to create national core of managers and work force to chart the future direction and effectively manage the sector.”

Another promise to the Guyanese people. Three years after, and clearly it is a failure. In the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), the Commissioner-General of the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) revealed to us that they were understaffed heavily when it came to the oil and gas sector, especially with reference to audits. This Regime said to the people of Guyana, in their manifesto, that they will immediately focus on training of thousands of Guyanese at every level. Three years after, more than half of their five-year term, and we are still in a state of wonder about whether or not that will happen.

“Ensure there are regular audits.”

It is not me who said that. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic said that they would ensure there were regular audits. That is what they told the Guyanese people. We know about the audits. We

know what is going on with them. We know how hard it is to get it down. We know how they are trying to hide the audit reports from the Guyanese people. They said that they will ensure that we have regular audits. They said:

“Civil society will be involved in a central role to monitor compliance and accountability.”

What better role is there for civil society than to include them in a petroleum commission? What better role is there for civil society and all stakeholders in this country than to include them in a national petroleum commission? You said this in your manifesto and all of you who have spoken before me, stood up there, played *tit to tat* politics with the Guyanese people and the resource that is supposed to benefit them and three years after, they are still waiting to benefit. You said in this very manifesto that the oil resource belonged to the people of Guyana. Yet, they are waiting to see a proper framework, managed by competent authority, so that they could indeed secure benefits from themselves. The manifesto again:

“We will ensure that oil revenue works for all Guyanese.”

All Guyanese are still waiting. Right now, oil revenue is only working for a small percentage. The ordinary people are still crying out daily about this heavy cost of living. The ordinary Guyanese citizens are still complaining about infrastructure in the health sector and all the other sectors and where it is. Three years after being in office... and they spent on improving people's lives and the support for job creation.

“Some areas in which oil revenue will be directed are:

Support for job creation.”

Yet, we hear that GRA is still looking for people to be trained in the oil and gas sector so they could provide the service to the Guyanese people.

“World class education and healthcare for Guyanese.”

We are still waiting for free university education. There was once, in this country, free education from nursery to tertiary. The very man who they all want to accuse as bad – Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham – was the one that educated this nation, free of cost from nursery to university. It was 1994, the year of the PPP/C in Government, that tuition fee was introduced at the University

of Guyana. It was introduced at \$127,000 – the equivalent, at the time, to US\$1000. Today, we hear them talking about free education at the University of Guyana. We are still waiting, three years after they have been in office. They promised free education in this country. World class healthcare for Guyanese.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, it is 3.58 a.m. Could we please speak to the Petroleum Activities Bill? You are quoting the manifesto instead of speaking directly to the Bill.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, with the greatest of respect to you and your chair, the Bill that is before us is a Bill that was presented by the People's Progressive Party/Civic. They indicated on numerous occasions in this House that this is their world class plan. Where I am quoting from, specifically, the headline is, "Securing The Benefits Of Oil And Gas For All Guyanese". I am making it relevant in the context of this Bill that is before the Guyanese people to show that it will not give them any of the promises that the People's Progressive Party/Civic made in its manifesto, when that is what it was supposed to do, because that is what they promised the people, that is what they came to the people with and that is why it is relevant. Respectfully, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, it is in relevance to the Bill that is before us. Thank you.

In this manifesto, they also said that there will be targeted cash transfer to Guyanese, particularly the elderly, children, the poor and other vulnerable groups. We are still waiting, three years after.... targeted cash transfer to Guyanese particularly the elderly, children, the poor and other vulnerable groups. It is quite evident that whatever was promised in this manifesto, to deal with securing the benefits for oil and gas for all Guyanese, was nothing else but fooling the people of Guyana. I am happy to be given this opportunity at this hour of the morning, 4.00 a.m., to let the Guyanese people know that there is nothing else that they could expect from the People's Progressive Party/Civic for the ordinary Guyanese of this country. When I speak about the petroleum commission and its importance in managing the oil and gas sector, I have to go back in history. My Hon. Friend, Shurwayne Holder, did a fantastic job at outlining what happened when the PPP/C was in Opposition. I want to build on that. I want to take you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, and the people of Guyana, to 15th June, 2017 at the 65th Sitting of the National Assembly. I want to tell you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, that when the Petroleum Commission of Guyana Bill 2017, Bill No. 4/2017, was up for the second reading, the Hon. Raphael Trotman in the APNU/AFC Government had these words to say:

“I pause to inform the House that, currently, the regime that governs and oversees all aspects of petroleum in Guyana is contained within the Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Act of 1986 which was later amended in 1997. This Act makes the Minister the sole arbiter and decider of all matters – the granting and refusal of licences, the penalties to be prescribed, the hiring and firing of staff and the appointment of all persons. It was felt, as I would develop the argument later, that, given our structure and the steps we are taking towards production of petroleum in a few years, some of these powers should be devolved to a commission or a regulatory agency so that the Minister will no longer have all of the powers as contained in this Act. We are taking a step towards enlightenment.”

4.03 a.m.

That was a Government Minister of the APNU/AFC. We had all the power in our hands as a Government and we did not seek to exclude the participation of civil society and the parliamentary Opposition. I will prove to you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, that we did not exclude the Parliamentary Opposition when we were considering the Petroleum Commission of Guyana Bill of 2017. Mr. Raphael Trotman, the then Minister, clearly outlined that we need to have a commission in place. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, at that same sitting, Minister Trotman went on to say:

“Oil is coming to Guyana. We must prepare for that eventuality and this allows us the opportunity to do so together. I say together, because we have written into this Bill the provisions that on the board there shall be a representative of the parliamentary Opposition.”

That was the A Partnership For National Unity/Alliance For Change’s position in Government. I continue:

“...there shall be a representative of the parliamentary Opposition. In the past when we had inclusive democracy it was a matter of a gentleman’s agreement that we adhere to, but we have placed into this Bill that a parliamentary Opposition shall be on the board, meaning that even if there is a Minister who wished to run afoul, there would be that oversight, not in Parliament, but in the board by the Opposition.

We have also stated that member of civil society shall also be on this board to ensure again a second layer of scrutiny on our activities. We have nothing to run from. We have nothing to be afraid of. We have nothing to hide. We wish to develop this resource together and this is why this Bill is going to a Special Select Committee so that we may get the benefit of any good and worthwhile comments and suggestions from the Opposition.”

That was the APNU/AFC’s position in Government. There was no act on our side to omit any participation from the parliamentary Opposition at the time, and that was the People’s Progressive Party/Civic in Opposition. The honourable gentleman who now sits as the President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, made contributions to this Bill and he said:

“First of all, let me say that all of our contributions to the development of legislation and Bills must be honourable. It is not for anyone of us to appear saintly by our words in saying that we will operate in an honourable manner. The purpose of legislation, laws, Bills and regulations are to set transparent and fair structure that will govern the way we operate and it is not for us to determine whether we operate in that manner. That is the purpose of these laws.

The 1997 amendment, which the Hon. Member spoke of, was in a particular time when we were in the exploration stage. We did not find the great reserve; we were in search of the reserves. The legislation, at that time, was crafted for the period of exploration. Now that we have found oil, it is our responsibility to draft legislation and draft laws that are transparent and open, that will safeguard and secure the management of this resource that is coming our way.”

The very gentleman who is now sitting in the Office of the President as President also went on to state:

“I must say, though, that we take with sincerity the statement by the Minister that we will approach this matter, every aspect of this matter, in a bipartisan manner.”

So, the approach to a bipartisan way of dealing with the oil and gas sector was deemed as sincerity when they were on the opposition side, when the gentleman who is sitting as President of this country was in the Opposition. He now sits as the Executive President and he has the ability, and

he has the period now to show the sincerity of a bipartisan approach. He has that in his hands. I hope, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, that after hearing what I have just said here, he will pick up the phone, dial the Hon. Teixeira or the Hon. Prime Minister (ag), Mr. Anil Nandlall, and say, ‘listen, let us send it to a special select committee’. We await to see if that phone call will come through.

“The Special Select Committee would review and the Government side will be opened to the suggestions that we will make here and make at that Committee. We also hope that, at that Committee, it will be opened up, so that as much of Guyana and as many stakeholders, who are interested in this legislation, would have the opportunity to make their contribution before that Special Select Committee.”

When we talk about managing the oil sector –I know that I have 30 plus 5 minutes, Mdm. Deputy Speaker – I know that after embracing such a belief in Opposition, that will also be embraced now by the gentleman since he is being reminded of what was his position, otherwise it is duplicitous. I do not believe that is an unparliamentary term. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, the Hon. Gentleman went on to say:

“Based on my review of similar legislation in other countries, we were unable to locate one that has bestowed comparable powers to the Minister. Indeed, based on our review, we found that the only power the Minister is granted in other countries is to provide policy guidance.”

So, let me ask the People’s Progressive Party/Civic, why have you created a piece of legislation and given so much power to a minister when no lesser person than the Head of State, in Opposition, contributing to this Bill, indicated that in other legislations there is nothing else the minister does other than provide policy guidance. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I turn your attention to my friend, the Hon. Vickram Bharrat. Mr. Vickram Bharrat contributed to that piece of legislation too. The Hon. Member Vickram Bharrat said:

“...Guyana must not go down the same desolate road as those countries in neglecting their traditional productive sectors for oil and gas. This resource and revenue earner must be seen as a bonus to our economy and not the trump card for an economic turnaround.”

I hope that my friends on the other side would not forget the soil because they have found oil. The Hon. Vickram Bharrat also stated:

“The power that will be given...”

Listen to this Mdm. Deputy Speaker:

“The power that will be given to the Minister over the petroleum Commission, as stated in the Bill, is one that is unacceptable and strange in comparison to other oil producing countries.”

I wonder if the amount of power that will be vested in him now is acceptable and not so strange. Again, if the Hon. Minister diverted from this position it speaks to the word duplicitous. I do not wish to categorise him in that way. I know he has to come again, before this House, to close and I hope he sees merits in sending this piece of Bill to a special select committee for inclusion and participation of the Opposition and also all other stakeholders. He had this also to say about the Petroleum Commission:

“Our proposal is that the Board of Directors be nominated then appointed by the Minister through transparency and consultation by the Government, the Opposition and other stakeholders. Further, the Bill should include that all academic information of the Board of Directors and Chairperson should be gazetted for transparency and accountability purposes. Further, it is our view that the Board of Directors should or must include at least one female.

In conclusion, we in the People’s Progressive Party welcome the concept of having a Petroleum Commission on Guyana, which is necessary as we venture into oil production in 2020. However, this body must be devoid from political inference and directives. This process can only start with the appointment of the Board through a more inclusive and consultative process. Hence, we look forward to working with the Government in the Special Select Committee to ensure that this Bill is tailored in the interest of the people of Guyana.”

Mdm. Deputy Speaker in closing, I say...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, it has been brought to my attention that the word “duplicitous” is unparliamentary, so I am going to ask you to withdraw it, please.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I am guided. I withdraw and I will replace it with two-faced.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Mahipaul: Do I have five minutes more?

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I want to quote the Hon. Bharat Jagdeo, who made a presentation on this very Bill. He said:

“...Mr. Speaker. I wish to thank the Hon. Minister for his statement, indicating that this Bill will be sent to a select committee and that, in the committee, we will have an opportunity to share our views on elements of the Bill. We hope that those views will be taken seriously, given his statement that he hopes to address this issue in a non-partisan manner.”

His Excellency the President, Dr. Irfaan Ali, was a member of the Special Select Committee when it met, and he said:

“I think that the objective is to have a Bill that benefits from as wide an input as possible from all of the stakeholders. In addition to the advertisements and the various agencies identified by Ms. Teixeira...”

Ms. Teixeira identified some agencies such as the Private Sector Commission, the Guyana Oil and Gas Association among others.

“...there are ... oil chambers.”

So, Mr. President knew that there were oil chambers.

“Of course, they will have an opportunity to respond to the public advertisement. There is also the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association (GMSA) and the Transparency International.”

He went on and on about various organisations to have an input through a consultative process which is totally respecting article 13 of our Constitution, which we have been harping on this side since 2020, that there is a need for consultative processes. There is a need for meaningful consultation and national consultation, especially on legislation of this nature. The Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, in all honesty, said:

“...if you look at us sitting in this room, none of us has any experience with petroleum, not one of us. It is brand new. We may have an idea of a Bill and a commission, but not on petroleum.”

Suddenly, the Hon. Vickram Bharrat has all the experience in petroleum. He is the most qualified person suddenly, five years after this was said. Hon. Vickram is the best person we have in petroleum, so we are going to hand him all the powers and we will say, you go and manage. When one reads this Bill, it is as though he has more powers than the Vice-President of this country.

4.18 a.m.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I am going to close with the same words that my friend, the Hon. Mr. Bharrat echoed a couple of years back. In conclusion, we in the APNU/AFC welcome the concept of having a Petroleum Activities Bill 2023, which is necessary as we venture and as we are in oil production. However, we deserve a petroleum commission to manage our oil and gas resource with competent, technical personnel, that will give us the best results and where there is no political interference or directives. This process can only start with the appointment of a petroleum commission through a more inclusive and consultative process. Hence, we on this side, the APNU/AFC, look forward to working with the Government in the special select committee to ensure that this Bill is tailored in the interest of the people of Guyana because, at the end of it all, it is them who must benefit and not just a 1% of our population. I thank you very much, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. [*Applause*]

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Mdm. Deputy Speaker, *Niari' no'gon. Ka'pon amik abiridi weyu yeshpu ko'mamiyau, ama'non, moine ding niri.* Yesterday, was the day to observe the International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples. The theme was, 'we celebrate youth'. I wish to quote from the United Nations (UN) Secretary General's message:

"The theme of this year's International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is youth. We celebrate young Indigenous Peoples, and their role in creating change and shaping the future.

Across the world, Indigenous Peoples face serious challenges, with their lands and resources threatened, their rights undermined, and their persistent vulnerability to marginalization and exclusion."

I want to thank you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, for asking the House to observe one minute of silence for the 20 young Indigenous persons who lost their lives to fire, who were robbed of their role in creating change and shaping the future for their communities and Guyana as a whole.

I now wish to make my contribution to the Petroleum Activities Bill No.16/2023. While the members of the PPP/C focused on the \$18 million signing bonus, they tried to hide the whole oil industry because they knew, just before they were voted out in 2015, that oil was discovered. This was confirmed by the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport a few hours ago. Also, we would not be having this debate if the APNU/AFC did not bring the industry on stream. I must state from the outset that we on this side of the House do not disagree at all that there is a need to update this Act since we have moved beyond discovery and exploration. We have begun to produce at least 400,000 barrels of oil per day as ExxonMobil and other companies accelerate their operations in Guyana. When the new FPSO vessel, Prosperity, is in operation, production is expected to increase to 600,000 barrels per day. Having said that, I wish to elaborate on the need to establish a national petroleum commission. This, in my view, is a major omission that contradicts the harping and calling of the establishment of the commission then, by the very persons who are now in Government when they were on the Opposition's benches. What we are seeing now is that the PPP/C never intended to establish the National Petroleum Commission. They have missed a golden, historical opportunity to show the nation and the world that transparency and accountability are of paramount importance in the good governance of petroleum activities. With

this commission in place, I believe that the Minister in the oil and gas sector would have benefitted from a less political or apolitical technical oversight body as it relates to exploration and production cost, licence applications and environmental safeguards. The Petroleum Activities Bill, as it is presented, has given the Minister excessive power, whereas, if the commission was in place, he would have gotten advice from experts on financial investment, training, and other expertise.

I now wish to touch on the development of Indigenous communities and hinterland regions as it relates to petroleum activities. In the quest for the development of Indigenous communities and regions, we must never forget or exempt by all possible means, the aspect of Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC), especially when we have recently read about the situation at Chinese Landing and Isseneru. Both of these are Indigenous communities where mining activities have led to significant risk for habitat destruction, erosion of community control and reduction of the conservation of local biodiversity. These risks will continue to exist when local people have little or no control over their own development trajectory. The Minister mentioned that over 5,000 Guyanese are working in the oil and gas sector. This is good for the nation. However, what will be more commendable is to know how many of them are Indigenous or are of Indigenous origin. Added to this, how many of our young Indigenous men and women are being trained to occupy their rightful place in the oil and gas sector? One of the aims of this Bill should then be to strengthen the community capacity in order to benefit, not only from the revenues gained but also from exploration and all other petroleum activities. I do not see how the Indigenous peoples of this country are poised to benefit from the exploration and other activities, knowing that they are considered as the most vulnerable and poor population of this country. Even though most of our hinterland regions have always been rich with natural resources, whether it be gold, diamond, bauxite, manganese, waterfalls, flora and fauna and forestry, the people and in this case, the Indigenous peoples who live in these hinterland regions, are poor and continue to remain poor.

Just as how all of us must be proud of our low deforestation rate, we must ensure, by all means, that all Guyanese benefit equally from petroleum activities. According to the 2012 Census, 89.1% of the 751,223 population resides on the coast. While unemployment stood at 12% as at 2017, significant human capital and physical infrastructure gaps exist across the country, largely as a result of the concentration of economic and other activities along the coast. This disparity stymies productivity and connectivity, resulting in relatively higher and varied costs of services and

production among the 10 administrative regions. There is, therefore, an urgent need for strengthened institutions and systems to support strong governance and oversight. Effective monitoring and evaluation are critical to ensure transparency and accountability. As a nation, a historical opportunity is before us today. Maximizing every Guyanese woman, man, and child is the Government's responsibility. In doing so, this is what will make Guyanese stand out as a people to the world, as a nation worthy of emulation.

In closing, I want to ask this House, I beg of this House, to send this Bill to a special select committee for further deliberations. I thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Datadin: Good night, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. [Ms. Ferguson: Good morning.] Good morning, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. We have heard much tonight about the future petroleum commission Bill. Maybe what we can do is, adopt all the speeches from the Opposition's benches and simply take them as having been made when we bring that Bill to this National Assembly.

The Hon. Minister, Mr. Vickram Bharrat, was at pains to say that this is essentially framework legislation and that in the future there will be a petroleum commission Bill brought to this House. What is not clear about that? This is not the petroleum commission Bill. You have to let it go. It simply is not the petroleum commission Bill. You cannot continue to speak, speaker after speaker and hour after hour, about something that is not before the House. In the interest of time, permit me to just clear up a couple of things. The Hon. Members of the Opposition have waxed lyrical about the Minister having all these powers and doing all these things on his own. Again, if you read and understand what you read, it is quite clear. Clause 5(2) states:

4.33 a.m.

"The Minister, in the exercise of the powers and the performance of the duties of the Minister prescribed..."

Prescribed comes from *scribere*, which means what is written in here.

"...shall conform with the general or specific directions given to the Minister by the Cabinet."

This is an elected Government in a democracy. Who else is supposed to make the decisions? Where else will we rest power? Executive power must lie with the Government. These are undisputed facts of a Westminster style government. [Mr. Mahipaul: That was not your position in Opposition.] Because you do not understand, Mr. Mahipaul, that a commission would be advisory to the Minister. Even under the Bill that you wanted to bring, the Minister had the power to disregard the commission, to fire the commission, to act in place of the commission. All of this you ignore. Understand that the Minister exercises the powers under this Act as directed by Cabinet, the elected Government. That is how all democratic countries are run. When we were in opposition, we debated a petroleum commission. Please, for the love of God, we are not debating a petroleum commission Bill; we are debating a Petroleum Activities Bill. Do you know what that means? Exploration, production; these are the issues that are relevant. But if you would be bothered to read the legislation... We all know, apparently, that mathematics is a problem, but English seems to be similarly so. How could you not understand that the Bill is not a commission Bill and it relates to a framework, the activities that relate to it? Please, read it. The other thing that was said was that direct negotiation is somehow the greatest ill of this Bill. The direct negotiation is permitted by clause 7(1)(b), which states:

“(b) direct negotiation, where the Minister acting on the directions of Cabinet...”

The elected government.

“...determines...special circumstances...which, in the national interest or national security, justify the use of direct negotiation...”

It does not mean that the Minister can decide to have direct negotiations. The Minister cannot do it on his own. He must first: one, get the direction from the Cabinet; two, demonstrate that special circumstances exist; and three, it must be in the national interest. Read, read, read. If you only read, you would not sound so foolish. For once, actually do the business.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, I am being advised that the word “foolish” is unparliamentary. Kindly withdraw.

Mr. Datadin: Regrettably, that might be poor advice, but I withdraw it. [Mr. Mahipaul: It is in the list of words the Speaker banned.] It is still poor advice. Notwithstanding, you would

not sound as if you do not know what you are speaking about; you would not waste hours at 4.30 a.m. speaking about things that are not being debated by the House. This view that you have, that this is a petroleum commission Bill is sadly misplaced. Hon. Member Mr. Patterson wanted to see Amerindian rights over Amerindian lands to be provided for in this legislation. I can only humbly suggest to the Hon. Member that he might find that in the Amerindian Act. As the Hon. Attorney General remarked to me earlier, we passed two or three pieces of legislation last week that did not state anything about the Amerindian Act. Maybe we should, because if every piece of legislation has to repeat the Act, then we might as well get along with it.

Regarding the environmental issues which you fear will befall Guyana and the issues of insurance and guarantee, once again, may I suggest you read the Environmental Protection Act for that. This is not that piece of legislation. You cannot decide, in one piece of legislation, to take all the other legislation we have and put it in this one. If that were so, do you want us to put the Criminal Law (Offences) Act in here too? Do you want us to put the Deeds Registry Act in here too? God forbid, you expected the Local Content Act in here. How can that make sense? The Local Content Act exists, it is operational, it is functioning, it is doing its job, but that is not enough. The reason why you have these great fears is, quite frankly, because you make inexplicable assumptions. Your conclusions are preposterous. How could it be otherwise? Because you are picking up the piece of legislation, you are reading it, and you are recommending God knows how many amendments, all of which have to do with a commission. Not one solitary amendment proposed relates to anything other than a commission. How can that make sense?

The Hon. Members on the Opposition came here today and spoke about all these things of transparency and how much they love Guyana, how much they love the people, and how much they want to protect the people's interests. Bleeding heart. If we had no memory of before, we would think that these people really care – the Hon. Members of the Opposition. Are we to forget that the Production Sharing Agreement that was signed, the existing one, that nobody knew about it, as Hon. Minister Ramson pointed out, for about two years? We were lectured about transparency. While in Government, the Hon. Members of the Opposition went and secretly signed a PSA, received \$18 million, and refused to tell the people of Guyana about it. There was a report about what happened. **[Mr. Holder:** We are fed up with hearing that.] No, this report is

interesting. It stated that ExxonMobil required a deal favourable to the company and would stop development in the fields unless one was obtained. I quote:

“Enter Raphael Trotman, Guyana’s Natural Resources Minister, who later that month stepped out of a limousine into the sunny spring heat outside Exxon’s Texas headquarters. Trotman and two other Guyanese ministers were meeting with Exxon on a “ministerial visit.” He had flown first class, was staying at a pricey hotel nearby, and would dine at Exxon’s exclusive Wolfgang Puck restaurant – all on the company’s dime.

The company being referred to being ExxonMobil. It continues:

“Mostly keeping to the hurried schedule, (negotiations for the licences) in June 2016 Trotman signed Exxon’s new deal.”

It went on well, apparently.

“Exxon got largely the same tax terms as before it found oil...”

Now you come and you say that a Minister acting on the direction of the Cabinet has too many powers. You ignore that every dime obtained from the petroleum sector, by law, has to be disclosed by Hon. Minister Dr. Ashni Singh. Every dime has to be gazetted and disclosed in this Assembly, so how exactly and why exactly do you want the Petroleum Activities Bill to direct and dictate about the contracts and the payments? That is already provided for. This is because the so-called best alternative, from Hon. Member Mr. Ramsaroop, involved issues that I am not sure can be understood. Speaking about the forestry sector, about the mining sector, the GGMC, and every other sector, Comrade, is unhelpful. We are speaking about the petroleum sector; speak about that. Tell us your views about that. I cannot help you when you want to speak about everything irrelevant. Understand that in framework style legislation, which is common throughout the Commonwealth, you would have legislation that provides the overarching, and then you would have other pieces of legislation that fit. This is the overarching bit of legislation that Guyana so desperately needs. Exploration production, geological surveys, these are the things that need to be addressed. We have a Natural Resource Fund Act that provides for that part, and we have a Local Content Act. The Hon. Minister said that we are going to bring to the National Assembly a commission; these all have to fit together. If you would appreciate that what has been happening,

step by step, the Local Content Act, the Natural Resource Fund, and now the Petroleum Activities Bill, are all steps on a ladder that will get Guyana to the top.

With those few words, permit me to indicate to you my absolute support for Bill No.16/2023, the Petroleum Activities Bill 2023. I thank you. *[Applause]*

4.48 a.m.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I would like it to be on record that the Clerk of the National Assembly did not give me poor advice. He has provided me with the list of Unparliamentary terms. The advice was rightly given for the record, that the word “foolish” is not...

Mr. Datadin: Mdm. Speaker, it is a poor attempt at sarcasm; forgive me.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you. Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, please, proceed.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you very much, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I wish to make the point immediately that the last speaker attempted, in a very rambling fashion, to indicate that “step by step we are going to get there”. The steps should not be that you *put the cart before the horse*. You have a regulatory framework that you went to constituents who voted you in and you promised them a regulatory framework in which indeed the politicians are going to be subtracted from. I have here the same *Report of the Proceedings of Debates* as quoted by Mr. Mahipaul. **[Mr. Nandlall:** Hon. Member.] Hon. Member. All that are there shows quite frankly as he said, the two facedness and the double talk on this matter of the governance of the oil sector.

I want to tell Hon. Member Mr. Benn, too that we have had precedence set a long time. When it comes to natural resources in this country, we always took it away from government departments and we gave it to commissions. The Geology and Mines Department in 1977 became the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission. Almost all the powers of the then Minister was then taken away and given to that Commission. He should know that. **[An Hon. Member:** Who is he?] The Hon. Member, Mr. Benn. In addition, prior to 1977, we had the Guyana Forestry Commission. Another natural resource organisation was established because you wanted to do away with the government minister being in charge and you got, basically, the formation of a Commission. What the Commission does is? It makes an insultation and a depoliticisation of ministerial powers

granted unto a body that knows about forestry and the Geology and Mines Commission. It is the body that grants all the mining concessions and all the forestry concessions. It is not the minister who does it. One goes to the Commission.

When it comes to lands, which is another natural resource, we created the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission. All matters concerning state lands went to that Commission and not to the Minister. You seem not to get it, when we indicated that ... In 2017, for the better arrangement and governance of the most important mineral, oil and natural gas we have to set up a commission. By the way, that Commission was endorsed by every Member of the Opposition then. Everyone of them endorsed that. That is where the *Hansard* that was quoted just now by Mr. Mahipaul, so clearly delineated that a Commission is required. Do you know what was the problem that the PPP/C had as the Opposition then? It was this, that Commission was going to be appointed by the Minister. I would like to indicate that almost all the Commissions – the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission, the Guyana Forestry Commission and the Geology and Mines Commission – are appointed by the Minister. What you do when you appoint the Commission, you make one step away from the politicisation by the Minister. That one step away is what we were doing in 2017.

I was in there and the trouble is... [Mr. McCoy: (Inaudible)] You want to bring the cart before the horse. All of this, important as it is, is relevant here, in connection with what you do with your activities. In the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission, who is it? It is not the Minister. With the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission, it is the Commissioner and with the Guyana Forestry Commission, it is the Commissioner. You have one step away, this thing called – that technical body and not a politician who knows nothing about oil but people who would know a thing or two about oil. That commission was supposed to then be constituted with members, as we said the Board of Directors shall include Chairperson, a petroleum commissioner and not more than eight persons appointed by the Minister, and so on. Hon. Member Mr. Hamilton is talking plenty. He is giving the impression that inside of this, we never catered for health, safety and environmental standards.

In clause 10 (b) of the Petroleum Commission Bill 2017, we have stated there that, in the Petroleum Commission, that function will be exclusively a matter for those Commissioners. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] Yes. Clause 8 states:

“The other members of the Commission shall have proven experience in ...

(b) health, safety and environmental matters;”

We were making it clear there. In addition to that, clause 4 (2) (f) indicates that this Commission power include ensuring compliance with health, safety and environmental standards. He did not read the Petroleum Commission Bill, but he came here and said that this is the first time we are talking about health, environment and safety is inside of this Bill that they brought here today.

[Mr. Speaker resumed the Chair.]

Mdm. Speaker, it is all in the context of their omission here. That is what is important and significant. As I have said, when it comes to natural resources, we wanted it because of the potential for so much corruption and all sort of things that could go on, to move it around to a commission. The Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission, land is a resource; Guyana Forestry Commission, Guyana Geology and Mines Commission; sand, gold, diamond, everything. This is oil and all of you across there when you were in Opposition agreed for a Commission. Now, all of a sudden, I would not use the word “hypocrite”; I would say indeed, you are beguiling the nation as to what indeed was your intention. Your intention is not to have a depoliticised body made up of experts in geoscience and a whole host of other things, including health and safety. All of this, we wanted to happen and you had agreed with it. I want to say that it is important, just as Mr. Mahipaul did, to indicate who and who supported and before you bring the Petroleum Activities Bill that you bring a Commission. It included, quite frankly, Mr. Nandlall... **[Hon. Member: Hon. Member Nandlall.]** It included Mr. Nandlall Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall. He stated in *Stabroek News* newspapers on 6th August, 2020:

““While we were in Opposition, we had some fundamental conceptual problems where it was felt that there was an overconcentration of powers to politicians. As a result, we withheld our support on the floor. The minister at the time, Raphael Trotman, expressed some reservations about the Bill and he had asked it to be sent to a Special Select Committee” Nandlall had said, he stressed the importance of having a Bill that reflected the best for the people of this country and also the benefits of the establishment of a commission.”

We also have Mr. Jagdeo, Vice-President and Hon. Member, who told *Stabroek News* newspapers in August, 2020, which is a long time after 2017, he:

“hopes that as soon as the 13th Parliament begins that the Petroleum Commission Bill will once again be tabled, as his government believes that it is needed for the sector to be insulated from political interference...”

– in accordance with their Manifesto promise –

“...before major decisions of the sector could be made.”

Now, Mr. Jagdeo is a sensible feller. He would not have meant that you are going to get the Petroleum Activities Bill first and then the commission later. He said:

“it is needed for the sector to be insulated from political interference before major decisions for the sector are made.”

Gosh! Now, you want to say, as Mr. Datadin just said with all the theatrics in the world, where must executive power lie? It lies in the minister. I agree, but there are checks and balances that are part and parcel of our Constitutional substructure and even infrastructure. Those are important. The checks and balance and Ministerial powers for natural resources by virtue of the precedence that I named just now, in oil, is a petroleum commission and that is why you must have the commission before major decisions are made. That is why I indicated “the cart before the horse”, when you now come and say we brought a Petroleum Activities Bill. Your omission to do that which all of you had promised is a big thing. It goes not only to show that probably you do not know about the oil sector, but it goes to show the intention. I have been here for a long time, after being expelled from the PPP/C. I came up with these words “*control-freakism*”. This, what you are doing here is but a vindication of being control freaks. That is exactly what it is. You come now with baby faces indicating that yes, we have the power. It is a terrible indictment on how the PPP/C wants governance in this oil sector. A very flimsy pretext was given just now, which is they bring this Bill and then later on they are going to bring the Petroleum Commission Bill. I am going to stand here and make this statement. Once this is passed – the Petroleum Activities Bill – you do not have anywhere to ever find a Petroleum Commission Bill. *The skirt was lifted* by Mr. Datadin and we saw it through, when he asked the question, where must the power reside if not in the

Minister? Where must the power reside? They do not have any intention of bringing a Petroleum Commission Bill here. Never. They were talking a lot of years ago. They are not going to bring any Bill to that extent.

5.03 a.m.

On some very flimsy terms, Mr. Jagdeo in another debate raised the issue. I have another *Hansard*. I think it was the 78th Sitting of 8th December, 2017. This was a couple months after we had debated the Petroleum Commission of Guyana Bill 2017. The *Hansard* states:

“The first has to do with the Petroleum Commission. We saw a Bill being brought here...”

This is Mr. Jagdeo speaking.

“...and now we are hearing that it may be amended.”

This was because Mr. Raphael Trotman had indicated that you, the then Opposition, had wanted certain amendments as mentioned by Mr. Mahipaul, even with Dr. Irfaan Ali and all of them.

“A Bill which states that the Minister has the right to appoint a board to the Petroleum Commission; the Minister has the authority to fire the Board; and the Minister can become the Board, if a board is not appointed. What does that tell you about the orientation of...”

The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government. [Mr. Hamilton: What are you reading there?] I am reading from the *Hansard* of Friday, 8th December, 2017. Mr. Jagdeo was saying all of these things.

“What does that tell you about the orientation of this...”

A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change...

“...Government. It speaks a lot about their words surrounding transparency, accountability and fighting corruption...”

Because the Minister had the power to appoint the board. Look what you have here now. The Minister has every... *Lemme nah cuss*. All the powers in the world in relation to exploration, production, transportation – *me nah know wuh an' wuh*. Everything. [Ms. Hastings-Williams:

(*Inaudible*)] Did you say 333 times? Yes. The Hon. Member, Mr. Jagdeo is not here to say, well I did not mean what I said. It is typical of Mr. Jagdeo. We are going to reduce the Ministers' salaries that we had increased. Did you decrease it? We are going to decrease the salaries. Did you decrease it? We are going to renegotiate the contract. It was the rottenest contract we ever had. Did you renegotiate? No. You put in an interpretation in your Manifesto that re-negotiation does not really means re-negotiation. The word 're-negotiation' is implicitly stating there that there was a negotiation and you were going to re-negotiate. Who did we negotiate with? It is ExxonMobil. It meant that you were going to re-negotiate with ExxonMobil. Hon. Member Mr. Charles Ramson do not come and tell me that is not what it meant. What type of lawyer are you? [An Hon. Member: Is that what he said?] That is what he said. It did not mean that. These fellas come here and want to now make volte-faces all around the place in relation to the promises they made to the electorate in 2020.

It is disastrous what we have here now. Disastrous in the sense that they are going to make this, sign it, seal it, and it is a done deal. The Minister has the power. You did not even think about what you had said in your Manifesto. You did not even think about what you said in the *Hansard*. You did not even think about what you said in relation to some of the press statements that you made in connection with the petroleum commission. My Friend, Mr. Hamilton, did not seem to read about health, safety and environmental standards. It is wonderful to have seen Mr. David Patterson at least put maximum effort into a Bill with those amendments that he brought here. No one can deny that, indeed, constituted a studied approach into ensuring that we get a better Bill. Petroleum activities, by itself, cannot be in that vacuum. It has to be there with a governance structure. That is what you failed to understand and comprehend. You are now coming to say well this is the Petroleum Activities Bill, speak on that. No. The entire context – text – as a matter of fact, context contains text and always, contextually, one will regard what transpired before. As I said, we have so many precedents all around dealing with commissions and when it comes to natural resources.

I want to also indicate that it would be in the interest of all Guyanese that we show – as Mr. Benn was asking for – a bipartisan approach to the Bill. He was going away with what is called, his gaze, only as if the APNU/AFC does not want to have that. He was giving the impression as if we want to create trouble. We do not want to create trouble. We want to stop trouble and it includes transparency. It includes accountability. It includes good governance in a sector. A lot of them do

not really appreciate, again, the context in which we signed that Agreement. During that Agreement, I was a Member of Cabinet and I know a thing or two. Indeed, ExxonMobil came and indicated that it had found oil – two billion barrels of oil, which is good news. We never had it better with such news. At the same time, the President of Venezuela, Mr. Nicolás Maduro Moros marked a line and said all that oil belongs to Venezuela. ExxonMobil is an American company. There was geopolitics involved. We then indicated that we do not want this one per cent royalty. There it is, ExxonMobil came and indicated that there is a model agreement by the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government in 2012 that said one per cent.

Today, they come with an agreement that states 10% royalty but, in 2012, they had a model Production Sharing Agreement that said one per cent. They do not want to speak about that. When ExxonMobil produced that, we were then calling up some of their former ministers begging them, please, what type of model agreement? *This nah model, this ah moodle*. This thing 'modelling' us here. Not one of them could have come – none of them – to say what it was that they had signed on to because ExxonMobil was indicating... [Mr. Nandlall: Who is 'you all'?] As far as I know, we called Mr. Jagdeo and a whole set of them. Brigadier Granger was trying to get on to them. he was the Leader of the Opposition then. They were not coming. Just explain, why you did what you did. All of a sudden, we told the people that we have to get more than they want. We got two per cent which is 100% more. They are now saying it was rotten. We also had geopolitical reasons to have an American company. That is why they cannot re-negotiate nothing about that contract. In that model Agreement of 2012, it had a whole set of things about ring-fencing and tax exemptions, *et cetera* that were in that Agreement.

You are now caught in the web that the PPP/C had spun in 2012, and we are there. We had then made a decision that we have to right side sugar. Sugar was not bringing in income. You needed the revenue stream from oil. How early could you get the revenue stream? We can do it in four years. We had so many other considerations. Just like a judge has to make a decision, we made the decision and that was it. You had indicated that it was rotten and that you were going to re-negotiate; you cannot re-negotiate. As a matter of fact, if I may say, your relationship with ExxonMobil certainly has gotten very incestuous now. To that extent, you are not going to touch anything and you are not even going to bring a commission. Do you know why? As I said, it is because the commission will be made up, not of politicians but it will be made up of people who

know science, oil, security, environmental standards and all of these things. They – like a Dr. Vincent Adams who headed the Environmental Protection Agency – can argue with the operator. What do you have here? I am not so certain that Mr. Vickram Bharrat will argue with ExxonMobil. I am not so certain because there is not the insulation of one step away as a commission and its set of members would have done. That is why it is disastrous for *putting the cart before the horse* and having this Bill so badly structured in a regulatory framework that has seen no petroleum commission. I urge that all the amendments as proposed... Notwithstanding, the first set of amendments dealing with the petroleum commission are important for Amerindian land rights. We must not come here as lawyers to say that, oh, we have to put in the Criminal Law (Offenses) Act in this Bill. What type of ludicrous argument is that? Hon. Member Mr. Datadin, we want to see that which will be in a collision course with the Petroleum Bill being at least mitigated to the extent of you stating that wheresoever there is a collision course, as in the Amerindian Act, the Amerindian Act will take priority. That is all that Mr. Vincent Henry was saying.

We have seen collision courses already like in the Marudi. Was it the Marudi where the United Nations (UN)... [Ms. Hastings-Williams: The Chinese Landing.] The Chinese Landing. Yes. We have collision courses as that. In law, there is a principle that says the latest act, if it contradicts an earlier act, the later act applies. It would necessarily mean that this Petroleum Activities Act – as I am certain you all will pass it – will now do damage to the Amerindian land titles that were granted if oil is found onshore. It is important that we get all these things straightened out. If we do not, we will get it to the detriment of the country and the various peoples that live here.

I urge that the amendments be approved and passed. We do not have any objections to it even going to a special select committee. Our governance structure in the APNU/AFC was – what do you think Mr. Opposition or various Members of the Opposition? They want it to go to a special select committee and we took it there but circumstances then befell the country and it died whilst in there. Do not let this one not have the scrutiny that can come from a special select committee. If we do not take it to a special select committee, kindly support the amendments as presented by the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Now, for the Hon. Member, Mr. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs.

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Speaker, I rise, with the morning sun, to offer my contribution to this morning's debate. Being very low down *the batting order*, I had the benefit of listening to a large number of presentations. Mr. Speaker, may I begin with the Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan?

5.18 a.m.

Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, one who is listening to him, with all the knowledge that he espoused, with all the experiences that he referred to, with all the expertise that he made reference to, at the end of the day, Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, admitted calmly that he was in Cabinet and was part of executing what has now been accepted as perhaps the most lopsided contract on planet Earth.

The simple question that Mr. Ramjattan cannot and did not answer, with Vince Adams and all the personnel who he spoke about, why did you not use that knowledge and get the people of Guyana a better deal when you had an opportunity? Mr. Ramjattan's excuse or his explanation is that they were bound by a model document executed or drawn under a PPP/C Government. Is that your excuse? You were the sovereign Government; you found billions of barrels of oil; billions of dollars; and you are bound by a contract signed years before when there was no certified finding of oil. Is that what you are telling the country? A Government made up of so many lawyers, you questioned somebody's legal competence just now. As a lawyer, you could not go to the bargaining table and say look, that contract there we do not agree with it. We have 11 billion barrels of oil. We want a better deal. **[Mr. Ramjattan:** We negotiated.] You did not. You accepted the model Agreement, according to you, and now you throw your hands up in the air and you blame us. What is worse, I did not know and the country did not know, is that the entire Cabinet knew about this contract. We thought it was Mr. Rapheal Trotman alone, but Mr. Ramjattan has helped us to clarify that this Agreement was at Cabinet and they all sat around. They all knew the terms and they went on to execute. Then, they did not disclose them. For one and a half years the country did not know. Mr. Ramjattan, you just said how important this contract was for Guyana; we were doing bad in sugar; we were doing bad in rice; and you are executing, according to you, the most lucrative contract in the country's history; and you kept it quiet and a secrete for one and a half year. You are coming now to tell us at 5.30 in the morning about transparency and you hid this contract. How many times did you approach the press? How many times you spoke to the press? How many press conferences did you...? **[Mr. Ramjattan:** It was online.] Let us assume that you put it online. Do you not think that – by Guyana finding all these barrels of oil out there,

millions, you sign a production contract with ExxonMobil –is newsworthy? You kept that away from the public domain for one and a half years, and you are telling us about transparency and accountability.

When the press begun to prob the issue, they denied. We had to go the Deeds and Commercial Registry and get a copy of this contract. It is only when we received the copy of the contract, then we knew of this clause. I will tell you the clause. Hold on just now. [Mr. Ramjattan: What date was it registered.] Do not bother about when it was registered. [An. Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] It is not the stability clause. I have not reach there as yet. The signing bonus is hidden in the last page. They received \$18 million and kept that away from the people of Guyana. You kept it away from the accounting measures. You did not bring it to this National Assembly; you did not bring it to the National Assembly; you did not put it to the Consolidated Fund; you did not tell the people about it for one and a half years, and you are coming here to lecture to us? We only knew of a signing bonus when we received a copy of this contract from the Deeds and Commercial Registry. That is the sordid history and track record of those who are now going to protagonise transparency and accountability, and lecture to us here. [Mr. Ramjattan: Born again champions.] Born again champions; let me tell you what you signed on to. The five or more lawyers in the Cabinet, this is what they signed on to. It states:

“Except as may be expressly provided herein, the Government of Guyana shall not amend, modify, rescind, terminate, declare invalid or unenforceable, require renegotiation of, compel replacement or substitution, or otherwise seek to avoid, alter, or limit this Agreement without prior consent of the Contractor.”

That is what they have given the country. You have condemned the country to this. I am going on. After signing this Agreement and conformity with article 15:

“the Government shall not increase the economic burdens of the Contractor under this agreement by applying to this agreement or the operation conducted thereunder, any increase of or any new petroleum related fiscal obligations, including but not limited to, any new taxes whatsoever, any new royalty, duties, fees, charges, Value Added Tax (VAT) or other imposts.”

That is what you have imposed on the backs of the Guyanese people. I will continue. It states:

“If at any time after the signing of this Agreement there is any change in the laws of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana whether through the amendment of existing laws (including hydrocarbons law, the customs code or the tax code) or the enactment of new laws or a change having the force of law in the interpretation, implementation or application thereof (whether the... such change has materially adverse effects to the economic benefits, including those resulting from the fiscal regime provided by this Agreement, accruing to the contractor hereunder during the term of this Agreement, the Government shall promptly take any and all affirmative actions to restore the lost or impaired economic benefits to Contractor, so that the Contractor receives the same economic benefit under the Agreement that it would have received prior to the obligation shall include an obligation to resolve promptly by whatever means may be necessary any conflict or anomaly between this Agreement and any such new amended legislation...”

That is what you have condemned the people of Guyana to. [Mr. Ramjattan: *(Inaudible)*]
Yes. You, to this contract. There is another one. The third one states: even if there is any change, even if there is a change on Government and there is a change in the law, and a change in the legal system of the country, this contract shall prevail. This is the most sovereign and supreme document you had made in this country. That is what you and your Government condemned the people of Guyana to. Do you expect us to go and renegotiate? When we said renegotiate, we meant renegotiate in this context. I will show you how we have reformed the entire licensing regime. We cut the environmental permit that you give for 20 years in excess of what the law permits and we brought it down to five years. That is a renegotiation. The terms of the licences now. Look at Payara and the other one, then look at the one that you give. You will see that there are material differences. That is the renegotiation. We have outlaw flaring. We have made that fine. They have to pay for that, Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan. Those are solely some of the changes.

Let me deal with the Amerindian Act as you have made a big issue out of it; the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, spoke of it. As law makers, you have to be economical with the use of language especially in a complex and comprehensive legislation. One had to do that in this case. The Hon. Member, Mr. Sanjeev Datadin, made the necessary references of not including in this Act what is provided for in other pieces of legislation. Since the Amerindian Act seems to be persistent worry for you, let me explain to you Mr. Ramjattan that – You must know this, because the Bill states it

– All natural resources of a country belong to the State. That is always the position. It is a universal rule across sovereign nations. Even if a person has a transported property and there is gold reserve at the bottom, the person does not own the gold reserve, my Friend. [Mr. Ramjattan: *(Inaudible)*] Yes. That is the power of the State. The person does not own the subservice rights; that belongs to the State. Mr. Ramjattan, let me complete my statement. To access that subservice rights, what law will govern the person's particular property? The Deeds Registry Act that shows the power of the transports, make the person the absolute owner, then the Government will have to go under the Compulsory Acquisition Act now to negotiate with the person. Do you want us to put all of that here if they find an oil reserve under your bottom house? Is that what you are telling the country? If there is an oil block in an Amerindian Community, it belongs to the State. The oil reserve would belong to the State and how the State will have access to it and be able to deal with it are set out elaborately in the Amerindian Act. You said 'gosh'; did you not know that?

Let me go one by one to deal with all of these issues that they have raised. I will deal with the petroleum commission frontally at a later stage, because that seem to be the big issue. Firstly, let us recognise – I believe that all of us have sufficient knowledge and experience – the oil and gas industry as a peculiar industry. Let me recognise the efforts one time before I forget, of the bright, young, diligent and hard-working professionals within this Government who have produced this Bill. They are right here with us at this hour in the morning. They are Bobby Gossai, Michael Monroe, Keron Matthias, Shoshanna Lall and Vishal Satram. They work tirelessly. They are bright young people and they produced this document. I want the National Assembly to, with your permission Sir, recognise them. Many of times while we were working on this Bill, we had to go for drafting instructions. There is no body who directed what to be put in this Bill. We were given free reign along with an American consultant who did the first draft. I have the notes of the American consultant here as well. Let me tell you the countries we have consulted with before we arrived at this model. We looked at the United States of America, the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act of 1961.

5.33 a.m.

We look at the United Kingdom. We, the Government, look at Norway, Ghana, Ireland, Angola, Brazil, East Timor, and Trinidad and Tobago. Those were the bundles that we looked at. Let us

look at Trinidad and Tobago. We could argue from now until tomorrow whether Trinidad and Tobago have managed the proceeds of the revenue generated from its oil and gas sector prudently, but that is a matter of opinion depending on which side of the fence one sits. However, no one could dispute that Trinidad and Tobago has had a successful model as a production centre for the past one hundred years. Trinidad and Tobago have all the powers vested in the Minister. There is no commission. There is no authority. All of the power is vested in the Minister of Energy in Trinidad and Tobago, and for one hundred years, *the sky did not fall*.

Let me deal with the ministerial power frontally. I have listened carefully; 90% of criticism against this Bill seems to centre around the Minister having the power, [Mr. Ramjattan: (Inaudible)] 90% of the problem you have is the Minister having the power. The Executive reserves the prerogative to determine the governing structure for one of the most important industries in the economy. This Executive, elected by the people of Guyana and given the mandate, has chosen the model where the power resides in the Minister. We stand and fall by that. It is as simple as that. We have put in the Bill a mechanism that whenever the Minister has to make an exceptional decision, he/she must consult with the Cabinet. My Friends, under our Constitution, a provision that you ought to be very familiar with, the Cabinet is collectively responsible to the National Assembly of Guyana; that is democracy, so hold us responsible. We were elected to govern and govern we will. Hold us accountable. We decided at this point in time not to give this power to non-elected people in a commission, and that is our prerogative, [Mr. Ramjattan: Non-elected people.] ...yes, non-elected people are in a commission because you cannot hold them answerable. We cannot hold them answerable. The people cannot hold them answerable. We are holding ourselves out as being answerable to you and the people of Guyana, and that is the model that we have decided to choose. Once we get that out of the way, I think we will have general support for the Bill because there is no other argument. Mr. Patterson, for example, wants a commission.

Let us entertain the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson's amendment, at this hour of the morning. The Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, asked us to establish a petroleum commission. Hon. Member, you can wake up. I am addressing your concerns. He wants us to establish a national petroleum commission. All the Hon. Members who spoke in support of him called for that commission to be established. They all claimed that they read and were duly impressed by what he had written. I

examined it and had to ask whether I had all the pages. I have examined the amendments, and I do not know where in the amendments there are any provisions as to how the commission would be constituted, who would appoint the commission, how many members would be part of the commission, how long they would be acting in the commission and what is the tenure of the commission. There was nothing like that. The Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, is asking for a commission, [Mr. Ramjattan: How nothing like that?] Mr. Ramjattan, you read it and tell me which provision, and I will withdraw it right away. Tell me which provision here states how the commission will be appointed, who shall constitute the commission, what is the commission's tenure, and how the commission will be funded.

Mr. Speaker, you know how amendments are to be tabled in this House. They have to, first of all, make sense, and they must be able to be interwoven seamlessly into the Bill that is before us. This cannot and does not make sense. It is a phantom commission. It is an empty commission. It has nobody. There is no person to appoint. There is no tenure of the commission, and that is the problem. When one scrambles together these amendments, I have to say that again, [Mr. Ramjattan: *(Inaudible)* established *(inaudible)*] To be established, but when? How are you going to establish it? [Mr. Ramjattan: *Nah, you seh you gon* establish it.] No. It has to be established in the Bill. The Hon. Member said there shall be a national commission, and that is it. There were no other provisions of the Bill, [Mr. Ramjattan: *(Inaudible)* expert *(inaudible)*] I am the expert. [Mr. Ramjattan: Are you the expert?] Yes. I am the Attorney General. I have never seen a law in this country that provisions for a commission but does not state how the commission is going to be appointed, how it is going to be established, who will constitute it, what it is, how many people will be part of it, their tenure of office and how they are going to be funded. I have never seen that. Point me to one piece of legislation. We will wait. Look, the law books are there. Point me to one piece of legislation where I could find that. The amendments were only put here for the platform. It was only put here for the gallery so the Opposition could tell people and get two or three news stories. It knows that the journalist would not go and read it properly. I saw one news story already that stated that the Hon. Member Patterson proposed wide-ranging amendments. They are phantoms. A total of 90 % of the amendments deal with the commission, and it is empty. Hear him being insulting now. He drafted something that did not make sense and accused all of us on this side of being silly. [Ms. Ferguson: What do you

mean, it does not make sense?] It does not make sense. Which part of that statement you do not understand?

We promise this country three major pieces of legislation in relation to the oil and gas sector. We promise this country that we will protect the local workforce because if we do not regulate the employment environment, Guyanese could easily be booted out and not be able to compete effectively in the sector. We know that the petroleum industry is one that is peculiar and one that is *sui generis*. They come with an entire apparatus, and unless we protect our local population, Guyanese could suffer tremendously. We promise to put protective mechanisms in place by way of laws. We heard a lot about draft policies: draft this and draft that. We put a law in place called the Local Content Act; that is the first measure that we put in place.

The second measure is we promise the people of Guyana that – this is a multibillion-dollar industry – if Guyana even had the potential of realising the dream of all its people in a short period of time, the oil and gas industry would provide that possibility. To guard the revenue stream, to protect the revenue stream, to make the revenue stream accountable and transparent to the world and all of the people of this country, we promise to create an infrastructure of a legislative nature to guarantee those imperatives.

We produced and passed in this House the Natural Resources Fund Bill. One will recall the passage of that Bill. The passage of that Bill itself was historic. Mr. Speaker, your Mace was taken from there and broken. Your staff were assaulted. The Opposition was dancing, singing, gyrating, and blowing whistles in the well of the Dome. It broke the microphone system. Those were its contributions to one of the most important pieces of legislation in this country. It is how history will record it. Those were its contributions to that most important Bill. This only sets up the administrative framework. The Guyanese people cannot eat from this or get wealth from this. It is that Bill that guarantees them and ensures them of wealth. Rather than contribute, the Opposition *knack down and bruk down* in this National Assembly and nearly assaulted my distinguished and honourable brother Dr. Ashni Singh as he tried to pilot the Bill successfully in this House. Those are its contributions. After condemning the people of Guyana with a contract that may be comparable to servitude from a different era and then hiding the \$18 million bonus, that is its contribution to the Natural Resources Fund Bill.

Today, rather than go through this Bill and try to walk with us through it to examine the framework, which is what we promise in this Bill, the third Bill. It is a Bill that will set up a robust, transparent, and accountable framework for the sector. This is what this Bill encompasses. As usual, the Opposition had prepared in a haphazard manner. From the beginning, the Bill stated that it would be read or must be read and would be applied along with the Production Sharing Agreements (PSAs) agreements. We have put modelled Production Sharing Agreements out there for months now. The Opposition has not contributed, not a word. I do not believe it has read it because many of its presentations indicated that it has not read the PSAs. **[Dr. Singh: ((Inaudible))]** No. I am not at all. One has to read the Bill, and one has to read the modelled PSA to get the picture because no singular bill could outline everything, which is why the Bill continuously makes reference to the PSA. The Bill sets out that regulatory framework. As I said, in important matters... **[An Hon. Member: ((Inaudible))]** Yes. The Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, is reading the PSAs or the Bill for the first time, so read; no, he is reading the Bill. We said that the buffer for the minister... The Bill states at several places... Clause 5(2), for example states:

(2) “The Minister, in the exercise of the powers and the performance of the duties of the Minister prescribed by this Act, shall conform with any general or specific directions given to the Minister by Cabinet.”

If the Minister puts a commission, the Minister will appoint the commission, and the commission will be directed by the Minister. **[Mr. Ramjattan: ((Inaudible)) a matter of policy.]** Policy, yes. **[Mr. Ramjattan: Operational matters ((Inaudible))]** Operational matters will not be done by a commission and that is your lack of understanding. The operational matters of any given undertaking in a structure cannot be done by the commission or the board. It has to be done by the executing authority, which is the Chief Executive Officer. **[Mr. Ramjattan: ((Inaudible))]** That is not the commission. Do you see, Dr. Singh, basic? A commission is like a board... **[Mr. Ramjattan: The Forestry Commissioner does it.]** Do you think the Forest Commissioner runs the forestry? It is why you all bankrupted the place. Do you think that the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) Board runs the Authority? *Oh my*. The level of incompetence here is staggering, really staggering. What you are calling for, you do not understand how it works. What you are calling for, you do not understand how it works. That is what I am saying, you all are attracted to concepts that are in your heads. You have an allergy.

5.48 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Attorney General (AG), I understand the concept of time. You need an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like you to give the Hon. Member five minutes more to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When compared with the 1986 law, this one is far more expansive, far more robust, and far more modern. The previous one had only – I think they called it – petroleum prospecting licences. This has exploratory licences, how one qualifies for them, the length of the licences, *et cetera*. In fact, the licensing regime is far superior to that. You have now petroleum exploration licences, petroleum production licences, pipeline operations licences, and geological storage licences for carbon dioxide. It is a far superior licensing regime.

If I may go quickly, we have introduced into the whole architecture now – for the first time – public bidding for the oil blocks. Under the previous Administration, the Minister could have signed off. Now, you have public bidding, and only in very limited, identified, and special circumstances can the Minister do direct negotiations. He is only permitted to do so upon the directions of the Cabinet. The whole Government will fall if the Minister misbehaves. That is the point. That is the responsibility that we are putting on the line. We have the qualifications, first of all, for potential licensees. It is a clear regime of qualifications – companies only of a particular financial standing. They must show their track records, *et cetera*, before they qualify to even begin to apply for either exploratory or production licences. At the end of the terms of transparency and accountability, we have a whole part of the law that states that Government officials, Members of Parliament (MPs), and family members are prohibited from holding licences. Do you hear that? Government officials, MPs, and family members are prohibited from holding licences. All these are defined in the Bill.

Once a licence is granted – any of the licences – the Minister is obliged to publish the details in the *Official Gazette*. The entire world will know who the licensees are and the terms and conditions

of the licences. What is more transparent than that? What is more transparent than that? [Mr. Mahipaul: A commission is.] What commission is that? Do not let me tell you who you will put on the commission and render it a waste of time. Every person now can look at the *Official Gazette* and know who the licensees are and the terms of their licences. The Minister spoke at length about unitisation. So, that is there. I heard criticisms being made about the absence of financial assurance. As you are aware, the Environmental Protection Act and Regulations contain a very stringent regime of assurance and guarantees for the protection of the environment. This Bill also has its own fiscal regime in terms of financial assurance and guarantees, as well. That is set out in clause 54.

We have training fees, rental fees, and a whole set of fees that are listed here. The sums are not fixed. I heard the Hon. Member Mr. Patterson asking us to fix the training fee at \$1.5 million. The Production Sharing Agreement has a fixed sum already. That is what I am saying. I know that you did not read it. All these things are stipulated in the PSA, and we are asking you to read it. The PSA will be part and parcel of this. Just as we are bound by this document, our model PSA will be as binding as this one is on the backs of the Guyanese people, Mr. Ramjattan. That is why you cannot read half and leave the other. I dealt with financial assurance. There is, then, tax. In this PSA, you exempted all the laws of Guyana. All the laws you exempted. Even what the law did not permit – what the 1986 Petroleum (Exploration and Production) Act did not permit. Here value-added tax (VAT) will apply; Corporation Tax will apply, and I believe Income Tax will apply. The Minister will fix the rate by an order which will be laid in the Assembly. Mr. Patterson said that nothing will come to the National Assembly. This is another inaccuracy; I cannot say it is a lie.

You then have the decommissioning part. There is an elaborate way by which wells are going to be decommissioned, and there is a decommissioning fund. I heard Mr. Patterson speak about the absence of a fund. I do not know which Bill he read. There is a decommissioning fund where the money will go in from the beginning of the operation. That is how it works. Any fund will be amortised over a period, not when the operation is finished. So, I conclude by commending this Bill to the National Assembly. I urge that it be passed without any amendments. I, thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Attorney General. Now, it is time for the Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Norton: Comrade Speaker, first of all, let me put on the record that I believe this entire process that started at 10.00 a.m. is an abuse of authority. To the extent that you cannot properly organise parliamentary sessions so that staff from the Ministry that we all congratulate, the Parliament Office and Members of Parliament (MPs).... We cannot organise sessions to have people here from 10.00 a.m. one day to this point – we are at 5.00 a.m. to 6.00 a.m. If the other two Bills are to go, we will go way past 10.00 a.m. and I believe that is unreasonable and unconscionable. Therefore, I wish to make it pellucidly clear that at the end of this Bill, we will go. Now, the Hon. Minister Mr. Bharrat, in his presentation, made a statement which I want to...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I was trying to signal to you that I wanted to respond because your observation about abuse is now centred on me. I run this House. So, thank you for putting the blame at the Speaker's feet. The business of the House is conducted not only by me but by all sides. So, let us all share the prolonged 67th Sitting of the National Assembly. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Norton: I heard you, Hon. Speaker. I hope when we object to this sort of behaviour, it will be recalled that it is not you alone, the Government or the Opposition's side; it is all of us. I just want that to be noted. Hon. Speaker, I want to refer to a statement made by the Hon. Minister, Mr. Bharrat. Before I make that comment, I want to say this – when the Hon. Minister started his debate, I thought he was putting us on the correct path in terms of trying to solicit support from the other side of the House. Unfortunately, some of your Colleagues changed the direction and undermined what you were doing. Having said that, you made this comment:

“Our forest is no longer a national asset,”

It is a global one. Now, it may sound innocuous, but it is not. Throughout the entire debates on international environmental relations, this question of our forest being a national asset is critical. I think I get what you wanted to say. The truth of the matter is – it is a national asset, but it also contributes to the global commons. We have to be very, very careful in making that point because if one runs the history of the evolution of the attempts at creating a forest convention, one will recognise that it ends up with authoritative principles on forestry since the developed and the developing world differ on this question of whether it should be treated as a national patrimony or contribute to the global commons. I believe it is in Guyana's interest for us to treat it and always

state that it is a national patrimony that contributes to the global common. [Mr. Persaud: *(Inaudible)*] You could not even answer the questions. [Hon. Members (Government): *(Inaudible)*] This will pass over both of your heads.

Mr. Speaker, I want to put something else in context. The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramson, allowed us to infer – since he implied – that we could have taken the matter with CGX Energy Incorporated to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) before, but the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) did it. May I correct the records historically? The negotiations on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea lasted from 1973 to 1982. Having covered that period, the law states that they had to get 60 signatures before anything went before the International Court of Justice. I want to remind the Hon. Member that in 1993, Guyana became the signatory that made up the 60. There was absolutely no possibility of that matter going before the International Court of Justice, apart from the PPP/C, because, by 1994, the PPP was in Office. I want to remind him that we supported it going and was very clear. In fact, I want to remind this House that previously, I had to remind the Vice President, the Hon. Dr. Jagdeo, that that was the case. So, I think we need to correct it so that people who are listening do not go out there believing the things that are peddled. I also want to say to the Hon. Member, Minister Mr. Bharrat, that I think he should engage the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. I made this point in the budget debate – there is a need for an element of foreign policy that speaks to international environmental relations. I am saying this because there is a concept called environmental space. Our foreign policy should create environmental space for us to be able to exploit our resources while at the same time pursuing sustainable development.

6.03 a.m.

I do believe it is a useful concept, and there is a role in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for creating the enabling environment to ensure that we can explore our resources and at the same time not be condemned, develop the environment and space, and give us the opportunity to develop our resources. I really do appreciate how Minister Bharrat started his debate. I think one of the things that should have happened, and the Minister hinted at it, was for us to recognise that we spent three years learning, all of us. To the extent that we spent three years learning, we should use the lessons and experience of that period for both the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) and the People’s Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) to improve our output. Too

regularly, we end up fighting and making everything APNU/AFC and PPP/C. This is a matter of national importance; this is a matter for the people of Guyana. Therefore, it is incumbent on us, as Members of Parliament, to focus on this issue in a non-partisan way. Therefore, while I know the trend is towards not going to a select committee, I believe we should go to a special select committee with a timeline. Do not tell me about recess. The law provides for important matters, national matters. You can be called out of recess. I think we need to have this matter addressed.

Let me tell you what happens in this country. The PPP/C comes into power and changes everything the APNU/AFC does, and then the APNU/AFC is going to come into power and want to change everything the PPP/C does. It is bad politics, and it is bad for the development of the country. We need to work out these arrangements so that when there is a change of Government whenever the critical issues are issues that were agreed on by both sides of the House and will allow us to progress. I urge very much that we ensure that we build that continuity. It is very critical, more so because it is oil and gas. It is our natural resource. It is for that reason that I want to comment on the commission. We should not be focusing on the commission based on, “We have been in power, we could have done it,” or “It should be done now.” We should focus on whether the commission is the best thing for us at this time in terms of ensuring that we put in place a governance structure that will allow us to promote the interest of the people of Guyana. From that standpoint, I say that a commission will give us some opportunities that we might not get in the present structure. I am not here gainsaying the fact that the Minister has responsibility for the sector. We are not going to doubt that. If we come into government tomorrow, the Minister will be responsible. You are in government at present; the Minister is responsible. But that does not mean that you cannot have a commission that is independent and insulates the oil and gas sector from the political partisanship that we see here. We need to insulate from political partisanship.

Let us be clear. Who will doubt that if you have a professional core managing the oil and gas sector, you will: one, have less of the rank that comes from this, and two, you will have the opportunity to put together a multidisciplinary group? You will have the opportunity to be guided as Minister by technical competent people based on the law. The call for a petroleum commission is not a case of, “You were in opposition, you did not have the idea and now you are coming with it.” That side of the House was in opposition, and while it was in opposition, it advocated for a petroleum commission. We have no problem with that.

What is important, now that you are the government, is that you understand that you put in the records, "This is what we will do." I invite you now to do retrospection and to ask yourself if what you said then was correct. If it was correct, ask yourself why you do not want to do it now. That, to me, is a more rational and reasonable approach. I do believe if we can move in that direction, then we will really place this country's oil and gas sector on a proper footing. Do we want, at the level of our oil and gas sector, which is now the largest income earner, to be fighting over it? Let us say you painted a bush shed in green, and when the PPP/C went, it painted it in PPP/C colours. There are some things we have to get past as a nation. I recommend to you, Hon. Minister, and Members of the Government's side, that this Bill provides us a good opportunity to show our maturity to the people of this country and to ensure, at the same time, that we get the best through discussions, not only from us but when we put it in the public domain. When the public is able to contribute, we will have a piece of legislation that all of us can say is Guyanese legislation that protects the interest of the people of Guyana.

Two things are facing us. We have to make the decision as to whether we want total domination and control or we want the evolution of a governance structure that will serve us in good stead. I am of the view that we really and truly should develop such a structure. There are other issues of concern to us. I want to make this statement: we are a small nation and a vulnerable nation. And when you are a small and vulnerable nation, the powerful can take advantage of you if what you have is a lot of discretion rather than a clear loss. Therefore, I want to suggest that, though we have come out of a British gentleman-type law, we need to become a little more legalistic as we have to deal with multinational corporations that are powerful. For instance, I believe that in any legislation, there should be full liability coverage so that we do not have to get into any arguments. This is what the law states, and all and sundry will be expected to live by the law. The same is true about the full parent company guarantee. More importantly, if we accept that our benefits will be based on profit oil, then it follows, axiomatically, that we need to focus heavily on auditing. Therefore, all the issues surrounding auditing should be rooted in law, including the timeframe in which the auditing should be done, as suggested by Hon. Mr. Patterson. If we can do that, then we do not have to come and rumble and grumble in here about who audited and who did not audit. The law will state to us, in real, specific terms, that this is what should happen. Therefore, all we will have to do is comply with the law. One of the underpinning philosophies I want to advocate

as we move forward is for us to move in a more legalistic direction to give us as a small state coverage.

Mr. Speaker, like I said before, I am uncomfortable with discretion, and discretion sometimes plays against us as a small state. It is in this context that I want to point out that we should have clear laws governing *recoverables*, for instance, a law that states that loyalty must not be recoverable; a law that states that as companies exercise their corporate social responsibility, it must not be recovered. The law gives us the framework in which to operate. I believe that this piece of legislation is an improvement from 1986, no doubt. If it is not, then all of us are stupid. The opportunity must be taken, not only to accept... I am happy and willing to congratulate all the young legislators or legal draft people I see up there. I am happy that they are there, but I do not think you will doubt that they themselves will benefit from a wider consultation that will allow them to give us a better document. I do not see us making these demands as belittling them, I see it as ensuring that the wider cross-section of the society participates and that they will get the opportunity to benefit from the wider cross-section of the society. I know I heard that is some American law-informed, *et cetera*, but a lot of times, we underestimate our own people. When we consult with our own people, we tend to do better.

I beg of this House that we do more legalistic approaches to ensure that we do better. I think we also need to remove the government-to-company arrangement. All the matters dealing with the oil company should pass through the National Assembly. As parliamentarians, we can speak while I am the leader of the Opposition; our interest is not to obstruct. Our interest is to see the best governance framework for our people and that for whatever exists, our people benefit. That is my major objective. I do not want to know that five years from now, we are talking about some curse and disease. I want us to be able to say, as a people, that we have worked together, we have put our best foot forward, and we have produced a piece of legislation that we can all be proud of. I do not have to come and *buse* about what the PPP/C did and what the APNU/AFC did, because at the end of the day, when we finish busing each other about who did what when, it is our people that will suffer.

6.18 a.m.

We have been here very long. I have more to say, but I just want to close on this note, that this Bill offers us a good opportunity to rethink our approaches politically. It offers us a good opportunity to work together, it offers us an opportunity that will allow our people to respect us. I lay my case and say to you, I offer a proper partnership in terms of ensuring we get the best legislation to serve the people of Guyana and the efficacious. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Leader of the Opposition. Now, for the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources, the Hon. Member, Mr. Bharrat, to conclude the debate.

Mr. Bharrat (replying): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we have been at it for over six hours now. Permit me, Mr. Speaker, through you, of course, to join with the other speakers, including the Attorney General and the Leader of the Opposition, to congratulate the team from the Attorney General's Office and the Ministry of Natural Resources who would have worked tirelessly on the drafting of this Bill. I think we have Bobby Gossai, Michael Munroe, Kiran Mattai, Shoshanna Lall, Vishal Satram, Ranetta Sarjoo and Joanna Simmons. That is the team that worked tirelessly. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to recognise the team from the Ministry of Natural Resources and the Attorney General's Chambers, as well as the Attorney General himself, and the Hon. Vice President, who would have worked tirelessly on putting this Bill together, to ensure that we have a modern piece of legislation that will take this very critical and important sector forward, as we continue to develop our natural resources.

My intention is not to delay the House for too long. We have already heard a lot, from both sides of the House. I want to thank all the Members who spoke, from the Opposition, as well as my Colleagues on the Government side, for making our case and to have support in the passage of this Bill this morning. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition when he mentioned that it is a difficult task or it is our responsibility to ensure that we responsibly explore and produce our natural resources but at the same time, maintain and preserve our environment. That is always a very difficult task, and it is a task that I think we would have handled very well as country, especially with so many natural resources and now with the addition of oil and gas. We have still managed to maintain sound environmental credentials. I would have heard the comment from the Hon. Member Patterson and the Hon. Member Holder as well, to say that Guyana is probably the highest emitter per capita. I want to say to you that Guyana is probably the only oil producing country in the world that is a carbon sink. As a matter of fact, that is carbon negative, maybe it is the only oil

producing country in the world. Because of our forest, we contribute nothing to the destruction of the ozone layer and our contribution to climate change is basically zero. Taking into consideration that the Government is still putting measures in place to ensure that we cut our emission even further with the gas to energy project, for example with the 33 megawatts of solar power, with the pursuing of the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project, we are still working towards our commitment of moving towards renewable energy by 2050, and to cut our emission even further.

Most of the comments that we heard, especially from the Opposition this morning, centres around the power of the Minister with responsibility for Petroleum. We have heard many arguments from both sides. We have also heard the argument of a Petroleum Commission. We wish to state that we are in support of establishing a Petroleum Commission, that we will do so at the appropriate time, to set up a Commission so that it can assist in the monitoring of this important sector. It is something that we are still committed to. It is not that we are saying as a Government that we are against setting up a Petroleum Commission. I just want to put that on record.

This Bill would have gone through a lot of consultations, which would have started I believe under the previous Administration. The Opposition would have started consultation with bringing a new Bill to replace the 1986 Act. We all agreed that we have to replace it. It must be replaced. It is too old. It is too outdated, especially in this modern era. They would have started consultation. It continued when we took over Government, during those Local Content consultations, which were held countrywide, by the high-level Local Content panel that was established and headed by Mr. Shyam Nokta and included Mr. Carl Greenidge, Mr. Floyd Haynes and a number of others. Consultation was on-going since we took over from 2020, right up until when this Bill was published online for two weeks. Nevertheless, the opportunity was always there for us to receive any suggestions, comments, ideas or amendments that we could have included at that point in time. However, the amendments must be reasonable too. I agree fully with the Attorney General, and I must agree with him because he is the Attorney General, that amending it to have the Petroleum Commission now, when there is no mechanism in place as to how we are going to establish that Petroleum Commission, I do not think that is something we can consider at this point in time, Mr. Speaker. As I mentioned, we as a Government are committed that there will be a Petroleum Commission. It is not a closed door on that.

I agree too that, we must audit the expenses of oil and gas operation. I agree too, that it must be clear that royalties, that corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes and others are not cost recoverable because this is in the interest of all of us, as a country and as a people. These are some of the comments that I would like to make. I know it has been a very exhausting deviate for a number of hours. We have been here since 10.00 a.m. yesterday. I would like to close by thanking everyone, not only for staying through but for the comments and for the participation in this debate. I now ask that the Bill be read a second time. Thank you.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Mr. Chairman: We have a number of amendments proposed by the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson. Give me a few moments to get ...

Clause 1

At clause 1, we are being asked to insert “National Petroleum Commission”.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, PART 1, PRELIMINARY – Interpretation, there is a proposed amendment. It is listed alphabetically.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Hon. Member but under PRELIMINARY has a number of clauses.

Mr. Patterson: They are listed alphabetically, Sir, so I tell you it will go right after “Minister” and before “national territory”. It is listed alphabetically, not numerically, that is why...

Mr. Chairman: Clause 1, I am dealing with, PART I – PRELIMINARY. I think your amendment will have to go in clause 2.

Mr. Mahipaul: Division.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Clerk.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, I withdraw, sorry. I thought that this was the one that had to do with the inclusion of the “National Petroleum Commission”, clause 2.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Chairman, good morning. Perhaps it might be useful if we put all. We assume that we all saw Mr. Patterson's amendments and we put all the amendments in the Bill and we can assume that we know where they are to go, then we vote on all the amendments.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let me consult with the Clerk ...

Ms. Manickchand: I can tell you where this was done, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Let me consult with the Clerk, please, Hon. Minister.

Ms. Manickchand: I am just advising the Clerk, recalling his memory to the fact that this was done on all the children's Bills. We put all of the clauses and all the amendments made together and then voted on them.

6.33 a.m.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the Hon. Minister of Education is correct. It was done before. I am advised by the Clerk of the National Assembly that it was done with the approval of the House. I would have to put a motion to the House that all the amendments tabled by the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, be taken together. Hon. Members, I propose that we put all the amendments tabled by the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, together and that we move a motion to put them all together. I put to the House, that all the amendments proposed by the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, be taken together.

Question put.

Mr. Patterson: Division, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: A division is called. Let us ring the bell and give persons an opportunity to get into the Chamber.

Bell rung.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Clerk, you may proceed.

Assembly divided: Ayes 34, Noes 27, Absent 4 as follows:

Noes

Mr. Sears

Mr. Sinclair

Ms. Alert

Ms. Philadelphia

Mr. Jaiprashad

Ms. Flu-Bess

Mr. Rajkumar

Mr. Mahipaul

Mr. Figueira

Mr. Cox

Mr. Patterson

Ms. Fernandes

Ms. Ferguson

Ms. Singh-Lewis

Ms. Sarabo-Halley

Dr. Cummings

Mr. Henry

Mr. Ramsaroop

Ms. McDonald

Ms. Walton-Desir

Mr. Jordan

Ms. Hastings-Williams

Mr. Duncan

Ms. Hughes

Mr. Holder

Mr. Ramjattan

Mr. Norton

Ayes

Dr. Kissoon

Ms. Coonjah

Ms. Veerasammy

Mr. Williams

Dr. Smith

Mr. Jaffarally

Dr. Westford

Dr. Ramsaran

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks

Mr. Narine

Mr. Datadin

Dr. Mahadeo

Mr. Charlie

Mr. Seeraj

Mr. McCoy

Mr. Persaud

Mr. Indar

Ms. Rodrigues

Ms. Parag

Mr. Ramson

Dr. Persaud

Mr. Croal

Mr. Bharrat

Mr. Hamilton

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai

Mr. Mustapha

Ms. Manickchand

Dr. Anthony

Bishop Edghill

Mr. Todd

Ms. Teixeira

Mr. Nandlall

Mr. Jagdeo

Mr. Phillips

Absent

Mr. Jones

Ms. Lawrence

Ms. Chandan-Edmond

Mr. Forde

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the Clerk will announce the results of the division.

The Clerk: Mr. Chairman, 34 Members voted for the motion with 27 against.

Mr. Chairman: The motion is carried.

Motion carried.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I now propose the amendments proposed by the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, which is titled: *Amendments - Petroleum Activities Bill*, received at the Parliament Office on 8th August, 2023 at 12.40 p.m. I now put the question that all the amendments received from the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, and seconded by the Hon. Member, Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop, titled: *Amendments – Petroleum Activities Bill*, received at the Parliament Office on 8th August, 2023 at 12.40 p.m., form part of the Bill.

Question put.

Mr. Patterson: Division, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: The ayes have it.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, I called a division.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Clerk, there is a division. Kindly ring the bell.

Bell rung.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Clerk, you may proceed with the division.

Assembly divided: Ayes 28, Noes 33, Abstained 1, Absent 3 as follows:

Ayes

Mr. Sears

Mr. Sinclair

Ms. Alert

Ms. Philadelphia

Mr. Jaiprashad

Ms. Flu-Bess

Mr. Rajkumar

Mr. Mahipaul

Mr. Figueira

Mr. Cox

Mr. Patterson

Ms. Fernandes

Ms. Ferguson

Ms. Singh-Lewis

Ms. Sarabo-Halley

Dr. Cummings

Mr. Henry

Mr. Ramsaroop

Ms. McDonald

Ms. Walton-Desir

Mr. Jordan

Mr. Jones

Ms. Hastings-Williams

6.48 p.m.

Mr. Duncan

Ms. Hughes

Mr. Holder

Mr. Ramjattan

Mr. Norton

Noes

Ms. Coonjah

Ms. Veerasammy

Mr. Williams

Dr. Smith

Mr. Jaffarally

Dr. Westford

Dr. Ramsarran

Ms. Pearson-Fredricks

Mr. Narine

Mr. Datadin

Dr. Mahdeo

Mr. Charlie

Mr. Seeraj
Mr. McCoy
Mr. Persaud
Mr. Indar
Ms. Rodrigues
Ms. Parag
Mr. Ramson
Dr. Persaud
Mr. Croal
Mr. Bharrat
Mr. Hamilton
Ms. Pauline-Sukhai
Mr. Mustapha
Ms. Manickchand
Dr. Anthony
Bishop Edghill
Mr. Todd
Ms. Teixeira
Mr. Nandlall
Mr. Jagdeo
Mr. Phillips

Abstained

Dr. Kissoon

Absent

Ms. Lawerence

Ms. Chandan-Edmond

Mr. Forde

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Clerk, no.

Mr. Chairman: Just let us identify the person who just said no.

Ms. McDonald: Mr. Clerk, Hon. Mc. Donald. I was having some difficulties. I am saying no, but it seems as if my microphone was being muted.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: It is the same for me, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Mr. Jones said no.

Ms. McDonald: It is a yes.

Mr. Jones: It is a yes, Sir, not a no.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have to allow the Hon. Members who we miss, but who... to call them after. Could you just formally call them again for me please?

Ayes

Ms. McDonald

Mr. Jones

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. That ends the call. The Clerk will now tally the results. Mr. Clerk, you could announce the results for the division.

Mr. Isaacs: Mr. Chairman, 28 Members voted for the motion, 33 against and one member declined to vote.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the amendments are defeated. The Petroleum Activities Act of 2023, Bill No. 16/2023 has 98 clauses.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now proceed with Data Protection Bill 2023, Bill No. 14/2023, published on the 20th July, 2023. Just to let Members know that breakfast has been ordered and should be here by 7.30 a.m. Hon. Members of the gallery, you are not allowed to come into the Assembly.

Data Protection Bill 2023 – Bill No. 14/2023

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to regulate the collection, keeping, processing, use and dissemination of personal data; to protect the privacy of individuals in relation to their personal data; and provide for related matters.”

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

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Speaker, I rise to begin the second reading of the Data Protection Bill which is before us this morning. This is a Bill that is long overdue as we have been for several years now moving at the level of the Government as well as in the private sector towards digitisation. I daresay, in our individual and personal lives, we have been moving in this direction as well. All of us have access to the internet. At the level of the Government, we have launched E-governance initiatives, on various platforms we have a digital identity card which we will debate later this morning. We are offering ICT hubs across our interior regions. Soon we will be bringing the Telemedicine Bill. The Ministry of Health has already begun to accumulate our medical records and storing them in a digital information system. We have passed, recently, the Electronic

Communications and Transactions Bill. Guyana is well on its way into traversing the digital age. This Bill, therefore, is of utmost importance as it seeks to establish a framework to support the accumulation, storage, use, dissemination, *et cetera* of data. Most importantly, it sets out a protective framework through which the data collected and used on our behalf – and when I say our, I mean the collective people of Guyana – that data is protected.

A person's data invariably consists of very personal, inalienable biometric and biographic information, peculiar to that person. A person is entitled to the privacy of that information, in the same that we have a right to freedom of expression, we have a right to liberty, we have a right to property, we have a right to privacy. Unfortunately, the current construct of our laws does not safeguard this very important right. This Bill, for the first time, seeks to set a statutory framework for the protection of data that we are using, and we are accumulating every day in our lives. The universal declaration of human rights recognises the right to privacy as one of the fundamental rights guaranteed to the citizen of our country. The various international conventions to which we are a signatory as a country, also enshrine the right to privacy. Our Constitution, Article 154 which speaks to fundamental rights, binds the State of Guyana to observe these international covenants as part of our constitutional architecture. That architecture, of course, will now include those convention rights, as well as we are now welcoming it in our country as part of our statutory landscape.

In crafting this Bill, we have used the well tested European model which exist in all the European Member States, it is titled the General Data Protection Regulations, and is approved by the European Parliament. That model has now become the gold standard for data protection laws. Many countries in the Caribbean, including Jamaica, Barbados, Belize, St. Lucia, and Grenada have enacted legislation already based upon this European model. In drafting this Bill, we took guidance from the United Kingdom, Jamaica, Barbados, Mauritius, and Kenya. We did not invent the wheel, we simply followed legislation that have been enacted across the Commonwealth and the Caribbean. In terms of consultation, this Bill has received widespread consultation. The Bill was published online in April and we invited comments from members of the public.

7.03 a.m.

Unfortunately, we only received two sets of comments. We examined those comments and, where necessary, we incorporated them into the Bill. We received technical support from data protection experts attached to Mount Sinai Hospital since part of this architecture will embrace our ability to accumulate, collect, store and use medical information as part of our data bank. The Law Reform Commission of Guyana did a comprehensive review and a comparative analysis of the Bill with other Caribbean data protection laws and had no objection to the Bill. In fact, they said:

“The draft Bill represents an updated legislative model for data protection. The provisions of the draft Bill build on existing regional legislative models.”

Mr. Bartlett Morgan, a lawyer from Barbados, whose work in the area of data protection and privacy is well known, commented on the Bill. If I may be permitted to borrow what he said, he said this:

“Guyana’s new Data Protection Bill is impressive. It is probably the most advanced and at the same time fit-for-purpose privacy law that I have seen emerging from the Caribbean region to date. While there is some room for fair criticism, there is a lot to be pleased about in the direction of the draft law. The drafters have clearly assessed prior efforts of other countries in the region and further afield and sought to strike a fair balance between competing interests of data subjects and data controllers.”

Our Bill has been endorsed both by a foreign expert and by our local Law Reform Commission. I go quickly to the main elements of the Bill. The Bill has a commencement clause, and this is important. The Minister is empowered to assign different days for different provisions of the Act to come into operation. This is critical because we understand the need for an implementation plan for the Bill. The Bill contains provisions which impose obligations on all persons and entities who process data. This means that these persons and entities must be aware of their obligations and be given time to *put their house in order* before we can enforce the law. We are not unique in this regard. For example, in Jamaica, the Data Protection Act was passed in 2020 but will come into force this year. Of course, we are hoping to not be so protracted in our bringing of the Bill into force. The Bill has territorial reach and will apply, however, to agencies in Guyana as well as outside Guyana once there is a sufficient connection with Guyana. That connection is set out in clause 3 of the Bill which I do not think I need to recite at this hour.

The data controller is a natural person or legal authority, public authority or agency or other body who determines the purpose and means of the personal data. Of course, it goes on to set out the infrastructure that will run this data machinery. The data protection principles are also set out in Part II of the Bill, and these are the safeguards that will govern the collection of data, the use of data, where the data will be stored, for what purpose data will be collected, and the limitations that one would have. They are all set out in the Bill. The Bill also details, in a comprehensive way, the process that will be employed in the accumulation of data and it highlights concepts such as lawfulness of the exercise. So, you can only collect a person's data for a lawful reason. The process that you use to do so must be fair and it must be transparent. The Bill sets out all of the mechanisms that will ensure lawfulness, fairness and transparency.

As expected, an important component of the Bill is the consent of the data subject. Naturally, consent would be an imperative ingredient of any undertaking that involves the personal information of subjects in a free society. A large part of the Bill details how consent is to be obtained from the data subject. This consent, also, will be granted only when the data subject is satisfied that the data will be used for a lawful process, will be obtained transparently and fairly, and will be adequately safeguarded once collected. Of course, they must be satisfied that it is going to be used for legitimate purposes. Of course, there are instances where consent will not be required and these are laid out in the Bill as well, very carefully. In the same way that the Constitution limits the fundamental rights and freedoms that we all enjoy as citizens – because they are not absolute rights – in the same way the Bill limits the right of the data subject to restrain use of the data or to refuse to participate in the data collection process. Those exceptions are also set out in the Bill and, once those exceptions are satisfied, then one's consent really does not matter. Those are very clearly defined and set out. There is also, of course, a right of correction of data, a right of erasure if the data collected is no longer valid or there is a change of data or there is an error committed or because of a change, the data collected is now inaccurate. For all of those things, the Bill allows for a rectification of that register.

The Bill also speaks to a right to data portability. So, once the data is in one platform, it can be used or transferred to other platforms, of course, based upon the mechanisms and procedures set out in the Bill. There is always, at every stage, a right to object and there are certain categories of data or certain circumstances when the data is required when one will not have that right to object.

The Bill also provides, as all Bills of this type do, allowance for cross-border data transfer and it sets out the circumstances where that is to be done. That is done right now. We have had cross-border sharing of data for a very long time now. I know when I say these things, it can excite all kinds of misgivings in the minds of people, but these things happen already. We are simply now putting a framework in place that will protect it from being abused and will streamline it in a regulatory framework to which all can refer so there is certainty, and it now has legitimacy. As I said earlier, there is a category of exemptions that are set out in the Bill and there are a series of offences created by the Bill if there is misuse/abuse of data collecting or if one gives wrong data knowingly or falsifies data in the exercise.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, there is an elaborate structure, which is headed by a commissioner, established in the Bill. Below the commissioner are data processors and data protection officers. These are all persons who are going to be appointed by this data commissioner and they will manage the machinery across the country. The data commissioner has powers to review the work of the data processor and those under him. They have to answer to him administratively and he has certain powers over them. Most importantly, this is an office holder who is appointed by the President, and he can only be removed upon grounds set out in the Bill and they are akin to grounds upon which a judge is removable from office. There is a heavy security of tenure in the holder of this office. I say that to emphasise that this is going to be an office holder who will be performing a very impartial role and who would be the guardian of data in this country. Therefore, the person ought not to be subject to interference or undue interference from politicians, *et cetera*, as this person is an independent or quasi-independent office holder and has the requisite security of tenure. Of course, the Bill provides how this system is going to be funded, *et cetera*.

I do not want to detain us unnecessarily here this morning but to say that Guyana, by this Bill, will now be joining a large number of countries, not only across the Caribbean but across the globe, in putting in place a legislative framework that will allow for the legitimate accumulation, use, transferral, storage and update of data to be used in electronic and digital transactions. We are, as I said at the commencement, transitioning into e-governance from a manual structure, which has existed. And we now have to prepare every aspect of our governmental machinery as well as the private sector infrastructure to allow for this digital, electronic transformation to take place as we

join the rest of the world in this age of information and technology. With those few remarks, Mr. Speaker, I commend this Bill to the House. I thank you. [*Applause*]

7.18 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, AG and Minister of Legal Affairs. I now call on the Hon. Member...

Mr. Ramjattan: Could I be.... I noticed that my name was not on the list, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: The next person I have is Ms. Walton-Desir. So, Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, you can proceed.

Mr. Ramjattan: I just would like to state that we on this side of the House do support this Bill and the other Bill, which is the Digital Identity Card Bill. Consumers should have transparency and control over what is being done with their data. From a reading of the Bill, I must tell you that I am not very *au fait* with all these data protection laws and so on. I have spoken to the learned Attorney General and he has indicated to me the pattern is out of the European Union (EU). From my readings, indeed, the European Union has a modern data protection legislative arrangement that is even superior to that of the Americans who have advanced. So, with my shortcomings on the sector, as it were, I would like to say, officially for the record, that indeed, we support this and, of course, the next one, the Digital Identity Card Bill.

I just want to make this comment. This has been almost a grievous injury – staying here from 10.00 a.m. yesterday right up to 7.15 a.m. We must not allow this self-infliction. What I urge – especially from the Members of the Government – is that we have more sittings between 2.00 p.m. to about 8.00 p.m. or 9.00 p.m. maximum so that we do not harm ourselves with this elongated period of no sleep. To that extent, I urge that this does not happen again. We must have more sittings of the National Assembly so that we can avoid this. With those few words and the support that we have given to the two Bills, I will take my leave, and so would my colleague, Mr. Patterson. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan. I will respond to your comment regarding the length of the sitting, just as I did to the Leader of the Opposition. We have Chief Whips and sometimes the injury is self-inflicted. For the Petroleum Activities Bill, we

started at 11.38 p.m. on 9th of August, and we completed the presentations at 6.26 a.m. on 10th August. We started the consideration of Financial Paper No. 3 at 10.30 a.m. and completed that – including about two and a half hours of breaks – just before 11.00 p.m. The Chief Whips will have to meet because during the consideration of the Financial Paper and the debate on the Petroleum Activities Bill, there was so much irrelevance, lack of preparation and repetition. If I had used the guillotine, then you would have heard how biased the Speaker was. It is all of us. If there is a lot of business to be done, we have to see how we can get through them most efficiently. Thank you very much. I have on my list, the Hon. Member, the Minister of Home Affairs, Mr. Benn. Is he off, Hon. Teixeira?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, we are withdrawing all of our speakers.

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

Mr. Nandlall (replying): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I want to thank the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, for his brief remarks and for his support. I ask, without further delay, that the Bill be read for a second time.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Clause 1

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Chairman, if I may, we have one minor amendment.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, let me conclude clause 1, please.

Mr. Nandlall: Very well.

Clause 1 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Attorney General, we have an amendment proposed by?

Mr. Nandlall: Yes, Sir. The amendment has been circulated. I ask that we move a motion to pass the amendment.

Amend the definition of “sensitive personal data” as follows-

(a) by inserting after paragraph (j) the following paragraph-

“(k)health record;”; and

(b) by renumbering the current paragraph (k) as paragraph (1)

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I propose the question that the amendment, as submitted by the Hon. Prime Minister and moved by the Hon. Attorney General with his permission, stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Nandlall: It was done by the Hon. Prime Minister, Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips, Sir.

Amendment put and carried.

Clause 2, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 3 to 106

Clauses 3 to 106, as printed, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported with amendments, read a third and passed as amended.

Digital Identity Card Bill 2023 – Bill No. 15/2023

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the establishment of a Registry for the collection of identity data of citizens fourteen years and over and noncitizens, including, skilled nationals of a Caribbean Community State and for the issuance of Digital Identity Cards containing digital identity data that were collected to facilitate electronic governance and to enhance government and other services and for related matters.”

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

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I rise to speak on this Bill, which stands in the name of the Hon. Prime Minister, Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips, who is not with us. I did so in relation to the Data Protection Bill as well, but I omitted to say so for the record. I hope that we can correct it.

A digital identity card has been in the public domain for quite some time now. A few months ago, Members would recall that our Government entered a contract with a company called Veridos Identity Solutions, a company out of Mexico owned by the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and a company out of the United Arab Emirates (UAE). They have been producing cards of this type for countries across the globe. Again, this is another fundamental step that our Government is taking in the direction of digitising business in the public sector. Naturally, it will have an impact in the private sector and also move our Central Government systems into an electronic and digital mode. An important indicator in today's world is the ease of doing business. In fact, the World Bank now uses that as an indicator by which countries, governance and public services are measured, and countries are ranked. Guyana has been pursuing various initiatives across the public sector spectrum intended and designed to make the conduct of business easier, in particular in relation to the Central Government and the State apparatus. Also, with the advent of our oil and gas sector and the commercial expansion taking place in our country, the growth of our economy, and the influx of foreign investors and foreigners, we need to protect our citizens, we need to protect our systems and we need to enhance national security. All of these objectives are intended to be addressed with the advent of this card. This card will tie in smoothly with the data protection law that we just passed. So, we will have, in due time, a digital reservoir of personal information from which we can draw as a country to satisfy any data requirements.

7.33 a.m.

The card will draw from that pool. The Bill that is before us is to create the legal framework and the legal infrastructure that will govern the issuance, the operationalisation, the efficacy, and the use of the card. That is what the Bill does, essentially. It lays out, clause by clause, how that will be done. Countries across the world, as I have indicated, have been using this card for a long time. If I can make quick reference, the United States of America that has been using the Social Security card since 1936. In India, they use a card called the Aadhaar card. There are many countries that I

have listed here that are using a card. This card simply will be a card that will contain a chip that will host certain basic information of the citizen. A unique identification (ID) number will be generated by the provider of the card and will be assigned to each citizen. That number will be unique to that particular citizen. Basic biometric and biographic data with a pictorial representation of the citizen will be on the card. The card will have, by a chip, the ability to access peculiar details of the citizen wherever the card is presented. Not only will it be an ID card, but it will be a key to open the personal data file of every citizen, wherever that data is kept or wherever that citizen would like to transact business. [Dr. Anthony: Your personal data.] Yes, your personal data. You go with that card to the GRA, for example, you present it, and all your tax information will come up, your driver's licence, and all documents issued by the GRA. All information the GRA holds on your behalf or for you will be accessed by that card. If you go to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), it would be the same thing. Your NIS number and everything else, whatever service the NIS offers, you will be able to access by that card. You could go government department by government department, and you will be able to access all government services with the use of that one card. So, you do not have to duplicate it. It will also have other information such as your passport information, *et cetera*.

At the private sector level, the same thing will apply. If you go to the bank, all of your banking information, *et cetera*, the bank will be able to access by the use of that card. You do not have to walk with many different cards, *et cetera*. It is expected that the card will be issued to Guyanese across the country who are 14 years and over. There is a structure that will be established that will handle or manage the issuance and monitoring and distribution of the card right across Guyana. Every citizen will be compelled to participate in this process because the card is going to be a national medium by which one will be able to interact commercially and in the public sector as well. How to register for the card is laid down in the Bill. You will have to produce your source documents – your birth certificate, your national ID card, or your passport – as the case may be. The process is very akin to the process one has to undergo to register on the national registration database under the National Registration Act. Centres will be established right across the country so that citizens can register easily. Once you are issued with that card, you will be allowed to update your biographic information that will be on the face of the card itself. If there are any changes within the data system, those changes will be made, and the card stays with you until you die. Eventually, it is hoped that the number that will be assigned when we have the system up and

running will be a unique number that will attach to all of your documents. That is the long-term plan, but for the time being, you will still maintain your various numbers. Your pension book number will remain the same, your NIS number will remain the same, your Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN) will remain the same. [Dr. Anthony: Your health records.] Your health records, sorry.

The health record is an important component of this. As I indicated when I was speaking about the Data Protection Bill, we are digitising your health records. When you turn up at any health facility and they have your data stored, this is the card that will allow them to know who you are, what your medical history is, and whatever medical data they require of you to offer you whatever treatment you seek. Another aspect of the Bill is that it deals with non-Guyanese who are legitimately in Guyana working. We anticipate that we are going to have a large influx of foreign workers in Guyana. The trend has begun, and from all indications, it will only intensify going forward. This card will ensure that we are able to monitor... All persons who are coming to Guyana to work will have a card of this type that will enable them also, once they are legitimately here, to access the same services to which I made reference. Of course, the card will expire once their work permits expire. Unless that is extended, once they are found with that card or they try to use that card, immediately the immigration authority and the other relevant agencies will be notified that the person is not legal in Guyana. There are a number of categories of persons who are exempted from work permits, as they are exempted under our current laws. For example, under the revised Treaty of Chaguaramas, there are all the categories of professionals who do not require work permits throughout the Caribbean. Naturally, they would be exempted because that is our current law; we are not changing anything. It is just to replace that work permit document now with a card and to put the infrastructure in place so that we can monitor people across the country to determine their status in the country. Lastly, this card, while it will be a national identification card, will not be a substitute for *the* national ID card. It will be another form of ID, but it will not replace the current national ID which is issued by the Commissioner of Registration or the Chief Elections Officer (CEO) of the Elections Commission (GECOM). That process remains untouched by this Bill, and I want to assure of that.

We will have to take some time to get that infrastructure built out and to get all the platforms ready to build the administrative structure. The people who have to do the cards have to set up the

platforms across the country. The reason this Bill is so urgent is because we have to get this in place before the infrastructure begins to be built. We have contractual obligations that are time-bound. That is why we had to, with haste, try to complete this Bill this morning, so that we do not breach our contractual obligations under the contract we have with the Veridos Identity Solutions company. With those few remarks, I commend that this Bill be read a second time. I thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Attorney General. Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, proceed.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As you know, I was not slated to speak, but on behalf of this side of the House, I would like to say, just as my colleague indicated before, that we do support this Bill. While we support this initiative, just as the Attorney General mentioned, currently, we have several different cards with several different numbers. For the Guyana Revenue Authority, there is the TIN and there is the driver's licence, and there is the national ID. We, on this side of the House, would be interested to see how it will be implemented and rolled out, in particular in the hinterland regions. There is the connectivity gap in those regions. I heard the Attorney General say that there would be centres. We would like to see that. We hope the implementation of this card does not contribute further to the divide between urban centres on the coast and the hinterland.

One matter which I do think that persons will be concerned about is the security of these cards. It has all of one's biodata on it. What if it is lost or stolen? Currently, if you have an automated teller machine (ATM) card, you use your PIN number before they can access it. Persons would be concerned that if these electronic cards are misplaced, it must be such that some persons cannot access all their data. With those few concerns and those few comments, I would like to say that we support the Bill. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson. Hon. Attorney General, Mr. Nandlall, you may proceed.

Mr. Nandlall (replying): Sir, I would like to thank the Hon. Member for expressing his support for this Bill. Permit me to assure the Hon. Member that the centres are going to be established across the country. If I may read clause 3(3) quickly:

“(3) The Commissioner may establish in every administrative region of Guyana one or more regional centres, including mobile centres, as may be necessary for the collection of data for Digital Identity Cards and the distribution of the Digital Identity Cards issued by the Commissioner.”

It would be countrywide. The other issue the Hon. Member raised was security; it is a valid one. It has, first of all, on the face of it, only your basic information. Nobody will see anything other than that. If you lose the card, for example, the card cannot be activated.

7.48 a.m.

First of all, there is a photograph so anybody would know that that is not... If I go and present Mr. Ramjattan’s card, right there, they will see a different photograph. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] I know that; I concede. You are far better looking than me at this hour of the morning. You will see that there is a photograph there. Importantly, it will have your fingerprint, all 10 fingers, two thumb and fingers, into the database. You have to be there to present the card and they will run your fingerprint. That is one of the several security mechanisms that I can answer you right away on. There is a whole series of mechanisms. That is why the Bill has a provision to allow the Minister to make regulations, to bring in even greater security features, as we begin to unfold the process.

The other issue that I want to raise, I cannot remember it right now. But I assure you that it is going to be secured; the card is going to be secured. It has been used and that is why we chose a company of this reputation and standing. I have a number of countries here that this company has applied the card to – Member States of the European Union, Bolivia, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Zambia, Nigeria, Argentina, Peru, Ecuador, Mexico and Canada. This company has supplied cards of this type to them. The Eastern Caribbean, a couple of years ago were going to implement these cards for the Eastern Caribbean but due to financing they could not complete the process.

Prime Minister Mia Motley has announced publicly that Barbados will soon move towards the implementation of a citizen card of this type. The Caribbean is moving in this direction. Of course, once again, like we do in many respects, we are leading the charge in the Caribbean. This is another initiative of ours that we will be leading on. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Clauses 1 to 19

Clauses 1 to 19, as printed, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Assembly resumed.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, that concludes our business for the 67th Sitting of the National Assembly. I take this opportunity to wish you well during the Recess, so that you can come back recharged and ready for more sessions, even such as these. To the staff, let me thank you all for bearing with us during this particular sitting. Many of our staff would be going on leave during this time. Thank you very much everyone. Hon. Attorney General, Acting Prime Minister.

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Speaker, permit me to thank you, thank the Hon. Members but most importantly to thank the Clerk and the staff of the National Assembly for a very long and tiring session, the staff of the Arthur Chung Conference Centre, the security, the kitchen staff and all those people who provided us with the wonderful services that kept us alive at this marathon session, and of course the media, having been with us since yesterday morning from 10.00 a.m. I would ask that the Assembly be adjourned ...

Mr. Speaker: Before you adjourn, I just want to ask the Deputy Speaker if she would like to say a few words.

Dr. Kissoon: Thank you, everyone, especially to the supporting staff, Mr. Speaker, the Clerk of the National Assembly. I think we were able to accomplish a lot for the people of Guyana. I wish you all well, going forward for the break.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Deputy Speaker.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to a date *sine die*.”

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly stands adjourned to a date to be fixed.

Adjourned accordingly at 7.56 a.m.