



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*

70TH Sitting

Tuesday, 19TH December, 2023

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

Assembly convened at 10.09 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

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*Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P., Speaker of the National Assembly

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

Peoples Progressive Party Civic (38)

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Hon. Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark A. Phillips, M.S.S., M.P., Prime Minister

Vice-President (1)

Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P., Vice-President (Absent)

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

Hon. Mohabir A. Nandlall, S.C., M.P., Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs

Senior Ministers (17)

Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P. (Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni), Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip

Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica), Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation

*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P., Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance

Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P., Minister of Public Works

***Non-Elected Member**

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Minister of Education

*Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P., Minister of Home Affairs

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Minister of Human Services and Social Security

Hon. Charles S. Ramson, M.P., Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport

Hon. Sonia S. Parag, M.P., Minister of the Public Service

Junior Ministers (4)

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Hon. Deodat Indar, M.P., Minister within the Ministry of Public Works

Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P., Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development

Hon. Warren K.E. McCoy, M.P., Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister

***Non-Elected Member**

Other Members (14)

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Hon. Alister S. Charlie, M.P. (Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo)

Hon. Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P. (Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne)

Hon. Sanjeev J. Datadin, M.P.

Hon. Seepaul Narine, M.P.

Hon. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.

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

Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P. (Absent – on Leave)

Hon. Faizal M. Jaffarally, M.P. (Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice)

Hon. Dr. Tandika S. Smith, M.P. (Region No. 3 - Essequibo Islands/West Demerara)

Hon. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.

*Hon. Sarah Browne, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs (Absent – on leave)

*Hon. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture (Absent- on leave)

Hon. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.

Hon. Nandranie Coonjah, M.P. (Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam)

MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)

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Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.

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Hon. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.

Hon. Volda A. Lawrence, M.P. (Absent)

***Non-Elected Member**

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Hon. Christopher A. Jones, M.P., Opposition Chief Whip

Hon. Vinceroy H. Jordan, M.P. (Region No. 5 – Mahaica/Berbice)

Hon. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P.

Hon. Coretta A. McDonald, A.A., M.P. (Virtual-Participation)

Hon. Deonarine Ramsaroop, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)(Absent)

Hon. Vincent P. Henry, M.P.

Hon. Dr. Karen Cummings, M.P.

Hon. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P.

Hon. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.

Hon. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P.

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Hon. Beverley Alert, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)

Hon. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P. (Region No. 8 –Potaro/Siparuni)

Hon. Devin L. Sears, M.P. (Region No. 10 – Upper-Demerara/Upper-Berbice)

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

Hon. Dr. Asha Kisson, M.P., Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly (Virtual Participation)

Officers (2)

Mr. Sherlock E. Isaacs, A.A., Clerk of the National Assembly

Ms. Hermina Gilgeours, Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Rulings of the Speaker

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, at least one occasion, I recall that I had to draw attention to the criticisms of the Rulings of the Speaker by Members of Parliament. I drew attention to one of the Rulings by the Speaker, Hari Narayen Ramkarran. It is at the back of your Standing Orders. He said that the comments and the Rulings of the Speaker are tantamount to questioning the authority of Parliament.

10.12 a.m.

At the last sitting, in spite of my conversation with the Opposition Chief Whip, he rose on the question of a Definite Matter of Urgent Public Importance which was raised by the Leader of the Opposition. I commented on that. Sometimes, one wants to question the type and level of life of Members of Parliament (MPs). That afternoon at the People's Parliament at Stabroek Market, the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes, said, 'So, imagine today in Parliament we brought what we call a motion which is just two pieces of paper, saying the things we want to discuss. And believe it or not, once again, the Speaker decided we must not even have a discussion. Now what is the point of having Parliament?' Hon. Members, I am speaking.

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

I will say again, as Speaker Ralph Ramkaran has stated, if you have a criticism of the Ruling of the Speaker, bring a motion. I will repeat, again, in a particular parliament, and from most parliaments that derive their standing orders and rules from the Westminster system, if the Speaker gets angry with you, he does not allow you to speak period, outside of the other remedies within the Standing Orders. So, I urge, again, Hon. Members, to please be careful as you comment on decisions that the Speaker makes.

Birthday Greetings

Hon. Members, I think we have a very important day today and we are starting with congratulations to the Hon. Minister of Health who is celebrating another milestone. Happy birthday on behalf of the Parliament, my family and I, Minister Anthony. Thank you, very much.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following papers and reports were laid:

- (1) Annual Reports of the Indigenous People's Commission for the years 2017 to 2022

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

- (2) (i) The Ministers, Members of the National Assembly and Special Offices (Emoluments) Order 2023 – No. 75 of 2023.

- (ii) The Constitutional Offices (Remuneration of Holders) Order 2023 – No. 76 of 2023.

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

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[Written Replies]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there are 11 questions on today's Order Paper. Questions number 1 to 5 are for Written Replies and questions 6 to 11 are for Oral Replies. For Written Replies, question 1 in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, and is for the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, *[inaudible]* I have submitted *[inaudible]* yesterday *[inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we are not at that stage as yet.

Ms. Walton-Desir: You said Oral Questions Without Notice, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I said Question on Notice. Is that right Clerk?

Clerk of the National Assembly [Mr. Isaacs]: *[Inaudible]*

ORAL QUESTION WITHOUT NOTICE

Mr. Speaker: Sorry, it was Oral Question Without Notice. Thank you. We could go back Hon. Member. Hon. Members, it is Oral Questions Without Notice. Sorry. Under this head, there is a question by the Hon. Member for Minister Todd, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, who is not here as yet so what we will do is wait until the Hon. Minister is here and we will revert to that question. Can we do that, Mr. Isaacs?

Mr. Isaacs: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: I think the Minister has an urgent engagement and he has asked to be excused for a short while, but he is coming today. Thanks, Hon. Member. I will allow the question.

[Written Replies]

So, questions for Written Replies. Question number 1 is in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, and is for the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance. Question number 2 is in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, and is for the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance. Questions number 3 and 4 are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, and are for the Hon. Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. Question number 5 is in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, and is for the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs. The answers to all of these questions have been received and have been circulated in accordance with our Standing Orders.

(1) Pensioners benefitting from Water and Electricity Subsidies

Ms. Ferguson:

(a) Could the Hon. Minister provide the National Assembly with a disaggregated list, as per region, of the number of pensioners who are benefitting from both water and electricity subsidies as of May, 2023?

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance [Dr. Singh]: (a) It would be recalled that in 2015, the then APNU/AFC Government callously removed the electricity and water subsidies from pensioners, thereby reducing the disposable income of this vulnerable section of society. This unconscionable act resulted in the loss of over \$200 million in water subsidy and \$350 million in electricity subsidy to our pensioners annually. Please see below a disaggregation by region, of the number of pensioners that benefited from water subsidies as of May 2023.

PENSIONERS BENEFITTED FROM WATER SUBSIDY AS OF MAY 2023	
Region	Number of Pensioners
Region 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam	1,978
Region 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara	5,217

Region 4 – Demerara/Mahaica	13,238
Region 5 – Mahaica/Berbice	2,939
Region 6 – East Berbice/ Corentyne	4,708
Region 7 – Cuyuni/ Mazaruni	300
Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo	13
Region 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice	1,530
Grand Total	29,923

Ms. Ferguson: (b) Could the Hon. Minister also inform the National Assembly what is the total cost per month this measure has on the treasury?

Dr. Singh: In the case of the water subsidy, the cost to the treasury for the month of May 2023 was \$21 million. The total cost of this initiative is estimated at \$250 million per annum.

In the case of electricity, it should be noted, the PPP/C Government has been continuously absorbing the impact of high fuel prices on the cost of services provided by electricity companies, thereby ensuring that it does not translate into high electricity bills to all customers. To this end, Government has made over \$10 billion in capital investment to the Guyana Power and Light Inc. over the period 2020 to 2023.

(2) Men on Mission Project

Ms. Ferguson: During the consideration of budget 2023 estimates, the sum of \$500M was approved under the Office of the President for "**Men on Mission**".

- (1) Could the Hon. Minister provide the National Assembly with a list, as per region, of the number of projects, sums expended per project, and beneficiaries from the expenditure, as of June 17, 2023?
- (2) Can the Hon. Minister inform the National Assembly what is the balance of the sum as of June 17, 2023?

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: With regard to questions 1 and 2, no moneys were expended from the \$500M allocated and approved in the 2023 Budget under the Office of the President between the months of 1st February to 17th June, 2023.

(3) Mechanisms in Law used by the Government for the disbursement of subvention to Municipalities

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Can the Hon. Minister inform this House what mechanisms in Law were used by the Ministry/Central Government to ascertain whether a municipality qualifies for subvention and how much subvention, by cash transfer, each municipality is entitled to?

Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Persaud]: The mechanisms in Law used by the Ministry/Central Government to ascertain whether a municipality qualifies for subvention and how much subvention, by cash transfer each municipality is entitled to the Approval Estimates of the Public Sector and the Fiscal Transfers Act 2013.

(4) Names of Neighbourhood Democratic Councils that received Subventions from the Government

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Can the Hon. Minister inform this House of the names of each Neighbourhood Democratic Council that received subvention (in the form of cash transfer) from the Ministry of Local Government, for the years 2020, 2021, 2022, and up to June 2023, and state the amount that was received, per year, by each of the Council?

Please see Appendix I for reply.

(5) The Number of Business Visas issued

Ms. Walton-Desir: Can the Minister indicate the number of business visas issued for the period 1st September, 2020 to 30th June, 2023 and the total number per nationality?

Please see Appendix II for reply.

[For Oral Replies]

Mr. Speaker: For Oral Replies, question number 6, the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, can proceed. Is the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, not here? Mr. Jones, I have not been able to monitor if she is online, I just got bumped off.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: That too is what I am wondering, if she is online. This is because I am trying to reach her on the phone. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Come on, let us be a little patient with each other. I am just asking the Information Technology (IT) people if there is a problem with the online/hybrid platform. I am online now, and we have the Hon. Member, Mr. Devin Sears; the Hon. Leader of the Opposition; the Hon. Member, Mr. Shurwayne Holder; and the Hon. Member, Dr. Asha Kisson. Those are the ones that I am seeing online at the moment. Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, the Parliament has been tolerantly waiting for your presence so that we can invite you – yes, she is – to ask your first question.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, even before I do so, that means that I am really a special person.

Mr. Speaker: You are. And you can tell them that we decided to wear grey today.

Ms. Ferguson: Pardon?

Mr. Speaker: You can tell the House we decided to wear grey.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay. Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker, for giving me the floor. Before I do so, allow me to publicly register in the House my deepest condolences to our Colleague, Dr. Jennifer Westford, on the passing of her husband. Also, to extend my deepest condolences to the families of the other deceased and to those who had survived. Let me just extend my deepest condolences to the relatives. **[Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)* All right. It is Christmas.**

Mr. Speaker, also allow me the opportunity to extend happy holidays to my beautiful Colleagues in this House. May we remember the reason for the season is Jesus.

Mr. Speaker: Amen.

(6) Mechanism in place to facilitate a 100% Census Survey

Ms. Ferguson: Question number 6 is in my name – Mechanism in place to facilitate a 100% census survey. This question is for the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh. The Guyana National Population and Housing Census 2022 was launched on August, 22, 2022, and the National Assembly approved the sum of \$2B via Supplementary Paper on August, 8, 2022.

Can the Hon. Senior Minister inform the National Assembly whether arrangements are in place to facilitate or accommodate persons who were not at home, at the time visits were made by enumerators?

Dr. Singh: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me start by thanking the Hon. Member for tabling the question she did and, in so doing, for drawing attention to a matter of extremely high national importance and an exercise that is of tremendous and immeasurable significance. That is to say of course, the completion of the current round of the national census.

The Hon. Member inquiries about arrangements that are in place to facilitate... Well, the preamble to the question reminds us about the launching of the census, *et cetera*. The particular question before us, currently, which is indeed one of a suite of three, I think, asks about arrangements in place to facilitate or accommodate persons who were not at home at the time visits were made by enumerators. In posing that question, the Hon. Member identifies, indeed, an issue that has in fact posed a particular challenge to the enumerators and, by extension, to the completion of the census. Let me in response share the following information. First of all, to say, enumeration is done at a household level. By that I mean the following: that a single mature member of the household may provide responses for other members who are not present at the time. So, one may conceivably be a part of a household of say five. Even if four members of the household are not at home but an adult member of the household is, that adult member of the household may answer on behalf of the entire household. That in fact has been observed very commonly across the entire country where typically a single adult member of the household would be interviewed and would answer questions for all the members of the household. That is the first point I want to make.

10.27 a.m.

The second point I want to make is that, where no one is present in the household at the time of the initial visit by an enumerator, the enumerator will make two return visits. In fact, I should add that the enumerators who, on the initial visit to the household, are unable to make contact, such enumerators are required to leave a call back card. A slip of paper and many of us would have received such slips, to inform the household of the visit and the date and time of the next visit.

Subsequent visits are made – at least two or in some cases three return visits are made. The area supervisor would also make a follow-up visit to confirm non-availability or refusal of persons to participate. In addition, Sir, recognising based on alternative sources of information and administrative data that there are indeed households that are yet to be fully enumerated, the National Bureau of Statistics has also provided an online

feedback portal, a form online, to facilitate anybody who has not been enumerated, to provide their contact information with the objective of scheduling a follow-up visit. That feedback form is accessible on the National Bureau of Statistics' website. Indeed, citizens or households can also send a WhatsApp message to specific WhatsApp numbers which have been published and which I will take advantage of the opportunity presented to me today to repeat. Those WhatsApp numbers are: +592-701-8700 and +592-701-8701. A message sent to those numbers would trigger a communication with the National Bureau of Statistics with a view to enumeration of households that have not yet been counted and would like to be counted.

Additionally, Sir, the National Bureau of Statistics has contacted a number of companies and agencies and have done outreaches to a number of public places. We would have witnessed many of these advertised in the media and on social media, all with the aim of identifying persons through additional channels of communication; identifying persons who believe that they were not counted and schedule interviews for them, should their non-enumeration be confirmed. Furthermore, Sir, we have been accessing, where available, administrative data, such as data from utility companies, that, of course, would include a record of all the households with a utility connection, in order to crosscheck the enumerated population to identify households and persons who may not have been enumerated. In addition, a number of large agencies have been contacted that typically have large databases or large populations of employees, to provide through those agencies an opportunity for persons to also indicate that they have not yet been enumerated.

Furthermore, Sir, verification teams and mobile enumeration teams are still in formation and deployment and are still working in the fields, particularly in hard-to-reach areas and in areas where we know they are based on the administrative data. We know that there are households that have not yet been counted. They are still in fact working to enumerate persons who were not initially enumerated. A call centre has been established to assist those mobile teams to reach out to those persons we have identified and there are persons who have not yet been enumerated. Let me say, Sir, that efforts will continue. The team from the National Bureau of Statistics is continuing to work diligently because like the Hon. Member, presumably from the posing of the question and the crafting of the question, we would like to ensure that we have maximum coverage in the census. So, the work continues to ensure that we are able to minimise and, as far as possible, eliminate any instance of non-coverage or of non-enumeration. Thank you, very much, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Minister. Question number seven, Hon. Member Ms. Annette Ferguson, you may proceed.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, even before we move to question number seven, I have a follow-up for the Hon. Member. I am happy to hear of the extensive response given by the Hon. Member, about Facebook and the engagement of other entities to support the National Bureau of Statistics in its efforts to have each and every eligible individual enumerated – but how many Guyanese are aware of the online services that are being offered and the engagement of the Bureau with other entities and stuff like that? This is because I guess if we are to do a random sample in this House, many of our Colleagues are hearing such information for the first time. Perhaps, rather than the Hon. Member preferring a response, I would wish to put a suggestion and recommendation to the Hon. Member, we need to do a wider PR and get our messaging out there so that we can get persons enumerated. Is that right? That would just be a suggestion and recommendation to the Hon. Member. I now move to the seventh question standing in my name Mr. Speaker, the question is for the Hon. Member...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, let us give the Hon. Member an opportunity to respond to your last statement.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. It was not really my intention to respond because I think it was a suggestion that was made. Indeed, it was a suggestion that is very much already in implementation, I could not agree more, Sir. Thank you very much.

(7) Number of Enumerators and Stipend paid for Census 2022

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, for agreeing with me. The Guyana National Population and Housing Census 2022 was launched on the 22nd August 2022, and the National Assembly approved the sum of \$2 B via supplementary paper on August 8th, 2022.

The question now to the Hon. Member: Could the Hon. Senior Minister inform the National Assembly of the total number of enumerators and the stipend paid to each enumerator for Census 2022. Thank you.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, through you, Sir, I am pleased to inform this honourable House and, in particular, the Member who posed the question before us that, in the primary phase of the census, a total of 2,314 enumerators were employed for the core enumeration period. I should add, Sir, that, in addition to the enumerators, there were other categories of staff hired, these included Supervisors, Area Co-ordinators, Regional Co-ordinators, amongst others which brought to a total 2,811 temporary census personnel who were recruited for the core enumeration period in connection with the census. Enumerators were paid for the core eight-week period of enumeration. They were paid a retainer fee, which was a flat rate paid to all enumerators. They were paid a performance related fee tied to numbers of questionnaires and other activities conducted, such as updating of maps, *et cetera*. The retainer fee for the period was \$80,000 and, like I indicated, Sir, the core period of eight

weeks of enumeration. Additionally, a fee was also paid for performance. Incentive was also paid for household questionnaire completed, individual questionnaire completed and updating of map. Those fees, in fact, differ depending on whether the enumerator was working in a coastal region, in an interior region or a riverine community. The enumerators were also paid a travelling and a telephone allowance. Sir, thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Is there any supplementary, Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson?

Ms. Ferguson: No, Sir. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Okay, then we can move on to question eight.

(8) Projection date of National Census Exercise

Ms. Ferguson: To the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance... Perhaps, Mr. Speaker, with your leave, rather than rehashing the preamble, in the interest of time, could I move straight to the question?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you, very much. Could the Hon. Senior Minister inform the National Assembly when the 2022 census exercise is likely to be completed and the final report laid in the National Assembly? Thank you.

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

Dr. Singh: Thank you, very much, Sir. Let me profess my answer by saying very clearly that we share the concern for a timely completion of the census. I want to assure the Hon. Member on the other side that the Government's position is firm that we would like a timely completion of the census, just as I am sure the Hon. Member would like. We are, I believe, fully aligned in terms of our objective in relation to a timely completion of the census as it is reflected in the question posed.

Let me also say that I am certainly mindful of the fact that we had anticipated a preliminary report to have been completed by now. The Bureau of Statistics has, on a regular basis, been keeping me informed on the progress of their field work and the challenges they have been encountering. These challenges are, I do not believe, unknown to all of us. They have included various episodes of inclement weather, competing national events – including around the time of the census the big period of cricket which meant a lot of persons were out of their

homes. There were a number of instances of respondents' unavailability or... I would use the word 'unavailability' for want of a better word. The National Bureau of Statistics has been keeping me apprised of the challenges that it has been encountering and we have been consistently maintaining our position that we would like a comprehensively prepared census, one that will be reflective of the required quality and rigor and gives us a comprehensive count and a rich set of data and statistics in relation to our demography.

10.42 a.m.

The latest information available from the Bureau of Statistics is that we should have a preliminary report by the second quarter of 2024. Subsequent to the preparation of that preliminary report by the end of the second quarter of 2024, the Bureau of Statistics will require a further four to six months for the preparation and publication of all reports. I want to conclude my answer by saying – there is no doubt, like the Hon. Member, we would like the census exercise to be completed as quickly as possible. We would also like it to be completed without compromise to its rigor and comprehensiveness. That is the balance and trade-off that must be struck. We welcome any opportunity to draw attention to the census. We welcome any effort to encourage households to ensure that they are counted. In that regard, I believe that the questions proposed by the Hon. Member in this regard certainly contribute to those objectives being met. Thank you, very much.

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

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have a few follow-ups based on what was just shared with us. Even before I go to the follow-ups, I must say that this is a major project that the Government embarked on for \$2 billion. Like any project, you would have an estimated start time and an estimated time of completion. Perhaps, the Hon. Member can share with this National Assembly what was the initial estimated start time. Likewise, what is the initial estimated completion time for this project? I also heard the Hon. Member made reference to getting regular updates from the staff at the Bureau of Statistics and the challenges the Bureau of Statistics faced in terms of inclement weather. Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, we had wonderful weather for 2023. Just a couple of days ago, we started getting rain here, there, and everywhere. So, I would like to find out from the Hon. Member – with you getting these reports of the challenges, what assistance or approach you took to assist the Bureau of Statistics in overcoming its challenges? That is the second question – a follow-up.

Thirdly, you made reference to a preliminary report that is likely to be submitted by the Bureau of Statistics in the second quarter of 2024. Subsequently, it would need an additional four to six months to complete its final

report. My follow-up on this particular answer is: when the preliminary report is made available to you as the subject Minister, will we, the 65 Members of the National Assembly, be previewed to that preliminary report?

You also made reference to liking the question put. You said it would be good if all of us could play our part. You will agree with me, Sir, that we can only play our part providing that we get timely and appropriate information to help disseminate such information to our constituents and have them all to be a part of the process. With all that you have shared – the different collaboration with entities, and the online provisions that the Bureau of Statistics has – can you make these available to the House so that we can assist in the process? Here ends my submission on the supplementary questions that I had. Thank you, very much.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance I think you have four issues to deal with there.

Dr. Singh: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. In answer to the question of whether there was an original work plan with timelines – yes, there was. In answer to the question of what assistance was rendered – in addition to providing whatever resources were required to facilitate the advancement of the census, the Government did and continues to provide whatever resources are required by the Bureau of Statistics to advance the completion of the census. We are quite happy to place reliance on the professionalism of the Bureau of Statistics. The Bureau of Statistics is manned by very capable and competent team members – many of whom have been doing this for a number of years and many of whom are not working on their first census. They are very familiar with the process of preparing these censuses and they have the technical capability to do so. They have access to advice where that is needed.

Let me also make the following point that I am usually very wary of drawing too many regional and international comparisons, but we are, in fact, a part of a regional census cycle. There is a Caribbean Community (CARICOM) context within which the periodic censuses, the once-a-decade censuses, are conducted. Let me say that if one were to look across the region at the other countries in the Caribbean that are a part of this cycle, one will see that they are also conducting censuses very closely aligned to our cycle. One would see, in fact, that the timeline we are working within is not dramatically different from that being experienced by our brothers and sisters across the region.

Thirdly, in relation to the publication and dissemination of any preliminary reports that are produced by the Bureau of Statistics in relation to the national census, I will be guided by precedent and previous practice in relation to this matter. Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Ferguson: I just want to take the Hon. Member back to the first response he gave to the supplementary question on the estimated start and completion times. I heard you respond in the affirmative, but you did not answer the second part of that supplementary question, that is, when was the start date and when is the completion date? You must have dates assigned to time periods. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance, I think you mentioned a cycle.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Sir. Were the Hon. Member to table a written question requesting the original timeline, I would be happy to provide a written response in relation to that. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister. The next person is the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, for question number 9. Hon. Member, you may ask your question.

(9) Skills Gap Analysis of the Local Labour Market

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. After what transpired last week as I attempted to ask questions, I am almost unsure as to whether I should continue along this line, but I will attempt to. I have a question for the supposedly Hon. Minister of Labour. Can the Hon. Minister inform the House whether the Ministry of Labour has conducted a skills-gap analysis of the local labour market at any time between 2020 and 16th June, 2023?

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

Minister of Labour [Mr. Hamilton]: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Presently, we are doing that. Just to reflect that, in five years, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) did not do such.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Hon. Minister state when exactly is this particular analysis likely to be completed and could be shared with the public?

Mr. Hamilton: As soon as necessary possible.

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

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Labour thinks he is cute when he comes up with these answers that really does actually... No, he is not. The reality is that I am not asking these questions on behalf of myself. It would be fitting for the Minister to understand that when he is asked questions, the public requires answers that are not seemingly cute but that could actually give some information that they could work with. Can the Hon. Minister state if there is a timeline they are currently working with for the likely completion of this skills gap analysis?

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

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, the question was answered already. I said, as soon as necessary possible. Again, I reflect, perhaps if you did something, we would not have had to do all that we have to do.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister. We will now go to question number 10. Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley, you have the floor.

(10) Modernisation of the Government Recruitment Agencies

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Can the Hon. Minister state whether there has been any modernisation of the government recruitment agencies to be able to respond to changing trends in the labour market?

Mr. Hamilton: I did not hear the question properly.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: It is written there, Sir. You could have read it. It states, can the Hon. Minister state whether there has been any modernisation of the government recruitment agencies to be able to respond to changing trends in the labour market?

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, I am shocked and flabbergasted. Since March of 2022, the Ministry of Labour launched a job bank. This is a platform that people are using. I can report that hundreds of people have already been hired through the platform. Hundreds of companies are registered free of cost on the platform. Hundreds of employees are registered freely on the platform. So, the fact that a Member of this House is unaware, speaks volumes about the representation that she is giving to the people.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, based on what the Minister said, the modernisation policy is the job bank that he created. That is understood. I will move on to the next question.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, when we are asking a question, we stand to do so. If you want to comment, I will allow the Minister to comment on your comment. So, you assumed and you said based on his answer that

is the modernisation policy. I do not know if the Minister would want to comment on your comment. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Hamilton: If you are moving from a paper-based system to an online platform and an Hon. Member does not even understand that is modernisation, then we have a problem in the National Assembly. It is modernisation – moving from a paper-based system that we had for decades to an online platform. This is a digital and paperless platform. Let me again say that the fact is, what you have now that they never thought about – in every region across Guyana, there are regional labour offices. It is not just a national job bank and relationship with potential employees. It is also being done at the regional level. I reflect again, we must do all of this because the people across there did nothing regarding the matter.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much.

10.57 a.m.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I am happy that my response was able to get the Minister to speak about what he is actually doing. Other than the job bank that he spoke about, is there a modernisation policy that is currently in place or that was implemented?

Mr. Speaker: Minister, I will take the final question on this question. You may respond.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, if we are moving from a Georgetown-based Region 4 activity...and since we came into office in 2020, we have established regional offices in every region. If that is not modernisation, then, what is?

Secondly, as I repeat, if we are moving from a paper-based system, which we have had in this country for decades, to a digital platform, to allow for any citizen who is seeking a job to be on their computer or their phone and put their credentials and certificate up so that employers can pay attention to them...Employers are, similarly by the hundreds, registered on the platform for free. Employees could also register on the platform for free.

Thirdly, it is not just a Georgetown-based Region 4 activity. This is also being done at the regional level. So, the regional officers have that relationship with the businesses and companies in their regions so that they also are participating and allowing for.... At the level of the regions, they can monitor, and they can help people get jobs.

Finally, the Ministry of Labour, through the Central Recruitment and Manpower Agency (CRMA), has been doing training programmes throughout the length and breadth of this country and preparing job seekers via coaching and via counselling. When a Member of Parliament (MP) comes and does not even understand that these things are happening...These are public things that are published every day. Yes, modernisation has happened, and we continue to do that. Finally, before I sit, let me say this: our platform is so good that the labour ministry of Barbados has asked to utilise the platform that we use in Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I am hearing a couple of un-parliamentary words being used. I am also hearing people challenging the Hon. Minister about his knowledge of digital platform. Let me just say that for the past 20 years, a lot of our digital platforms have been associated with the Hon. Minister who was an information technology (IT) expert for a certain group. Please, because this is coming to the next question. When we are going to put these questions, we should arm ourselves with facts. I see the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have a follow-up to the Hon. Minister's response. Could the Hon. Minister, Mr. Hamilton, kindly provide to the House the number of persons who have been utilising these services successfully through the regional offices? My second follow-up is: has there been any collaboration between your Ministry and institutions such as the University of Guyana (UG) and the Government Technical Institute (GTI) and so forth to better facilitate a more proactive system?

Sir, I am asking specifically because the Hon. Minister would appreciate that, while the University of Guyana has students coming out and they have the information readily available, without persons even having to go, we have many graduates of the university out there saying that they are not finding jobs. It would be a very nice activity for your Ministry to collaborate with the University and so forth. More importantly, at the regional level, we are very much aware that the persons who are employed at those regional offices are very politically aligned and so there is no guarantee that there is not going to be bias.

Mr. Speaker: You are making assertions now, and we have three minutes remaining on the question time. You asked two questions, and I will put the two questions to the Hon. Minister.

Ms. Fernandes: Yes, Sir. Thank you.

Mr. Hamilton: Mr. Speaker, again, what the Hon. Member is asking for has already happened. The Ministry of Labour, via CRMA and the Board of Industrial Training (BIT), has been collaborating with the University of Guyana. For that matter, we have established a joint technical committee with the University of Guyana,

and we are working to ensure that people who graduate from the university are exposed to internship and apprenticeship regarding the profession they seek. That is an ongoing process. We have collaboration with the Private Sector Commission (PSC). We have collaboration with the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce and Industry (GCCI). We have collaboration with American Chamber of Commerce of Guyana (AmCham). We have a collaboration with ExxonMobil Guyana. And I can go on and on. To make the point again, since this ministry was re-established by the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government...We must recall that the Ministry of Labour did not exist under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) wide leadership. Therefore, what we have to do and what we are doing is whilst we establish a ministry, we are building structure, and we are giving service. So, yes, we have wide collaboration throughout the length and breadth of Guyana, including with regional chambers.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. We have exhausted the time, but I will give the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, an opportunity to ask question No. 11. I made a comment or intervention about arming ourselves with the facts. Regarding the question on Labour Market Information System, go ahead.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, I think I respect you enough, but I do not understand the insinuations that keep coming sometimes, but I would leave it at that.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, this is not an insinuation.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: It is not an insinuation.

Mr. Speaker: This is a matter of fact. Labour market information system has existed for decades by law in this country.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: We are not talking about law.

Mr. Speaker: It is done annually. I am not insinuating. I speak as an authority, having served in this particular ministry and having dealt with annual labour market information systems. This is no insinuation. Now, you still have 30 seconds to ask the question and I will put it to the Minister. Go ahead.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: (*Inaudible*).

Mr. Speaker: I am disappointed in you, having served in a particular Ministry dealing with (*inaudible*) and do not know about this. Go ahead.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Excuse me. Mr. Speaker, I was not going to respond to you because as the Speaker, I feel as though you have the right to say [*inaudible*], but do not start with that. You do not know where I was going with this question, you do not know what I know about the question and so you cannot decide that you could say what I do and do not know about...

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Mr. Speaker: I want to hear from the Hon. Member.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: No, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: I have not heard you yet.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: As the Speaker, you need to know your place as well. I am done.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Labour? Thank you. Hon. Members, that consumes the time allocated for Questions for Oral Replies.

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

Establishment of a multi-party, multi-stakeholder task force

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I did receive a request, moved by the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, for a matter of definite urgent, public importance. That matter dealt with the issue of our border controversy with Venezuela.

Mr. Duncan: (*Inaudible*).

Mr. Speaker: I will repeat again: Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, you could have brought something under this particular head, too, if you wanted to speak. Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, a matter under this head has to deal with definite, urgent and important. The matter before us has been in existence since September. The issue of urgency does not satisfy the criteria. Also, our Standing Orders deal with issues that are similar. I want to quote from the rulings of former Speaker Ramkarran when a similar matter was brought before him. Outside of the urgency issue, it has to deal with the issue of a similar matter that was dealt with, and he quoted a few authorities. He quoted the position in the United Kingdom (UK) – *Erskine May* page 326. He stated:

“A motion or an amendment which is the same, in substance, as a question which has been decided during a session may not be brought forward again during the same Session... However, a question which has not been definitely decided may be raised again.”

Then, he also quoted the position in Australia as follows. *The House of Representatives Practice*, I. C. Harris, page 275. He quoted:

“The Speaker may disallow any motion (or amendment) which is the same in substance as any question which has been resolved in the affirmative or negative during the same Session... The same question rule has rarely been invoked... However, a question which has not been definitely decided may be raised again.”

He quoted a few other texts. His ruling is dated 6th May, 2008 and it is at the back of the Standing Orders also. I just want to say that when we debated on 6th November and resolved, unanimously in the National Assembly, one of the resolve clauses called for deepening engagement among all national stakeholders on issue relating to sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, particularly within the context of the meetings of the Bipartisan Ministerial Advisory Committee on Guyana/Venezuela controversy. That has a lot of similarities with your result also. As usual, I will still give you an opportunity to address us for a minute.

11.12 a.m.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I must thank you for allowing me to at least state my motion because you would normally state the motion and then you would rule, but, obviously, this is slightly in the reverse. Anyway, Mr. Speaker and colleagues, I brought a motion standing in my name, and I will read the resolve clause with your leave. It states:

“BE IT RESOLVED

That this National Assembly calls on the Government of Guyana to immediately establish a multi-party, and multi-stakeholder Task-Force to address all aspects of the clear and present danger that Venezuela’s actions portend against the good order, and safety and security of the state of Guyana and its peoples, and to do all acts and things necessary for the preservation of the territorial integrity of Guyana, and for the safety and wellbeing of its citizens.”

Mr. Speaker, the reason we brought this here....I would like to state publicly that we believe the effort in achieving the Argyle Declaration was commendable. However, we do feel that Venezuela will not rest and

will continue to have efforts to undermine Guyana's sovereignty. Sir, the Argyle Declaration has offered us a break in Venezuela's aggressive behaviour, and we must use this break to be prepared. That is why we are calling for the need for an active taskforce. It is urgent and immediate. Sir, you made reference to a ministerial taskforce. Since the November meeting of this Assembly, it has not met. The ministerial taskforce has not met. The Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Relations has met twice. The information coming out of the Foreign Relations Committee has been sparse and... *[Interruption]* Mr. Speaker, can you...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Speaker, can I have some protection, please? I am addressing you. I am not addressing anyone else. Thank you very much, Sir. The Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Relations has met twice.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not need to get a present list of meetings and who came. I have given you the opportunity to address us on the particular matter. If there is anything else you want to say, I will allow you and then we will move on.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, I had no intention at all of mentioning those two Committees, but in your ruling, you mentioned it, and I do think I have to respond to that. That is why I mentioned it. My notes had nothing at all other than which you raised. It is in the records. I think I checked...

Mr. Speaker: You must appreciate that a ruling from this seat does not entail a comment or a debate.

Mr. Patterson: No, Sir, but it can entail a response. It is not a comment or a debate.

Mr. Speaker: I have to entertain it first.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, we on this side, are calling on the Government to wake up and see the light and involve all of Guyana's best minds and muscles in this national endeavour. This is too grave and too serious an issue for them to do it alone. We have offered and we continue to try to offer our support, but their response has been minimalistic at best. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I deliberately wanted to rule, and I wanted to give you the chance at the last word. Thank you. Hon. Members, I was informed by the Hon. Minister Todd that he is on his way, and he also would like to make a statement under Statement by Ministers, Including Policy Statements. Mr. Clerk, we will take the Oral Questions without Notice and the Statement by Ministers, Including Policy Statements as soon as the Hon. Minister arrives. Proceed.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

Presentation and First Reading

SEA AND RIVER DEFENCE BILL 2023 – Bill No. 21/2023

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to repeal and replace existing legislation on sea and river defence, to make provision for protection from inundation from the sea or rivers and to provide for the establishment, construction and maintenance of sea and river defences, natural defences and to provide for related matters.”

[*Minister of Public Works*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have the next item which is the Financial Paper. I would not want to start the Financial Papers and have to break for the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. Let us take a short suspension to allow him to get here and we will deal with the two matters for the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. We will complete at least one Financial Paper before we break for lunch.

Sitting suspended at 11.21 a.m.

Sitting resumed at 11.46 a.m.

ORAL QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Please be seated. Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, we had deferred two items on our agenda. Firstly, there is an oral question without notice, which I will allow from the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, and you had indicated to me that you would like to make a statement.

Before I invite the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, to ask her question, an oral question without notice would normally get only two supplementals. I raised the issue earlier of the accuracy of statements and resolutions that come to the House. I could have easily also ruled against this particular oral question without notice because it is headed ‘International Criminal Court’(ICC), and the body speaks of the International Court

of Justice (ICJ). The ICC deals with prosecuting persons and the ICJ deals with the issue of borders. Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, you may proceed to ask your question.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you for drawing that typographical error to my attention. Mr. Speaker, the question that I have for the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation is premised on the decision by the ICJ, specifically the interim measures indicated, where the Court made two distinct decisions. The first is as it relates to the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela refraining from taking any action that will modify the *status quo*, that is, Guyana's current administration and control of the area of Essequibo. The second one is that both parties will refrain from actions which might aggravate or extend the dispute before the Court or make it more difficult to resolve. The Declaration appears to consider the second limb of the ICJ's judgement. Therefore, my question to the Hon. Minister is: could the Hon. Minister indicate to the House whether during the course of the negotiations which resulted in the Argyle Declaration, the Government of Guyana specifically requested the first limb of the interim relief granted by the ICJ, which enjoins Venezuela from interfering with Guyana's administration and control of the Essequibo...Did they specifically require that this form a part of the Declaration?

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation [Mr. Todd]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Before I respond to the Hon. Member's question, I would like to take this opportunity to apologise for being late. I had to attend an accreditation ceremony with His Excellency, the President. The answer to the Hon. Member's question is yes.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I am happy, and I thank the Hon. Member for his answer. My follow-up question, therefore, is: if you requested, why is that not reflected in the Declaration?

Mr. Todd: Mr. Speaker, I think if the Hon. Member had read the Declaration carefully, she would have recognised that it is implicit in the Declaration, and it is mutually beneficial to both parties, beginning also with the title of the Declaration which speaks to peace within the region. It was incorporated into the context and content of the Declaration.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, we have a document titled, *A Declaration*. Does the Hon. Member expect us to accept that a matter as important as ensuring the security that Guyana enjoys from the interim decision of the ICJ, we are to imply it in a declaration? The essence of a declaration is for something to be stated and declared, Mr. Todd. That answer is completely unacceptable. Mr. Speaker, I have one more question.

Mr. Todd: Mr. Speaker, I would like to react to the Hon. Member before she goes on to the next question.

11.52 a.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Minister, I was about to say, if someone makes a statement, I said before that I will give you – the Minister – a chance to make a statement too.

Mr. Todd: Mr. Speaker, in responding to the Hon. Member's remarks, the Hon. Member would recall that Venezuela agreed not to threaten or use force against Guyana, either directly or indirectly, in any circumstances, including those consequential to any existing controversies between the two states. I go on. Venezuela:

“...committed to the pursuance of good neighbourliness, peaceful coexistence and the unity of Latin America and the Caribbean.”

Thirdly, Venezuela noted the position of Guyana:

“...that it is committed to the process and procedures of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for the resolution of the controversy.”

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, you may now ask that follow-up question.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I have listened to the explanation proffered by the Hon. Minister and I agree with him that Venezuela did, in the Declaration, specifically undertake to do these things. But I wonder whether the Hon. Minister is prepared to accept that the use of force is but one mechanism or aspect of the interference with Guyana's ability to administer Essequibo. It certainly is not the only way with which our administration and control of the Essequibo could be interfered. I want to draw his attention to article 9 of this agreement. Article 9 states that they will have to speak, in essence, with Venezuela on any matter that has implications for the territory. I am deeply disappointed and deeply concerned that the Hon. Minister is suggesting to the people of Guyana that the threat of the use of force is the only way in which our administration and control of the Essequibo could be interfered. Is the Hon. Minister prepared to accept that this was an oversight on the part of the negotiating team?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, proceed.

Mr. Todd: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. That was not an oversight on the part of His Excellency, President Ali, and his delegation. May I also remind the Hon. Member that paragraph 9 of that Declaration speaks to any other matter. Any other. There are many other matters of mutual importance that we can have conversations and discussions on, outside of the case that we have at the ICJ. That is what we are referring to in this paragraph. The Hon. Member would also, having read the Declaration carefully, and hopefully more than once, and having listened to His Excellency, the President...In the maintenance and the preservation of our sovereignty and territorial integrity, the President has made it very clear to the people of Guyana and to the people of this region that we will explore all available options to ensure that we have a peaceful coexistence with Venezuela. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, remember, I was very clear...

Ms. Walton-Desir: Ms. Sarabo-Halley?

Mr. Speaker: Sorry. Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir. Very careful. Hon. Member, it is two supplementals. You had the two.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate this.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS, INCLUDING POLICY STATEMENTS

Update on Guyana/Venezuela Border Controversy

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Hugh Todd, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, you wanted to make a statement.

[Interruption]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Mr. Todd: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Members, you would be aware that on 1st December, the International Court of Justice published its decision on Guyana's request for the provisional measures concerning Venezuela's referendum. The order of the Court, which was unanimous and final and binding on both countries, stated that:

“Pending a final decision in the case, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela shall refrain from taking any action, which would modify the situation that currently prevails in the territory in dispute, whereby the Cooperative Republic of Guyana administers and exercises control over that area.”

Secondly, that:

“Both parties shall refrain from any action which might aggravate or extend the dispute before the court or make it more difficult to resolve.”

The Hon. Members would also be aware that despite the Court’s order, two days after Venezuela conducted its referendum on 3rd December, a number of measures were announced by that Government to give effect to the purported results of the said referendum. The measures include: the creation of a high commission for the defence of *Guayana Esequiba* and a proposal to promulgate the organic law for the defence of *Guayana Esequiba*, which will include the implementation of the five responses of the referendum, which are (1) the rejection of the 1899 Arbitral Award, (2) the Geneva Agreement of 1966 as the only legal instrument, (3) no recognition of the jurisdiction and competence of the International Court of Justice, (4) a mandate to secure the maritime border with the line of the azimuth 70 starting from the mouth of the Essequibo and, finally, (5) creation of a *Guayana Esequiba* state; . the publication, as a decree in the Official Gazette of 6th December, 2023, the creation of a New Comprehensive Defence Zone, *Guayana Esequiba*, that will defend economically and militarily on the strategic comprehensive defence region of Guyana – this is, Essequibo; the designation of a Major General, Alexis Cabello, as the sole authority of *Guayana Esequiba*, with political administrative headquarters in Thimiru, Bolivar State; the stated intention was to proceed with the granting of licences by Petroleum of Venezuela and the Petroleum Corporation of Guyana Minerals for the extraction of oil, gas, and mineral resources in the territory of *Guayana Esequiba*; the dissemination of a map of Venezuela incorporating *Guayana Esequiba* into the national territory of Venezuela; installation of an office of the administrative service for identification, migration, and immigration in Thimiru, Bolivar State to carry out the census and give Venezuelan citizenship and national identification (ID) cards to the population; the promulgation of a special law to prohibit concessions in Venezuela to the foreign oil companies that operate in Guyana in the disputed area of undelimited waters in the Essequibo with a three-month deadline; and the promulgation of the creation of environmental protection areas and the national parks in the territory of *Guayana Esequiba*.

The measures announced were a direct threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Guyana and blatantly disregarded the Order of the Court of 1st December, 2023. They are also an affront to the political independence of Guyana as a sovereign state and the violation of the fundamental principles of international law enshrined.

The Government took a number of diplomatic initiatives in response to the illegal actions from Venezuela. This House will recall that the President has had several engagements at the level of heads of state and government, as well as international organisations here within the region and extra-regionally. Guyana has had tremendous support on the side of international law from our friends, our partners, as well as institutions to which Guyana is committed.

Mr. Speaker, you would also recall that the President of Brazil, President Lula, along with the *Pro Tempore* Chair of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves of the Saint Vincent and the Grenadines during his Chairmanship, has also spoken with many of the heads within Latin America and the Caribbean. You would also recall that CELAC is an intergovernmental organisation that speaks to political consultation, that speaks to peace and stability within the region and that speaks to environmental protection and human rights. Within the CELAC umbrella, and within the sub-regional grouping that is the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), and CARICOM's advocacy on this matter, President Ali was encouraged, within those frameworks, to have dialogue with President Maduro on maintaining this zone as a zone of peace. Also, he made it very clear, orally and in writing, that he was not going to engage on the controversy that Venezuela has with Guyana over the validity of the 1899 Arbitral Award which is before the International Court of Justice.

For emphasis, I will recap what I had mentioned to the Hon. Member, that coming out of the joint Declaration, which we believe has been mutually beneficial to both Guyana and Venezuela, and by extension, to CARICOM and CELAC, Venezuela has agreed not to threaten or use force against Guyana, either directly or indirectly, in any circumstances including those consequential to any existing controversies between the two states; Venezuela committed to the pursuance of good neighbourliness, peaceful coexistence and unity of Latin America and the Caribbean. Moving on, Venezuela noted the position of Guyana that it is committed to the process and procedures of the International Court of Justice for the resolution of this controversy. I end here, Mr. Speaker. Thank you. [*Applause*]

12.07 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, before I proceed, I think it is important, having noted the presentations we have had regarding the matter at hand, that just after 11.00 a.m. today, I received a letter from Senator *Cédric* Perrin – excuse my French – President of the French Senate's Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Armed Forces. Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, it is noteworthy, and I will read the letter.

“Mr. Manzoor Nadir

Speaker of the National Assembly of Guyana

Mr. President,

It is with great concern that we observe the rising tensions between Venezuela and Guyana following the referendum organised by Caracas on 3 December 2023.

While the meeting between President Maduro and President Ali on 14 December, at the end of which the two heads of state pledged not to resort to force, gives cause for some optimism, the territorial dispute between Venezuela and Guyana can only be resolved in compliance with international law, which must be determined by the forthcoming decision of the International Court of Justice, to which Guyana has referred the matter.

As the senators you received on 16 April pointed out, the French Senate is committed to respecting your country’s sovereignty and security. We will therefore follow developments in the situation with the utmost attention.

Rest assured that we will stand by your side in these circumstances.

Please accept, Mr. President, the assurance of my highest consideration.

Cédric Perrin”

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Motion

Motion to approve Supplementary Financial Paper No. 4/2023

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves of the proposal set out in Financial Paper No. 4 of 2023 – Schedule of Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling one billion, eight hundred and ninety-nine million, six hundred and forty-seven thousand, three hundred and

thirty-four dollars (\$1,899,647,334) – Advances made from the Contingencies Fund for the period 2023-10-01 to 2023-12-08.”

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

Assembly in Committee of Supply

Motion proposed.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, just give me one minute to find my digital copy. Let us turn to the first page of our Financial Paper...

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

I will always defer to you.

Current Expenditure

Item 1:12-121 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation – Development of Foreign Policy – Subsidies and Contributions to International Organisations – \$382,418,390

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Chairman, the requested amount here is \$382,418,390. I want to verify whether the amount voted here is correct because I want to refer to Volume I of the *2023 Budget*. At page 477, the voted provision is \$156,375,000.

Mr. Chairman: Repeat for me again.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I am just querying the amount in the voted provision here, whether it is correct.

Mr. Chairman: Eight hundred and fifty-seven...

Ms. Walton-Desir: Yes, because we had \$156,375,000. Agency Code No. 12-121 – Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

Mr. Chairman: Could you restate that sum for me, please, the voted provision that you are on?

Ms. Walton-Desir: In the *2023 Budget*, the voted provision was set out as \$156,375,000. We could clarify that. I am willing to accept the clarification at a later date. What I observed though, this is a very large supplemental funding, relative to what was budgeted. I wonder whether the Hon. Member can explain the *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Todd: The amount that is being put to this House today caters for our arrears and payment that will take us to the end of this year, 31st December.

Ms. Walton-Desir: The Hon. Member referred to our arrears, so I must ask, what were the arrears outstanding as at 2022? Could the Hon. Member say to us why it was not catered for in the *2023 Budget*?

Mr. Todd: It was catered for in the Budget, as I recall, but we can check back the numbers. What has happened is, the procedure is that we wait on the Regional Security System (RSS) to submit the invoice and then we go through the process. They were a bit late, actually, in submitting. When they submitted the arrears as well as the current balance, we decided to pay both at the same time.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Could the Hon. Member then say to this House if this payment of \$382,418,390 would clear out all of our arrears under the head for this year?

Mr. Todd: Mr. Chairman, if the Hon. Member was paying attention she would have recalled that that was what I said earlier, that it would take us to 31st December.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I want to assure the Hon. Member that I heard what he said. I was very deliberate in asking the question again. I want to add one more question. The invoice that the Hon. Member referenced, has there been, over the years, a variation in the amount? I asked the question because I am wondering, if it is a fixed contribution, why would it not be possible to budget for it as should be done as it were, an expenditure. The reason I am asking this is, are there variations in the invoice? If there are variations in the invoice, what would occasion the variations? As I noted, it is quite significant.

Mr. Todd: Guyana is a relatively new member to the RSS. We only joined in 2022. In August of 2022, I think, we signed on to the Treaty. This is our first full year plus within the organisation. We pay based on... there is a measurement they use for your contribution which can vary from year to year. It is not fixed.

Ms. Ferguson: The paper before us for consideration is Financial Paper No. 4/2023, for contingency fund. You would agree with me, Mr. Chairman, that the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA), Section 24(4) speaks to the issue of such papers coming to the National Assembly for approval. I would like to ask the very Minister who just answered, Hon. Todd, what was unforeseen, what was the emergency that would have requested you to come to this House, at this stage, for this approval? [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] I understand he said something about RSS. Then again, we had a Supplementary Paper in

August, 2023. Therefore, at the preparation of that paper, did the Ministry not see the need to cater for such a provision?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister.

Ms. Ferguson: Since I am on my feet...

Mr. Chairman: No, Hon. Member. I just put that question to the Hon. Minister.

Mr. Todd: This is an organisation that we just signed on to. We have had other charges as well. We have been working closely with the Ministry of Finance, in conjunction with the RSS. The invoices that we have received, we have decided that we would have to come back to the House to pay what is due to the RSS. Going forward, we will have a better understanding of the charges so that we can meet those payments within the yearly budget.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, a follow-up to the answer given. The Minister said that they received invoices to effect this payment. Could the Minister say to this House, when did the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation receive those invoices?

Mr. Todd: As I had explained, Mr. Chairman, we received two invoices together. One showed the arrears balance and the current balance due. We received them, I think, sometime in, it may have been September. I can actually get the exact time, but it is sometime in that period we received invoices. Actually, we were following up on it and that is how we actually got the information and the invoices from the RSS itself.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, I now put the question that the sum...

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, may I?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Senior Minister.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Sir. Just to respond to the first question that was posed by the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, in relation to the voted provision indicated and to advise that what the Hon. Member was looking at was the detailed table. As you know, we provide in the Estimates, a detailed disaggregation of the contributions and subscriptions that we are paying to the various international organisations of which we are a member.

12.22 p.m.

What the voted provision indicates in the financial paper is the total voted provision for that particular line item, Chart of Account 6322, Subsidies and Contributions to International Organisations. That \$857,563,000 represents the voted provision for that line, which is the practice when these financial papers are prepared. The estimates will then provide a disaggregation by international organisations. The \$156 million to which the Member was referring is the disaggregation that relates to the RRS in particular. I thought that I should offer that clarification, Sir. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Senior Minister.

Item 1: 12-121 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation – Development of Foreign Policy – Subsidies and Contributions to International Organisations – \$382,418,390 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 2: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – \$643,690,000

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Member kindly detail the operational cost that is set out in this \$643,690,000?

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: Mr. Chair, this is for wages and salaries. The breakdown is: wages, \$383 million; salary, \$172 million – those are monthly staff —and pension, \$88 million, which gives \$643 million.

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Minister say whether this is a result of new employees or the ordinary employees that were there since the beginning of the year?

Mr. Mustapha: This came about because of our programme. If you remember, we reopened the Rose Hall Estate. The Rose Hall Estate is now producing sugar. We have employed a total of 543 new employees. We employ these people because of the mechanisation programme we have started. We must also know that those persons are from the area of Rose Hall who were severed when the factory was closed. Thank you.

Mr. Jordan: I want to thank the Minister for that answer. Could the Minister say what caused the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) to fall short in meeting the wages and salaries for workers during the month of November, in particular?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, to my knowledge we have been meeting our targets and no employees were denied salary during the month of November. I know for a fact that all weekly and monthly salaries were paid in November.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, I understand the Minister saying that this operational cost was part of ensuring that the workers at the Rose Hall Estate were being paid. Could the Hon. Minister say to this House, for the Rose Hall Estate since it was refurbished, what was the set target for the crop, both daily and weekly?

Mr. Mustapha: When we were looking at the Rose Hall Estate, the target was set at 5,000 but when we went into the field it was abandoned and there was a large forest and because we were trying to push the mechanisation system, we had to employ these employees. Now, we have produced just over 1,000 tonnes of sugar because the canes and the land that we expected to meet we did not meet when we went there. Now we are doing the mechanisation. I know for a fact the Rose Hall Estate will be one of the most productive estates again in GuySuCo.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, just to be correct, the Hon. Minister said that the estate produced just over 1,000 tonnes of sugar at the Rose Hall Estate. If that is so, what is the total operational cost for both the field and factory for this estate since the reopening?

Mr. Mustapha: I can lay that over to the Hon. Member.

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Minister also provide for us whether the Rose Hall Estate made any profit based on the sugar produced and sold?

Mr. Mustapha: The Hon. Member, like me, would know that the first crop, the initial crop... There is an estate that is now producing once again that was closed by the Government then. Now we are trying to rebuild that plantation. The estate is running effectively; all the parts have been rehabilitated... [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] Yes, shortly, we will make a profit, but you cannot expect us to make a profit in the first crop to produce 1,031 tonnes. So, yes, definitely GuySuCo... Every year we are seeing that GuySuCo is taking less and less from the public [*inaudible*].

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Minister now say what was the estimated duration of this first crop since the reopening of the estate?

Mr. Mustapha: The operation period was six weeks. We grind at Rose Hall Estate for six weeks.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister state whether any study has been done in relation to the labour that will have to be obtained to ensure that the estate is a success, in view of the fact that the young people of that area do not want to go and cut cane and fetch it to the punts?

Mr. Mustapha: I have been saying this over and over, and the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, would know too that I said we are trying now to do mechanisation in GuySuCo. We know for a fact that some of the people do not want to go back to cutting cane, this labour-intensive job. We are mechanising, and that is why we have studied and we are starting the mechanisation at GuySuCo. We are now bringing in machines that will cut and load the canes. We are looking to make GuySuCo more modernised and mechanised.

Mr. Ramjattan: Could the Minister indicate how many mechanised harvesters are there for this last crop that made 1,000 tonnes of sugar?

Mr. Mustapha: We have four across the industry. **[Hon. Members: (Inaudible)]** Just an additional point, the Hon. Member should not confuse harvesters with loaders. We have many loaders, but we have four harvesters.

Mr. Jordan: Sir, the Hon. Minister received, in August, \$1.5 billion for the rehabilitation of temporary abandoned lands at Albion, Blairmont, Rose Hall and Uitvlugt Estates. I will focus on Rose Hall Estate for now. Could the Hon. Minister say how much of this 1,572 hectares of land that were scheduled to be rehabilitated was rehabilitated and how much is under cultivation at present?

Mr. Mustapha: Just over 1,000 hectares are under cultivation. I was saying earlier that the next crop and the other crop will be good for Rose Hall.

Mr. Ramjattan: Could the Minister indicate when it is that this estate and factory is going to make a profit in view of all of the mechanisation that he is going to input?

Mr. Mustapha: I would not be able to say when, but we are working towards that; and that is why we are reducing the subvention from the central Government. We are working towards that.

Mr. Ramjattan: Is there absolutely no projection by this Minister as to when it is going to become profitable?

Mr. Mustapha: We have a lot of projections, unlike the Opposition now. When we asked them to do a socio-economic study at Rose Hall and they destroyed it... This year we set a target and we will reach that target. Next year we will set a target and we will reach that target. We will continue to set projections. For example,

we said we wanted to start the mechanisation process, and we have started it. We are now advancing in that stage because we know, for a fact, that we are not finding so many harvesters/cane cutters, that is why we want to mechanise. The point I am trying to make is that GuySuCo is moving into a different phase. The Hon. Members must appreciate what we are doing because we want to keep GuySuCo alive. The Guyana Sugar Corporation is the single largest employer of people in our country. Our Government will continue to maintain GuySuCo and keep it alive.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, it seems as though there is a lot of confusion concerning this particular provision being sought. Let me remind the Hon. Member, based on his response to Cde. Vinceroy Jordon when he asked, what is the total production, you said over 1,000 hectares. [Mr. Ramson: Over 1,000 tonnes.] Well, 1,000 tonnes. Then again, in August – and I am referring to the official report of the National Assembly – when the question was put by my colleague, Hon. Volda Lawrence:

“Could the Hon. Minister kindly indicate to the House how many hectares he has now brought under cultivation at the Rose Hall Estate?”

His response to her was:

“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.”

My question to the Hon. Member would be, from this provision that you are seeking, how much of this provision is going to Rose Hall Estate and how many hectares of cultivation has been done to date at the Rose Hall Estate?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, the Hon. Member probably did not comprehend what I said. This is for wages and salaries and not for mechanisation. When I made that statement in August, the Hon. Member had asked how many lands we put into mechanisation, and I said just over 1,000, but the Hon. Member did not ask me how many manually we did. At that time, I responded to the Hon. Member, Ms. Volda Lawrence, with the manual amount and the mechanised amount that we had done totally, which is over 4,000. This money is not going to mechanisation; it is going to wages and salaries.

Mr. Jordan: I am happy that the Hon. Minister stated that the moneys are going to wages and salaries. Hon. Minister, through the Chair, could you tell this House what actual revitalisation works were achieved and how much of that \$1.5 billion was spent at Rose Hall in order to effect the reopening?

12.37 p.m.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, approximately 90% of that \$1.5 billion was expended at Rose Hall, because of the state of the cultivation when we went there.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair... [**Mr. Hamilton:** (*Inaudible*)] ...I will not venture into the numbers. Mr. Chair, the Hon. Minister is saying to us that after spending 90% of \$1.5 billion the Rose Hall Estate was reopened and we experienced, and he knows for a fact – the Hon. Minister – that there were major mechanical failures at that estate. Mr. Chairman, the boilers were losing steam, leaks from the steam pipe and centrifugal baskets, overheating at various points within the estates... Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Minister then say to us, what really this 90% of the \$1.5 billion did?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, this money was used to mechanise the cultivation. We have to change the Dutch bed into broad beds so that the harvester can work; I did not mention about the factory. There are other sums that were spent in the factory, which was retooled and rehabilitated by Guyanese; and it is one of the most modern factories now in GuySuCo with the [*inaudible*].

Mr. Jordan: So, the Minister, helped me along. What then was the additional cost to remedy all the mechanisation failures, or mechanical failures rather, within the factory?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I will lay that figure over to the Hon. Member. But I want to say that the Rose Hall factory was left to deteriorate. When we went there we rehabilitated the factory, and ‘we try and bring back all the parts.’ We tried to mechanise and bring it back, that is why we have it so effective now; but I will lay the figure over to the Hon. Member.

Mr. Jordan: I will accept the information, Mr. Chair. My final question here is, what is the actual wage bill for weekly workers within the corporation of GuySuCo? What is the total for monthly workers within the corporation? I am asking if the Minister can kindly give me that as weekly and, also, monthly.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, I do not want to call a figure here and mislead this National Assembly. I will lay the figure over to the Hon. Member.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Chairman, just a follow-up and a clarification from the Hon. Minister. Earlier, when the question was posed, the Hon. Minister stated that when they set the target and they went into the field then they realised that there was a lot of work to be done in the field. My question and clarification to the Hon.

Minister, is this the standard operation procedure of the Ministry or GuySuCo to set a target then go and see what they have to work with?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, if the Hon. Member know how targets are being set, for GuySuCo, as the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan said just now, you have to do projection for years. This target of 5,000 tons was set a year before. When we went to do the replanting, what we found in the corporation in terms of the cultivation, the entire area forested, abandoned fields, hundreds of punts were sunk and we had to raise them, and all those things we had to take into consideration. The most important factor we must take into consideration is that the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government brought back Rose Hall to life.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Chairman, just to confirm, the Minister is saying, indeed, that they first set targets and then go and see what they have to work with.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I do not know how the Hon. Member interprets that, but I am saying that projections are made. We are making projections and we have set ourselves-targets and that I am saying.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, the Hon. Minister just stated that after they would have set the target they saw fields overgrown and all of those stuff. Mr. Chair, is it that the Hon. Minister is saying to this House that he had no idea of how many fields or the amount of cane that was there to be harvested for the factory to grind before setting the target?

Mr. Chairman: I will give this particular line or question that last one. Minister, you may have the floor.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chair, I answered that question already and I am saying [*inaudible*]. Thank you.

Item 2: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services –Subsidies & Contributions to Local Organisations – \$643,690,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 3: 40-401 Ministry of Education – Policy Development & Administration – National and Other Events – \$20,000,000

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Mr. Chair, the Ministry of Education is asking for \$20 million as an advance for the period 1st October to 31st December, 2023, and the explanation given for this provision, it “caters for hosting the Annual Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) Governance Meeting and Regional Awards Ceremony.” Could the Minister tell this House, when was Guyana chosen to host the 2023 CXC Governance Meeting and Awards Ceremony?

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: The Ministry was unaware at the time that the budget was prepared for 2023 that we would be hosting the CXC Governance Meeting and Regional Awards Ceremony.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, are we to believe that the Annual Governance Meeting is an *ad hoc* meeting for CXC?

Ms. Manickchand: No, in fact, Guyana hosted twice, both times I was the Minister of Education. The CXC as well as the rest of the region, as well as the world, had shut down face-to-face meetings that were not absolutely necessary because of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). So while it is not *ad hoc*, as the Hon. Member said – if that is the correct phrase – all kinds of considerations go into where the meetings will be hosted. Perhaps telling you, as I said, both times that it was hosted here, it was with the PPP/C Government, and so it is not; it is very well thought out. The Caribbean Examinations Council thinks clearly about where they want to host their meetings.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, as I understand it, these activities were concluded first week of December. Could the Minister provide a breakdown of the expenses for the \$20 million?

Ms. Manickchand: Yes, please your Honour, we usually have to do that before we are allowed to get the contingency award, or at least this Ministry of Finance under this Government requires that. Transportation for delegates and awardees, \$3.5 million; courtesy visits and lunch, \$500,000; CXC Governance Meeting, \$3.5 million; the Regional Awards Ceremony, \$5 million; meeting of principals, \$3.5 million; tours for delegates and awardees, \$2.5 million; tokens/branded shirts and other paraphernalia, \$1.5 million, totalling \$20 million.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: The first expense was captioned under transportation. Could the Minister say if airfares and accommodations for the CXC officials were catered for under this \$20 million?

Ms. Manickchand: No, CXC pays their own fees, but we had local accommodation and some transportation costs for things like taking delegates, picking people up from the airport and so on. It is very common to all host countries. This is \$20 million to host the region's governance meeting and awards. Just to be clear, this was internal transportation around Guyana.

Ms. Singh Lewis: Could the Hon. Minister tell this House if CXC would have contributed financially to the award ceremony and the meeting we have had here?

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, the Regional Awards meeting, is the Hon. Member talking about what happened at the Cultural Centre? The entire thing lasted two days. As I said, CXC's officials paid, through CXC, for their transportation and accommodation here. This would have been things like the cocktail had after the award

ceremony, the décor for the stage, paying the hostess, the performers – those kinds of activities. But if the Hon. Member wants a dollar-by-dollar breakdown we can lay that over.

Ms. Singh Lewis: Sir, I just want to repeat my question. Understand, at the beginning, for my first question, the Minister outlined the expenses for the \$20 million breakdown. I just want to repeat my question. Did CXC contribute financially towards the two activities we had in Guyana in the first week of December? Whether it was two days, three days, or a whole week, did they contribute?

Ms. Manickchand: There can be no participation if people did not jump on a plane and come here. So, in that sense, they contributed to the participants coming here. There can be no participation if people did not have a place to go and bathe, lie down and sleep, get up and dress and so on. In that sense, they participated for their hotel accommodation. Did they pay for the décor on the stage? No. Did they pay for the hostess? No. Did they pay for the cocktail reception? No. Guyana, known for its hospitality, paid for that.

Ms. Singh Lewis: Sir, I just want to share my understanding of the Minister's response with you for clarity.

Mr. Chairman: No, ask your question, do not share your opinion.

Ms. Singh Lewis: Is the Minister saying that CXC did not contribute financially to the two activities, Sir?

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, I would be happy to lay over for the Hon. Member. We are being carried on the World Wide Web and I would ask us all to be cautious and careful about how we speak about the region's Examinations Council and the hosting of it, specifically when Guyana has performed so excellently. I said where the contribution came and where we contributed, but I would be even happier to lay that over dollar by dollar, cassava ball by cassava ball, for the Hon. Member.

Item 3: 40-401 Ministry of Education – Policy Development and Administration – National and Other Events – \$20,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

12.52 p.m.

Capital Expenditure

Item 3: 40-404 Ministry of Education – Primary Education – School Furniture and Equipment – \$31,730,000

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you. Thank you for the... [Ms. Teixeira: (*Inaudible*)]. Thank you, Ms. Teixeira. Thank you. Could the Minister tell this Committee which schools have received furniture at this time?

Ms. Manickchand: That would be the Zeelugt Primary School and the Arthurville Primary School. Arthurville is on the island of Wakenaam. Hitherto, in the last five years a spanking new and very pretty guard hut was built. The school was dilapidated. The residents and parents rightfully made an objection to their children going to a school that was dangerous for them. We broke that down and reconstructed a school. While we were able to use back some of the furniture, in the process, we had to replace some as well. We put in for the first time something the school never had – furniture for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) laboratories, the computer laboratories and all the other facilities that are currently in that really, nicely appointed school. This is for Arthurville Primary School on the island of Wakenaam, in the Essequibo River and the Zeelugt Primary School.

When I visited Zeelugt, in 2021, I think, the school was literally shaking. I made a commitment immediately that we would rebuild the school – which we have done. That was done through the region. While the estimates catered for the building, the physical infrastructure, the region perhaps did not think it through and cater for furniture. We have now changed how we are building schools. By the way, that is very common. It was not corrected in any of the five years that my Colleagues spent in Government – buildings were built and furniture were provided later down. We are now changing that, and putting the buildings as well as what would be needed to furnish them in the entire Bill of Quantities. That is what people are bidding on through public bid processes. These are for the rebuilding of the Zeelugt Primary School which will house over 500 children.

Ms. Ferguson: On this very project code, I have to follow up on a response given by the Hon. Member. My question to the Hon. Member – since this is a contingency fund, moneys have already been expended, I guess. Could you say what type of procurement method was used for the provision of these services – to procure this furniture?

Ms. Manickchand: Generally, what we are trying to do is to buy goods and services from persons in the community. So, if we are in Wakenaam, we try to give the job to people there once it can be done to our specifications. We would use the Ministerial Tender Board and the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB), depending on the amount of procurement. We have different things. If we want 30 buckets, I can give you exactly what we bought, the quantity, and the cost. If it comes under a particular amount, we will go to the Ministerial Tender Board. If it is something costing... [Mr. Mahipaul: (*Inaudible*) single sourcing.] I heard a heckle from across there. If it is a Ministerial Tender Board, the method is

already determined; it is three quotations. If it is the NPTAB, it can be single-sourced or go to public bid, depending on what the thing is. If it is a screen that only LG provides, for example, then we have to go directly to LG. If it is a pen that 20 or 30 people, or the entire country could provide, we go public with it. There are several items that were bought here. As I said, I would be happy to list out for you per school – what the items were, their costs, and units per item. Would you like me to do that?

Ms. Ferguson: I have a follow-up. I am happy that the Hon. Member has made a decision to lay over the method and disaggregation of this amount to this Committee.

Mr. Chairman: I think she asked if you want her to do that.

Ms. Ferguson: Pardon? Yes, I would like her to do it, Sir.

Ms. Manickchand: I could do it now, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: I suggest that you lay it over. Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, proceed.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I heard the Hon. Member referenced the Ministerial Tender Board. I guess my Colleague, the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, could assist me here but under this Legend, this is capital for new furniture being procured. I was just wondering, what is the cut-off point for the Ministerial Tender Board because the sum being sought is \$31 million and change?

Ms. Manickchand: The Ministerial Tender Board cut-off is \$1.5 million, so anything above that is for the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board. It will be \$1,499,000 as the cut-off.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, am I to understand from the Hon. Member that NPTAB was involved in the procurement process?

Ms. Manickchand: Remember what I said. I sought, for example, 30 buckets because this school needed that for whatever reason. What was needed was determined by the school's community – the parents, teachers, students as well as the friends of the school. If we bought 30 buckets, it may have come up to I do not know how much is for a bucket. I have it here; I can give it to you. If it comes up to under \$1.499 million, we will go to the Ministerial Tender Board. However, if we are buying 30 computers and that comes up to \$7 million, then we have to go to the NPTAB. I cannot tell you here that we did one or the other generally because each item was dealt with differently. You will get that when we lay it over.

Mr. Chairman: You mentioned that before, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Singh-Lewis, you have the floor.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could the Minister tell us if this unforeseen purchase of furniture to accommodate the large number of students, particularly in Region 3, has anything to do with the influx of Venezuelan children in our communities?

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Chairman, this school was shaking so much so that I thought I was feeling faint. This was until I asked, what was happening. Then, I realised the school was shaking. Nothing had been done with it from 2015 to 2020, which is why these children whether Guyanese or otherwise, were in danger. Children of this world were in danger. This school has been shaking long before the Hon. Member recognised that there are Venezuelan children here. In Guyana, we proudly accept into our education system children who are eligible for education – that means once they are passed nursery age. Regardless of where they come from, it is a humanitarian gesture, on our part, to make sure that the children we have in our communities are educated. I would think that the Members on the other side of this Committee would like to join us in that responsible behaviour and exercise their influence in communities where they see children not attending school.

To be clear, majority of these children are from Guyana and are Guyanese. I cannot speak from here to give exact numbers, but I would say with great pride that any child in this country who is of an eligible age and needs an education will get it under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government; whether they are Venezuelan, Surinamese, Guyanese or anything else, that is our aim. That is why, Sir, we were able to reach universal primary education under the PPP/C's Government. This was so declared by the United Nations. That is why we will reach universal secondary education under the PPP/C Government, as recognised again by the world. This means all our children of school age will be able to access a school. That is compared with not a single secondary school starting and finishing for five years under the APNU/AFC. That is something that they should be enormously ashamed of.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I join with the Minister of Education to endorse that every child of school age...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, please, is there a follow-up question?

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Please, go ahead with the question.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: ...is entitled to education in Guyana. I join with the Minister in saying that. Could the Minister tell us, how many Venezuelan children will be benefiting under this project?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, clearly, go ahead.

Ms. Manickchand: As many children who fall in the catchment of the Zeelugt Primary School, regardless of whether they are Guyanese, male, female, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Brazilian or Venezuelan, will get an education at that school – a good, sound, quality education. We are very proud of that, Sir.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, since the Minister cannot give us a definitive figure, I will tell you what my figure is.

Mr. Chairman: No. Please, ask a question.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir...

Mr. Chairman: Please ask a question.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: How many Venezuelan children are benefiting from this project? I believe it is over 1,000.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, there is a question on floor – how many Venezuelan children? – which you have answered before.

Ms. Manickchand: As many who fall within the catchment area, are entitled to an education under all the treaties and conventions that we have signed – as many who fall within that category.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Could the Minister say to this Committee if more than 1,000 Venezuelan students are benefiting from this project?

Ms. Manickchand: Mathematics continues to challenge the APNU/AFC and every single one of its Members. The school has a capacity for 500, so 1,000 would be double that capacity. The Hon. Member may or may not understand that would be impossible. The Hon. Member is giving us a figure. As a matter of fact, it is 1,000 children benefitting from this school who are Venezuelans and I want to remind the Hon. Member that there is something called the ‘privilege’ in this House that she should not abuse.

1.07 p.m.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, I do not take it lightly that the Hon. Member is threatening me.

Mr. Chairman: I recognised the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. In an earlier response, the Hon. Member stated that the building was rock shaky and all manner of things. Since the Hon. Member stated that the two school that have benefitted from this provision are Zeelugt Primary and Arthurville Primary in Wakenaam, what I need to find out is, could the Hon. Member state for this Committee how much furniture were procured and how many children benefited?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, proceed.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I am not through with my question.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, you asked one and I can choose to put it as you asked or in bunch. I have already called on the Hon. Minister to answer the first one.

Ms. Manickchand: Your Honour, do you remember that I said we have an exact list of what we bought? We said 500 children are benefitting from Zeelugt Primary and for the Arthurville Primary, the last time I checked, I think it was 97 children. When there are new schools, we also encourage attendance, you might see that number rising a bit, especially in places such Arthurville.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, go ahead. Hon. Member, you said that you had other questions.

Ms. Ferguson: I do not have any.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. Hon. Member Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, you may have the floor.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Sir, could the Minister tell us what percentage of grade six students will benefit from this project?

Ms. Manickchand: Sir, 100% at both schools.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I think we have exhausted the questions in this particular head, and I would like to put the question now.

Item 3: 40-404 Ministry of Education – Primary Education – School Furniture and Equipment – \$31,730,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Hon. Members, you will bear with me for a few moments since the Shadow person for the Opposition would be back to her seat in a few moments. She has asked me to hold for a moment on her. I do not want to proceed

to the other head as yet because that is Local Government and I do not want to break the rhythm of the questions. Is she here? A grand entrance for the Hon. Member.

Current Expenditure

Item 4: 51-515 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Fire Service – Fuel and Lubricants – \$24,000,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Under this line item, the Minister is seeking an additional \$24 million under the heading ‘Fuel and Lubricants’. Could the Hon. Minister give a detailed breakdown of how this amount will be spent? Is this request premised on the fact that there will be an increase in fire or, perhaps, an increase in fuel? Could you also state what are your plans to enhance resources and support services and expansion of the services within this sector to ensure that there is readiness by the fire service?

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: I want to thank the Hon. Member for her question. I am glad that the Hon. Member mentioned the issue of an increase in fires, which is a fact. There has been a large requirement for responses to fires in this dry season. We have the El Nino on us. The temperature has been going up to 35° celsius. Particularly, in the country areas where there have been dry have lots of grassfires. There have also been a number of malicious setting of fires and, in addition to that, the Fire Service has the Ambulance Service with it. The responses for both the fire service and the ambulance service which it has partnered with is also in response to increased calls and malicious and fake calls, which adds to all the problems. The sum that we are requiring is just \$24 million. There have been a number of new assets which we have procured. There are two new excavators that have been brought online, a couple of new assets including a new aerodrome Fire Fighting Unit at the airport and a ladder for going up to rescue people which is employed at the hotel [*inaudible*] on the East Bank. To be specific, in terms of grass fires, there were 807 grass and rubbish fires countrywide, 6,140 ambulance calls for the year so far, 510 building fires were recorded for year to date. We have a new support vehicle, Hilux pickup; two new excavators; and all of this requires our response to foot the bill to acquire the payment for fuel and lubricants.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. Minister, in terms of the malicious setting of fires, could you say how these are being dealt with by your Ministry? What is the status of your investigation? Have you initiated intended prosecutions? Have some of the matters been filed in court *et cetera*?

Mr. Benn: The difficulty with this is the time when these occurred and trying to put together what may have been involved in them. They had been referred to the police. Though there are files on the matter, there has not been any specific one which has gone to the courts in respect to any person, but we keep working on it.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Could the Hon. Minister indicate whether any of these files are with the Office of the Director or Public Prosecution (DPP)? That is in relation to the malicious setting of fires. I am just trying to ascertain the status of these files.

Mr. Benn: No. I cannot say, at the moment, if we have any at the DPP's chambers but we will check on that in respect of the reports from the Fire Service and from the police.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you, Sir. I take it that the Hon. Minister is committing to lay over the status of these investigations.

Mr. Benn: In so far, the reports which have been completed by the Fire Service, yes. We will check with the police on the status of any investigation that they are pursuing.

Item 4: 51-515 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Fire Service – Fuel and Lubricants – \$24,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, quite a few Members are asking if we could take the lunch break now. I will agree and let us get back here within one hour. Many times, I sit for half of an hour waiting for a quorum. Let us take a suspension now for lunch – one hour.

Sitting suspended at 1.18 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 2.23 p.m.

Thank you, Hon. Members, you may be seated. The Assembly will revert to Committee to continue the consideration of Financial Paper No. 4 of 2023.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Hon. Members, we have not done too bad. It is one of our shorter lunches.

Item 5: 71-711 Region 1 –Barima/Waini – Regional Administration & Finance – Security Services – \$8,900,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, in Financial Paper No. 3, a number of regions came for additional sums, reference security charges or security services. the answers that were provided was because of the tendering process and it led to an increase in the rates. Is it the same here for these programmes under Region 1?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, yes, Hon. Member.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, may ask the Hon. Minister to name the security firm or firms? What is the rate for the contract that was awarded?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chair, the name of the security firm is Strategic Action Security.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. Sir, is it one security firm? With reference to the previous question, in terms of the rate, what is the new rate?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chair, it is one security firm. The rates for Monday to Friday was \$275 per hour and it has now moved to \$480 an hour; Saturdays were \$413 per hour and it has now moved to \$720 per hour; Sundays and Holidays were \$550 per hour and it has now moved to \$960 per hour.

Item 5: 71-711 Region 1 – Barima/ Waini – Regional Administration & Finance – Security Services – \$8,900,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

2.26 p.m.

Item 5: 71-712 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Public Works – Security Services – \$13,807,139

Item 5: 71-712 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Public Works – Security Services – \$13,807,139,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 5: 71-713 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Education Delivery – Security Services – \$153,600,000

Item 5: 71-713 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Education Delivery – Security Services – \$153,600,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 5: 71-714 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Health Services – Security Services – \$12,500,000

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Agency Code - 71-714, Chart of Account - 6281, Description - Security Services and the Voted Provision is \$27,463,000. I have noticed an almost 50% increase that you are seeking for contingency advance granted. What is the reason for the additional increase in the service charges? Is it due to an increase in personnel or the number of personnel? Could you also name the security services and the location of these health facilities?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the name of the security service is Strategic Action Security. There was an increase of four guards. It moved from 21 to 25.

Dr. Cummings: I cannot hear. Kindly, pull down the microphone.

Mr. Persaud: The name of the security firm is Strategic Action Security. The number of guards moved from 21 to 25. The rates increased. From Mondays to Fridays, it moved from \$275 to \$480 per hour. For Saturday it has moved from \$413 to \$720 per hours. For Sundays and holidays, it moved from \$550 to \$960 per hour.

Dr. Cummings: A follow-up: Are these security officers trained personnel? As you know Region 1 is a very vulnerable and sensitive area. We are looking at the high-risk department of staffing. Are they trained security personnel?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, they are all baton security and they were trained by the company.

Item 5: 71-714 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Health Services – Security Services – \$12,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 6: 72-724 Region 2: Pomeroon/Supenaam – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$12,000,000

Mr. Holder: Cde. Chairman. Through you, I would like to ask the Minister how much of this sum was spent, if any at all, on the repairs of the school boat in the lower Pomeroon area? I was there just a few weeks ago and persons were complaining. I had firsthand view of the state...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, let me just interrupt. Are you asking for the repairs to the school boat?

Mr. Holder: Yes, under...

Mr. Chairman: We are under fuel and lubricants?

Mr. Holder: Sorry. I did not notice that. I will rephrase my question. Let me just seek some clarity if I can from you, Cde. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Sir.

Mr. Holder: On the cover page has the period 1st October to 8th December, but on the spreadsheet, it has 1st October to 31st December. I am just seeking clarity with regard to the period. As I understand it, these funds

have been advances from the Contingency Fund but I am wondering why the extended period is to 31st December. I assume this is...

Mr. Chairman: Could I ask the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance for some clarification? That might be rhetoric over most of the other heads.

Dr. Singh: My apologies, Mr. Chairman. I am not completely clear on what is being asked. Could I possibly, through you, ask the Hon. Member to repeat his question?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Holder: Yes, certainly. The cover page has the period in question from 1st August to 8th December, but the spreadsheet gives the period from 1st October to 31st December. I am seeking clarity if this is the normal practice or why is there a difference between the cover page and the spreadsheet?

Dr. Singh: It is a valid observation. These Contingency Fund advances were granted up to 8th December, 2023. The headings I would think too should be consistent. I think it is a valid observation. Thank you very much.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance for that clarification. My question for the Minister, Mr. Anand Persaud, could he explain what exactly this \$12 million is drawn for? What specifically? I see in the remarks column there is:

“Provision of additional resources due to an expanded work programme.”

Mr. Persaud: It is to cater for fuel for the distribution of water to schools in the Pomeroon River due to the prolonged dry season resulting in the water becoming salt.

Mr. Holder: Cde. Chairman, that would be all.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, a follow-up to the response given by the Hon. Member as it relates to transporting of water to villages in the Pomeroon River. Could the Hon. Member state how many boats or land transportation actually benefited from this \$12 million? Perhaps, the Minister could provide a disaggregation as to the number of gallons, in terms of cost, for each mode of transportation? Thank you.

Mr. Persaud: There are 16 villages along the Pomeroon River. There are 22 boat engines being used to transport water. Do you need the fuel consumption? Am I correct?

Ms. Ferguson: Yes.

Mr. Persaud: These are for the various villages. It is 310 gallons and 62 lubricating oil per week and 30 gallons and six lubricating oil per week, 45 gallons and nine lubricating oil per week, 50 gallons and 10 lubricating oil per week, 45 gallons and nine lubricating oil per week, 75 gallons and 15 lubricating oil per week, 30 gallons and nine lubricating oil per week, 50 gallons and 10 lubricating oil per week, 30 gallons and six lubricating oil per week, 40 gallons and eight lubricating oil per week, 180 gallons and 36 lubricating oil per week, 45 gallons and nine lubricating oil per week, 45 gallons and nine lubricating oil per week, 50 gallons and 10 lubricating oil per week, 85 gallons and 11 lubricating oil per week, 100 gallons and 20 lubricating oil per week and 175 gallons.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Chairman, I just want to come back again. This item falls under education. The understanding that I am getting from the Minister is that they delivered these to villages. I am trying to understand the relation. Now, if he had said 16 schools, I could understand that, but he said 16 villages. The boats that he is talking about, again, I am not certain about. Well, he can say whether those are the school boats that were used. I am trying to get how is it that this falls into the education programme. How is it that it falls into the education programme?

Mr. Persaud: These are all for schools and there are schools in the villages.

Ms. Ferguson: I have a follow-up to my Colleague's question. Since the Hon. Member stated it is 16 villages, perhaps, he can list the schools within those 16 villages that actually benefited from this provision.

Mr. Persaud: The schools are Wakapau Mission, Friendship Canal, Abrams Creek, Kabakaburi Creek, Jacklow, Bethany Creek, Strong Hope, Barakawau, Ykinipa, Bath Creek, Ulele, Kaiburi, Mashabo Mission, Capoey Mission, Hackney Canal and Saint John.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Chairman, you know I must come in. For example, Kabakaburi Creek, I do not know of any school there. I am from Region 2. I do not know if the Minister is confusing the issue or where the water was delivered.

Mr. Chairman: Well, let us get the clarification from the Minister. Hon. Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Persaud: There is a primary school there.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, the Hon. Minister said that this was for the distribution of water during the dry season. Could the Hon. Minister say how many cases of water went to each school? Could he give a breakdown of

that? He need not call it out. He could lay it over so we could understand how many cases went to which school.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, they are not cases, but 450-gallon tanks were transported.

Item 6: 72-724 Region 2: Pomeroon/Supenaam – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$12,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 76-761 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne – Regional Administration and Finance – Security Services – \$3,828,626

Item 7: 76-761 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne – Regional Administration and Finance – Security Services – \$3,828,626 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

2.41 p.m.

Item 7: 76-762 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne – Agriculture – Security Services – \$19,454,722

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, may I ask the Hon. Minister to provide the name of the security firm, if it is the same security firm for all five programmes and what is the new rate?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the name of the firm is Queensway Security Service Incorporated, and the rates have increased from \$632 per hour to \$702 per hour. [**An Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*] Yes. That is across the board.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, having noted the question, could I put 76-763, 76-764, 76-765 – the same Chart of Account?

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, just before we put them, on this same line item... I was trying to find my records.

Mr. Chairman: Take your time.

Ms. Ferguson: In August, 2023, we came for extra moneys for security services for a few regions that I cannot recall off my head. Mr. Chairman, my concern is, and I am putting the question to the Hon. Member, when you came seeking additional provisions for those regions for security services, why is it that the regions you are now seeking moneys for were not a part of the Financial Paper we considered in August, 2023? As I am on my feet – what would have occasioned the increase from approximately \$600, I think you said earlier, to approximately \$700 per hour? What would have occasioned that increase?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this has to do with a new contract. It is a new contract.

Ms. Ferguson: That is all right. Since the Hon. Member has stated that it is a new contract, could the Hon. Member state for this House what procurement method was actually used? This is because these moneys would have been expended probably before we came here today. When did the advertisement go out, when was it closed and when was the contract effected? I guess many of my Colleagues would get that understanding that there was a contract in place, hence the increase in the cost per hour from approximately \$600 to approximately \$700. How come it is now a new contract? Mr. Chairman, I do not understand that. I guess the Hon. Member could clarify for us.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it was open tender. The contract was from May, 2023 to April, 2024.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, that is where the problem lies. It clearly shows that we have poor budgeting by this Government. This is because if one had...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, could you please ask the question? Is it poor budgeting – is that your question?

Ms. Ferguson: That is one question. Then I will ask the Hon. Member, why it is that this provision was not sought in Financial Paper No. 3 which we considered in August, 2023.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, at that time we had money. We are now seeking additional sums.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Member state for the House when the contract took effect for this new security service? When did the Ministry sign the contract for the services for the various regions?

Mr. Chairman: Is it for the various regions or for this region?

Ms. Ferguson: Sorry, Mr. Chairman. It is for this particular region.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, that question was answered earlier.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, since I did not hear the response given, for my information's sake, I guess the Minister could provide a response to the question I just posed.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, the Hon. Member said she did not hear you.

Mr. Persaud: The contract was signed by the region from May, 2023 to April, 2024.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, you would agree with me that, based on what the Hon. Member is saying that the contract was signed in May, 2023 and ended in April, 2023, you said earlier...

An Hon. Member: In 2024.

Ms. Ferguson: *Oh.* In 2024. Sorry.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, very much, Minister. I think we have exhausted the questions here.

Item 7: 76-762 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne – Agriculture – Security Services – \$19,454,722 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 76-763 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne – Public Works – Security Services – \$4,020,588

Item 7: 76-763 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne – Public Works – Security Services – \$4,020,588 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: I have been invited to put all the remainders, but I have to propose before I put.

Item 7: 76-764 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne – Education Delivery – Security Services – \$265,807,470

Item 7: 76-764 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne – Education Delivery – Security Services – \$265,807,470 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 76-765 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne – Health Services – Security Services – \$125,152,188

Item 7: 76-765 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne – Health Services – Security Services – \$125,152,188 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 8: 79-791 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Regional Administration and Finance – Security Services – \$9,777,645

Item 8: 79-791 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Regional Administration and Finance – Security Services – \$9,777,645 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 8: 79-793 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Public Works – Security Services – \$3,062,660

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, may I ask the Hon. Minister to provide the name of the security company, the rate from what it was to what it is now and if it is the same security firm for all the programmes that are listed here for security services?

Mr. Chairman: We have one other – 79-794.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, Strategic Action Security Services Limited across the board. Due to an increase of the daily rates, weekends, Sundays and holidays – weekdays, \$480 by 16 by 245 days, Saturdays, \$720 by 16 by 50 days, Sundays \$960 by 16 by 70 days plus 14% value-added tax (VAT).

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, I will propose the other item under this agency, Chart of Account.

Item 8: 79-794 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Education Delivery – Security Services – \$23,086,477

Mr. Henry: Mr. Chairman, concerning Agency Code 79-794, Security Services, Education Delivery, Region 9: could the Minister say if the primary schools and nursery schools are entitled to be beneficiaries of this – being granted a security service in Region 9?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, something is wrong with the question. This is Dietary not Security Services.

Mr. Chairman: No. The Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, said we could put both together. I proposed one and I was proposing Agency Code 79-794 which is Education Delivery, Security Services. I have not put the two yet. Not the Dietary, the Security Services.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, Strategic Action Security Services Limited, 44 locations.

Mr. Henry: The specific question is whether...

Mr. Chairman: Secondary and primary.

Mr. Henry: Not secondary. It is if the primary and nursery schools have been benefitting from these security services as shown in this line item?

Mr. Persaud: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Henry: Could the Minister state the names of the primary and secondary schools in the Annai Sub-District that are benefitting from this service – nursery and primary schools?

Mr. Chairman: In the Annai sub-district.

Mr. Henry: In the Annai sub-district. The former Regional Executive Officer (REO) is supposed to know the place well.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I will provide the list.

Mr. Chairman: The Hon. Minister will provide the list whether it is Woweta, Kwatamang, Surama, Annai itself.

Mr. Henry: Thank you. Just to say that the Toshao said that none of them are receiving this service. Just to let you know that. Could I go on to a next one?

Mr. Chairman: No. Let me put the question for these two as I have not put the question yet. I just proposed the question.

Item 8: 79-793 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Public Works – Security Services – \$3,062,660 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 8: 79-794 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Education Delivery – Security Services – \$23,086,477 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

2.56 p.m.

Item 8: 79-794 Region 9 - Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Education Delivery – Dietary - \$140,629,950

Mr. Henry: I am asking if this is the correct information we are seeing here because, in the Budget Estimates, we were told by the then Hon. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development that all secondary schools children would be entitled to dietary benefits. I see it is marked ‘Dorms’ here. Is it just for dorms or for all secondary school children who are attending secondary schools in Annai?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, primary tops and all the dorms.

Mr. Henry: Thank you for providing that information for us.

Mr. Mahipaul: This voted provision of \$221,444,000, was that sum budgeted for the needs of the dorms also?

Mr. Persaud: Yes, but there was a shortfall.

Mr. Mahipaul: For the period 1st October to 8th December, which is roughly two months, we have expended \$140,629,950 and before that it was \$221,444,000. Could the Hon. Minister explain the reason for this substantial increase for just this two-month period?

Mr. Persaud: We are now providing snacks for the children in the dorms, which they have never received before.

Mr. Mahipaul: Is the Hon. Minister saying that the snacks began in October, 2023 and ended on 8th December? This is because, when I look at the supplementary that is coming, I am not seeing any requests for additional sums for that purpose. Were the snacks only for that period?

Mr. Persaud: I did indicate that there was a shortfall for the year because of the introduction of the snacks.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am trying to get an understanding. For this two-month period alone, this sum catered for the snacks as the Minister indicated. The voted provision is \$221,444,000. Could the Hon. Minister say when the distribution of snacks began?

Mr. Persaud: I alluded earlier that it is was for the entire year 2023, but there was a shortfall. There are 1,583 children who are receiving snacks now.

Mr. Mahipaul: Are these the snacks that are part of the School Feeding Programme where persons fell under the Ministry of Education before or is this a different arrangement that is specific to Region 9?

Mr. Persaud: It is a mid-afternoon snack.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, with your permission I understand that. I know that the Ministry of Education has the School Feeding Programme. I am asking if this is specific to Region 9 because no other region I saw came before us for Dietary increase for this mid-morning snack in other regions. Is it specific to Region 9 or are the other regions benefitting along the line?

Mr. Chairman: On this provision, is it for Region 9?

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister ...

Mr. Persaud: Yes, Mr. Chairman. It is for Region 9.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Henry.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I have one other question, if you will permit me, please.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you. If this is specific to Region 9, could the Hon. Minister say why are the other regions not a part of ...

Mr. Chairman: When we get there, we will see. This is Region 9. Let us stick to Region 9. Hon. Member, Mr. Henry.

Mr. Henry: Could the Hon. Minister say what is included in the snacks that the children in the secondary schools get, according to him, in the afternoons?

Mr. Persaud: There are caterers that provide the meals and the snacks. I do not prepare them.

Mr. Henry: I received word from the Toshao that they are getting a banana or an apple as a snack – one banana as a snack. Is that true, Hon. Minister?

Mr. Persaud: Absolutely no, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Henry: Thank you. The nation is hearing that.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Henry, please. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson...

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman. Earlier, the Minister, in his response, stated that the provision that is now being approved by way of Contingency Fund was as a result of a shortfall. My question to the Hon. Minister is: the initial provision of \$221 million, could you say how many persons benefitted from this \$221 million? **[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible.)]** No, I am going somewhere.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I answered that question already.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson ...

Ms. Ferguson: This is unacceptable from the Hon. Minister. The Hon. Minister stated earlier that the initial provision, and I trust I heard him correctly, was from the time the Budget was passed in February, 2023 up to September, 2023. Therefore, at the time of budgeting, did he not know he had 1,583 students in the dorms to take care of? **[Mr. Hamilton:** Our children come to school ...] That is what I am trying to ask. That is what I am trying to get from the Minister. From the time the budget was passed, how many children this \$221 million was catered for?

Mr. Persaud: I answered with regards to the number of children previously. I do not think I need to repeat myself. This number for the snacks not budgeted for last year. The snacks were introduced this year. That is where the shortfall was created.

Mr. Mahipaul: It may have missed me but could the Hon. Minister provide us with the names of the dormitories to which this service has been offered?

Mr. Persaud: The Annai Dormitory – 353 children; St. Ignatius Dormitory – 219; Sandcreek Dormitory – 312; Aishalton Dormitory – 180; Karasabai – 145; and Nappi Primary Top – 62.

Item 8: 79-794 Region 9 - Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Education Delivery – Dietary - \$140,629,950 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 8: 79-795 Region 9 - Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Health Services – Security Services - \$2,181,479

Ms. Ferguson: Chart of Account 6281 – Security Services is the description. We had a voted provision of \$38,352,000, thus far. For the period of this contingency Financial Paper, the sum of \$2,181,479 was expended. The explanation given was as a result of the provision of additional resources which catered for increased security charges. I have several questions for the Hon. Minister, starting One – which firm is currently providing health services delivery in the region?

Mr. Persaud: Strategic Action Security Services.

Ms. Ferguson: Could the Hon. Member state the period for the contract with Strategic Action Security Services?

Mr. Persaud: This contract expires in March, 2024.

Ms. Ferguson: I am asking for the period. A contract would have a start date and an end date. Could you please give me the start date?

Mr. Persaud: April, 2023 to March, 2024.

Ms. Ferguson: The budget was passed in February, 2023. We had a supplementary in August, 2023. The question to the Hon. Minister is: why come now and not in August if you had a variation in the cost for security?

Mr. Persaud: There were funds available then.

Ms. Ferguson: Could the Hon. Minister state, from the time the contract was entered into in April, 2023, what was the rate per hour at that time?

3.11 p.m.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, Mondays to Fridays – \$275.00 per hour moved to \$480 per hour; Saturdays – \$413 per hour moved to \$720 per hour; Sundays and holidays – \$550 per hour moved to \$960 per hour.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, I am trying to find out, what explanation was given to you by the company after entering the contract that caused an increase in the rate per hour from \$275 to \$480 per hour. You have already given other figures.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this was a new tender. The security firm increased its rates.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, if the budget was passed in February, 2023 and there was a voted provision of more than \$300,000, could the Hon. Minister state which security firm provided services from January to February, just before the budget?

Mr. Persaud: I answered that question earlier.

Ms. Ferguson: You did not state the name of the security firm.

Mr. Persaud: I did.

Ms. Ferguson: The security firm that provided services between January to February, 2023, just before the budget.

Mr. Persaud: It was the Strategic Action Security Services Ltd.

Ms. Ferguson: My follow-up question to the Hon. Minister is, could you say whether or what procurement method was used?

Mr. Persaud: The open tender method was used.

Ms. Ferguson: My final question to the Hon. Member is: the service is being provided as Health Services – could you say how many health centres are being managed by this security service and the number of persons assigned to each health centre in the region? Thank you.

Mr. Persaud: There are 22 locations: the Lethem Public Hospital, Sand Creek Health Centre, Annai Health Centre, Karasabai Health Centre, Aishalton Sub-District Hospital, *et cetera*. I will lay over the rest.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, very much.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, sorry, the Hon. Member did not answer the second part of my question which was the number of persons manning these 22 health centres across the region.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I will lay that over.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, this is the problem I am having because...

Mr. Chairman: Ask the question if you have a follow-up question.

Ms. Ferguson: This is the Contingency Fund. These are moneys already expended. The Hon. Member should have that information before him so that he could provide it to this House.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, is there a question? This is because the Minister is not in a position to give you the answer immediately. He said he will lay it over.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay. To the Hon. Minister, could you say to this House why you do not have the information?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Persaud: It is because I do not have it.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, I think we...

Ms. Ferguson: The last question...

Mr. Chairman: You have had three last questions.

Ms. Ferguson: I have a follow-up question. Could the Hon. Member state when exactly is he going to layover the information requested?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, when?

Mr. Persaud: As soon as possible.

Item 8: 79-795 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/ Upper Essequibo – Health Services – Security Services – \$2,181,479 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members this complete consideration of all the items on this Financial Paper.

Question

“That the Committee of Supply approves of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 4 of 2023 – Schedule of Supplementary Provision on the Current and Capital Estimates – Advances made from the Contingency Fund totalling \$1,899,647,334 for the period ending 1st October, 2023 to 8th December, 2023.”

Put and agreed to.

Assembly resumed.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I wish to report that the Committee of Supply (COS) has approved of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 4 of 2023 and I now move that the Assembly doth agree with the Committee in the said Resolution.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this completes consideration of Financial Paper No. 4 of 2023. The House will now resolve itself into Committee of Supply to consider the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 5 of 2023.

Motion

Consideration of Financial Paper No. 5/2023 – Current and Capital Estimates

BE IT RESOLVED

That the National Assembly approved the proposal set out in Financial Paper No. 5/2023 – Schedule of Supplementary Provision on the Current and Capital Estimates totalling twenty-four billion, forty-

four million, ninety-five thousand, nine hundred and eight dollars (\$24,044,095,908) for the period ending 31st December, 2023.

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

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, in accordance with article 171 (2) of the Constitution, I signify that Cabinet has recommended for consideration by the Assembly the motion for the approval of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 5 of 2023 Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling \$24,044,095,908 for the period ended 31st December, 2023. I now move the motion.

Motion proposed.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members we will now consider the proposals laid out in Financial Paper No. 5. I invite you to consider item one.

Current Expenditure

Item 1: 02-023 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – \$86,910,956

Item 1: 02-023 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation –Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – \$86,910,956 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I am on my feet.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I have to move on to Agency Code 02-023...

Ms. Ferguson: I was on my feet before you put the question, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: I now move to Chart of Account 2610000. I proposed the question. Hon. Members, when I proposed that is when people have to be ready with their questions. When I ‘put’ it means that we have exhausted the question, so one cannot rise when I am putting the question. The opportunity has passed. I asked that people be alert. I would scan the room after proposing to see if there is any red light or if any person catches my attention. Now, I am at proposing.

Capital Expenditure

Item 1: 02-023 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Solar System Project – \$101,091,778

Item 1: 02-023 Office of the Prime Minister – Power Generation – Solar System Project – \$101,091,778 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.]

Item 2: 03-301 – Ministry of Finance – Policy and Administration – Technical Assistance – \$31,544,559

Ms. Ferguson: This is a supplementary paper for the period ending 31st December, 2023. The request being sought here is for more than \$31,544...million

Mr. Chairman: It is five hundred and forty-four thousand plus.

Ms. Ferguson: Initially, there was a voted provision of \$30 million. Today is the 19th December. There are practically 11 days remaining to the end of this year. The explanation given to expend this \$31 million and change is the provision of additional inflows under the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) Technical Assistant programmes as a result of the acceleration of project activities. Could the Hon. Minister explain, one – the reason for the Ministry now seeking this money, whether the Ministry would be able to expend this money before the end of December, 2023, and how many persons are likely to benefit from this provision now being sought?

Dr. Singh: I wonder, where does one begins.

Mr. Chairman: It is by answering the question.

Dr. Singh: First of all, just a point of correction. I believe I heard the Hon. Member say that the original voted provision was \$30 million. It was not. It was \$50 million. Secondly, the Hon Member noted that this supplementary provision is being sought under what is described as specific finances.

3.26 p.m.

The Hon. Member, having served, I believe, this is [Ms. Ferguson: Do not go there.] Through you, Sir, the Hon. Member held her head aloft during consideration of Financial Paper No.4, brandished her hand in the air and said, “I am going somewhere.” I, too, Sir, am going somewhere with this. This is a specific allocation. This is a foreign inflow under an Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)-supported technical assistance programme, as is clearly indicated under the narrative. Sir, the Hon. Member has served, as far as I can recall,

in at least two Parliaments. Perhaps more. I do not know if this is her third Parliament. I know it is at least her second. She must know of the time-honoured practice of bringing to account, at the end of the year, additional inflows in the case of those foreign-funded projects whose execution progressed at a pace that was more rapid during course of the year than was originally anticipated.

Now, I understand that this would be a circumstance that would be somewhat alien to the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC), given that they were known more for sloth of implementation rather than for speed of implementation. So, I sympathise somewhat with the fact that this is an unfamiliar circumstance for them. But we have been implementing proceeding...In fact, I believe that it was the Hon. Minister Manickchand who said that they used to send back money and we are executing more rapidly than we anticipated because we are delivering services to people. Sir, what this reflects is accelerated implementation of the project, which resulted in a higher level of disbursements from the IDB, as is clearly indicated in the narrative. And has always been the case where disbursements by foreign-funded agencies exceeded the budgeted allocation, we come at the end of the year to seek an appropriation to bring to account that additional inflow, and that is what this represents. Thank you very much, Sir.

Item 2: 03-031 Ministry of Finance – Policy and Administration – Technical Assistance – \$31,544,559 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 3: 21-212 – Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – \$6,053,000,000

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister disaggregate the \$4 billion that he is now seeking for the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA)?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, drainage and irrigation (D&I) activity to maintain 441,000 rods of canal channel and drainage – \$2,572,189,691, maintenance of machinery and equipment – \$840,589,529, operation of machinery and equipment – \$244,433,000, supervision and transportation cost - \$121,358,000, maintenance of vehicles (77) – \$51 million, fuel and lubricants – \$50 million, and manual cleaning of a number of channels in Region 10 – \$120 million, giving you a total of \$4 billion.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Minister received, in August of this year, in excess of \$2 billion for NDIA. Could the Hon. Minister say whether with the 12 days remaining the Ministry has the capacity to expend

the \$4 billion that he is now seeking, and why is it that in August he did not seek to get funds to do the additional cleaning and maintenance of the machinery to the end of the year?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, probably the Hon. Member would know that we are doing a lot of maintenance. He has called me and requested some canals to be maintained in Region 5 and he commended the process. We are in the *El Nino* situation now. We are moving pumps; we are moving machinery; and we are clearing canals. Although we are in this situation in terms of irrigation, we are still able to satisfy the farmers' need in getting irrigation for cash crops, rice farming and things. [Ms. Ferguson: (*Inaudible*)] This is ongoing work, Ms. Annette Ferguson.

Mr. Jordan: The responsibility is mine to seek of the Minister of Agriculture and any other Ministry assistance for the people of Guyana, and that I will continue to do. Mr. Chairman, in the same breath, I want to ask of the Minister to disaggregate the \$53 million for the Mahaica-Mahaicony Abary/Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA).

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, maintenance of canal, drain and access dams – \$50 million, other goods and services, which include spare parts for a number of machinery and equipment – \$3 million, giving you a total of \$53 million.

Mr. Jordan: The Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) is now receiving another \$2 billion. It is almost \$40 billion from the year 2020 to now. While it is clear that other agencies have not received such sum and care, could the Hon. Minister say what this additional \$2 billion would be used for at GuySuCo?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, the disaggregation is: wages and salary – 58%, which gives \$1.168 billion, for fuel – \$242 million, lubricants – \$40 million, other essential material and supply – \$284 million, lorry contractors – \$203 million, giving a total of \$2 billion.

Mr. Chairman, I want to say that with the accelerated work programme, due to the *El Nino* condition in the estate pattern, this has resulted in more opportunity days, and we are now moving ahead, rapidly, to enhance our cultivation to grow more cane and to produce more sugar. I am happy to say that we are moving in that light, and we are achieving our goal bit by bit, whilst we are reducing the dependency on the Government's coffer.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, just for clarity, could the Hon. Minister state what is the amount for wages and salaries for GuySuCo? I just want to get it clear.

Mr. Mustapha: I said it was 58% out of the \$2 billion, which would give you \$1.168 billion.

Mr. Jordan: Right.

Mr. Chairman, I want to ask of the Hon. Minister if the new trend of the Government will now be to subsidise GuySuCo annually for wages and salaries for workers, and if so, how much is he planning to come for next year?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I just said that this sum is for work that we are accelerating to achieve our objective. So, the extension of the work has called for more funds. If one looks at last year's contribution that the Government made to GuySuCo, it is far higher than this year's contribution. Although we are now moving and increasing cultivation, mechanising it and ensuring that we produce more sugar, we are reducing GuySuCo's dependency on the Government's coffer.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I heard the Hon. Minister when he said that he is moving to reduce the dependency of GuySuCo on the Government coffer. While he is moving to do that, he is expending billions and billions of dollars on GuySuCo, from which we are seeing no return to the country. Could the Hon. Minister say why is it that GuySuCo, at the various estates, is unable to make the budgeted targets for sugar, especially at Uitvlugt Estate?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, it seems that the Hon. Member wants to make some political statement. If it is that, I will ensure that I respond appropriately. From 2020 to 2023, we have employed over 1,400 new persons in the sugar industry. We have employed close to an additional 900 persons in the Canje area, and I am very optimistic that, at the end of this year, we will reach the target that GuySuCo has set itself.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, with the large numbers for employment, could the Hon. Minister say to this Committee how that has impacted the nation after spending billions of taxpayers' dollars on GuySuCo?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member has failed to realise that workers and their families are benefitting. Guyanese are benefitting. We are employing and making economic opportunities to Guyanese, unlike what they did. When they were in Government, they dismissed over 7,000 workers from the sugar industry. We are ensuring that the people of our country gain economically to ensure that they enjoy a better life. That is the main purpose. GuySuCo as a state industry, we will ensure that we revitalise GuySuCo. That is why GuySuCo is now moving into a different trend in terms of less dependency on Government's funds.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, while I do not disagree with the Minister that we need to employ people and that we need to ensure that our families can meet the meals on tables and all the necessary, for three and a half years, we have heard in this House that we are modernising, we are retooling, revitalising and all that for GuySuCo, but we have not made one single dollar in profit from GuySuCo since then but we would have expended \$40 billion.

Mr. Chairman: What is the question?

Mr. Jordan: I am asking the Minister, again: could he name one of the returns from GuySuCo to the nation?

3.41 p.m.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, if we could be factual, we took over an industry that was ailing. The previous Government did not spend any money to revitalise this industry. They dismissed over 7,000 workers and killed the village economy. All of the economic activities in places like Wales, Rose Hall, Skeldon and Enmore... The village economy died. We are revitalising it. We are putting people into economic activities. We are moving up the village economy. We are creating more opportunities for people whilst GuySuCo is being revitalised. We are recapitalising. We are making the GuySuCo a more modern industry. Not long from now, GuySuCo will be an industry *to be reckoned with* and will produce sugar for profitability in this country.

Mr. Ramjattan: In view of their massive mechanisation and all that, has the Minister included, in any study, how many workers will be displaced as a result of mechanisation?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, as I said earlier, the workers who are in GuySuCo will not be displaced. We are trying to ensure those persons who left earlier can fill the gaps so that we can reach the target we have set for ourselves.

Ms. Ferguson: On GuySuCo, I heard the Hon. Member state that 58% of the \$2 billion will go towards paying salaries and wages for workers. Could the Hon. Member state for this Committee the total number of administrative staff currently at GuySuCo and also the number of factory workers who are likely to benefit from this 58% of \$2 billion? That is just one.

Secondly, could he state the highest paid position and also the lowest paid in GuySuCo at this moment?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I will lay those figures over to the Hon. Member.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, you know we are considering a paper. The nation is listening and so I would love for you to let the.... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you do not have that at your fingertips and so you will lay over. The Hon. Minister said that he will lay it over. Remember, we are asking specifically for the factory workers, and also for the highest and lowest paid. Those are the three things for which we have asked.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I also want to remind this House that when I had asked a question of how workers many were actually displaced under the Coalition Government – for them to provide the 7000 – he never provided that information. So, I hope that it would not be the same today.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you for that intervention, Hon. Member.

Item 3: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – \$6,053,000,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 3: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – National Drainage and Irrigation Authority – \$5,396,397,780

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, this is the capital expense of \$5,396,397,780. It is for the provision of additional resources to facilitate critical drainage and irrigation works. Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate this sum, please?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, there are a number of requests for machinery across the country. We are trying to place our own machinery in different parts of the country. We have \$908,771,706 allocated for the approval to purchase machinery. We have already put systems in place and are awaiting approval to purchase this machinery. What we have also done is advertise. We have a number of critical works in the Pomeroon. We want to ensure that Pomeroon becomes a productive area again. For places like Friendship, Marlborough, Martindale, Hackney, Strong Hope, Karawab, Sirikie, Jacklow, Abrams Creek and a number of areas, what we are doing there...the President and I went there and looked. The people would normally get floods there. We are now lifting the beds for these people to 1.5 metre so that the floods they have suffered over the years could be avoided. Since then, over 40% of the farmers have returned to the land as the programme goes on. Those are a number of areas in which we will be spending \$794,000,286. What we are also doing across the country is looking at a number of canals that need rehabilitation in places such as Friendship, Den Amstel, Craig,

Plaisance, Belladrum, Profit, Gordon Table, New Amsterdam, Manchester, Black Bush Polder, Bonasika and Mahaicony Creek. There are a number of areas in which we are doing rehabilitation. We are doing new canals. What I mean by new canals is that we are rehabilitating these canals at a cost of \$2,549,400,440.

We are also doing studies now to design the Hope-like Canal that we want to do. We are doing a number of those canals in Regions 5 and 6. The designs are being done and we have allocated \$6.4 million to do those designs. Hopefully, by February, we will get the entire design done and works will commence to do those Hope-like canals as we did at Hope. Also, the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) needs additional funds. We are seeing a high performance for projects that we budgeted for this year. In relation to the moneys which we allocated for those projects, we now must have more capital sum to add because the work is moving apace. So, we have \$880,349,435. This gives a total of \$5,396,397,780; that is the disaggregation.

Ms. Ferguson: I heard the Hon. Minister detail briefly for us how this money will be expended. May I remind the Hon. Member....

Mr. Chairman: Do not remind him. Ask your question.

Ms. Ferguson: You have 11 days remaining....

Mr. Chairman: Ask a question, please.

Ms. Ferguson: ...in the year of 2023. I heard the Minister state that the advertisement was done. [**An. Hon. Member:** He said systems are in place.] If systems are in place, you have three weeks to go to advertisement, which will take you into 2024. Could you say to this Committee when the advertisement will be posted and list the number of machineries that are expected to be procured from this sum of money that you are seeking?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, look, I have in my hand here all the advertisements that were done a long time ago when we [*inaudible*]. This is all the procurement process and public tendering.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman...

Mr. Mustapha: Public tendering...

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, the Minister is on his feet, and he is providing the answers.

Mr. Mustapha: I have here the list. So, we have all the procurement procedures that were put in place. In some areas, work have already commenced because these were critical works. Poor farmers are suffering. We cannot wait on the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) to come here while the farmers punish. We have to execute the work. Now, the Hon. Member asked for the disaggregation of the machinery. We are purchasing six long-reach excavators. These will be going at Leguan, Wakenaam and Uitvlugt. Two will be going to the Pomeroon. We are purchasing five amphibious excavators. An additional pontoon will be going to the Pomeroon. There are a number of other pumps in the country, which we will be procuring, to go to critical areas around the country. This gives you a total of \$908 million.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, when we come to this Committee, we must be transparent. This is the taxpayers' money you are talking about. Is the Hon. Minister saying to this nation.... Did I hear you say the purchase was made or that the purchases will be made?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I think the Hon. Member should listen. Listen. Listen. Listen. These machineries are in the country. The procurement procedure has already been completed in terms of putting all of the procedures in place. We are awaiting the funds to be approved to complete the process. We have not awarded anything. No contract was signed. This will happen within days.

Ms. Ferguson: Am I to understand, Hon. Member, that this was not a public tender? You just prepared the tender document and have it there probably waiting to award the contract.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, this was public tender.

Ms. Ferguson: Since it was public tender, could the Hon. Member state to this National Assembly: one, when the tender was publicised – in which paper – and whether he can make these clippings available to the National Assembly?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I will lay it over to the Hon. Member.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. The Hon. Minister disaggregated the sum of which we are told that \$880 million is an additional sum to cater for expenditure on projects that are ongoing. My interpretation is that for the rollover projects were budgeted for in 2023, in relation to the sums budgeted, because the work has moved at a pace, there is a need for more money to cater now for expenditure. Could the Hon. Minister say if this includes the construction of the pump station at Charity, which on 12th September, 2023 had a 10% status

completion from a total sum of \$544 million that was awarded after \$254 million was budgeted? If so, could the Hon. Minister tell us what is the current status in terms of percentage of completion for this specific project?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, that pump station is not in the estimate. That is an ongoing rollover project. As he rightly said, for the pump station at Charity, the current status is 14%; we are working. This is a rollover project, and the completion date is next year. We have a number of other projects that had better performance. Based on our budget this year, the money has been expended. That is why we are coming now for more money to complete the performance enhancement that has happened in those projects.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, could the Hon. Minister please tell us what projects this \$880 million will cater for as additional sum on the current contract sum that they have?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, there are advances on some projects. There is Meten-Meer-Zorg, Pouderoyen, Belle Vue, Jimbo, Montrose, Ankerville, Letter Kenny and other projects in the Baracara area that we have started. You know that we have started massive work in Baracara. We have created new canals there. We are now building a massive structure to ensure that the farmers get irrigation there. We recently gave them farming equipment such as tractors and plough. We are doing 400 hundred acres of beans production in Baracara now.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, the Hon. Minister was kind enough to point out the four additional pump stations that were awarded recently for advances. May I ask the Hon. Minister to provide the sum for each of these pump stations in terms of what will be their advance payment?

Mr. Mustapha: I will lay it over. If I could remember well, it is 15% of the contract sum. I will lay it over to the Hon. Member.

3.56 p.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, the Hon. Minister also indicated that \$908 million will be used for the purchase of machinery, that he has already advertised and so on, and that he has started the procurement process. Could the Hon. Minister guarantee this Committee that it will be awarded within the 11 days and delivered? This is because procurement process and financial management requires that one delivers the item and then one is fully paid. If that does not happen, could the Hon. Minister guarantee this National Assembly that the moneys will be returned to the Consolidated Fund on or before 31st December, 2023?

Mr. Mustapha: Sure, Mr. Chairman. Yes. These machineries are in the country, and it is a matter of days, as I said earlier, in which we can advertise, execute payment and collect our machinery.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to lay over in the National Assembly the company or persons that they will be purchasing these machines from when the procurement process is finished and at what cost?

Mr. Mustapha: Of course. We are always accountable, and we can give the Member that at any time.

Item 3: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – National Drainage and Irrigation Authority – \$5,396,397,780, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 3: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services –Sustainable Agriculture Development Project – \$703, 913,000

Mr. Jordan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister kindly state what are the project activities under this line item?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, these are ongoing IDB projects. Earlier, the Hon. Member and I were speaking. I even invited him to visit the abattoir at Region 5. I was there two Saturdays. We have close to 75% completion. We are now purchasing the equipment. We are doing the soil laboratory at Mon Repos at the National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) station where we will also purchase equipment. We are doing a tissue culture laboratory. We signed a contract with The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI) in India. We have to purchase equipment and help to build the building. These are ongoing projects from IDB inflows to these projects.

Item 3: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services –Sustainable Agriculture Development Project – \$703,913,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 3: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Hinterland Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture Development Project – \$189,000,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I know it is money coming in. Could the Hon. Member state what are some of the activities this provision will cater for? I know we had an initial \$500 million approved. Could you say what percentage of that money has been expended to date?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, here again, this is an International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) project. I want to say that when we assumed Government in 2020, this project was about to be taken away from Guyana because this project was underperforming. Recently, while I was in Rome, I discussed it with IFAD

officials, and we have had an extension to this project. There is \$189 million which will benefit 14,520 persons in the hinterland community. I can go through the list of projects in the villages, for example, revetment of swamp bridge walkway, construction of Information and Community Technology (ICT) hubs, implementation of mess hall, upgrade of hot meals kitchen and a number of projects that we could go through. This is a continuation of the IFAD project. We have completed the \$500 million that was budgeted, and these are additional projects in the hinterland which will benefit the village economy and benefit the villages.

Item 3: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – Hinterland Environmentally Sustainable Agriculture Development Project – \$189,000,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 4: 26-264 Ministry of Natural Resources – Petroleum Management – Oil and Gas Sector Development Programme - \$199,090,668

Item 4: 26-264 Ministry of Natural Resources – Petroleum Management – Oil and Gas Sector Development Programme - \$199,090,668, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 5: 31-311 Ministry of Public Works – Policy Development and Administration – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations – \$79,000,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, I know this is subsidies to the Transport and Harbours Department (T&HD). They are now seeking an additional \$79,000,000 and the explanation given in the remarks' legend states, "Provision of additional resources to support and Transport and Harbours Department." Could the Hon. Member state what exactly this new provision of \$79,000,000 will be catering for? That is my first question.

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I thank the Hon. Member for the question. Mr. Chairman, I believe that one of the things for which the people of Guyana would be very appreciative is the significant improvements that have come to our ferry service since August, 2020 when the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) came to office. There are a number of initiatives that were put in place. For example, we have increased the number of trips that were scheduled per day. We have put in place online booking. We have now put an additional vessel in place which is to the Region 2 area. Yesterday, I saw a social media post complaining about late departure of the vessel to Region 1 but the passenger or the person

who made the post did not tell the whole story. Two boats departed for Region 1 yesterday – the Barima that was fully loaded with cargo and passengers to Port Kaituma and the MV MA Lisha which departed later into the evening to Mabaruma, fully laden with cargo and passengers.

The people of Region 1 used to have a service once every month or once every six weeks. Now, could you imagine that on the same day there are two vessels going to Region 1? One is to Port Kaituma and one to Mabaruma to ensure that passengers get there. Mr. Chairman, that is in an environment where the propaganda said that people were fleeing Region 1 because of the Venezuela issue. That is in that environment. In Bartica, people are more satisfied. They can get their vehicles and their trucks in there. In Wakenaam and Leguan, the people can get their paddy and other agricultural products to market in a reliable, well-organised service. The \$79,000,000 that we are asking for should not be a cause for complaint anywhere. It should be a cause for jubilation because this is for additional support for fuel to ensure the joy of the people who utilise these services and the supplies that come to the market are adequate and that everyone is fully satisfied. That is why we are seeking these additional sums. This is as a result of more trips. If the Hon. Member wants to get a breakdown of all the trips, she would be able to see how many trips per month, the consumption per trip and all the rest of it. This is really an improvement.

I notice the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, has a very nice smirk, a smile. He is my very good friend. One of the reasons we have this problem with the heavy consumption of fuel is because of the age of these vessels. We have to keep maintaining these vessels while we bring new vessels in stock. Once we are able to get new vessels, which is something that we would be looking for...And we hope that when we come to this House...where we could retire the 48 year-old and we could retire those that have been going forever, we would be able to get fuel consumption at a manageable rate as it relates to passenger, load and distance without having to put extra burden on people of increasing fares. This subsidy for fuel is to keep fares in check, to continue with efficiency and to ensure that we have a continuous service. The more trips that are being made... Mr. Ramjattan could keep smiling. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what proportion of this sum, if any, would be utilised specifically for Transport and Harbours Department in Region 7? I know mention was made of Bartica in Region 7. Could the Hon. Minister also say whether or not any action is being taken, through the Transport and Harbours Department, to address the issue that is being faced in Bartica right now with speedboat operators charging \$3000 per passenger when the Transport and Harbours Department put out a notice saying that it should only be \$2500? These issues have been there for a while, and I am hoping that some amount of these funds will be

utilised so we can get some aid in Bartica for these charges that are imposed upon passengers. They do not utilise the ferry as their main means of transportation. Barticians go by the speedboat service. Thank you.

4.11 p.m.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the Hon. Member for the question. Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member would be advised by members of the Region 7 community that the service has been increased, even the days when there was not usually service to Bartica. Because we have been able to put in place additional vessels, we have been able to carry vessels on those days as well. The actual consumption of fuel would be based upon the number of trips that go to a particular area. When we talk about fuel, we procure fuel in bulk. The Transport and Harbours Department (T&HD) procures fuel from the Guyana Oil Company Limited (GUYOIL) based upon a procurement process, and GUYOIL provides fuel in bulk. It is monitored and measured based upon the trips, consumption, weight, the distance travelled, and it is logged. That is how we deal with fuel.

As it relates to the issue of charging extra by speedboat operators, all speedboat services in Guyana that operate are regulated by the Maritime Administration Department (MARAD) of which I am the Minister responsible. The speedboats put themselves into a turn system and they are organised by their respective associations. If there are 40 boats and they have turns, they would meet. Who has turn one, turn two, or turn three, would load on a daily basis and traverse the rivers based upon a principled approach. Anyone who is charging more certainly is not doing so with the blessings of MARAD, and I can honestly say, based upon my engagement with the various speedboat associations, not with the speedboat associations in the various areas. When we get these complaints... At all of the stellings there are monitors. Every time a boat is dispatched, there is a monitor who could tell you the number of passengers, what time the boat left and even, in some instances as we advance safety, the names of all the passengers. In case there is a difficulty, you can account for them. What happens is that some people want to leave – and this is what we are told – before time and before the boat is filled with the number of passengers. They would say, ‘let us go, it is getting late’. So sometimes the captain would make his own local arrangement with those to charge extra to compensate for the empty seats.

As far as we are concerned, I could assure the Hon. Member, MARAD nor the Government of Guyana has not sanctioned, approved, or condoned overcharging for minibuses, for speedboats, even when it comes to aircraft fares, and any fare that is being hiked. As the Minister of transportation, we pay careful attention to these and we have been monitoring them. If there are unscrupulous operators or there are local arrangements between operators and passengers, there is hardly anything that we could do. It would be a good opportunity, since the

Hon. Member has asked the question, to remind the travelling public, especially at this Christmas time when we can have that kind of exploitation, that the Government of Guyana, the Maritime Administration Department and the Ministry of Public Works have not approved any increases in fares for speedboats. I would also take the opportunity to say minibuses as well. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. The Hon Member, Ms. Fernandes.

Minister with the Ministry of Public Works [Mr. Indar]: Mr. Chairman, if I may?

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

Mr. Indar: Just to add to what Minister Edghill said, three weeks ago we had a campaign where eight of those boats were detained and some of them were suspended because of that practice. It is not that we received the reports and we did not act. We acted on them. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, you have the floor.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am happy that the Hon. Minister, Mr. Edghill, said all that he said because I can make a very clear statement. Ms. Teixeira is there also. I know she will be able to say and to confirm that there is absolutely no speedboat operating under the Bartica Speedboat Owners Association that charges \$2,500 which the Transport and Harbours Department prescribed as the fare. It is not in existence, Sir. I am going to ask the Hon. Minister right now, and I am going to make this statement, that there are no systems that passengers have put in place. There is no way that passengers are asking to go before the boat is loaded and all of that. That is not true, Sir. Whatever report is going to the Minister...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, are you saying that what the Minister responded, as his answer, is untruthful?

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I am.

Mr. Chairman: All right. I will stop you there because I do not know where your facts are. He is the competent authority.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, he did not say that as his facts. He said that is what is being reported to him and I am giving clarity to him, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: At this stage here, please, do not give him clarity. Give him a question and then let him give us his position.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. My question to the Hon. Minister is, from today onward what action or what penalties is he prepared to invoke upon speedboat operators operating under the Bartica Speedboat Owners Association who are all charging \$3,000 per passenger? Never once did they have it lowered after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Chairman: I will say Hon. Ministers, preference to the honourable or priority to and then...

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I think my colleague, Minister Indar, indicated what has already been done. When we had the situation with the Demerara Harbour Bridge, we had speedboat operators at Vreed-en-Hoop who went into that practice to make 'a hustle', so to speak, in Guyanese language. We took them off and we brought boats from as far as Parika to provide the service across the Demerara River. They learned their lesson because they were not earning for a period of time. The ones that overcharge passengers, once we get those reports and we mount sting operations and they are caught – and, Hon. Member, I would make this public so that everybody could hear – we have applications for persons to enter the turn system. So, persons who want to carry out mischief and do that, we will make space for those who want to get into the turn system. We will enforce that like we have done.

This is something that passengers must know. They would not be left at the mercy of a speedboat operator or a conductor in a bus or anything. You can demand your rights. Do you know people would say that people take bribe? But it takes two people to make that transaction complete. It takes two people to make that overcharging complete – a speedboat operator that is asking for more and a passenger who is complying. There is a monitor at every stelling. I am making this public today, and I thank you for allowing me. Passengers can report to the Monitor. The Monitor is uniformed, and he or she is marked 'Monitor' and he or she is at every loading place. If a speedboat is overcharging, you can report it to the Monitor, and MARAD and the Ministry of Public Works would take the necessary action. We rely on voluntary compliance, moral suasion, but we are not afraid to use the fist when it is necessary to maintain law and order and to protect citizens from being exploited. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Minister Indar, is there anything to add?

Mr. Indar: No.

Mr. Chairman: No. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I am happy to hear the Hon. Member is trying to make life easy for our people by providing additional trips and so forth. To the Hon. Member, I note here you are

seeking \$79 million. I have two questions for you. First, would a portion of this money go towards the two speedboats that you have operating between the New Amsterdam/Rosignol route, and if so, what percentage of this \$79 million would go to that service?

The second question would also be... We know that GUYOIL, because you said earlier that GUYOIL is the main provider of fuel for the T&HD, so we know that the demand for fuel is great out there. Could you say whether this \$79 million would be expended by 31st December, 2023, and if the moneys are not fully expended whether it will go back into the Consolidated Fund?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, the two water taxis that ply the Rosignol/New Amsterdam route was catered for and adequately supplied in the last provision that was sought. This \$79 million is mainly for the ferries, the bigger and larger vessels that are plying the Essequibo River, whether it is to Bartica, whether it is the Essequibo Coast, Leguan, Wakenaam or wherever we are going.

As it relates to if this money will be spent, the only reason why we were able to come to a finite number of \$79 million is based upon projections and calculations of what is required to take us to 31st December. The money definitely will be spent and it will not be \$79 million to cover... This is just a subsidy that we are asking the Government to add to what the Transport and Harbours Department already expended. Thank you.

Ms. Ferguson: Would the Hon. Member be kind enough to say to this House the total number, whether you want to calculate it in gallons or litres, that this \$79 million will cater for? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: It is about 18,800 gallons per week that is consumed.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Minister say from this sum of \$79 million if we are also covering the cost in terms of fuel for a boat that I see operating from Parika to Supenaam? I think the boat's name is MV Hercules.

Bishop Edghill: The answer is, yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask the Hon. Minister if he can provide some information on this new boat that we are hearing of for the first time?

Bishop Edghill: I think this matter was discussed publicly. His Excellency the President, in his visit to Essequibo and the demands of the people of Essequibo for additional service, said that we will make every effort to procure additional vessels for service. The demand was great. We searched and we located a fit-for-purpose vessel that was available locally. We engaged that person on what we call a trial basis. The operator

has to service so many trips to Supenaam, so many trips to Wakenaam, so many trips to Bartica, checking on both timings, speed, fuel consumption and at the same time during that trial improve the service.

4.26 p.m.

We are at the stage now, having done the trials and based upon the arrangements during those trials, we are looking to properly acquire that vessel as a part of the Government of Guyana's assets.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, may I ask the Hon. Minister, who just said that the Government is now looking to acquire this new vessel, what is the cost that the Government is looking to expend for the acquisition of this new vessel?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I would say at an appropriate time when negotiations and everything else is completed, we will be able to make that disclosure to the National Assembly (NA).

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask the Hon. Minister, since the boat has been on a trial run and it is consuming fuel, it also has staff, *et cetera*, is the ministry renting this boat from this individual? If so, would the Hon. Minister be able to say what is the cost per month?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, the understanding that we entered with the supplier during the period of trials is that we will stand the cost of fuel and other incidentals for the operation while we log, check, and verify. We have been dealing with that.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Member say why the boat is not currently working and why it has not been for the past three weeks?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, if we could have an independent person to give us a report from Parika, the Hon. Member would know that the MV Hercules is sailing as we speak.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, I would like to verify that it has not been working...

Mr. Chairman: Do you want to withdraw and ask if the boat was... Rephrase that. You made a very positive statement which...

Mr. Mahipaul: That it is not working. Sir, I am confirming that to you because I travel using that service.

Mr. Chairman: You should have confirmed it before you were so positive. Go ahead let us hear your question.

Mr. Mahipaul: Perhaps we could verify by taking a team and go, like we visited the bond at Sussex Street in a National Assembly before. If the Hon. Minister is confident to say to this House who the individual is that they have engaged with this boat, I am putting to you, Sir, it is the same person with that bond.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I will invoke the issue of withholding names because I do not want anything to arise and the person cannot defend themselves.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I would like to read a report that I have on the...

Mr. Chairman: On the sailing.

Bishop Edghill: On my phone, which is normal, that I get from the Transport and Harbours Department. 'The MV Hercules departed Parika for Supenaam at 9.38 a.m. on 19th December, 2023. Adults, 90 passengers; children, 6; pensioners, 6. Total passengers, 102. Total passenger revenue, \$35,400. In terms of cargo, B class, 24; C, 4; D, 6; E, 8. Total spaces, 56. Total vehicles, 42. Vehicle revenue, \$120,000. Freight note revenue, \$224,203. Tonnage, 115.64 tons. Total revenues, \$379,608.' This is standard every time a vessel departs. This is a report of 9.38 a.m. – this morning.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, may I ask if the Hon. Minister can confirm that from the time the trial period began to 19th December – which is today – that this boat has worked continuously during that period, or every day, providing a service?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, the boat operated in keeping with an agreement of the trial that was established with the provider based upon the engagements that were made. I am saying to you now, the boat is currently sailing with an engagement, with the Government looking to acquire it as an asset of the State.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to say what is the total consumption in terms of fuel, for this very boat, per trip?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, I thought I heard total consumption per trip.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, consumption is determined by one, tonnage, tide, and distance to where one is travelling. It will vary.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, I am not sure if I heard the answer to a previous question correctly. Could the Hon. Minister tell this House the dates from the time this boat started to work on trial to 19th December – the

specific days when this boat worked the Essequibo River? Could the Hon. Minister confirm that the destination and departure is Parika to Supenaam, Supenaam to Parika?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I think I have heard most of that, but go ahead. I did not hear the dates.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I would like to confirm to the House that during the engagement for the trials of the MV Hercules, we sailed to Supenaam, we sailed to Bartica, we sailed to Wakenaam, we sailed to Leguan.

Mr. Chairman: He also wanted the dates of sailing.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, that would require that I now go to the Transport and Harbours Department to get the logs of which day...

Mr. Mahipaul: Lay it over.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Member, I will give you one more question, then I have my very good friend who I will be given a lot of priority to today – Ms. Ferguson – to take the floor.

Mr. Mahipaul: I may have to turn your very good friend to get some priority.

Mr. Chairman: That will be difficult.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Minister verify that he will layover the dates? The other question is, in the event...

Mr. Chairman: Come on. Hon. Member, the Minister just said that. Now you want him to verify a commitment he gave.

Mr. Mahipaul: I did not hear him say it.

Mr. Chairman: Come on. Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, you have the floor.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I have a different question.

Mr. Chairman: Come on.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, you have the floor.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. What a revelation. By way of a question from my colleague, we just learnt of a private vessel providing services in the Essequibo River. The Hon. Minister responded by saying that they are working out whatever arrangement for the Government to acquire this boat at a later time. At the said time, the Government, through the Transport and Harbours Department, is providing fuel to operate the vessel. My question to the Hon. Member, though the Government is providing free fuel, could I get from you whether a cost is being applied to the users of this vessel and could you provide to us what the cost per passenger is, as well as for cargo and vehicles? Thank you. Remember, it is free fuel that they are getting.

Bishop Edghill: Whatever is the fare for a passenger to Supenaam, whether it is on the Makouria, whether it is the Kanawan, whether it is the Sabanto, whatever vessel is sailing, it is the same fare. Cost per ton, same. Cost per vehicle, same. Whatever is the cost of a passenger to go to Bartica, if the boat is going to Bartica, same fare. Cost per car, same fare. Tons per canter, same fare. Nothing has changed. There is nothing like free fuel. We are subsidising. All right, Mr. Chairman? I want to make that very clear. The Transport and Harbours Department's operations have always... Even in the time of the Coalition, fuel was subsidised. There is not a private man that is charging passengers a fare. It is the Transport and Harbours Department that is utilising a vessel during a period of trials that is now being sought to acquire and everything was operating just as standard Transport and Harbours Department operations. I do not think I can be clearer than that.

Ms. Ferguson: I think the Hon. Member has made it a little clearer. The impression that I got is that this private vessel is being operated by private persons. He has now rectified that by saying that those who are operating the vessel are actually from the Transport and Harbours Department. My only concern is – and perhaps the Minister could consider this – since it is a private vessel, though not procured yet by the Government, but the Government is using taxpayers' money that procured fuel subsidies, perhaps they could look at reducing the cost rather than having that standard cost as against the Sabanto, Kanawan, Barima and the other vessels. It is just a consideration.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, it is just a consideration.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I used to play soccer when I was younger.

Mr. Chairman: I see to your right is one of the presidents of one of our better football clubs.

Bishop Edghill: Yes, yes, yes. I used to play soccer when I was much younger. When we are off the field, we seem to know every move as against when we are on the field. Whenever one gets sent off the field, one used

to be able to tell the other players, move so, move so, move so, but when one was on the field, it was a different story. That is all I will say for now in response to that comment. It would appear that some of us who were on the field did not know that we could provide additional services, we did not know that we could improve the service to the people out there, and now that we are doing that... [An Hon. Member: Twenty/twenty vision.] Twenty/twenty vision. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Before I entertain another question, coming up in February, we have a Parliament against the Diplomatic Core soccer game. I am practicing as goalie. Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, are you finished? Thank you. Hon. Member Mr. Holder, you have the floor.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. It would be remiss of me if I do not contribute or ask the Minister a few questions. I have been travelling from Parika to Supenaam, Supenaam to Parika on a regular basis. In fact, just recently, I did. I think the Minister and his team should be aware that the MV Sabanto has been malfunctioning for a number of months. Almost six months. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] I guarantee you, almost six months; four to six months. The last time I said four months, so it is now about six months. It has been having a negative impact on farmers and everyone that has been using the ferry system. [An Hon. Member: What is the question?] The question is, the Minister has been talking about time and distance, I know distance does not change but timing certainly has. The boat now takes two hours...

Mr. Chairman: What is the question?

Mr. Holder: I am coming to the question.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, but you have to shorten the preamble.

Mr. Holder: I have to give some context, Cde. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Ask the question. We have had a lot of preambles today.

Mr. Holder: It is taking longer, Cde. Chairman. I am right there. I want to know how is that impacting, in terms of fuel... We are speaking about fuel here. How is that impacting this \$79 million? When does the Minister intend to fix it as it has been on his watch for the last four to six months?

4.41. p.m.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, you will recall that the MV Sabanto and the MV Kanawan were vessels that came to Guyana, as a result of an engagement with the Government of the People's Republic of China. Those

vessels have been operating the Essequibo route and they have served us very well. The vessel that is under question by the Hon. Member encountered a difficulty with its one engine. The normal trip to the Essequibo on the MV Sabanto or the Kanawan is 90 minutes. As a result of the malfunctioning of that one engine, the boat has taken a longer time. He is justifying, by his question, why we had to even move towards acquiring additional vessels, because every time there is a difficulty, there is a build-up of traffic. While the boat is sailing, the Machine Corporation of Guyana Limited (MACORP) is on the boat, working to fix the engine. We had a choice of taking the boat out of service and parking it until it is fixed or we go with a boat that is not as fast as used to be but continues to provide the service because the trucks with the gas, the trucks with the provisions, the trucks with the coconut water, the trucks with all the products coming out, need to get out, and the supplies to get into Essequibo need to go.

We made a decision that we will continue to sail while work is being done. While the work is being done, because of the nature of the vessel, some of the spares that were required were not readily available in Guyana. We had to ship the spares in. [An Hon. Member: It is six months.] It is not six months. I stand here, Sir, and I would like to say that we should not use the National Assembly to create hysteria and spread misinformation. It has not been six months. [An Hon. Member: Say how long.] It is just over six weeks we are having this problem. We have another problem, where another one of the same vessels need to actually go into drydock to get a part underneath fixed because we cannot get it fixed. We cannot do that now at Christmas time. We have to time these things. When we take it out of service to get that fixed, we have to do rearranging of the other vessels – the Makouria and others, the Malali that is out there – to make sure we keep the service going.

The bottom line is, we are happy to tell the people of Guyana that with all the challenges with these ageing vessels and the difficulties of spare parts, we have kept the service and we have kept our faith with the people, ensuring that they could get to their destination and, in many instances, improving the efficiency of the service. It is true we have a problem. While we are talking here, I have not gotten the final report, but we have the men on board working because the parts have arrived in the country, and they are working to get it sorted out.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. The case of half a loaf is better than no bread.

Mr. Holder: The boat obviously had a number of other problems over the course of six months, but ageing seems to be a problem, according to the Hon. Minister. You have to get new vessels. [Mr. Hamilton: Ask the question.] I am coming to the question. I am right here. How old is the Sabanto and how old is the Hercules, because age is a problem?

Mr. Chairman: I will put the question to the Hon. Minister.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I do not know... [*Interruption*]

[*Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.*]

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am happy that this afternoon it seems that the National Assembly has come alive to the issue of the Transport and Harbours Department and the provision of services to the people of Guyana. What I do know is, the MV Sabanto and the MV Kanawan came into operation while the PPP/C was in Government after 1992. That is what I know for sure because that was as a result of the intervention.

Mr. Chairman: The Hon. Minister of Home Affairs ...

Bishop Edghill: ...will be able to tell us more about that.

Mr. Chairman: ...will be able to tell you because he had it redesigned.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you, Sir. The second thing is,...

Mr. Chairman: And though I signed the contract in 2005, we had some issues with designing it. Yes, I did in China.

Bishop Edghill: Yes, Sir. The other issue... I will say this, quite recently we had a distinguished trade mission from the United States of America (USA) visiting here. One of the engagements that I had with them was to help us to find fit-for-purpose vessels that might be available for auctions from the USA market. Acquiring new vessels takes years. While someone might want to say we are buying an old vessel, to get a new boat is two years...

Mr. Chairman: More.

Bishop Edghill: ...or even more. We were able to get the Government of India, through the Garden Ridge Shipbuilders and Engineers Limited (GRSE), to build MV Militia in record time and deliver it to Guyana. That is not normal. This is not a canoe we are buying, [*inaudible*] boats. You have to see what the market has to offer so that you will be able to get to the rescue. We are looking at acquiring fit-for-purpose vessels that will improve consumption, time in terms of travels, and certainly as the number one priority – and I should have said that first – safety. The same gentlemen who asked questions about the MV Hercules that they saw on the Essequibo River, would have seen that when it started passengers were actually standing in the sun.

I think the question that Mr. Mahipaul is asking, during the period when we were seeking to improve on the accommodation for passengers, he wants to know why it was not sailing; but it was all in an intent to improve the conditions of passengers and make sure we have it in a way to deal with the high-peak Christmas season. The issue here of age is something that all of us in this House must recognise. At this time, fit-for-purpose is what is required while we go to the next level. I have been making this point here in the National Assembly, Mr. Chairman, and please allow me to make it again for emphasis. The Government of Guyana had to be engaged in two things since we came to Office – fixing, while we are modernising. We have to keep an old bridge moving while we build a new bridge. We have to keep the old ferry sailing while we buy new ferries. That is what we have to do. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, I think we have exhausted the questions for this item. I would now like to put the question.

Item 5: 31-311 Ministry of Public Works – Policy Development and Administration – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations - \$79,000,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 5: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Maintenance of Roads – \$600,000,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I note that the Ministry is seeking an additional sum of \$600,000,000. They had an initial provision of \$2.7 billion and then a further provision of \$500,000,000 in August, 2023. My first question to the Hon. Minister is, based on the explanation given in the “REMARKS”/legend, can you explain for us what is meant by “expanded work programme”?

Bishop Edghill: The first thing I would like to bring to your attention is, this is provisions under the current budget, where we do maintenance of roads. The Hon. Member served at one time, so she is supposed to know what that means. It includes more than 100 small contractors, who are engaged monthly, to ensure that the roads are properly weeded and drained; the sand that we are picking up, you pass and see the people picking up the sandbags; the oil that is discharged on the road by recklessness and so on, is cleaned to ensure safety on the roadways. Then there is the big job that everybody wants – *meh* potholes.

Mr. Chairman, it gives me the opportunity to report to the House and to the nation why we need more money. For example, we went into Melanie Damishana where the roads were not maintained or repaired... [An Hon. Member: Never.] Forever. We did 13 roads in Melanie Damishana. A total of 13... Let me just get it right. [An Hon. Member: Yes, 13 roads.] Thirteen roads, 3.2 kilometre of road. We went into Non Paniel and did six roads. That is not capital projects where we award to contractors; this is the Special Projects

Unit of the Ministry. Recently, we went into Queenstown – eight roads at 4.96 kilometres. We went into Alberrtown – the Special Projects Unit – and did nine roads at four kilometres. We went into Kingston and did three roads. We went into Campbellville and did two roads. We went into Foulis and did 17 roads. We went into Enterprise and did 14 roads. We went into Strathspey and did eight roads; in Ogle we did one road; in Haslington North we did four roads; in Strathspey, Area J, we did three; and in Enmore we did five roads.

Do you know what we have been doing, Mr. Chairman, that is different from what used to be done before? When we go into a village that had a bad road, we used to patch the bad section. Now, when we carry the Special Projects Unit in an area, we do everything so when we come out of that village, that village is complete. We did it in Little India, we did it in Little Africa, and we did it at No. 58 Village in the Corentyne. That is our approach. So while we have contractors who are doing capital projects, road rehabilitation, building new roads – maintenance. We have had to maintain the Corentyne Highway. Right now, the Corentyne Highway is undergoing a major rehabilitation where we are currently building and expanding the 99 structures to be able to accommodate a wider road. That road was built how many years ago, the weight, the traffic – gone. We had to keep maintaining it. Those who travel the Linden/Soesdyke Highway would know of the waves that have developed on the Linden/Soesdyke Highway and how it is unsafe. The Special Projects Unit had to go and do sections.

4.56 p.m.

You have seen the junction where Soesdyke meets the East Bank; we just had to finish doing that. The entire East Bank corridor and, more particularly, the Grove area where it seems that there is a faulty line in terms of the soil, we have had to keep moving into that. While we are doing all of these, it is not just the road we have to do but, sometimes, we have to do the shoulders and the drains to make sure the water is draining. This money that is being sought is because of the volume of work that has been done. We have to pay for asphalt. One of the most expensive components of road maintenance is the cost of asphalt. We have to be able to move machinery and all of the rest of it around to be able to get the work done. The Government of Guyana could be criticised for many things but one of the things one cannot criticise us for is its track record when it comes to answering the needs of people where their roads are concerned. We have not been able to do everybody's roads, but we are doing times over better than we have ever done. I think this is clear in the eyes of everybody. Thank you, Sir.

Ms. Ferguson: While I hear the Hon. Member, there is a clear distinction between new roads and maintenance of roads – clear distinction. For this provision that is being sought of \$600 million, could the Minister provide

to this National Assembly a disaggregation and also inform the Committee whether Haslington North is included in his work programme; that is one? Secondly, Sophia, I think the last supplementary paper, I advocated for works to be done in the Sophia area and also in La Parfaite Harmony. Could you say if those areas are in your work programme? Thank you.

Bishop Edghill: I think I did indicate that in Haslington North, we did four roads. The cost of that operation was about \$19.891 million. I know sometimes when we speak in this House we are playing to the gallery. As it relates to Sophia, it is benefiting from roads under the miscellaneous roads programme. We cannot maintain what is not there. We have to go in and build roads. We have been doing, in Sophia – the people of Sophia could see; all are not yet done – is concrete roads which are being done under the miscellaneous roads programme.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chair, I want to ask the Hon. Minister... He spoke extensively on the maintenance of roads. I know this is an issue everybody is concerned about. Particularly when it comes to Region 7 – Bartica, I do note that there were allocations there for both maintenance and building of roads, particularly on 9th August in that...

Mr. Chairman: Let me help you frame the question if you have difficulty in so doing.

Ms. Fernandes: I do not have a difficulty, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Well, get to the question, please.

Ms. Fernandes: I am getting to the question.

Mr. Chairman: Please, ask the question.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I am asking the question.

Mr. Chairman: You are making a lot of statements.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I am asking specifically about the Bartica roads.

Mr. Chairman: Right.

Ms. Fernandes: I cannot just come and just say bluntly. I just have to give...

Mr. Chairman: I could help you frame it if you have difficulty in so doing.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I will ask you to help me. If I give you the scenario if you want to help frame the question...

Mr. Chairman: The question would be very simple. Are the roads in Bartica... You could list it here for maintenance.

Ms. Fernandes: That is not the question.

Mr. Chairman: We are dealing with the maintenance of roads not miscellaneous.

Ms. Fernandes: I am getting to that question but that is not my question.

Mr. Chairman: I am asking you to get there now.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I seldom ask questions and when I ask questions it is because I am representing a specific constituency, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: I have no problems with you representing your constituency. I have a problem with the speeches before the questions. I am asking you to get to the question, if not, I will put the question.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I do not think you even gave me the chance to get a question.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I think we have exhausted the questioning on this item.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, could I have one question please? Mr. Chairman?

Item 5: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Maintenance of Roads – \$600,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 5: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Equipment – \$362,000,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I just want you to hear me out for one second.

Mr. Chairman: If you have a question, you can ask it. I do not want to hear...

Ms. Ferguson: All right.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: This a time to be nice. It is joy and peace. It is Christmas.

Mr. Chairman: I have been extremely nice.

Ms. Ferguson: You have to show love.

Mr. Chairman: Exactly; I agree with you.

Ms. Ferguson: As we are considering this particular line item, Equipment; \$300 million was actually procured sometime early in the year. I note the Ministry is now coming for an additional \$362 million. This is a capital item. The explanation in the remark legend states:

“Provision for additional resources to facilitate purchases of equipment.”

Perhaps, the Hon. Member could explain to this Committee what equipment is to be procured. Why is it that he is coming 11 days short of the end of the year? Why could this not come in budget 2024 that will be in another two years?

Secondly, what is the purpose of this equipment? Where exactly this equipment will be assigned?

Bishop Edghill: I thank the Hon. Member for the question. It is because of the expanded work programme. This is not going to stop. Every time we build a road, we have to have crews that will do the maintenance. If there are 15 roads and a crew to do maintenance... When there are 3,500 roads, there have to be several crews to do maintenance. What we are doing with the moneys that we are seeking is to provide for two additional crews. The equipment that are being procured I could list them so that the Hon. Member and all of us... We are trying to buy a pneumatic road roller; a single drum road roller; wheel loader; tandem road roller; mini excavators; tipper truck; backhoe; water truck; tractor truck, Halla; tipper truck; gooseneck trailer; tandem roller; pneumatic roller; two skid steer; a canter and grader.

Now, I noticed that somebody asked my Hon. Colleague, Minister, Mr. Mustapha and he went to pains to explain that these are things that we already went out for, in terms of procurement – starting the procurement process. All of the equipment that we are seeking to buy here are going to be bought from companies who have submitted their bids with the items being here in Guyana. When this National Assembly approves this financial paper, the Ministry of Finance will be able to signal to the Ministry of Public works that the resources are now available for it to consummate and bring to conclusion its procurement process for the acquisition of these items. As I said, this is all for the increasing of the teams. It means in 2024, *we will be hitting the road running*

with additional equipment, more teams and places rather than just going into, for example, Enterprise and spending two months there or Little India and spending three weeks there. We will be able to multiply that by three, which is three different crews in different places working. That is what we are seeking to do. Thank you, Sir.

Ms. Ferguson: I have a follow up to the Hon. Member. I heard the Hon. Member clearly state that the Ministry already went out to procurement. It is now waiting on these moneys to start the purchasing and that these items will be procured from local providers. Could the Hon. Member state to this National Assembly, one, whether the procurement was done publicly; when it was advertised in newspapers and, secondly, the name or names of the local companies that will provide these services when the moneys are made available? When will they be delivered?

Bishop Edghill: The Procurement Act of 2003 provides for different forms of procurement. The items that are being procured are not sold by 75 people in Guyana. We wrote and got the approval of the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) to engage in restrictive tendering for providers that provide these sorts of equipment. Based upon the submission of the bids, the evaluation and the rest of it that was done by the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board, we are ready to proceed and go forward. These are all the suppliers; so every heavy-duty equipment supplier in this country was asked to put in their bid; do you have rollers, what is the cost; do you have it ready; this is that, *et cetera*. That is where we are.

Ms. Ferguson: I thank the Hon. Member for his response. He went to restrictive tendering, so by doing so you should know by now the name or names of company or companies that have submitted their bids or their quotations. Could this honourable Committee be provided with such information as to names of the companies that have already submitted their information to the Ministry of Public Works?

Bishop Edghill: The Hon. Member is asking me to do the job of the Ministry of Finance National Procurement and Tender Administration Board of which I am not the gazetted Minister responsible for and I cannot offer her any assistance in that regard.

Ms. Ferguson: The response from the Hon. Member is unacceptable. If the Ministry of Finance National Procurement and Tender Administration Board went out and did the restrictive tendering, by right the Chairman of that Tender Board will write to the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry to inform the Permanent

Secretary that approval has been given to 'x' company to provide whatever type of machinery. You should have that information, Sir.

5.11 p.m.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chair, I think we are getting some lines crossed. Mr. Chair, this is how the Procurement Act works. My Permanent Secretary who is the accounting officer writes to the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board requesting restrictive tendering; the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board replies to the Permanent Secretary stating approved or not approved; then the bid is launched, every person who is approved to participate in the restrictive process collects documents and they have to submit them at the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board by a particular time at a particular date; the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board evaluates those bids when they go to Cabinet for their no objections and then they are awarded. At this stage, the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board have to issue an award to the Ministry of Public Works before it purchases. Then, that is when we will know that the pneumatic roller is coming from 'John X', the grader is coming from 'Y-Z-B' and the skid steer is coming from 'Shirley G'. Thank you, Sir.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, the Hon. Member has not answered my question. He just gave an explanation of how the process works. The Permanent Secretary wrote to NPTAB seeking its no objection for restrictive tendering. It is now for the Permanent Secretary to invite Ms. Annette Ferguson, three persons or whoever he/she wants to submit their bids. The Ministry should have that information. Hon. Member, who or which company or companies the Ministry has engaged after getting the approval from NPTAB regarding restrictive tendering? That is the question and I would like to have a response to that. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I thought I heard where the stages and you have not been informed but go ahead and you can respond.

Bishop Edghill: I stand my previous.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I think this exhaust our questions for this line item.

Item 5: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Equipment – \$362,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

I want to thank the Minister and the person to his far right – the Head of the Special Projects Unit – who have brought so much of relief to a lot of persons along all those bad roads and I know he is working on old Eccles at this time. Thank you, Mr. Giddings. Thank you, PS

Item 6: 40-406 – Ministry of Education – Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education – Skills Development and Employability Project – \$530,593,000

Item 6: 40-406- Ministry of Education – Post-Secondary/Tertiary Education-Skills Development and Employability Project- \$530,593,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 7: 47-471 – Ministry of Health - Policy Development & Administration – Other – \$259,000,000

Dr. Cummings: At line item 6294, Other, the voted provision for this item was \$863,680,000. Now, what is being requested is more than a 25% increase. It is a sum of \$259,000. What is the expanded work programme and additional resources that are needed? Could you disaggregate what comes under Other?

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Well, we assist persons to get medical help, so under this heading we have been providing moneys for persons who need dialysis. We have also been providing resources for people who need cardiac services, so it is congenital hyper insulinism (CHI) and so forth. We have also been providing prosthesis for patients who need it. There is In vitro fertilization (IVF) for those patients who need it, hip replacements to get the implants and knee implants. From this heading we do provide for these patients. The sums that are requested are for patients who we would be providing assistance to before the year comes to an end.

Dr. Cummings: Is there an increase in the cost or is it an increase in the number of persons accessing this service?

Dr. Anthony: It is the number of persons.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6265 – Other Transport Travel and Postage: there is a voted provision of \$222,313,000. There is also an increase current expenditure of \$44,000,000. I thought that you would not need the service, since there is a hybrid you have more *Zoom* and other things, this travel. Could you tell us why you need this increase for travel?

Dr. Anthony: This is for Medevac that we do from the interior. In Region One, when we did our analysis you would see those flights are dropping. We are not doing as much but in Region Nine, Region Eight, especially in those regions where we have put in telemedicine because we are able to do direct diagnosis of these patients, we have recognised that when they are in a critical condition and therefore if we discover such patients we would send a medevac in to pick up those patients. That is one category of people and, in fact, with the telemedicine, we are seeing an increase otherwise we would not have detected these patients and many of them probably would have died. We have also, under this provision, expended a lot of resources to flights to Mahdia and therefore we had a shortfall because normally this projection would have taken us to the end of the year.

Dr. Cummings: A follow up: I applaud the telemedicine. It is the way to go but, at the same time, when we were in Government we had more specialist doctors going to that area. Are we not training more specialists who will go air so to minimise the number of medevacs that you are having?

Dr. Anthony: In fact, you would see a decline. As I said, in Region One, we have a decline in flights because we have put the Mabaruma theatre into operation. There is somebody there who is able to do surgeries. It is not just general surgery but we also have somebody who is doing obstetric surgery if a person is doing the caesarean section (CS) and so forth. Similarly, over the next year or so, you would start seeing a decline because we are investing heavily at Annai, Sand Creek and Karasabai. All these places would now have theatre but those projects would come to fruition maybe by the mid of next year and, therefore, as we put more specialist out there, you will start seeing a decline. Similarly, in Region Seven and Region Eight, again, you will start seeing similar things. We have a number of hospitals that we will be building. One such hospital is to enhance what we have right now in Region Nine. We have new hospitals that will be built at Moruca, one at Kamarang and one at Kato. All of these facilities which would be starting next year – we are currently in the design phase – would have specialised services.

Mr. Figueira: Hon. Minister, you have indicated that the moneys will be utilised for the extension of training and so forth for other services. Would those services be extended to paramedics more specifically the emergency medical services in the ambulances in particular? I ask this question with regard to my own experience, when my neighbour called for an ambulance and one could term the team who came as somewhat like a taxi service. It was just the driver, one female attendant and nothing else. The question therefore is, will these ambulances and the paramedics be equipped to satisfy the real services we expect when they come as a first responders to maintain life until the person reaches to the hospital?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, for that question. This line item does not deal with training. This one deals with local transportation, especially for medivacs. I will answer your question. In terms of training, we have been doing a lot of training. Just this year, we actually brought in somebody from Canada to train paramedics. This is something that we continue to do. There is also life support training that we want a lot of our staff to get trained, with both the basic and advanced. While we had trainers in Guyana, because of COVID-19 many of them did not retain their license. We have since sent them to the United States of America (USA). They have come back; they have now gotten that supervisory thing, where they can conduct the training; and we have started those trainings. The intention is that everybody who is on ambulances and other emergency response should be properly trained and be able to deliver that service.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6284 – Other: the voted provision here had been \$150,780,000 and now we are seeing...

Mr. Chairman: Dr. Cummings, Hon. Member, before you reach here, let me put this line item and then propose.

Item 7: 47-471 – Ministry of Health - Policy Development & Administration – Other – \$259,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 7: 47-474 – Ministry of Health - Regional and Clinical Services – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$44,000,000

Item 7: 47-474 – Ministry of Health – Regional & Clinical Services - Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$44,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the schedule.

5.26 p.m.

I now invite the Hon. Member, Mr. Seeraj, to carry on.

[Mr. Chairman left the Chair.]

[Mr. Seeraj assumed the Chair.]

Presiding Member [Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Members.

Item 7: 47-474 Ministry of Health – Regional & Clinical Services – Other – \$36,000,000

Dr. Cummings: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair. I am just asking under, Other. Could you disaggregate what constitutes as Other because there is a provision already voted for – \$150, 780,000? Here, you are requesting \$36 million. Why is there an increase?

Dr. Anthony: Again, under this heading, we bring doctors and nurses from Cuba and take them back. Under the contract that we have, once they have spent like a year here, they go back on vacation. The additional provision is to take care of additional people who we brought from Cuba this year. One of the challenges that we have is with the nurses. We have increased the number of nurses that we are bringing from Cuba. These additional resources are to pay for those flights for people to come from Cuba.

Dr. Cummings: Through the Chair, is it cost effective to bring nurses from elsewhere rather than increase the amount of money that you give to our local nurses who know the system inside and out, and who are pretty good? You know that the midwives are pretty good. They are the best in the world. Why would you not want to encourage and motivate them to stay rather than send? I think that is foolhardy.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. We would love to have all the nurses stay here. Unfortunately, there is a global market. In that global market, there are lots of people who would migrate to England because they want to go there. Perhaps the pay and conditions are much better. That is an option that people have. While we recognise that there is that movement, we also started training more people. Our capacity at the three schools that we have would be around 200 to 250 persons. We have increased that. In addition to the 250 who are trained in classrooms, as of last year we put 1200 persons on a hybrid programme where they will be doing this online in a partnership that we have with Coursera. We have refined the curriculum for online teaching. There are 1200 persons in that Registered Nursing Programme right now. In the next three years, you will start seeing the benefits of that programme.

In addition to that, starting from January, we will have at least 1000 persons being trained as Nursing Assistants. That is a shorter programme. It is one year so we will see the benefits of that programme after a year of training. While we are losing some people – it is not only a phenomenon in Guyana; it is across the Caribbean and the world – we are replacing them by training more and bringing them into the system. With the expanding that we are doing over the next couple of years and all the new facilities that we are opening, we would need a lot more nurses. That is why we have this training going on.

Dr. Cummings: I have a follow-up question. Whilst we are living for the real, I think we should still strive for the ideal. You are training more nurses. It was brought to my attention that when they are finished with the

training it takes a while to have the increase in salary. If they went on from the Personal Care Assistant (PCA) to Nursing Assistant, for example, some of them – up to a couple of months ago – had not gotten remuneration for this new additional service. Could you please look into that and probably give a reason certain person are not being paid the new salary increase or the change in the status quo?

Dr. Anthony: If you know of any specific instances, just get them and we will resolve them. Whoever the persons are, once they have been upgraded in terms of qualifications, we employ them at that different level and scale, and do the retroactive so that they do not lose any benefits.

Mr. Figueira: Minister, I do not know if I missed it, but could you reiterate the number of Cuban nurses who we have in the system now? More so, for the number of nurses who we are training, those training programmes are expected to come to an end – you said in the next two years. For the number who you are training online via the hybrid system, you said that it is 1200 of them. Is it the intention of the Ministry to extend those numbers far beyond, given the worldwide phenomenon of an exodus of nurses? Is this 1200 a trial to see how it goes with the desire of the Ministry to have an increase of training for more nurses who could really service the industry to satisfy all the regions of Guyana?

Dr. Anthony: We started with 1200 in the Registered Nursing Programme, which takes three years to be completed. We will have some attrition from the programme; that is natural. We wanted to make sure that most of them – at least try to see – complete it. We will work with them to ensure that they complete it. For whatever challenges, we will have mentors who will work along with them. That is one thing. Every year, from now over the next three to four years, we want to make sure that we can bring at least 1,000 to 1,200 people into the system on the hybrid programme. Once they complete or finish their training, we will give them a job. Similarly, we are doing that for the Nursing Assistants. Once they complete their programme, they will get a job with us. For all the people who we are training, we have jobs. We are doing about 12 more hospitals. With the expansion of the system, we have to compensate for those who we are losing and the additional workload that we will have when we open these facilities.

Mr. Figueira: Minister, I think the idea of a hybrid system is a good one. The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) has really opened new avenues that we did not consider in providing opportunities for those who might not have been in a position to travel to the university but still have access to tertiary education. I think that is indeed commendable. The fact that you are on a trial run with the hybrid system of training 1,200 nurses and you are engaging the Canadians to assist in training, would the Ministry also consider the idea of training Paramedics? Would the Ministry also consider such an initiative? We are seeing an increase in road accidents.

We really need ambulances to be on the site to assist. People in their desire to help accident victims, actually create more harm pulling them out of the vehicles. If we can train more Paramedics and have them strategically aligned either at the fire stations or police outstations where these accidents frequently happen, especially on the East Coast, East Bank and the Linden/Highway, I think we would be in a better position to save more lives. I said all that to ask – will the Ministry take into consideration having these very Canadians it will be bring here to train Paramedics, also create a curriculum to feature the hybrid system to train more persons who would be interested in that field?

Dr. Anthony: I am just going back a bit to the nurses to say that we have two sets of agencies that are helping us. We have a university from Brazil which is a World Health Organization (WHO) collaborating centre that has been working with teaching staff for this programme – helping them to put it online and doing this. They have vast experience in doing this. In addition to that, we also have Mount Sinai. There is a team from Mount Sinai that has been working with us on these programmes to make them more effective, updated and everything. The training that they are getting is top notch. We revised the curriculum to make sure that content and everything are in place. Coming back to the Paramedics, we can do some of the theory online. I do not see any reason we cannot do some of the theory online. However, with the sort of training that we need to give them, they will have to do a practical component, especially with resuscitation, using mannequins and things like that. Now, a part of what we will be doing with the nurses is building a number of simulation laboratories in all of the regions. Those simulations laboratories can be used to teach nurses, but they can be also used to teach other categories of healthcare workers, including Paramedics.

Mr. Figueira: This is my last question. I want to go back to the services that the ambulances provide. I do not know if you had an opportunity to go inside one of those ambulances. It is like a moving taxi – no exaggeration – with a stretcher. We need these ambulances to be properly outfitted with the equipment and drugs that can actually save lives. For some of these resources that you are asking for – not the \$36 million – in the additional \$3 billion or even in the 2024 Budget that is being prepared, would those be considered with regard to: one, procuring more ambulances and more so, equipping them with lifesaving equipment and drugs to really make a difference in saving people's lives?

Dr. Anthony: Just to be clear, this heading does not have anything to do with ambulances. [Mr. Figueira: I know that. Thank you for your indulgence.] In terms of ambulances, one of the things that we are working on is to have a special legislation for setting up an ambulance authority. There are lots of parameters in that – types of vehicles and what they can be used for. We have specialised ambulances for when a person is

responding to somebody with a heart attack versus other types of events. [Mr. Figueira: It could be a fire.] There is a total overhaul that we will need to do to make sure that we can update and modernise our ambulance services. That is something that we will work on and come back to you. One of the things that you should note is that right now a lot of the emergency response is done by the Guyana Fire Service. A lot of the ambulances are under the Guyana Fire Service. Persons there are trained and so on to respond. We just do not need this system to be geographically confined. We need a national system. [Mr. Figueira: Yes.] That is what we have to work on building. We do not have coverage in all parts of Guyana. So, that is something that we have to work on.

5.41 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: Under the very line item under consideration 6284, Other, I heard the Hon. Member in his explanation earlier stating that a portion of this money or if not portions, all of this money, is going towards the Cuban doctors that we have in Guyana. Could you say the total number of Cubans who will be benefitting from this additional provision? Thank you.

Dr. Anthony: The \$36 million that we are asking for is for transportation for 78 persons.

Presiding Member: Thank you, Minister. Go ahead, I will allow one more question on this.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much. To the Hon. Member, is it ground transportation or air transportation?

[Dr. Anthony: *(Inaudible)*] Oh. Is it for them to go back home? Thank you.

Presiding Member: Dr. Anthony, does that require a response?

Dr. Anthony: It is for persons who have finished their stint here and, in some cases, they are due for vacation. As per contract, they go back to Cuba and it is also for those new persons who are coming from Cuba to Guyana.

Item 7: 47-474 Ministry of Health – Regional & Clinical Services – Other – \$36,000,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 7: 47-474 Ministry of Health – Regional & Clinical Services – Health Sector Improvement Programme – \$3,609,956,709

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, this is a capital project. It comes under theegis of the Health Sector Improvement Programme. A voted provision was made of \$14,600,000,000. Now you are requesting \$3,609,956,709 more. Some of these are Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) projects. For instance, the reconstruction and expansion of the hinterland hospitals, and the Georgetown, New Amsterdam and Linden hospitals. In addition to those being reconstructed, they were also doing the design and construction of the Maternity Hospital – the Paediatric Hospital. It also includes Lima, Tuschen, Diamond, Enmore, Bath Settlement, and Number 75 Villages. Could you tell us the status of some of these programmes? What percentage was completed in terms of design? Just give us some information on the number.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you very much for that question. The \$3 billion that we are requesting is for a very specific thing. That is, we have recently signed the contract with VAMED to build a new New Amsterdam Hospital. As per contract, the Government’s obligation is that we have to advance 10% to the company and this \$3 billion reflects that 10% that we advanced for the company. We have already started work on the site, so we have grubbed the site and levelled it. We have handed the site over to VAMED so we expect that construction would start early in the new year. This is for a 230 beds hospital that would be at New Amsterdam. It would consist of about four operating theatres, and a special theatre for caesarean sections (CSs). We will have a cardiac suite and it will be four storeys with a complete lab, complete new emergency room with Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), computed tomography (CT) scan, and a whole host of other features.

Dr. Cummings: Through the Chair, would the location of this be where the old New Amsterdam Hospital was originally located or will it be the new one where Sheriff has something around that side, by the Palmyra area or is that something different? **[Dr. Anthony: (Inaudible)]** Okay. That is different. Just before you answer. Would you be placing a hospital at the location of the old New Amsterdam Hospital?

Dr. Anthony: The new site for the new New Amsterdam Hospital will be in the compound of the Psychiatric Hospital. There is a big field from the road coming back that was there. The new hospital would be in that area. As you know, with the Bill that we have passed – the Psychiatric Hospital – one of the things is that we will be scaling down the in-patient capacity of that hospital. Currently, we have about 220 patients, about 100 of them can go home, so we will have a smaller patient load. In the new facility that we are building, there would also be a two-storey building in the new hospital that is set aside for psychiatric patients. We intend to have the care of patients in an acute way. When there are acute episodes, we will be able to treat them and, after maybe about one week or two weeks, they can go home. You do not have to have a big in-patient capacity for

patients. This is the new way of treating patients with psychiatric episodes. You do not keep them in for long periods of time. We are building a new building within this complex that we will have for psychiatric patients. We will scale down with the existing hospitals that we have there.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I do not know if I missed it during the explanations given by the Hon. Member. From this provision that you are now seeking, what percentage, if any, is going towards these regional hospitals that are being constructed that I noticed at Diamond and Region 5? What percentage of this sum, if any, is going towards those new regional hospitals? Thank you.

Dr. Anthony: I can tell you how much money. It is about \$260 million that we will be using to do sand filling. That is for the six regional hospitals. For the ones at Anna Regina or at Lima, De Kinderen, the ones at Diamond, Enmore, Bath Settlement and Skeldon. The \$260 million will be used for sand filling.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Could the Hon. Minister say if this line item, Health Sector Improvement Programme, caters for a microphone system at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) or on the East Bank? I am asking this question because I went to do some observations and I want to know if it caters for that. Is there any plan to have that system? **[Dr. Singh: (Inaudible)]** Okay.

Presiding Member: Hon. Minister, we will need you to put your answer into the record.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This is for major infrastructure works. This line item does not cater for the things that you are asking for.

Ms. Singh- Lewis: Hon. Minister, the response you provided to my Colleague just now brings another question to my mind. You said the new New Amsterdam Hospital is going to be in the compound of the Psychiatric Hospital. Could you tell us the dangers, if there are any at all, having psychiatric patients in the same compound with a regional hospital?

Dr. Anthony: I want to make one statement very clear. This view that people with psychiatric disorders are dangerous to those who are supposedly normal is really a myth. The people who are more endangered are those patients. In our society, if they know someone has a psychiatric disorder, our society has been very unforgiving. I am looking for the right word. People with psychiatric disorders get a hard time in our society. How we treat people, that puts them more in danger. It is not that we have to fear patients. There is no fear. In any event, the way we will be doing the construction, at this point, there will be a separation so there would not be any direct

contact where the construction site will be. The site is big enough. There will be no patient coming across until the construction is completed and we have ensured that all of that is included in the plan.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I heard the Hon. Member as it relates to the treatment of our psychiatric patients. I do not know when last you visited that institution to see the state in which those patients are. It is very humiliating. I would like for you to check to see what is really happening there. It is not nice at all. Coming back to the line item under consideration, you had an initial provision of \$14 billion. You are now seeking an additional \$3 billion and change. Could you say to this House what percentage of the \$14 billion has been expended to date and whether you will be able to expend this \$3.6 billion by 31st December, 2023? If you are talking about expanded services, I guess it is a new project. Would the procurement method be applied to the services you are seeking through this project?

Dr. Anthony: First of all, let me say to you, I was at the National Psychiatric Hospital about two weeks ago and the conditions you are describing do not exist there. I can tell you that. I am telling you that. I was there two weeks ago. I can tell you that does not exist. I was there two weeks ago. Let us start with that. The second thing is, pertaining to these moneys, we have \$3,332,000,000. The moneys that we are asking for, the \$3,332,000,000, would be spent to pay our advance to VAMED, which is 10% of the contract. As I explained earlier, \$260 million is going for sand filling for the regional hospital sites and \$16 million is to get someone who will supervise the New Amsterdam Hospital project.

5.56 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: To the Hon. Member, why request additional sums now when we have practically two months for *Budget 2024*? Is it that *Budget 2024* might be trillions and you just want to cut it down by bringing projects or sums in this year. Why not wait until 2024? Why now?

Dr. Anthony: First of all, the projects that we have – the regional hospitals – we have started them, and we need to do the sand filling. That is something we need to do now. We cannot wait until next year. We cannot wait until two months from now. That is one.

The second one, as it pertains to the majority of funds we want here, as I said, we recently signed a contract with VAMED Engineering. Our contractual obligation is to advance them 10% of the sums of money and this sum here represents that 10%. We cannot wait until whenever the budget will be. What did you say? [Mr.

Mahipaul: (*Inaudible*)] This represents 10%.

Item 7: 47-474 Ministry of Health – Regional and Clinical Services – Health Sector Improvement Programme – \$3,609,956,709.

Current Expenditure

Item 8: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Field Materials and Supplies – \$200,000,000

Presiding Member: We will allow the Minister of Home Affairs a few seconds to get in place. Thank you, Minister and team.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Chairman, I noticed that we had a voted provision of \$160 million. In August, we spent an additional \$50 million and now \$200 million, which is a percentage that is far and in excess of 100%. Could the Hon. Minister indicate what it is that has caused this massive increase by almost \$250 million?

Mr. Benn: I want to thank the Hon. Member for his question. Mr. Chairman, we are all aware of the situation that we have been enduring over the last few months. In respect of that, the Guyana Police Force (GPF) has been inlying over that period. With respect to this problem, which in various ways is still continuing, the sum is requested to cover the cost related to inlying.

Presiding Member: Thank you, Hon. Minister. I now put the question that the sum stated under Chart of...

Mr. Ramjattan: No, no.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Mr. Chairman, I am on my feet.

Presiding Member: Go ahead, Hon. Member, Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you, very much, Sir. I...

Presiding Member: You have to catch the Chairman's eye.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: I have been trying to, Sir.

Presiding Member: Go ahead.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: It seems like my efforts have failed, so I will have to be more innovative in trying to catch your eye. Hon. Minister, could you explain to us whether all these moneys will be utilised for ranks to

be inlying? Is this for the entire amount that you are seeking here? Or could you state whether a percentage of this amount will be going towards the procurement of more crime lab kits?

Mr. Benn: The intention is to have the money available to make the expenditure. The situation, as we are aware, is that it could be pretty dynamic. Until recently, it has changed the character of the footprint and lay out of our policemen. It is not only that they had to be simply inlying, but they have also had to be moved to particular areas in the country, and in the interior with particular resources, to make their presence effective. That is why this sum is being requested.

Presiding Member: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, do you have another question?

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Could the Hon. Minister commit to laying over or giving us a detailed breakdown? The answer you have given me, *albeit* it is reasonable, does not satisfy the question being asked in terms of us having to know how exactly these moneys will be spent. If it is that you do not have the answers, could you commit to laying over a detailed breakdown of how these moneys will be spent?

Mr. Benn: Certainly, we will give a detailed breakdown. We will lay it over soon.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Would the Hon. Minister commit to laying this detailed breakdown before the end of the week?

Mr. Benn: Yes. We should be able to do so. Thank you.

Item 8: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Field Materials and Supplies – \$200,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 8: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Office Materials and Supplies – \$50,000,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: The Legend states that this is for an expanded work programme. We will all appreciate that this is a very vague description. Could the Minister provide a breakdown of the aims and objectives of this line item?

Mr. Benn: This relates to Office Materials and Supplies. The additional funding relates first to the additional persons and resources we have in the new police stations and in the ZARA Computer Training Centres, and, also, in making more efficient and effective the work that the police do in their request for these things. There is also the question too of inflationary issues relating to some of these expenditures.

Presiding Member: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Chandan-Edmond, do you have another question?

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Yes, Sir.

Presiding Member: Go ahead, please.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Is that your detailed breakdown, Hon. Minister?

Mr. Benn: Yes. Certainly, again, thank you, Mr. Chairman. There will be a detailed breakdown being laid over.

Item 8: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Office Materials and Supplies – \$50,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 8: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$400,000,000

Mr. Ramjattan: Again, I would like to...I beg your pardon? [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible.)*] I am all over the place. That is why I will be asking for some more Local Travel and Subsistence myself. Just to get clarity on certain issues here, this is the second time you are coming, \$200 million previously and \$400 million now. What is the cause of this local travel jumping like that by \$600 million?

Mr. Benn: I did refer to the questions in my first response – to a question here today. To the particular situation we are in now. I did speak to that. [Mr. Ramjattan: Is this going towards the hinterland thing?] Are you going to listen or are you going to heckle? I did say that we had to change our footprint and the places where we are operating in respect of the policemen and women and the operating sites. We have to also be in support of visits to locations and monitoring and surveillance of places which we normally would have to be in a fairly ready state. That is the reason for this. It also requires meals, accommodations and so on. [Mr. Ramjattan: We will come to Dietary just now.] Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ramjattan: This additional \$400 million, would it be for purposes of the next 11 or 12 days? Is that what you are saying?

Mr. Benn: Basically speaking, I do not have to say... For the services, generally, we have been in a heightened state of readiness and activity for close to two or more months now and expenditures and commitments are unfolding into this request.

Mr. Ramjattan: I can appreciate the necessity for the Minister speaking almost Aesopian terms like Aesop because, indeed, we have an existential threat. In the context of having a parliamentary committee that has not been convened for the last three years, that should have given the answers to these questions, I ask now, since we have an existential threat, is that parliamentary committee, which carries on with the Minister at a certain level of secrecy, are we going to have that so that we could get some more answers to questions?

Mr. Benn: I am not going to delve into the reasons here in relation to the parliamentary committees, the operations that we do and the activities. I am here now, and I am giving the answers. I am giving the answers to the line items which are here. It has nothing to do as it is with the question of the meetings of the parliamentary committees.

Mr. Ramjattan: It has everything to do ...

Presiding Member: Hon. Member Ramjattan, go ahead with your questions.

6.11 p.m.

Mr. Ramjattan: It has everything to do because we cannot go at a national larger assembly to deal with those issues. We are to meet in that in-camera committee to get exactly. It is true, we cannot go and publicise all these answers to the members of the public. That was the rationale behind that parliamentary sub-committee. We are now being denied the answers here by Aesopian answers. Now we are being told, ‘You take what I have to give you, Mr. Ramjattan’.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I am not sure what the question is here. I am not going to Aesop and his fables. The Hon. Member seems to be more aware of those things. I am saying here and now, in relation to the questions being raised and asked here, I am here to give those answers as is the correct and proper format here. We can discuss later, in another forum, if the Hon. Member Ramjattan is really interested, the questions of the meetings of the committee. Here and now, I am simply answering these questions as posed and required by me here in the National Assembly.

Mr. Ramjattan: Hon. Minister, the fact of us establishing it has a direct relation as to accountability and transparency of moneys spent on the Guyana Police Force. It has that added exception clause, it must not be to the larger Assembly or members of the public. That is the function of it. I could understand your position. I would not seek to ask you any further questions because it is already a no go.

Presiding Member: Hon. Member, I would not say that. The Minister offered to take up this discussion at another level in relation to the committee that you are speaking about. You should consider that offer.

Item 8: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$400,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 8: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Other – \$200,000,000

Ms. Chandon-Edmond: Under this line item, the Hon. Minister is seeking an additional \$200 million. Could the Minister give us a breakdown of this amount that he is seeking? Could the Minister also indicate the percentage of this amount that will be going towards remedying the defects of police stations and other buildings that fall under this item?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member. Hon. Members, the line item request is for funding to cover the cost of rentals for barriers, tents, chairs, projector screens, humidifiers, air conditioning (AC) units, tables, portable washrooms to host police and other events. There has been an extraordinary effort to improve police community relations. I am sure we would have seen all that in various postings on social media platforms and in the print media, not to mention the television media as well. This amount is intended for that. The issue of the conditions of the police stations, I think we would have generally noticed, all of us, that we are constructing new police stations. They are being outfitted with modern reticulation, ablution areas, *et cetera*. I think in respect of that question, which you raised, we have a great reach forward of those issues, both in the physical assets – the buildings – and in respect of where the stations are being designed for ergonomic and for relational purposes with the public.

Ms. Chandon-Edmond: Minister, the question was specific for you to give us a detailed breakdown. In your answer you mentioned rental, projectors, improving community relations, which I will give you probably an A for. That is very good that you want to improve community relations, but the question is very specific. How much of these moneys are you expending towards community relations? Could you give us a breakdown as to how you will be spending every dollar, every cent under this line item? We will appreciate that it is a huge amount you are seeking here – \$200 million.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond. Yes. We will lay over the details in respect of the stations, the outposts, according to the various regions.

Item 8: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Other – \$200,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 8: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Dietary – \$300,000,000

Mr. Ramjattan: The sum of \$300 million is being asked for now and a further \$80 million was asked in August for Dietary. Could the Minister say whether this increase in expenditure is a result of inflation in the prices of goods that make up Dietary?

Mr. Benn: Certainly, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Hon. Member. I think that is figured into the calculations. Generally, in terms of the total, it relates again to inlying, greater activity, greater numbers of police officers, more vehicles, and, generally, much more engagement out there with the public in terms of their duties. It is not yet at an optimal level, but we are working hard and making progress in relation to those issues, even in the current situation.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, the provision in August to now is \$80 million which I am assuming was exhausted and hence caused the Minister to come for \$300 million today. Is the Minister saying that from today to 31st December, the Guyana Police Force will be eating \$300 million?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member. No. I am not saying that. There will be expenses going to the end of the year and, of course, at the end of the year is a particular period. Again, I refer to commitments and higher activity over the special period we are still in, and the fact that they have been inlying and with higher levels of activity.

Item 8: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Dietary – \$300,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 8: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Training (including Scholarships) – \$30,000,000

Ms. Chandon-Edmond: Under this line item, the Hon. Minister is seeking an additional \$30 million. Could the Minister indicate what percentage of this amount being sought will go towards continuous training on the response to domestic violence, child abuse and trafficking in persons? Could the Minister also elaborate on the type of training, duration, *et cetera*?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member. I cannot say, with specificity at this moment, the amounts which will go towards domestic violence, trafficking in persons with the police, *et cetera*. For the general issue relating to trafficking in persons, the Ministry has a unit which deals specifically with that. We could disaggregate and get the police to provide to us the information which, perhaps, will go for training in respect of cases for domestic violence and violence against children. We have been working with the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security – Minister Persaud – in respect of issues relating to those things.

In terms of training for policemen, there is a Cop Squad Initiative through the Ministry of Home Affairs which has been training police personnel which will eventually take up perhaps two-thirds of all the force in respect of that training. [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] If I would say... To the suggestion the Hon. Member is heckling there, when the police go to training, while an agency may provide the training in terms of the thing, the expense of the training and moving policemen around in respect of it, it is borne by the Police Force. At various levels of junior ranks, senior officers and others, basic safety training, we have had with the MatPal Marine Institute Incorporated, we have had occupational safety and health (OSH), social work, psychology, supervisory management, diplomas in organisational management, Master of Music – we have that too – we have a number of police personnel who have graduated just now from the University of Guyana (UG) mostly at the Bachelor's level in terms of administration and other issues. Perhaps, it would be interesting for us to lay over to the National Assembly specific information on the range of training that has been done.

As Commissioner Hicken says, contemporary policing nowadays requires a wide level or a wide range of skills/training, not only with the typical or normally understood policing methods, but we have issues in relation to cybercrime, money laundering, *et cetera*. Our Police Force is becoming more upskilled. The range of skills are much wider than it has ever been, and we still have to put in more effort to look at particular areas where we have to train policemen. I think we have two who are pilots, and we have some other issues in relation to forensics. There is continuous training which is required their normal skills area and in relation to new areas of training and awareness that they need to have in the current situation. Thank you.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, I agree and support that we need to ensure that our policemen and women are well equipped to deal with what is before us and what has been before us for a couple of months now. If I am getting the Minister correctly, this \$30 million really is going to pay for services that would have already been rendered or is in the process of being rendered to our policemen and women and not necessarily to spend from now to 31st December. Are these services already in the making?

Mr. Benn: There are some amounts which are already in the making. Even today, there was a training in firearms *et cetera*, the recognition of new and other types of firearms in terms of interdiction and finding them. Between now and the end of the year, there is also other training being done, also virtual training for some persons in cyber security. You may know that we have had some recent cyber-attacks which have compromised some systems in the country already.

6.26 p.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask the Hon. Minister, of this \$30 million that is being requested, how much of it is already associated with expenditure as of today? This is so that we can get an understanding of how much will be spent from today to 31st December.

Mr. Benn: My advice is \$20 million, Hon. Member.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. Minister, are you committing to laying over the range of training topics and duration to us? I take it that you will. If it is yes, you can just indicate because I have another question for you.

Mr. Benn: We will, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Minister, it was reported by the Department of Public Information (DPI), on 28th March, 2023, that you will be training your junior ranks to promote professionalism. I note that there is heavy emphasis on training of junior ranks. I am interested in whether there will be continuous training, and training also for your senior ranks. If yes, could you indicate how much of this money or what percentage of this money will be going towards training your senior ranks, also?

Mr. Benn: We will have to get the specific moneys allocated for specific types of training at various levels. Training is certainly at various levels. In relation to the question of training for police persons on professionalism, it is a continuous process. It has to be done continuously. Secondly, certainly, we have police persons who do not adhere to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) of the Guyana Police Force (GPF) for which, usually, other than in their unit responses, the Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR) deals with those issues. We do lose some police persons as a result of resignations and going to the courts in terms of the lack of professionalism and in the way they deal with the public. We are continuously working on that. I have said before that we are working to have a new culture in our Guyana Police Force. It has to be more empathetic; it has to be more respectful of persons and of each other in the Guyana Police Force, which is something that we need to emphasise too. Particularly for areas where we may go in the countryside or the country or other

places and even in the city, we certainly have some policemen who fall into rouse behaviour from time to time or who are predatory on people. We are continuously dealing with those issues and persons on almost a weekly basis.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. Minister, we all appreciate that those are very lofty ideals to which most of us will subscribe. The answer was very good. The question was very specific, and you have not answered that question. I am going to rephrase it and, somehow, I will hope you will answer the question. The question specifically relates to your senior ranks. Can you indicate to us what are the current ongoing training programmes for your senior ranks or the intended training programmes for your senior ranks? I noticed that there is heavy emphasis on the junior ranks, but I feel, and I will advocate strongly, that your senior officers need training also. I see your Permanent Secretary (PS) is shaking his head and so I know he agrees with me.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the Hon. Member for the repeat of the question. I did say that in terms of the range and level of training, we will lay them over. We will produce a list for you. We do not have that here. There are many courses that they do. That is what we will do. We do not have all the courses. We will lay them over to you. We make that commitment. That is easy to do. I agree with you that we have had questions sometimes as to the quality of training. I want to say, too, that it is not necessarily, both at the middle and senior levels, there is a lack of training. It is whether they use the training and whether they follow the SOPs. That is more the issue. I am saying, in any event, while we work on that issue, we will lay over the courses to you. Unfortunately, Mr. Chairman, I do not know why Ms. Chandan-Edmond is resorting to heckling me when she can ask me proper questions with which I could help her.

Item 8: 51-512 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Police Force – Training (including Scholarships) - \$30,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 8: 51-515 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Fire Service – Land and Water Transport - Fire - \$2,778,016,370

Mr. Ramjattan: I was wondering if there is a misprint here. Are we spending \$2,778,016,370? We had a voted provision of \$489,000,000. Then everything went blank. We then have four figures that are identical. I do feel there was a misprint.

Presiding Member: Possibly, I could call on the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Singh.

Dr. Singh: In relation to what, Sir, may I ask?

Presiding Member: Under agency code No. 51-515, there is listed an amount of \$2,778,016,370, under Capital – “Local” – “Provision of additional resources to procure assets for the Guyana Fire Service”.

Dr. Singh: Yes, Sir. There is no error there.

Presiding Member: Thank you very much. Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, proceed.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Minister, through the Chairperson, what is this \$2,778,016,370 for?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the former Hon. Minister of Public Security for his question. Mr. Chairman and Hon. Members, you may have noticed that we have built new fire stations, including a new Guyana Fire Service Headquarters. We may have noticed that throughout the country, we have expanded the footprint of the fire operations and fire stations. We may have noted, too, the criticisms we have been getting in relation to fire response and engagement at the scene of an event. We have been working hard to bring up the Guyana Fire Service, both in training of persons and in relation to the assets which they have to have to be able to be more effective. You may recall that we spent, and we agreed on, quite an amount of money which had to be spent on fire hydrants throughout the country, including new housing areas. What we are seeking here now, as a result of fairly prolonged discussions with Angloco Limited of the United Kingdom (UK), is for more units to fight fires in our country. This year has been the most difficult year in relation to loss of buildings, loss of equipment, loss of schools, including last year, and the particular issue of the loss of children and deaths of adults, too, in relation to fires.

The fact that we are building higher buildings, larger buildings and more buildings require us to have more assets and more interventions. Arising out of the discussions with Angloco Limited...Relates to fire-fighting units throughout the country in areas which will be manned through firefighter or volunteer training in Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and also in relation to water bowsers. There is also a new fire boat that we are going to buy. We may have noticed that there is an expansion of the port in terms of the number of activities and the length along the estuary that we have, in addition to what is happening in the Essequibo. We need this level of support to bring our firefighting capabilities to the level of (*inaudible*). We have been discussing this with Angloco Limited in the United Kingdom. We have had long discussions with the High

Commissioner herself and specialists who came down from Angloco Limited. They have done a thorough review of the equipment which we have and what our needs are, both the new assets and in maintenance, which are required to bring us to an optimal level, and this is the result coming out of that effort. That is what we are doing. That is what we have to do. I look forward to the support of the Parliament in respect of this intervention.

Mr. Ramjattan: That is commendable. Angloco Limited is a very reputable firm from the United Kingdom. Of course, it has helped us, I think, since Independence days. It is important, however, that we do not get this globular answer. What is it, effectively? Is it going to be two fire engines, three bowsers and another fire boat that constitute the \$2,778,016,370? That is what I am asking for, Mr. Chairman. It is a disaggregation. [Mr. Mahipaul: How many fire boats do we have?]

Mr. Benn: We will lay over the details of the matter. For units which will operate in the NDCs with volunteers, led by specialist firefighters, there will be 40. In relation to water bowsers, there will be 15. In relation to a new fire boat, there will be one new fire boat, to make it two, as to the question Mr. Mahipaul raised. [Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you.] I think we have, too, a new high-rise truck in relation to ... We have a new telescopic handler which was successfully employed at Hotel Ramada on East Bank Demerara (EBD), where we had a fire which had serious implications for us. We were able to go and rescue people with that at the fire.

Presiding Member: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Chandan-Edmond, do you have a question for the Minister?

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you, Sir. Hon. Minister, I take it that you will be laying over a detailed breakdown, and in your breakdown, you will be giving us the cost for this one fire boat. I also take it that you will be giving to us what sort of equipment you will be purchasing for the new fire stations.

Mr. Mahipaul: I just want to get some clarity. I see the urgency in terms of the Minister coming for this \$2,778,016,370 for the additional equipment, under Land and Water Transport. I do not see any change in the wages and salaries and the number of staff. Could the Hon. Minister say if there is an intention to recruit so that they can add to the staffing capacity at the Guyana Fire Service, so that they will not only have the necessary equipment but they will also have the necessary personnel to ensure that all of these equipment function effectively?

6.41 p.m.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the Hon. Member for his question. If the Hon. Member had read today's papers... Yesterday, we graduated 74 firefighters – men and women. This is the second cohort of firefighters we have trained for this year, and just now there will be a new intake of another 70 or more. In respect of training and continuous training of firefighters, that is not the issue at the moment. We have that issue covered. Thank you.

Item 8: 51-515 Ministry of Home Affairs – Guyana Fire Service – Land and Water transport – Fire – \$2,778,016,370 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Print and Non-Print Materials – \$5,000,000

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Print and Non-Print Materials – \$5,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Fuel and Lubricants – \$200,000,000

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Fuel and Lubricants – \$200,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Janitorial and Cleaning Supplies – \$7,000,000

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Janitorial and Cleaning supplies – \$7,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Vehicle Spares and Service – \$30,000,000

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Vehicle Spares and Service – \$30,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$40,000,000

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$40,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Other – \$30,000,000

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Other – \$30,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Dietary – \$300,000,000

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Dietary – \$300,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Other – \$665,000,000

Item 9: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – Other – \$665,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 71-711 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Regional Administration and Finance – Fuel and Lubricants – \$4,635,120

Item 10: 71-711 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Regional Administration and Finance – Fuel and Lubricants – \$4,635,120 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 71-711 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Regional Administration and Finance – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$4,100,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Local Travel and Subsistence: For 11 days, the Hon. Minister is asking for \$4.1 million for a particular programme – Administration and Finance. Could the Hon. Minister say where this team – Administration and Finance – is expected to go within 11 days to the value of \$4.1 million, specifically local travel which speaks to within the Barima/Waini Region?

Mr. Persaud: This increase caters for payment for part-time workers, which was not catered for in the budgetary allocations. It is not for now but for prior.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I am not sure if this falls under the right line item, given the Minister's answer. If it is payment for part-time workers, I believe there is a line item under wages and salaries that speaks to part-time workers.

Mr. Persaud: This increase caters for payment to part-time workers which was not catered for in the budgetary allocations. It includes meals and accommodation for staff to make payments and travel to Georgetown to uplift cash.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, there is a line item under this agency that speaks to dietary, which one would have expected to cater for meals, as the Minister said. And there is a line item called 6117 that speaks to temporary employees. How is it that the Minister is catering for this amount of money for that purpose under local travel and subsistence?

Mr. Persaud: This is the correct line item.

Presiding Member: We are at chart of account, line item 6261, Local Travel and Subsistence.

Mr. Mahipaul: My understanding of what he is saying is that, basically, it is subsistence. In terms of this \$4.1 million for 11 days, where is it that the staff under Regional Administration and Finance are expected to travel?

Mr. Persaud: This is for the year and not for 11 days.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, the Minister seems to not understand that \$24,200,000 was approved in this National Assembly for the entire year. That sum has been exhausted. Hence, us being before this House for the approval of a \$4.1 million. So, this \$4.1 million is for 11 days. Perhaps, the Minister may want to revisit his answer.

Mr. Persaud: This programme started prior to 11 days.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, with your permission, is the Hon. Minister saying that they have already engaged in the expenditure without the approval of this National Assembly?

Mr. Persaud: No, Mr. Chairman. There was a shortfall.

Presiding Member: Correct.

Mr. Mahipaul: Therefore, Sir, with your permission, the Minister said it is not for the 11 days and it has happened before. Therefore, could the Hon. Minister say how much of this \$4.1 million was already expended and what the remainder is for the 11 days?

Mr. Persaud: We are now asking for \$4.1 million to cater for...and will be spent by 31st December, 2023.

Presiding Member: Hon. Member, the Minister is saying that he is asking for \$4.1 million to cater for travel and subsistence for members of the Ministry's staff in this area here.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, with all due respect, the Minister gave a previous answer and said that the Ministry has already begun spending from this money. That is what the Hon. Minister said. Perhaps, the *Hansard* could bear me out.

Mr. Persaud: I never said that.

Mr. Mahipaul: If we may have some clarity, this \$4.1 million is to be spent within 11 days.

Presiding Member: That is correct.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Minister say where is it that the staff members under Regional Administration and Finance are expected to travel within 11 days to the tune of \$4.1 million?

Mr. Persaud: It is for travel across the region.

Presiding Member: Hon. Annette Ferguson, you have the floor. You are the Speaker's special Member for today.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The Hon. Member, in his earlier explanation, stated that this sum is to take care of ... was it the payment of part-time workers across the region?

Presiding Member: I think the Minister corrected that statement in his latest remark.

Ms. Ferguson: All right. The Minister further stated that this \$4.1 million will be used by the staff of the Ministry to go across the region to make payments to... [Mr. McCoy: Several regions.] It is Region 1. It is Region 1 we are considering here and so it cannot be several regions. Where exactly in Region 1 are there part-time workers?

Mr. Persaud: There are part-time workers across the region. There are three sub-regions within that region.

Presiding Member: Let us allow the Minister. The Minister said that there are three sub-regions in Region 1 and the amount of \$4.1 million is to allow for the staff of the Ministry to travel and conduct their official business.

Ms. Ferguson: I have a follow-up question.

Presiding Member: Go ahead, please.

Ms. Ferguson: Could the Hon. Minister state how many part-time workers there are across Region 1?

Mr. Persaud: There are 1,200.

Presiding Member: Hon. Members, we should contain ourselves to our line item and the description therein. The Minister's answer is 1,200.

Ms. Ferguson: Is it 1,200?

Presiding Member: It is part-time workers within Region 1.

Ms. Ferguson: Is it 1,200 in Region 1?

Presiding Member: It is one thousand two hundred in Region 1.

Ms. Ferguson: Is that in Region 1?

Presiding Member: In Region 1.

6.56 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: A follow-up, Sir. How many staff from the Ministry are expected to go across Region 1 to make the payments? Let me just simplify it a bit. How many staff will be benefitting from this \$4.1 million in 12 days?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is the accounts staff from the region that do the payments. *[Interruption]*

Presiding Member: Hon. Members, let us have some order, please. The Minister's response is that the accounts staff will be travelling across the region to execute the work of the Ministry. Do you have a follow-up question, Hon. Member?

Ms. Ferguson: That is not a response to the question asked. I am asking for the number of staff from the Ministry that will be travelling across the region which this sum will take care of their travel, their meals and their subsistence. How many staff?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is not the accounts staff of the Ministry. It is the accounts staff from the region that come to Georgetown to collect the cash to take it back to the region.

Item 10: 71-711 Region 1 – Barima/Waini-Regional Administration & Finance – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$4,100,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 71-712 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Public Works – Fuel and Lubricants – \$60,000,000

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, there is a supplementary provision for \$60,000,000 and the remarks state, “Provision of additional resources due to an expanded work programme.” Could the Hon. Minister provide details as to what percentage of the work programme this \$60,000,000 will be expended upon and could he break down that percentage of the expanded work programme specific to the three sub-districts within the region? Thank you.

Presiding Member: This chart of account caters for fuel and lubricant. Hon. Minister?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is to procure fuel and lubricants for generating sets that provide electrical power for over 10,000 residents in the region. One must take into consideration that there was a rated increase for the cost of fuel.

Mr. Cox: The other part of the question was: could the Hon. Minister give a breakdown as to specific sub-districts – Mabaruma – X amount, Moruca, Matarkai? While he is addressing that aspect of the question, could the Hon. Minister also tell this Committee the corrective measures in place to ensure that the frequent blackouts, especially in Mabaruma, are minimised?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the last question first. That is not part of the estimates. The areas that are being powered are: Mabaruma, Wauna, White Water, Kamwatta, Yarakita, Parakese, Manawarin, Waramuri and Warapoka.

Item 10: 71-712 Region 1 - Barima/Waini – Public Works – Fuel and Lubricants – \$60,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 71-713 Region 1 - Barima/Waini – Education Delivery – Field Materials and Supplies – \$7,000,000

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, we have a request here for \$7,000,000. Could the Hon. Minister provide details of what field materials are catered for and if it is for specific schools in terms of level – primary, secondary or nursery? Give a breakdown of this allocated sum.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this sum caters for additional teaching aids for nursery, primary and secondary schools.

Mr. Cox: The Hon. Minister would understand that there was a previous provision of recent where all schools were given cash grants, which catered specifically for the purchase of all of these materials. Could he justify if this is a duplicate or is it specific to the department or schools?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, due to the influx of migrant families from Venezuela, we have provided this sum, including additional field materials.

Presiding Member: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Are you giving way to Hon. Mahipaul? Go ahead, Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. It is \$7,000,000 for field materials and supplies for teaching aids in nursery and so on. The Ministry of Education gave a subvention to all schools from which teachers got a sum and then a part of it was specifically for these kinds of materials. Outside of that, Sir, school is closed. So, \$7,000,000 to now be approved for purchasing teaching aids when school is not going to open until January of next year, who are we procuring this \$7,000,000 to serve?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this is a request by the schools, and it is to supplement the procurement by the Ministry of Education.

Presiding Member: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Mr. Mahipaul, do you have a follow-up?

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir. Could the Hon. Minister say how much of this \$7,000,000 was already spent?

Presiding Member: I think the Minister is now seeking approval. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, these moneys could not have been spent because we have not received them as yet.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much for the good observation, Cde. Chairman, and learned assistance to the Hon. Minister. Your impartiality is noteworthy, Sir. May I ask the Hon. Minister to provide a detailed breakdown, by a way of laying it over, of the specific items that will be purchased with this specific figure of \$7,000,000? My understanding, Sir, with your permission, is that the specific amount of \$7,000,000 caters for a specific sum of items. Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to lay over a detailed breakdown of the \$7,000,000? Thank you, Sir.

Presiding Member: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister, would you be so inclined.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, yes.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. One final question. I heard the Hon. Minister say earlier that this sum will cater for the purchase of teaching materials for the large influx of Venezuelan pupils. I am a teacher in the school system and I know that all of the migrant students who are registered in all nursery, primary and secondary schools were catered for under the subvention by the Government and also received student cash grant. How is this sum an addition? Are you saying that the Venezuelan migrants are being privileged and they have been gaining attention in duplicate compared to our local students?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member is a teacher for one school. I said earlier that it is because of the influx of the Venezuelan migrants.

Mr. Holder: Just a follow-up, Sir, to Cdes. Mahipaul and Cox. Cde. Mahipaul asked for the specific teaching aids. I would ask for the Minister to lay over the specific schools and the specific number of migrant pupils in those schools who are being catered for under this \$7,000,000. Sir, the Hon. Minister, when we considered Financial Paper No. 3, had promised to lay over a number of stuff and they were never laid over. I am asking if he will lay it over and when exactly he intends to do it or at least a timeframe within which to do it.

Presiding Member: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I think the Minister already gave a commitment. Hon. Minister, do you wish to respond?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is for 319 migrants and the teaching aids are for all the schools across the region. So, I am not prepared to lay over anything.

Presiding Member: That is because you are providing it now.

Mr. Persaud: Correct.

Presiding Member: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister.

Item 10: 71-713 Region 1 - Barima/Waini - Education Delivery - Field Materials and Supplies - \$7,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 71-713 Region 1 - Barima/Waini - Education Delivery - Fuel and Lubricants – \$12,700,000

Mr. Cox: Could the Hon. Minister provide an answer as to why the school buses in the region were not transporting students for about the last two months, although there were provisions being made to ensure that sums are allocated here for fuel and lubricants?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, that was not reported to me or the Ministry.

Presiding Member: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Mr. Cox, do you have a follow-up? Go ahead, please.

7.11 p.m.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I sit on the regional education committee meeting and the Regional Education Officer (REDO) said to me, when I questioned her, that the regional budget for education has been exhausted and there is no money in place for the transportation of students to schools. So I am surprised that has not reached the Minister. I guess that it has reached the Minister of Education. My question still – what amount of this \$12.7 million will be spent between now and 31st December, specifically under education? Could he explain?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the entire sum will be spent before 31st December.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, on the very line item, \$12 million is currently being sought. Could the Hon. Member state the total fleet of vehicles that will be benefitting from this provision?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I do not have that information on me readily.

Ms. Ferguson: I am sorry, Mr. Chairman. I did not hear the Hon. Member clearly so could he repeat, please?

Presiding Member: I will ask him. Minister, are you prepared to repeat your answer for the Hon. Member?

Mr. Persaud: No, Mr. Chairman. We ought to pay attention in this Committee.

Presiding Member: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Ms. Ferguson, do you have a follow-up?

Ms. Ferguson: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Member state the number of boats in the region and also the number of buses that will be benefitting from this allocation? Thank you.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I do not have that information readily available.

Ms. Ferguson: This is the problem that I am having: When these requests are being made, they are based on information submitted by the respective officers to the Ministry of Finance so that the moneys can be released.

The Minister is fully aware that we are considering his Ministry, and he is not fully equipped with the information that this Committee requires. So, could the Hon. Minister state when exactly he will lay over the information that he could not provide a response to?

Presiding Member: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister, are you prepared to lay over the...?

Mr. Persaud: That will be very soon, Mr. Chairman.

Presiding Member: Thank you very much. The Minister will make the list available very soon.

Item 10: 71-713 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$12,700,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 71-713 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Education Delivery – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$9,144,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister give us a breakdown of this \$9.144 million that the region is seeking under Education Delivery, please?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this is to support two programmes – the literacy and the Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) programmes.

Mr. Mahipaul: Did I hear correctly? Did the Minister say, the Sustainable Livelihoods and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) programme?

Presiding Member: That is correct, Hon. Member.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I alluded to earlier, that we should pay attention in this House.

Presiding Member: That is correct.

Mr. Persaud: I said, SEND – S-E-N-D. It is abbreviated.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Perhaps the Hon. Minister should speak fluently, and I will hear clearly. Sir, may I ask the Hon. Minister to disaggregate the sum and specify which one is for SEND and which is for the literacy programme.

Presiding Member: Thank you. At least we have it correct this time. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is a team of 16 officers who work, and it is to supplement, as I said, the programme before.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, given that school is closed, what exactly is going to happen in terms of the teaching for the literacy and SEND programmes. School is closed so what exactly are you doing with \$9.144 million for those two academic programmes in an academic environment where school is currently closed and will be reopened in January of next year.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this has been an ongoing programme, and the money will be spent before the 31st December.

Presiding Member: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Do you have a follow-up, Mr. Mahipaul?

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir.

Presiding Member: Go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, we understand that this is an ongoing programme, and we are promoting literacy. We are promoting the SEND programme too. In the year We believe that education is important but the point to note is that school is currently out of session. Who will this money be spent on? School is out of session and if you do not have anybody to spend it on, it will have to be returned to the Consolidated Fund. The question is, who are you spending it on?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is an ongoing programme, and we still have to pay our expenses.

Mr. Mahipaul: There is one other question, Sir. Perhaps, I will not go down the road of asking continuous questions because of the answers. This one – is the programme currently happening at respective schools in Region 1? Currently – today, yesterday and tomorrow – will we be having this programme still happening? Who are the beneficiaries of it?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, they are mopping up now.

Presiding Member: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Ms Ferguson, I recognised you before Mr. Cox.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, let us carefully look at the description column. It states, Local Travel and Subsistence, which particular programme is asking for \$9.1 million to be spent by 31st

December, 2023. My question to the Hon. Minister, since you said that it is an ongoing programme, apparently things are in session now whilst school is out, who exactly will be benefitting from this allocation?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it will be the 16 officers.

Presiding Member: It will be 16 officers. Thank you very much, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Persaud: They are resource officers.

Ms. Ferguson: There are 16 officers. My follow-up to the Hon. Minister – I guess you have a disaggregation of how this money will be expended. Could you list the names of the schools along with the disaggregated amount for each of them? Could you provide to the National Assembly that which would give you a total sum of \$9.144 million to be expended by 31st December, 2023.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this is not being spent by the schools but by the officers.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Minister, you said that there are two programmes which are currently ongoing – literacy and SEND. So, now, if these 16 officers are travelling, where are they travelling to? Which schools are they going to?

Mr. Persaud: They are going across the region, Mr. Chairman. It will be across the region.

Presiding Member: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Mr. Cox, I am sorry. Mr. Cox, please give me a minute let me...

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I am sorry.

Presiding Member: Yes, go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: I did not hear the Minister clearly because at the said time, you spoke. So, could he repeat himself, please?

Presiding Member: I will tell you what the Minister said. The Minister said, across the region. Hon. Member, Mr. Cox.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chair, so to the Hon. Minister [*interruption*].

Presiding Member: All right, let us allow Mr. Cox to ask his question.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The Hon. Minister did mention that there are two programmes that will be benefiting from this sum; SEND is the Special Education Needs and Disabilities programme. These officers will be travelling, according to the Minister, across the region. My question is – what are the projects they will be engaged in Mabaruma, Matarkai and Moruca, and who is the target audience? How many students or pupils do we have in Region I under the Special Education Needs and Disabilities programme?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, SEND is for the Special Education Needs and Disabilities programme and, I said earlier, there is literacy.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chair, I know you assist us when we do not hear the Hon. Minister properly. Could you assist the Hon. Minister. Apparently, he is not hearing or comprehending us. So, the question is – when these officers traverse the region under literacy and SEND, what are the programmes now and by 31st December that will be implemented in these districts and how many pupils will benefit from these programmes? On enrolment, how many pupils do you have under the disability programme in Region 1?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I do not imbibe every day in Region 1. There are two programmes which are ongoing. I do not have the number of children who benefit but I can lay that over.

Item 10: 71-713 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Education Delivery – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$9,144,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 71-713 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Education Delivery – National and Other Events – \$5,000,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, National and Other Events is there for \$5 million. Could the Hon. Minister say what are the national events under this programme of Education Delivery again, Sir?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, expenses were incurred and that is why we came here for a supplementary.

[Mr. Chairman resumed the Chair.]

Mr. Mahipaul: So, is the Hon. Minister saying that this sum of money was already expended? He did say, “expenses were incurred.”

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the moneys are to be expended.

7.26 p.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. I heard the Hon. Minister correcting himself by saying that the money will be expended. Could the Hon. Minister tell this National Assembly what national event would it be expended on within the 11 days that are remaining considering that school is out of session?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, athletic sports.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, today is 19th December and the financial year closes on 31st December. The Hon. Minister was kind enough to say that this money will be spent over the next 11 days. May I ask what day is designated, under Education Delivery, for the athletic sports and which sports ground? Perhaps we could take a trip and visit the athletic sports, Sir.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, there was a request by the Ministry to expend these moneys based on the school sports whereby we had to bring children out of the regions to Region 3.

Item 10: 71-713 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Education Delivery – National and Other Events – \$5,000,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 71-713 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Education Delivery – Dietary – \$16,200,000

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Minister say which schools will benefit from Dietary from this \$16.2 million? Obviously, given that schools are closed... That is my first question.

Mr. Persaud: All the dormitories, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chair, there are no dormitories in session presently. Is the Hon. Minister saying that these moneys were already spent on dietary within dormitories? There is no school in session. There is no one in any of the dormitories across Region 1. Am I to understand that this money will still be spent on dormitories still?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, we are honoring a programme and we will deliver on that.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair. I heard the Minister's response to my colleague. Under Dietary, the region is seeking \$16 million; you said that you have to feed children who are in the dormitories currently. My question to the Minister is, how are these services to be procured? Are you going to public tendering, are you doing selective tendering? How do you intend to expend this money by 31st December, 2023? That is one. Second, could you say how many students who are currently in the dormitory will benefit from this \$16 million as at 31st December, 2023? [Mr. McCoy: All of them.] I need a figure; all is not a figure.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, as I alluded to earlier, this has been an ongoing programme, expenses were incurred and that is why we have come here for a supplemental. It will be spent by 31st December, 2023. The question regarding the amount, I think you should ask the Hon. Member Mr. Cox. He goes to all the schools.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Chairman, I intend to write to the Auditor General to probe this. For that purpose, I would like the Minister to name one dormitory. I am a little confused. Sir, before you came in, he said “incurred” then, he said ‘will incur’ then, he went back to his original position. The first question is: what really is the position? Was this money spent or is it going to be spent in the next 11 days? And name at least one dormitory that will benefit from it.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, all the dormitories will benefit. As I alluded to earlier, expenses were incurred. That is why they are here today.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Minister give a breakdown for the three dormitory schools that we have in Region1 with regard to this amount?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, they are restocking the dormitories. We will also be restocking the dormitories.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, in his earlier responses, the Hon. Member alluded to the fact that some of this money has been incurred, which means that it has already been spent. That is what he said; let us go to the *Hansard*.

Mr. Chairman: Honourable, please do not argue over...

Ms. Ferguson: My question to this Hon. Member is, this \$16 million that you are seeking, could you say how much has been spent from it and what was it spent on? Thank you.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I answered that question earlier.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Chairman, finally, as I understand it, if moneys were spent, then one is not supposed to be coming for its approval *via* a supplemental paper. The question is, why did you not bring it on the paper which has advances from the Contingencies Fund rather than a supplemental? It is clear to this House that at least some, a part of, or all of it was already spent based on the exchanges and the line of answers. That is my question, Cde. Chair.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I never said that the moneys were spent.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, with your leave, I would like us to go to the *Hansard* because in this Minister's earlier explanation, he stated that the money has been incurred. The money was spent already. Do you want me to give an example? You said that the money was used on nationals, on school sports. Mr. Chair, I would like us to extract the information from the *Hansard* and you will see exactly what was said. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I think we have exhausted this item.

Item 10: 71-713 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Education Delivery – Dietary – \$16,200,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I heard heckles of a particular unparliamentary word.

Item 10: 71-714 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Health Services - Fuel and Lubricants – \$19,000,000

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chair, Fuel and Lubricants, \$19 million. Could the Hon. Minister provide a breakdown of Fuel and Lubricants as to the amount here and what exactly would be done in terms of travel, in terms of usage? Is it the hospital, is it the power plant at the hospital in terms of the standby? What exactly? Could he provide more details on Fuel and Lubricants?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, increases in the migrant activities in Yarikita, Imbotero, White Water, Kursima, Baramita and Arakaka which saw an increase in respiratory illnesses. Henceforth, from September, a decision was made to ensure that outreaches by medical doctors are done weekly to Yarikita and White Water, and on a monthly to other existing areas.

Item 10: 71-714 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Health Services - Fuel and Lubricants – \$19,000,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, please, be careful with your answers.

Item 10: 71-714 Region 1 – Barima/Waini – Health Services - Local Travel and Subsistence – \$20,000,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, under Local Travel and Subsistence, the voted provision was \$147 million. The new provision being sought is \$20 million, to be expended in 12 days. Sir, the explanation given is it will be utilised for the:

“Provision of additional resources due to an expanded work programme.”

Could the Hon. Minister explain to this House what is the expanded programme for the 12 days remaining in 2023?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, for medical outreach programmes, escorting nurses, escorting patients regionally and nationally; quarterly and half yearly outreaches.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, as life has it, we will suffer from illness and all manner of things. Based on the explanation just given by the Hon. Member, he has stated that nurses will be escorting patients. I do not know that is from where to where.

7.41 p.m.

Could you say exactly how many persons are likely to benefit from this provision because local travel and subsistence...? Where are these persons expected to travel?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I am not a fortune teller. If the Hon. Member is, she could provide the answer.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, with all due respect to the Hon. Member, when we come to the National Assembly, we come here to do the people's business.

Mr. Chairman: What is the question?

Ms. Ferguson: This is the taxpayers' money...

Mr. Chairman: And the question?

Ms. Ferguson: ...and he must be accountable for it. My question to the Hon. Member... In order for him to arrive at \$20 million, something had to occasion that. How many persons are likely, how many nurses are you all catering for to travel with patients across the region and to where?

Mr. Persaud: This Government does not play with the livelihoods of people, especially where medical intervention is needed. I cannot foresee how many people will contract a disease and when there will be a breakout.

Item 10: 71-714 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Health Services – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$20,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 71-714 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Health Services – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$10,000,000

Item 10: 71-714 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Health Services – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$10,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 10: 71-714 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Health Services – Cleaning and Extermination Services – \$6,000,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I noted earlier the region has \$11 million for this programme, and they are now seeking \$6 million to be expended in 12 days. Could the Hon. Minister explain how many health buildings across the region are expected to benefit from this allocation and could he provide a disaggregation? That is the second one. Third, could he say whether he is going out to tender for such services and what mechanisms will be used to have these moneys expended?

Mr. Persaud: All of the medical facilities are being serviced. We were cleaning these facilities every four hours. *[Interruption]* Now we have increased the cleaning to an hourly basis.

Mr. Chairman: I am just asking the information technology (IT) people to monitor what is coming through the speakers. Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Persaud: This is due to the high traffic making the areas dirty very fast.

Ms. Ferguson: The Hon. Member responded by saying that all the health buildings across the region will benefit from this allocation. I asked specifically for the numbers. How many health buildings in the region will benefit? I do not live in Region 1, so I do not have a full count as to how many there are.

Mr. Persaud: All of the health facilities in Region 1.

Mr. Cox: The Hon. Minister did mention that all of the health buildings would be cleaned. All. My question is specific to the Mabaruma Regional Hospital, the Santa Rosa District Hospital and the Port Kaituma District Hospital. What sum would be allocated to those cleaning and is this sum here of \$6 million enough to ensure that those large institutions are thoroughly cleaned? I know the region would engage in cleaning of all of the buildings throughout the year, especially along the Christmas season. Is this enough?

Mr. Persaud: It is adequate.

Ms. Ferguson: The Hon. Member did not answer part of my question when I asked what mechanism will be used to ensure cleaning and extermination services are done. Is it that you are going out to have private persons conduct the cleaning and extermination services? Who will be actually doing the work across the region?

Mr. Persaud: We have cleaners that are employed, and we would supply the materials to do the actual cleaning.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, if you look in the legend under Description it speaks to two activities, Cleaning and Extermination Services. Am I to understand from the Minister that staff are trained, or do you have experts in the ministry to deal with extermination?

Mr. Persaud: We do not have a problem with bats or any other insect to be exterminated. It is strictly for cleaning.

Item 10: 71-714 Region 1: Barima/Waini – Health Services – Cleaning and Extermination Services – \$6,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 11: 76-762 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne – Agriculture – Fuel and Lubricants – \$125,000,000

Mr. Jaiprashad: With regard to Chart of Account 6231, could the Hon. Minister give a breakdown as to the type of vehicle that would be using this fuel? We know that it is about 11/12 days for the completion of the year and there is \$125 million for 11 days.

Mr. Persaud: Due to the prolonged El Niño situation, pump stations went into operation on a 24-hour basis. This is to assist the rice farmers across the region in accessing water.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you can use the other microphone (mic).

Mr. Jaiprashad: Could the Minister outline the location for these pumps?

Mr. Persaud: It is for the Manarabisi Pump Station and the Black Bush Polder Pump Station.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Is the Hon. Minister indicating to us that two pumps would be operating at \$125 million for 11 days?

Mr. Persaud: These activities started in early October and there are some other units that incurred some expenses.

Ms. Ferguson: A follow-up to my colleague's question and the response given. The Minister stated that there were some activities in October and some of the money will now cater for probably new activities. What are these new activities?

Mr. Persaud: I did not say activities.

Ms. Ferguson: Probably I have to go see a neurologist, but anyway, let me move on. You stated earlier Hon. Member that the sum of \$125 million would take care of two pumps, one at Black Bush Polder and the other one in another area. Could you say to this House, give a disaggregation, as to this amount going to the two locations? That is one question.

Second, how do you intend to procure fuel and lubricants with 12 days remaining in the month December, 2023?

Mr. Persaud: In Black Bush Polder there are seven pumps and in Manarabisi there are three pumps.

Ms. Ferguson: Earlier the Minister... My understanding is that there were two pumps, two locations, but he did not say how many pumps at the two locations. Now that you have provided that information to us – I think seven and three – you would be able to say to us how much money or fuel would be used for each pump at the two locations.

Mr. Persaud: For the pumps at Black Bush Polder, it is 2,112 gallons of fuel per day and at Manarabisi it is 960 gallons of fuel per day.

7.56 p.m.

Item 11: 76-762 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne – Agriculture – Fuel and Lubricants – \$125,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 11: 76-762 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne – Agriculture – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$5,500,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, according to the description here – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – you are now seeking \$5.5 million to be expended by 31st December, 2023. Could the Hon. Member provide an explanation? What is being explained there in the Remark legend is not helpful to me. You are speaking about other transport, what are these other transports? You are speaking about travel and postage,

perhaps you could provide a breakdown of these activities and the number of moneys attached to each activity.
Thank you.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the El Nino situation is still in effect, so we are now required to transport fuel and lubricants for the irrigation of fresh water from Manarabisi and Black Bush pump stations to rice lands in the East Berbice and Corentyne areas.

Item 11: 76-762 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne – Agriculture – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$5,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 12: 77-773 Region 7: Cuyuni/Mazaruni – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$12,163,500

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what is the expanded work programme that is being catered for the \$12,163,500?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, there was an increase in extracurricular activities organised by the Ministry of Education to facilitate participation at national events such as choral speaking and impromptu speech.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say how many of those activities will be conducted between now to 31st December?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this programme is ongoing.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say which schools will be having activities from 20th December to 31st December?

Mr. Persaud: Schools and students are participating in this programme that is ongoing.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister state, specifically, what are those schools within the region?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, schools across the region.

Ms. Fernandes: The Minister is saying schools across the region so I am trying to ascertain which schools. Could the Hon. Minister say how much of this allocation will be utilised on boats?

Mr. Persaud: All the boats within the riverain areas will be used.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say how many boats are currently operating within the region? How many are functional? How many under maintenance?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, all are working.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say how much of the \$12,163,500 will be utilised in Bartica and the schools in Bartica?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, as I alluded to earlier, it is for the entire region.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chairman, I am asking, specifically, as I know that there was a process to arrive at \$12,163,500. There must be a sum that is allocated to be utilised, specifically, by the various schools. Could the Hon. Minister say if I am to just take this sum, look at how many schools there are, for example if there are 20, just divide it by 20 and that is how it is being distributed?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the names of the schools are Kalakun, Sakarara Bay, Ampau Bay, Wolga and Dagg Point. We also have Philippi, Eteringbang and Kangaruma.

Ms. Fernandes: I am thankful for that response because that response would say if the allocation is not for all the schools because we have been very specific there. A lot of schools are not listed. I am going to now ask the Minister, for the Upper Mazaruni area. What sum is being allocated here for fuel and lubricants?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this sum is adequate for those schools and the other schools in the Region.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say whether all these moneys would be utilised from 20th to 31st December? Is any portion of this money being catered for expenses that were incurred prior to today?

Mr. Persaud: These moneys are adequate to be spent by 31st December, 2023.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I do not think the Minister heard my question. I specifically asked if there were expenses incurred prior to today that is being catered for in this allocation?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this amount is adequate and it will be spent by 31st December, 2023.

Item 12: 77-773 Region 7: Cuyuni/Mazaruni – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$12,163,500 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 12: 77-773 Region 7: Cuyuni/Mazaruni – Education Delivery – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$32,741,685

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what amount from the \$32,741,685 will be allocated to postage?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is not postage. It is transportation. There was a shortfall due to additional activities not catered for in the 2023 budget estimates which include an increase in extracurricular activities organised by the Ministry of Education to facilitate participation at the national level, payments for freight and passengers for school grants and purchases.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what proportion of this money is allocated for expenses that were incurred before, as was highlighted by the Minister?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, no moneys were incurred.

Ms. Fernandes: With that response, could the Hon. Minister say how many of those events and could the Hon. Minister identify when these events will take place from 20th December to 31st December?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is currently ongoing whereby 575 students will be transported and 40 teachers to return home for the Christmas vacation from lower, middle and upper Mazaruni. We will be transporting teachers from the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) returning from Turkeyen and those writing examinations within the region.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, before you proceed, we were so busy I overlooked the 8.00 p.m. hour when the Standing Order states we should have suspended. Could we get the Hon. Prime Minister to move the relevant Standing Order so that we could continue to the completion of the business for today?

Suspension of Standing Order No. 11

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Order No. 11 be suspended to enable this sitting of the National Assembly to continue with its business beyond 8.00 p.m.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, I ask that we move the Standing Order so that we can have extra time to complete today's business.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister identify which schools the 575 students are coming from?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, across the region.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Minister say how many schools from across the region?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, all the dorms.

Ms. Fernandes: How many of the 575 students will be coming from the Three Miles Secondary School dormitory? How many from the Bartica Secondary School dormitory?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, they are being catered for.

8.11 p.m.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say for the Three Mile Secondary and the Bartica Secondary School, what proportion of the moneys being sought here today will go towards those students' transportation?

Mr. Persaud: All of their expenses will be taken care of.

Ms. Ferguson: Under that very line item currently under consideration, earlier the Hon. Member stated that these 575 students will be engaged in activities at the national level. Could the Hon. Minister state what are these national activities, when will these national activities be held and where?

Mr. Persaud: I never mentioned national activities.

Ms. Ferguson: Since the Hon. Member is saying that he never or he cannot recall stating national activities, could he say to this Committee then, what will these 575 students be engaged in?

Mr. Persaud: They are being transported from their dorms to their homes and brought back to the dorms when schools reopen.

Item 12: 77-773 Region 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni – Education Delivery – Other Transport, Travel and Postage - \$32,741,685 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: I think we may have to start banning the use of cellular phones in the Chamber.

Item 12: 77-774 Region 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni – Health Services – Fuel and Lubricants –\$12,267,200

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister please disaggregate the \$12,267,200 being sought here?

Mr. Persaud: There was an increase in a number of medial outreaches, especially in communities where General Medical Officers (GMOs) are placed.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say how many medical outreaches will be conducted between 20th December to 31st December?

Mr. Persaud: These outreaches are ongoing.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. I understand that the outreaches are ongoing but, specifically, how many outreaches will be conducted from tomorrow to the end of the year?

Mr. Persaud: They are ongoing.

Ms. Fernandes: I am going to ask, is there any sum from the more than \$12 million being sought here today, be for expenses specifically for outreaches that were already conducted?

Mr. Persaud: It is an ongoing programme.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say, when he says “ongoing”, does he mean that the expenses... Could the Minister say, rather, for the ongoing activities – in this case, the ongoing medical outreaches – when was the commencement date for these outreaches and what is the expected closing date for these outreaches for 2023?

Mr. Persaud: It is for the last quarter, Mr. Chairman and it will end on 31st December, 2023.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you. Being that this sum is for the last quarter, could the Hon. Minister say how many outreaches were done prior to today, 19th December, in the last quarter?

Mr. Persaud: There were 19 done.

Ms. Fernandes: That is good. Could the Hon. Minister say where these outreaches were done?

Mr. Persaud: Across the region.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say on average, what is the cost per outreach?

Mr. Persaud: It depends, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Fernandes: Given the response from the Hon. Minister that the cost varies, one would expect the sum to be sought here today for \$12,267,200, this was very specific to locations because the cost would vary. Could the Hon. Minister say what locations are being catered for in this sum?

Mr. Persaud: We cannot put a definitive figure on any of the outreaches, but this amount is adequate.

Ms. Fernandes: My final question on this line item, could the Hon. Minister say how he arrived at \$12,267,200, for this line item?

Mr. Persaud: It is based on the trend and projection for the outreaches that we had.

Ms. Ferguson: Under that very line item, I have a follow up question based on the response provided by the Hon. Member. He said that these are ongoing activities in terms of medical outreaches. He is saying to us that on 31st December, which happens to be a Sunday and Old Year's Day, he will be having medical outreaches. On Christmas day and Boxing Day, he will be having these outreaches.

Mr. Persaud: This is ongoing and started in the last quarter of this year.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay. Could the Hon. Minister explain what entails the medical outreaches? What are they doing? What are these Nurses or Doctors doing?

Mr. Persaud: They are treating patients, those who are sick, vaccination campaigns, dengue and malaria. There are so many other things that could happen to patients and to people.

Item 12: 77-774 Region 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni – Health Services – Fuel and Lubricants –\$12,267,200 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

**Item 12: 77-774 Region 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni – Health Services – Other Transport, Travel and Postage
-\$25,000,000**

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what proportion of the money is going to be utilised on transport, travel and postage?

Mr. Persaud: All of it.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say how much will be utilised on transport, how much will be utilised on travel and how much will be utilised on postage?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, as the need arises.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say whether or not he is in possession of a sum for transport, travel or postage? Was this allocation not disaggregated like that before it was being sought here today?

Mr. Persaud: This was a projection to be spent by 31st December, 2023.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say specifically what the sums will be spent on from 20th December to 31st December?

Mr. Persaud: The full request, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Fernandes: I do not think the Minister heard the question. I was asking specifically, what are the activities that the moneys will be expended on?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, transportation.

Ms. Fernandes: Transportation, thank you, Sir. That sort of goes against what the Minister said earlier. Is the Minister now saying that none will be on travel and postage but only on transportation?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the line item states specifically ‘transportation’.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I am not sure if we are looking at the same line item but the one I am looking at states “Other Transport, Travel and Postage”. The Remarks states:

“Provision of additional resources due to an expanded work programme”.

It did not specify, hence my question.

Mr. Persaud: I did not complete the statement that I was making. It is transport, travel and postage.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what caused the Ministry to utilise the \$77,000,000 as of 19th December but it needs \$25 million from 20th December to 31st December?

Mr. Persaud: The \$25 million is a projection that will be spent up to 31st December, 2023.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what is he projecting to be happening between 20th December to 31st December that would incur \$25 million?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it would be medivac, transporting patients to Georgetown, fuel, *et cetera*.

8.26 p.m.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chair, fuel and lubricants were already catered for under chart of account 6231 so it cannot come back under line item 6265. When it comes to medevac, could the Hon. Minister kindly inform the Committees why he is projecting that there is going to be such heightened medevac requirement from 20th December to 31st December given that the total sum allocated for the rest of the year was \$77 million?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it was a projection.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what informed this projection?

Mr. Persaud: Could the Hon. Member please repeat her question?

Ms. Fernandes: What data informed the projection?

Mr. Persaud: The work programme informed the projection.

Ms. Fernandes: If I could coin the question a bit differently, what part of the work programme is being expended from the 20th to the 31st that was not catered for previously under the \$77 million but now requires \$25 million from the 20th to the 31st?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this is an ongoing programme.

Ms. Ferguson: Earlier, the Hon. Member stated that this provision of \$25 million now being sought to be spent by 31st December, 2023 will cater for other transport, travel and postage. Could the Hon. Minister explain what is other transport; that is one, secondly, since the description is given for postage, what things are to be posted between 20th December to 31st December? What amount from this \$25 million will go to postage?

Mr. Persaud: It is the hiring of boats, planes and bringing vaccines into the region, *et cetera*.

Ms. Ferguson: The Hon. Member failed to answer the second part of my question. Since the Hon. Member provided information on boats, bringing medicines, vaccines and all other things, could the Hon. Member state, from this \$25 million, how much is going to transport of medicines, vaccines and other things?

Mr. Persaud: This amount is adequate for the continuation of this programme which will end on 31st December.

Ms. Ferguson: I never put to the Minister whether the sum of \$25 million is adequate or inadequate. I simply asked the Hon. Member, from this \$25 million that you are seeking to be expended by or to be spent between tomorrow 20th to 31st December, how much is going to transport of these medications across the region and how much is going to postage? What is it that you are posting out from the region or into the region?

Mr. Persaud: The activities have not started, as of tomorrow until 31st December.

Ms. Ferguson: I find this quite interesting. While the activities have not commenced, my Colleague earlier asked you what had informed your decision to request an additional \$25 million and you said activities are ongoing; that is what you said, so you are contradicting yourself.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I also said it is a projection.

Ms. Ferguson: While that might be a projected sum, there is still something that had to inform your projection to arrive at \$25 million. I am asking you how much is going to transport, how much going to travel and how much going to postage from this \$25 million. You should have the disaggregated sums there. How did you go to defend those moneys at the Ministry of Finance?

Mr. Persaud: This is an ongoing programme. This amount is adequate for the completion of this programme by 31st December.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have been hearing the same questions over and over again in different forms by different people. I think we have exhausted the questions. I will give the Hon. Member from Region 7 one final opportunity to ask a question.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My final question to the Hon. Minister is, given that there are six working days remaining for the rest of the year, this is going to be giving an average of \$4,166,000 and change per day, could the Minister say what mode of transportation is carrying the bulk of this cost and where? Thank you.

Mr. Persaud: It is airfare.

Item 12: 77-774 Region 7 Cuyuni/Mazaruni – Health Services – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$25,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 78-781 Region 8 Potaro/Siparuni – Regional Administration and Finance – Electricity Charges – \$32,439,232

Mr. Sinclair: Mr. Chairman, I notice for electricity charges for Region 8 there is something like \$33.5 million. Could the Hon. Minister say to this Committee what buildings, institutions or others are responsible for these arears?

Mr. Persaud: The Regional Democratic Council (RDC) owes the Mahdia Power and Light Incorporated for the following years; in 2015 – \$10,867,700, in 2016 – \$3,777,500, in 2017 – \$2,160,100, in 2018 – \$5,050,632 and in 2019 – \$5,881,800. Those years were under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government.

Mr. Sinclair: I have a follow-up question, Mr. Chairman. Now, why is it that it took this region so long to absorb that?

Mr. Persaud: We were awaiting the APNU/AFC to fulfil their obligation.

Mr. Sinclair: What part of this arears is owed by National Communications Network (NCN)? Perhaps, the Hon. Prime Minister could attest to that.

Mr. Persaud: None, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Ferguson: It is quite interesting to hear on 19th December, 2023, the arears by the previous Administration are now coming to be offset by this Administration. Mr. Chair, my question to the Hon. Member is, why wait three years when there were approximately three budgets that were passed, then there were five supplementaries for 2023 and supplementaries in 2022, 2021 and 2020? Why only now?

Mr. Persaud: Madhia Power and Light Incorporated was waiting for those payments. It was waiting for those payments since 2015.

Ms. Ferguson: To the Hon. Member, could you say when last the Mahdia Power and Light Incorporated received a subvention?

Mr. Persaud: That does not come under this Ministry.

Mr. Mahipaul: My only clarification is, would this sum clear the expenditure that is owed to Mahdia or is there more?

Mr. Persaud: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I think we have exhausted the questions under this item.

Item 13: 78-781 Region 8 Potaro/Siparuni – Regional Administration and Finance – Electricity Charges – \$32,439,232 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 78-783 Region 8 Potaro/Siparuni – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$12,273,000

Mr. Sinclair: Could the Hon. Minister state to the honourable Committee how many vehicles will benefit from this huge sum of money? It is over \$12 million. From that amount, what portion is for fuel and what portion is for lubricants?

8.41 p.m.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this is not a huge amount.

Mr. Sinclair: A follow-up question: how many of these vehicles are rented and how many are owned by the Mahdia Power and Light (MPL) Co. Inc. or by the region?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, none.

Mr. Sinclair: A follow-up: how many are owned; how many all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are rented; and how many trucks are rented?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, nothing is rented.

Mr. Sinclair: What about the... Alright, no further question.

Item 13: 78-783 Region 8 – Potaro/Siparuni – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$12,273,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 78-783 Region 8 – Potaro/Siparuni – Education Delivery – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$14,000,000

Item 13: 78-783 Region 8 – Potaro/Siparuni – Education Delivery – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$14,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 78-783 Region 8 – Potaro/Siparuni – Education Delivery – Dietary – \$32,575,949

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate how he intends for the \$32,575,949 to be spent within the final 11 days in the year?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I am not seeing that amount.

Ms. Fernandes: We are on the same line item Sir; I am on line item 6292.

Mr. Chairman: I think you and I are on the item, yes, 6292.

Ms. Fernandes: The provision being sought is \$32,575,949.

Mr. Chairman: I can confirm that is on my documents.

Ms. Fernandes: That is the line item.

Mr. Chairman: Item 13, Hon. Minister, Agency Code 78-783...

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this is for the restocking of supplies for Kato and Paramakatoi.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Minister say, when they are restocking the supply, for what period are you restocking for? Is it from the 20th to when? What is that period you are restocking for?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the beginning of the new school term.

Ms. Fernandes: With that said Mr. Chairman, am I to interrupt the Minister to mean that more than \$32 million will be expended on Dietary from now until school re-opens?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, yes.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say how many students are being catered for here?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, Kato – 364 students and Paramakatoi – 571 students.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say how many of those students will be staying within the dorms during the holiday period until school re-opens?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, we are taking them home.

Ms. Fernandes: Given that we are definitely seeing expenses, money is being sought for their transportation to go home, how is it that we are still catering for them to be in the dorms until school reopens?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I thought I said earlier that we are restocking.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you did.

Ms. Fernandes: Yes, Sir and I am not disputing that the Minister said that they are restocking. However, I am asking, when I asked for what period you are restocking, Sir, you indicated that you are restocking for the period of now until the new school term re-opens, between that period. With the students going home, who will be utilising these items that are being restocked?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, we are restocking, we are not cooking.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Fernandes... Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, you may have the floor.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, a follow-up from my Colleague's question.

Mr. Chairman: I hope it is a follow-up and not the same question.

Ms. Ferguson: No. It is not the question, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, thank you. Go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: Based on the Minister's response, you said that you are restocking, could you say what are the items that you will be restocking?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, dry goods.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, we have exhausted the questions for this line item.

Item 13: 78-783 Region 8 – Potaro/Siparuni – Education Delivery – Dietary – \$32,575,949 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 78-783 – Region 8 – Potaro/Siparuni – Education Delivery – Training (including Scholarships) – \$3,800,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, Training Including Scholarships, line item 6302, they are now seeking a provision of \$3.8 million and based on the explanation in the remarks Legend, "Provision of additional resources due to an expanded work programme".

My questions to the Hon. Member: (1) What are these expanded work programmes? (2) Who will be benefitting from these training; what is your target number – how many? What would have occasioned or informed your decision to request an additional \$3.8 million?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, strategic planning for the year 2024.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I do not know if the Hon. Member is having a difficulty understanding the question put, but I put several questions. (1) – Okay, you responded by saying strategic planning, but who are the beneficiaries of the strategic planning? That is one. Secondly, how many persons will be benefitting from this training. Thirdly, I asked what would have informed your decision to request an additional \$3.8 million? Perhaps, you can also provide us with when the training will be conducted since the request is for the 31st December, 2023?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is the meeting of head teachers to complete the work programme for the year 2023.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Item 13: 78-783 Region 8 – Potaro/Siparuni – Education Delivery – Training (including scholarships) – \$3,800,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 13: 78-784 Region 8 – Potaro/Siparuni – Health Services – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$10,000,000

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what are the additional resources being sought here and what is the expanded work programme being referred to?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, we are now receiving bills from the unfortunate situation at the place in the Mahdia – the fire. Those bills are now coming in to pay medical staff who worked during then.

Mr. Chairman: Thanks, Minister.

Item 13: 78-783 – Region 8 – Potaro/Siparuni – Health Services – Local Travel and Subsistence – \$10,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 14: 79-791 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Regional Administration and Finance – Fuel and Lubricants – \$3,999,350

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, just an observation. Throughout this entire paper considering Local Government, I notice that the common trend is Fuel and Lubricants being requested. However, Mr. Chairman, my question to the Hon. Member, line item 6231 – Fuel and Lubricants, you are now requesting a sum close to \$4 million. Could you provide a disaggregation for this sum?

Mr. Chairman: Before I put to the Hon. Minister, the observation you made with respect to fuel and lubricants, is the same question going to apply to all of those headings? That is what I think...No? Hon. Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is Christmas time, and this sum is for extended electricity to the various sub-districts.

8.56 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: But, then again, Mr. Chairman, the explanation given in the Remarks column states, “Provision of additional resources due an expanded work programme”. The Hon. Member responded not so long ago, by stating that this \$4 million will take care of electricity. So, if I am to accept that, since it is the Regional Administration and Finance, Sir, can you disaggregate this sum as to what will go to the administration section and public works? What is going where? Can you provide that kind of information.

Mr. Persaud: It is going to the generators, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Ferguson: Generators? Where are these generators and how many are there?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I recall mentioning earlier that we are offering extended hours of electricity.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member would agree with me that Lethem, in that region, has a power company called the Lethem Power Company Incorporated to which we would normally give subsidies to. So, I am trying to understand the reason just proffered by the Minister. Am I to understand that the Regional Administration and Finance building is being powered by generators?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I wilfully left out the words sub-districts because I mentioned it earlier. I mentioned it earlier in my opening statement.

Ms. Ferguson: We know Region 9 is a vast region. Would you be able to assist this Committee and say which sub-districts will benefit from this allocation now being sought to be expended in less than 11 days?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, these are Sand Creek, Karasabai, Annai and Aishalton.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, since you have provided a few villages – Sand Creek and Karasabai – can you say to this Committee, from this total sum, what amounts are going to Sand Creek, Karasabai and the other areas that are likely to benefit from this allocation?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is approximately \$500,000 each.

Item 14: 79-791 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Regional Administration and Finance – Fuel and Lubricants – \$3,999,350, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 14: 79-791 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Regional Administration and Finance – Vehicle Spares and Service – \$2,500,000

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say how many vehicles are being catered for under this allocation and what type of vehicles?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, there are five tractors, one land cruiser, three Toyota Hilux, eight ATVs, four water pumps, six brush cutters, six mist blowers and four fogging machines. These are all for service and maintenance.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what is the status of the vehicles now? Are they completely out of operation as of this moment or are they just requiring services?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is for preventative maintenance.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, I think there were three Toyota Hilux or so, for the vehicles, can you give us the years of these and if possible, the vehicle numbers?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I do not have that information here with me.

Item 14: 79-791 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Regional Administration and Finance – Vehicle Spares and Service – \$2,500,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 14: 79-792 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Agriculture – Fuel and Lubricants – \$1,598,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I note that the region is requesting \$1.6 million more for Fuel and Lubricants. Based on the explanation in the Remarks column, this is for the expanded work programme. So, can the Hon. Member state what are the expanded work programmes that the Agriculture Department will be involved in between the 20th to the 31st of December, 2023?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister...

Ms. Ferguson: Secondly,

Mr. Chairman: I am sorry. Go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: Secondly, what is the number of vehicles that will be benefitting from this allocation? Thank you.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, for some reason I am not seeing that \$1.6 million.

Ms. Ferguson: That is all right. I will correct myself. It is \$1.598 million.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this is to support the farmers in transporting their produce to the Lethem Municipal Market. It is for preventative maintenance.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much to the Hon. Member. This is a follow-up to the Hon. Member. You said that the sum will be utilised to assist farmers in getting their produce to the marketplace or places. Can you say exactly which day the produce will be transported to the various marketplaces across the region? Thank you.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it will be on the market days.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, I think we have exhausted the questions.

Item 14: 79-792 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Agriculture – Fuel and Lubricants – \$1,598,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 14: 79-794 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$2,479,350

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, again I will repeat for emphasis's sake. Since we are considering all these regions, the common practice is Fuel and Lubricants. I noticed that Region 9 has added a different component,

Vehicle Spares and Service. So, my question to the Hon. Member is, how many fleets of vehicles are there in this – what you call it....? What is the current fleet of vehicles in this programme?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, there is only one fleet.

Item 14: 79-794 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Education Delivery – Fuel and Lubricants – \$2,479,350, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 14: 79-794 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Education Delivery – Vehicle Spares and Service – \$2,889,228

Item 14: 79-794 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Education Delivery – Vehicle Spares and Service – \$2,889,228, agreed and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 14: 79-795 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Health Services – Field Materials and Supplies – \$2,394,867

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I note that the request for this particular line item is \$2,394,867. Based on the explanation given, it will be utilised for additional resources due to the work programme. Can the Hon. Member state what are the materials to be procured between the 20th to the 31st, December, 2023 and who will benefit from these supplies?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, 317 healthcare workers will benefit. This is for procuring raincoats, long boots, *et cetera*.

Item 14: 79-795 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Health Services – Field Materials and Supplies – \$2,394,867, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 14: 79-795 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Health Services – Fuel and Lubricants – \$2,239,350

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, can he state what is the current fleet of vehicles under this programme? That is one. Secondly, how many vehicles will be benefitting from this allocation?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it will be all the vehicles under the health programme.

9.11 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, that is only one question to the second part of my question.

Mr. Chairman: Is it one question to the second part of your question? It is one answer.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, excuse me, I am just a bit tired.

Mr. Chairman: All of us.

Ms. Ferguson: Good. The Hon. Member responded to the last part of my question, and he failed to respond to the first part of the question which speaks about the current fleet of vehicles. Perhaps he can state further for the House the types of vehicles that will be benefitting from this allocation being sought. The types – whether it is a Hilux, bobcat, a tractor.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Hon. Minister, I know we have had a marathon session, and the Hon. Member is craving your indulgence, please.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, ambulances, ATV, a few Hilux, 4x4, and a few boat engines.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I guess you would agree with me that ‘a few’, ‘a number’ is not helping the situation. It is not helping the first part of my question asked, which is, the number of vehicles you have in this particular programme.

Mr. Persaud: All the vehicles, Mr. Chairman. The one fleet.

Item 14: 79-795 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Health Services – Fuel and Lubricants – \$2,239,350, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 14: 79-795 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Health Services – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$10,373,257

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what is the expanded work programme and what are the additional resources being sought here in this allocation.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is the restocking of medical supplies for the region, from Georgetown to the region and the various villages.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I beg your indulgence. I was not clear if the Minister said “restocking”. Could the Minister say what is the period being catered for with this allocation?

Mr. Persaud: From hereon to 31st December, 2023.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Minister say what is catering for in this expansion?

Mr. Persaud: It is a continuous work programme with regards to the transportation of medical supplies and medical gases, capital items, basically, to the region and the sub-districts.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say, for an expanded work programme, how is it that the Ministry is seeking over 50% more of the voted allocation to be expended within 11 days, given all so that there are six remaining working days in the year. How is it that the Ministry is asking for 50% more than that which was allocated for the entire year?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this is our projection, and we think this will fulfil the requirement for the rest of the year.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister kindly share with us what is the data that informed this projection, specifically, what was the hike in cost that is being catered for here.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the work programme.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Mahipaul, your laughing is infectious.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chairman, could the Minister say what exactly is this work programme?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, the plan for the year.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, we are looking at the supplemental. It is a financial paper in addition to what the plan for the year was. It cannot be the plan for the year, this is more so a plan for 11 days. Could you say what is the work programme that you will be executing, over \$10 million, for the next 11 days – six working days?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it was an elaborate work programme, and this amount will fulfil that programme.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chairman, I am really trying to get exactly what is the work programme. I understand that there is a work programme in place and there are additional resources needed to have works completed for the rest of the year. Could the Minister say what are the activities being done within the next 11 days for this expanded work programme?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, this amount will fulfil the activities for the year 2023.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister kindly say how many activities are being conducted from now to the end of the year?

Mr. Chairman: We are now beginning; what, are, how many... Hon. Minister, go ahead.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, as I mentioned before, restocking and the moving of medical items to the various sub-districts.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, you will agree with me. When we come here to approve moneys, it is the taxpayers' moneys that we are approving and, by right, when we ask the questions, the appropriate responses must be provided. We cannot be accepting 'all' and 'moving around the five districts' and all manner of things. This is unacceptable. Sir, what are the additional activities? Which area or areas across the region will be benefitting from this \$10 million plus that you are now requesting? We have to be serious with taxpayers' money. It is not the People's Progressive Party/Civic's (PPP/C's) money.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, what is the question?

Ms. Ferguson: Let me go slowly. The question to you, Hon. Member, is, what are the activities to be done between 20th December to 31st December, 2023 that this \$10 million that you are asking for will take care of?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I answered that question before.

Mr. Chairman: It was asked about five times. I think we have exhausted the questions under this particular head, Hon. Members.

Item 14: 79-795 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Health Services – Other Transport, Travel and Postage – \$10,373,257, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 14: 79-795 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Health Services – Dietary – \$7,568,000

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister kindly inform the House as to what are the changes for this line item, from the beginning of the year to today, that are requiring an additional \$7.5 million plus?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is not a change, it is the continuation of the work programme.

Ms. Fernandes: Is the Hon. Minister saying that the voted provision was inadequate?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it was unpredictable because we were providing meals for patients.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say how many locations would be catered for under this provision?

Mr. Persaud: Seven.

Ms. Ferguson: The goodly Minister provided a figure of seven. Seven areas will be benefitting from this allocation. Could you list the seven areas that will be benefiting from this \$7.5 million?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, eight areas.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, the goodly Minister, not so long ago, in response to my Colleague's question said "seven". Alright, let us give and take. I will give and take. If you say eight, I will go with the eight. Could you list the eight? Could you say, 'Sand Creek will get *so much ah* money'? "*Yuh* know, 'Aishalton getting *suh much money* from this \$7.5 million'. Could you list the eight areas that will be benefitting from this requested allocation? Thank you.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, Lethem Regional Hospital, Infectious Disease, Aishalton District Hospital, Annai Health Centre, Sand Creek, Karasabai, Yupukari and Nappi.

Ms. Ferguson: That is seven.

Mr. Persaud: That is eight.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I thank the Hon. Member for responding positively, but, then again, you missed the second part of the question. Though you listed the eight, *yuh nah* tell *meh* how much, *wa* amount going to Aishalton, *wa* going to Lethem and stuff like that. That is the information that I need. From this \$7.5 million, you have to disaggregate for me. Thank you.

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, I am unable to disaggregate. I do not know how many patients will go where and when. This is a projection.

Ms. Ferguson: I find the response to be very surprising. Therefore, how did you arrive at the \$7.5 million that you are requesting?

Mr. Persaud: Mr. Chairman, it is a projection.

Item 14: 79-795 Region 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo – Health Services – Dietary – \$7,568,000, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

9.26 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, this concludes these estimates line by line. Let me really commend the two Hon. Members, Ms. Juretha Fernandes and Ms. Annette Ferguson, for their tenacity.

Question

“That the Committee of Supply approves of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 5 of 2023 – Schedule of Supplementary Provision on the Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$24,044,095,908 for the period ending 31st December, 2023.”

Put and agreed to.

Assembly resumed.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sir, I compliment our friends on that side of the House, in particular, the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, for her remarkable tenacity, her persistence and perseverance in interrogating these estimates and scrutinising them with such careful attention, thereby, allowing us on this side of the House to provide answers and showcase the very high standard of transparency for which we are known and with which we manage and administer public money. At the end of that extended examination of the Supplementary Financial Paper No. 5 for 2023, it is my pleasure to report to the Committee of Supply (COS) has approved of the proposals set out in the said Financial Paper and I now move that the Assembly doth agree with the Committee in the said Resolution.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this completes the consideration of Financial Paper No. 5 of 2023. Hon. Members, we will now move to the Appropriation Bill, Supplementary Appropriation Bill (No.3 of 2023) Bill 2023, Bill No. 20 of 2023.

Suspension of Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 3 of 2023) Bill 2023, Bill No. 20 of 2023 to be introduced at this stage.”

[Prime Minister]

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I move that Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Supplementary Appropriation Bill (No. 3 of 2023), Bill 2023, Bill No. 20 of 2023 to be introduced at this stage.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with paragraph 2 of article 171 of the Constitution, I signify that Cabinet has recommended the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 3 of 2023) Bill 2023, Bill No. 20 of 2023 for consideration by the National Assembly. I now present the Bill to the Assembly and move that it be read for the first time.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read for the first time:

Supplementary Appropriation (No. 3 of 2023) Bill 2023 – Bill No. 20 of 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 the Cooperative Republic 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 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: I now move that the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 3 of 2023) Bill 2023, Bill No. 20 of 2023 be read a second time.

Bills – Second and Third Readings

Supplementary Appropriation (No. 3 of 2023) Bill 2023 – Bill No. 20/2023

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 the Cooperative Republic 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 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: I now move that the Supplementary Appropriation (No. 3 of 2023) Bill 2023, Bill No. 20 of 2023 be read a third time and passed as printed.

Question put and carried.

Bill read the third time and passed as printed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I understand that this will conclude our business for today. I have not had any indication that we will meet before or on Friday. This would be the last sitting of the National Assembly before the holiday season.

Season's Greetings

I take this opportunity, on my behalf and on behalf of my family, to extend Season's Greetings and a very happy and prosperous 2024 to you and your families, to the staff and their families, our security and their families, the press, those at the Arthur Chung Conference Centre and all the caterers who have been serving us throughout this year. Hon. Members, I would normally invite the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister to make their comments, but noting the hard work done by the Hon. Member, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul, throughout this year, I now call on him to make his presentation.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Allow me to join with you in extending greetings to all and sundry, both in the National Assembly and Guyana wider. I do hope that they enjoy the festive season. I trust that they will celebrate it with much caution and pay attention to the road rules with all of these things

that we see happening. I want to extend a special Season's Greetings to you and your family, the Clerk of the National Assembly and his family, and by extension, the entire Parliament family, in addition to our colleagues on the other side. I wish them a productive 2024 as we enter the year. Hopefully, as we go forward, we can find the room to cooperate more for the betterment and development of Guyana. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very, very much, Hon. Member, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul. Hon. Prime Minister, go ahead.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to wish you and your family a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year. I wish the Clerk of the National Assembly, the Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly and all the staff of the Parliament Office and their families, a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. To the staff of the Arthur Chung Conference Centre, the security, the media all present here, the caterers, and of course, to our Members on both sides of the House, a Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year to you and your families.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Members, I now invite the Hon. Prime Minister to move the adjournment of the Assembly.

ADJOURNEMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to a date to be determined.”

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of the Assembly to a date to be determined.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Members, the Clerk has prepared for us so please join us in consuming what he has to offer. Thank you very much.

Adjourned accordingly at 9.37 p.m.

Appendix I

QUESTION

NAMES OF NEIGHBOURHOOD DEMOCRATIC COUNCILS THAT RECEIVED SUBVENTIONS FROM THE GOVERNMENT

(Notice Paper No. 314 (Q239 Opp.239))

Please see attached information requested.

Name of NDC	2020	2021	2022	2023
Port Kaituma / Matthew's Ridge / Arakaka	\$5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Charity / Urasara	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Evergreen / Paradise	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Aberdeen / Zorg-en-Vlugt	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Annandale / Riverstown	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Good Hope / Pomona	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Moruka/Phoenix	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	\$0
Kitty/Providence	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	Merged in 2023
Nile Cozier	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Wakenaam	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Leguan	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Mora / Parika	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Hydronie / Good Hope	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Greenwich Park / Vergenoegen	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Tuschen / Uitvlugt	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Stewartville / Cornelia Ida	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Hague / Blankenburg	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
La Jalousie / Nouvelle Flanders	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Best / Klien Pouderoeyen	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Malgre Tout / Meerzorgen	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
La Grange / Nismes	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Canals Polder	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Toevlugt / Patentia	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Soesdyke / Te Huis Te Coverden	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Good Success/ Caledonia	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Golden Grove / Diamond Place	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Little Diamond / Herstelling	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Mocha / Arcadia	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Eccles / Ramsburg	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Plaisance / Industry	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000

Better Hope / La Bonne Intention	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Beterverwagting /Triumph	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Mon Repos / La Reconnaissance	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Buxton / Foulis	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Enmore / Hope	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Haslington / Golden Grove	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Unity / Vereeniging	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Cane Grove	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Lamaha / Yarowkabra	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Hauraruni / Yarowkabra	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Woodlands / Farm	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Hamlet / Chance	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Mahaicony / Abary	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Profit / Rising Sun	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Seafield / Tempie	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Union / Naarstigheid	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Bath / Woodley Park	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Bel Air / Woodlands	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Rosignol / Zeelust	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Blairmont / Gelderland	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Enfield/ New Doe Park	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Plegt Anker/ Kortberaad	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Wyburg /Caracas	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Ordinance/Fort Lands	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Canefield/Enterprise	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Kintyre/Borlam	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Gibraltar/Fyrish	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Kilcoy/Hampshire	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Port Mourant/Johns	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Bloomfield/Whim	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Lancaster/Hogstye	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Bushlot/Adventure	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Maida/Tarlogie	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Black Bush Polders	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Macedonia/Joppa	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Good Hope/No. 51	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
No. 52/63	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	\$0 Split in 2023
No. 64/74				\$0 Split in 2023
Crabwood Creek/Molsen	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Aranaputa / Upper Burro Burro	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000
Kwakwani	5,000,000	5,000,000	5,000,000	2,500,000

TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA – FIRST SESSION (2020-2023)

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

NOTICE PAPER NO. 321

Member Asking: Mrs. Amanza Walton-Desir, M.P.

Minister Answering: Hon. Robeson Benn, Minister of Home Affairs

QUESTION

THE NUMBER OF BUSINESS VISAS ISSUED

Can the Minister indicate the number of business visas issued for the period 1st September, 2020 to 30th June, 2023 and the total number per nationality?

ANSWER

Number of Business Visas Issued for the period of 2020-09-01 to 2023-06-30

NATIONALITY	Business Visas on Arrival
Afghan	nil
Albanian	nil
Algerian	nil
Angolan	nil
Aregentian	nil
Azerbhaijani	nil
Bangladeshi	nil
Belarusian	nil
Bolivian	nil
Bosnian	nil
Bulgarian	nil
Burmese	nil
Cameroonian	nil
Cape Verdian	nil
Central African Republic	nil
Chadian	nil
Chilean	nil
Chinese	21
Colombian	nil
Congolese	nil
Croatian	nil
Cuban	4

Czech Republic	nil
Dominican (Rep)	8
Ecuadorian	nil
Egyptian	nil
El Salvadorian	nil
Estonian	nil
Ethiopian	nil
Filipino	1
Gabonese	nil
Ghanian	nil
Guatemalan	nil
Guinean	nil
Haitian	1
Hondurian	nil
Hungarian	nil
Indian	13
Indonesian	nil
Iranian	nil
Iraq	nil
Israeli	nil
Japanese	nil
Jordanian	nil
Kazakhstan	nil
Kenyan	nil
Korean	nil
Latvian	nil
Lebanese	nil
Lithuanian	nil
Macedonian	nil
Madagascan	nil
Malaysian	1
Malian	nil
Maltese	nil
Mauritius	nil
Mexican	nil
Montenegrin	nil
Moroccan	nil
Mozambican	nil
Myanmar	nil
Namibian	nil
Nepalese	nil
Nicaraguan	nil
Nigerian	5
Omani	nil
Pakistani	nil

Palestinian	nil
Panamanian	nil
Paraguayan	nil
Peruvian	nil
Polish	nil
Romanian	nil
Russian	nil
Senegalese	nil
Serbian	nil
Sierra Leone	nil
Sinaporean	nil
Slovak	nil
Slovanian	nil
South African	nil
Sri Lankan	nil
Sudanese	nil
Syrian	nil
Thai	nil
Tunisian	nil
Turkish	nil
Ugandan	nil
Ukranian	nil
United Arab Emirates	nil
Uruguayan	nil
Venezuelan	2
Vietnamese	nil
Zambian	nil
Zimbabwean	nil
TOTAL	56