



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
(2020-2024) 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*

79TH Sitting

Thursday, 1ST February, 2024

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 11.25 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

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Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P., Vice-President [Absent- on leave]

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

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Apology for late start

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, our apologies for the delayed start today. There was an electrical issue with one of the panels that powers the central air conditioning. The alertness of the staff of the National Arthur Chung Convention Centre (ACCC) was able to detect that damage and they worked feverishly over the past two hours to ensure that they could have it working again. I assure you everything is safe and we have put the standby emergency operations in place. It is very safe now.

Virtual participation

I know quite a few of our Members have been having some sniffles. If Members want, just stay online. I will share the link again with you. If you do not want to be in the Dome, you can still be around, but stay online so that we can have your full participation, especially when needed.

Welcome

Let me welcome the students and teachers of Soesdyke Secondary School. There are four students. To tell these children again, what you are going to witness today is the Members of Parliament scrutinising the Budget line by line. They will ask questions of the Minister such as, why this amount of money, what was it spent for, what happened last year and so forth. That is the process you are going to be observing this morning. Hon. Members, we will resolve ourselves into the Committee of Supply to continue Consideration of the Estimates.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2024 – MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2024

WHEREAS the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana requires that Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for any financial year should be

laid before the National Assembly and that, when the Estimates of Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly, an Appropriation Bill shall be introduced in the Assembly providing for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure;

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2024 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on January 15, 2024, as summarised in the attached Schedule 1;

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

AND WHEREAS the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, Cap. 73.02, requires that the annual lump sum subvention recommended by the Minister with Responsibility for Finance for each Constitutional Agency be included in the annual budget proposal for approval by the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Minister with Responsibility for Finance recommends lump sum subventions for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2024 as summarised in the attached Schedule 2;

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2024, of a total sum of one trillion, eighty billion, five hundred and eight million, and six hundred and thirty-seven thousand, two hundred and nine dollars (\$1,080,508,637,209), excluding sixty five billion, three hundred and fifty-four million, one hundred and twenty-seven thousand and sixty-

five dollars (\$65,354,127,065) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in Schedule 1, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and make further provision in respect of finance:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly approves the recommended lumpsum subvention for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2024 as stated in Schedule 2, amounting to a total sum of thirteen billion, three hundred and sixty eight million, five hundred and seventy-five thousand and eighty-three dollars (\$13,368,575,083) which is charged upon the Consolidated Fund by the Constitution and for the sums voted for the Constitutional Agencies to form part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures of Guyana for the financial year 2024.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the sum of \$240,059,490,286 equivalent to US\$1,154,250,087 to be withdrawn from the Natural Resource Fund for the financial year 2024 in accordance with the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021.

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

Assembly in Committee of Supply

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we are now in committee. I invite the Hon. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, the Hon. Minister, Ms. Sonia Parag, and her team to join us in the well.

Agency: 13 Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development

Current Expenditure

Programme: 131 – Policy Development and Administration – \$402,151,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, permit me to join with you in welcoming the students from Soesdyke Secondary School to witness this deliberation on the estimates of 2024. Cde. Chairman, when we look at Volume 2 of the Estimates for this particular programme, it is guiding us that

100% of the budgetary allocation for 2023 has been expended. However, guidance from Volume One shows \$337,049,000 being spent from an allocation of \$376,432,000, which is a difference of \$39,383,000. Could the Hon. Minister please provide clarity on this?

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Ms. Parag]: While we have fulfilled the mandate as per the Ministry's policy and programme of last year, there was some on transportation that were sent back Hon. Member.

Mr. Mahipaul: It is established that there was not a 100% budgetary allocation spent. In fact, it was 89.5% of the budgetary allocation which is \$337 million of the allotted \$376 million. Sir, in keeping with the Hon. Minister's answer that they fulfilled the mandate of the Ministry, I again turned my attention to Volume 2 of the Estimates. In 2021, we approved for this Programme \$324 million. In 2022, we approved \$356 million. In 2023, we approved \$376 million. Here in 2024, we are being asked to approve \$402,151,000. Guided by the indicators of Volume Two which is very similar to what it was last year and from 2021 and 2022, the mandate of the Ministry was to ensure that we have a Local Government Sector Strategy, a Local Government Data Infrastructure, a Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development Strategy Plan, a Sanitation Sector Plan and the Establishment of the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework. After spending \$1.057 billion, none of these were accomplished. Could the Hon. Minister say why they were not accomplished? What guarantee can she provide to this honourable Committee that with the approval of this \$402 million they will be accomplished this year?

Ms. Parag: This was a Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) project that was discontinued. the sum that was left for logistics was a very marginal amount. This year, we want to be able to continue that programme. You will see this money that is allotted being used for that.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am happy to hear that we will see a Local Government Sector Strategy and the other indicators in Volume 2 of the Estimates. Sir, may I turn your attention to line item 6116, Contracted Employees. Sir, I recognised that there is an increase from 26 to 27. May I ask the Hon. Minister what is the position for the one that we are catering?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, just permit me to stand. Hon. Member, as you would know, there was an appointment of a Legal Assistant as of May, 2023. You would also appreciate that the line item has increased because of the 6.5% salary increase.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I did take into consideration the 6.5% increase to \$93,777,000. When I subtracted that figure from the \$109,261,000 that is there now, I got a revised figure of \$9.384 million that will cater for the 12 months period. Could the Hon. Minister say if this is the figure that is going to be associated as salary and benefits to this Legal Assistant?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman through you, Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, you started off by saying you did your own Mathematics and so on. I mean, that is concerning to me even but just to say that the figure does not include only the Legal Assistant.

11.38 a.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, let me see if I can break it down simpler for the Hon. Minister to understand and comprehend. Sir, the \$93.777 million catered for 26 employees. When one adds the 6.5% to that...and minus it from the \$109,261,000 which caters for the 27 employees, the difference that one will get is a total of \$9,384,000 which is the annual sum, in terms of difference. Is that the salary for the Legal Assistant? Simpler, what is the monthly salary and benefits for the Legal Assistant?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, just so I can break it down and make it simpler for you, when you did all your mathematics there just now and you took that out, we have the salary for the Legal Assistant, as well as the allowance and benefits. I beg your pardon. [Mr. Mahipaul: What is it?] Hon. Member, you are so good at doing mathematics, I am pretty sure you can dissect it.

Mr. Mahipaul: Perhaps the Hon. Minister did not hear the latter part of the question. Could she provide the monthly salary and benefits of the Legal Assistant?

Ms. Parag: The salary is \$319,500.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, my observation is you would ask your question – and this has happened consistently – and as the person responds, you also do your own little off the record heckle. That interrupts the person and it interrupts me also. So, if you ask a question, give the Member a chance. I do not mind you respond in your mind but do not let your mind come out too loudly through your mouth.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. I always respect your guidance. Could we turn our attention to line item 6284, Other, where we see an increase from \$9,010,000 to \$16,826,000? Could the Hon. Minister please say what this increase would cater for?

Ms. Parag: For Other, we have an increase of \$6.8 million over the 2023 appropriation. This provision caters for the public notices, advertisements, procurement of software and other software, domain renewal identification cards, *et cetera*.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Minister, you can sit and respond. Just pull the microphone, which will help you with the volume.

Programme: 131 – Policy Development and Administration – \$402,151,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 133 – Regional Development – \$107,397,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I turn your attention to line item 6116, Contracted Employees. An additional staff was added to this line from one to two. Could the Hon. Minister say what is the position and the salary and benefits of that position?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, as you know, we are always committed to ensuring the Ministry is staffed in a way that it can function well. There was an appointment of an Engineer as of April, 2023.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I remind the Hon. Minister that I also asked for the salary and benefits?

Ms. Parag: The salary is that of an Engineer which is like those at the Ministry of Public Works, *et cetera*.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, I do not know what the salary of the Engineers at the Ministry of Public Works is. Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to provide the figure?

Ms. Parag: I find that very difficult as the Hon. Member seems to know a lot about everything else, but the Engineer's salary is \$276,881.

Mr. Mahipaul: I turn your attention to line item 6281, Security Services, there is a heavy increase here from \$8,733,000 to \$28,536,000. Could the Hon. Minister say what has caused this massive increase?

Ms. Parag: I do not believe an increase, whether massive or minor, is very uncommon given that from 2015 to 2019 we also had massive increases, especially in the years from 2017 to 2018. However, it is due to rates and locations.

Mr. Mahipaul: The Hon. Minister was kind enough to say that it caters for rates and locations. Are there other locations that are considered here that were not considered in 2023?

Ms. Parag: In this particular one, it was the rates and the increase of personnel for the security service.

Mr. Mahipaul: If we are increasing the personnel and we know that last year we approved of a 24-hour basis for every location to have a security officer, are we adding to the already filled locations? If not, could the Hon. Member provide if there are additional locations?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, you would appreciate I also just said, through Mr. Chairman, that this one deals with the rates as well as the increase in personnel. What we had before was baton security but now we have armed security for 24 hours, in addition to. Again, this is not something that is uncommon to have this sort of increase.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask the Hon. Minister to provide us with the new rate? Could the Hon. Member kindly tell us what was the old rate? Also, could we know the name of the security firm?

Ms. Parag: If I could go back to 2017, we had a jump in security service from something like \$403 million to \$530 million in 2019, which is more than \$100 million increase in the two years. Again, this is not uncommon but, in this particular period, we have the rate for armed at \$1,000 an hour and for baton at \$600 an hour to \$850.

Programme: 133 – Regional Development – \$107,397,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 134 – Local Government Development – \$2,224,117,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Line item 6211 – Expenses Specific to the Agency: This shows from \$226,827,000 to \$245,799,000. Could the Hon. Minister tell this Committee if they are catering for increases in the salaries of the chairpersons, the vice chairpersons, the Regional Executive Officers (REOs) and the other staff members that fall under this programme? I know it considers the 6.5% but are there additional sums that will be going to them?

Ms. Parag: The Government have already increase by 6.5% so the increase is included in this amount that is here.

Mr. Mahipaul: I turn your attention to line item 6294, Other, from \$878,617,000 to \$1,342,962,000. May I ask the Hon. Minister how much from this sum is allocated to the recurrent expenditure for the Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill Facility?

Ms. Parag: We are committed, of course, as a Government, to ensure we continue to develop our landfill sites, as well as those sites that we can ensure garbage collection and the removal of garbage. We have committed \$400 million thereabout for the Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill Facility.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am happy to hear about this increase to \$400 million from last year's figure which was \$300 million. May I ask the Hon. Minister if in this \$400 million there are measures that are expected to be taken to stop that high stench which is sadly being inhaled by residents as far as Farm on the East Bank Demerara and all commuters who would normally use the Heroes Highway? It really has a high stench. What measures would be taken to ensure that is removed?

Ms. Parag: The Hon. Member would be happy to know that we, as a Government, are taking care of all Guyanese, including my Hon. Colleague, the Hon. Mahipaul, who is living at Farm and is taking in this stench. We are building more cells at the Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill Facility, as well as operational systems.

Mr. Mahipaul: Outside of the Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill Facility, could the Hon. Minister say how many other sites are catered for here, in terms of a total number?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, you would be happy to know that we are not lazy. From day one, as you know in 2020, we worked very hard and we are committed again to ensuring that we have waste removal, so 14 more are on board.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am happy to hear the Hon. Minister is not lazy. I know she worked very hard for her promotion, and I wish her well in her endeavour as we will meet again next year to know and to judge that performance. Notwithstanding that, the Hon. Minister indicated 14 additional sites. Last year, we were told there were 13 and we were also told that the moneys we allocated there was \$878,613,000 catered for six additional sites. From her answer just now, there is a clear indication that only one additional site is there. May I ask the Hon. Minister to explain perhaps what has caused us to not have the full complement of six as was stated last year and which is the additional one that was added?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, we did an assessment, and to ensure we are in places and locations that are suitable. Several of the sites were closed for four locations. That is the answer.

Mr. Mahipaul: Am I hearing that we did open six new landfill sites and from the 13 that we have, we closed from there and that is why we are at 14?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, through Mr. Chairman, again, we have delivered 100% in our Manifesto so this is another delivery. Last year, we stated six but you are correct in what you heard. Six new ones were opened.

11.53 a.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I turn to line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations. My interest here is to know the salary and benefits of the Chairman of the Local Government Commission.

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, through Mr. Chairman of course, earlier in the week you said, you will be coming to take the position of Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, but I think you are not aware of some of the information. The Chairman of the Local Government Commission is not paid through the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. We do not have that information available.

Mr. Mahipaul: The moneys that go to the Local Government Commission, this \$188,897,000 do this cater for every expense of the Local Government Commission, except wages and salaries of the personnels who work there in terms of the benefits to the Commissioners?

Ms. Parag: May the Hon. Member repeat his question?

Mr. Mahipaul: The Hon. Minister indicated that the salary of the Chairman of the Local Government Commission is not paid from this line. I am seeing a sum of \$188,897,000 as the subsidies and contributions to the Local Government Commission. Is the Hon. Minister saying that all other expenses for this Local Government Commission is catered for here outside of the salaries and benefits of the Commissioners at the Local Government Commission?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, just to correct, I do not think the Hon. Member heard me clearly. I said we do not retain the salary, the figure, the sum ... Let me break it down and put it in another way or use another word. We do not retain the sum of money for the Chairman of the Local Government Commission. [Mr. Hamilton: They do not pay. Subvention is given; move on.]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, Mr. Hamilton, you have to be careful with the shouting. If you need to make a contribution, come to the seat and I will give you the floor.

Mr. Ramjattan: Line item 6281, Security Services, I noticed there is almost about \$40 million increase from \$39 to \$96. Could the Hon. Minister just explain why that increase?

Ms. Parag: Again, in relation to the security services increase in rates. This is for the benefit of the Hon. Member, I am sure the Hon. Member probably had this information or not paid attention to the information. If you look from 2015 to 2019, there have been increases. There was a drastic increase from about 2017 to 2018 because of rates. Pretty much, it is the same thing. I keep saying this is not an uncommon situation.

Mr. Ramjattan: The increase has happened from 2023 to 2024. The year 2022 remains roughly the same. In any event, what is the name of the company who provides the service?

Ms. Parag: The name of the company is Elite Security. There are increased personnels at the different locations.

Mr. Mahipaul: One other question, the Local Government Commission is by virtue of our Constitution, supposed to be a Constitutional Agency but it is treated here as a Subvention Agency receiving a subvention from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. May

I ask the Hon. Minister if there is an intention of the Government to make this Agency a Constitutional Agency, as prescribed for in the Constitution?

Ms. Parag: The Hon. Member would appreciate that this is a policy question indeed. It is something that my friend is now raising in an Estimate. We have not been dealing with this. We have not looked at this.

Programme: 134 – Local Government Development – \$2,224,117,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 131 – Policy Development and Administration – \$36,000,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Project code 3500100, Furniture and Equipment, from October, 2020, to December, 2023, this Ministry spent \$31 million for furniture and equipment. In 2024, I see a proposal for \$10 million. With a decrease in staff complement, from 101 in 2021 to 72 in 2024, could the Hon. Minister explain why we continue to see increase in the purchasing of furniture with a steady decrease in staff?

Ms. Parag: The Hon. Member would appreciate that when one is in an agency especially in an institution where one ... This Government have been very robust in ensuring that we hold meetings and that we carry out the mandate of the Ministry to deliver 100%. In doing that, we have to have the necessary refurbishing and rebooting of the Ministry.

Mr. Mahipaul: Would the Hon. Minister tell us what are the furniture and equipment that will be purchased?

Ms. Parag: I am very happy to assist the Hon. Member with this information. We have two desktop printers. We have one heavy-duty all-purpose printer, a floor printer, seven executive chairs, 10 guest chairs – We engage with the public a lot, Mr. Chairman. – security cameras, two office fridges, three laptops, five desktop computers, five UPS backup batteries – PRO 1500VA, one electronic binding machine, one heavy-duty shredder, one small kitchen cupboard, one radio, one voice recorder, one microwave, six filing cabinets, one guillotine, three wall paintings, one sofa, three air conditioning units – 1200 BTU, one portable scanner, one digital camera, fibre glass

ladder step six inches, one small desk, one mechanic tool set – 85 pieces, two conference tables with eight chairs and four office desks.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, I just got a notification that our Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira is hospitalised. On behalf of our side, we would like to wish her a speedy recovery because we need her in this honourable House.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, the Hon. Member texted me this morning and stated that she had some issues with oxygen level last evening and, for precaution, the Hon. Member had to get some oxygen and the doctors said she should stay overnight. I think the Hon. Member is okay because she has been up very early this morning.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am happy to hear that.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, for your concern.

Programme: 131 – Policy Development and Administration – \$36,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 133 – Regional Development – \$3,000,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Project Code 1302200 – Community Infrastructure Improvement Project, my first question here is... It caters for Community Enhancement Workers and the National Pathway Workers. For the benefit of all, the National Pathway Workers are the \$40,000 10-day workers. We have the Community Enhancement Workers, which is a separate category. The Community Enhancement Workers are also paid \$40,000 but they work for 16 days. The National Pathway Workers are paid for 10 days at \$40,000. I am very thankful and grateful for these Community Enhancement Workers. They have been doing a fantastic job across the country, in cleaning up and so on. Could the Hon. Minister explain why is there a difference in the amount of days that these two categories of workers work, even though they fall under the same project code and are paid the same sum of money for their respective services?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, I think you are under the wrong programme head here. We are at Programme 133.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am sorry. Mr. Chairman this, Programme: 133 – Regional Development could be put.

Programme: 133 – Regional Development – \$3,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 134 – Local Government Development – \$20,635,800,000

Mr. Mahipaul: The same Project code 1302200, Community Infrastructure Improvement Project, and the same question. I do not know if the Hon. Minister wishes for me to repeat the question or she can provide the answer.

Ms. Parag: The Hon. Member just laid out on us two full paragraphs of a question, so I think he could go again.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, the Hon. Minister is kindly inviting you to repeat the two full paragraphs.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. This Project Code caters for Community Enhancement Workers and the National Pathway Workers. The Pathway Workers are those 10-day workers who are receiving \$40,000 a month. The Community Enhancement Workers are the ones who are directly attached to the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) that are doing a fantastic job at cleaning up the country, in terms of their 16-day work. They are paid \$40,000 for their works, which is 16 days and the National Pathway Workers are paid the same \$40,000 for 10-day work. They are both from the same category or the same line item, doing basically the same type of works – assisting to ensure that the services that are delivered to the population are done properly and brings some degree of relief to the nation. Could the Hon. Minister explain why is it that Community Enhancement Workers, which is a Programme that has been long in existence, working for 16 days and receiving \$40,000 and the National Pathway Workers work for 10 days and also receive \$40,000?

12.08 p.m.

Ms. Parag: First of all, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the Hon. Member for recognising the visionary leadership that we have in this Government to ensure that the Community Enhancement

Workers continue to do their job and do it at their best. Now, there is also a fundamental difference between the National Pathway Workers and the Community Enhancement Workers. You do not know, Hon. Member, but I will fully explain so that you will not leave here without the comprehension of that difference. The National Pathway Workers, we do require a minimum amount of qualifications from them, which is different from what we require from the Community Enhancement Workers. We are also upskilling these persons further to be able to enter the workforce. I do not believe that you understand that, so I am giving you the benefit of an explanation. Thank you very much.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much. Can the Hon. Minister tell this House what is the minimal qualification that differentiates the National Pathway Worker from the Community Enhancement Worker? [Mr. Ramson: (*Inaudible*) Minimum.] Minimum.

Ms. Parag: With the Community Enhancement Workers, you have those persons who possibly would have left school, did not continue secondary school, did not have the benefit possibly of writing Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) and so they do not have any of those qualifications. The National Pathway Workers though are persons who were finished with secondary school and would have attained at least three CXC subjects, so we do, and we are going to upscale them. They are placed in positions such as at the health centres and the schools. It is for the benefit of the development of the communities within which we all live.

We are looking at two different things, but we are also looking... If you want to go back to that, the Community Enhancement Workers have been there, but they did not receive \$40,000 several years ago, they are receiving that now.

Mr. Mahipaul: I think I ought to remind my Hon. Friend, Ms. Sonia Parag, who is doing a fantastic job in comparison to what we had before, Sir, but the Community Enhancement Workers is a programme that was started by the People's National Congress (PNC) Government. We had that during the leadership of President Burnham and President Hoyte. I know of that from my history, Sir. When we left Office in 2015, the Coalition Government, \$35,000 was the amount of money they were receiving, which we moved in 2012, and which was, at that time, \$20,000. Now, I am happy to know it is at \$40,000.

Sir, the Community Enhancement Workers are not just... And I can tell you this from my experience in Region 3, having worked extensively in the local government sector. There are persons who would like to contribute in terms of weeding and cleaning and so on and there is no qualification, whether you left school or did not leave school. The National Pathway Workers – I am aware of people who are on that programme also that are not persons who have three subjects more or less or could matriculate to that extent. Would the Hon. Minister please provide better clarity, if she can. I know she is new to the Ministry and may need to get some more time to do that at another time, but can she provide some better clarity so that the people of this Assembly and the nation can understand why is there a difference in the amount of days the service is offered as the Community Enhancement Worker and the National Pathway Worker, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, very much, Hon. Member. I just want to bring to your awareness that, when you said you are aware of people, somebody might challenge you to produce the list so we could verify. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, the simple answer to that is, they are two different programmes.

Mr. Ramjattan: Could you indicate, Mdm. Minister, how many workers or beneficiaries are of the National Pathway and how many are within the Community Enhancement category?

Ms. Parag: Again, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, through the visionary leadership of His Excellency, as well as the fact that we wanted to be able to create not only a pathway to upskilling young Guyanese and Guyanese, but also afford them the opportunity to earn an income, and this is an additional income in their household, we were able to have 15,890 persons benefit from this programme.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, may I ask the Hon. Minister what is the mechanism in place to upscale the National Pathway Workers?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, did the Hon. Member say upskill or upscale?

Mr. Chairman: Upscale – scale.

Ms. Parag: Is the question why we want to be able to upscale?

Mr. Mahipaul: What mechanism is in place for the (*Inaudible*)

Ms. Parag: We are, of course, going to be able to provide training in different areas for these persons and allow them, like anything in the public sector and the private sector, to give them... There is a reason why there is this word 'Pathway'. It was not just plucked out of the air and placed there. It is a pathway to upskilling a young Guyanese person or a Guyanese person to be able to have them reach a level where, not only will they be able to earn a higher income, but also be able to develop themselves.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, this same line item has in it this year for consideration, the further development and enhancement of our markets across the country. This year, we see Charity, Suddie, Leonora, Hydronie, Mon Repos and the Kumaka markets being budgeted for. Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to provide us with a disaggregation as to the sum that is allocated to each one of these markets?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, through Mr. Chairman, one of the Ministry's functions is to ensure that we do have functioning and well-established markets. It is the feature that is so not only common but beneficial to the communities, especially like the ones we live in, in Guyana that we will work towards rehabilitating. So, yes, we have placed sums in here for the rehabilitation of the markets. For example, for the rehabilitation of stalls at the Kumaka Market, Mabaruma, we have placed the sum of \$50 million.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I do not know if my friend has to focus more on what I am saying, but I am asking for the disaggregation for the Charity, Suddie, Leonora, Hydronie, Mon Repos and Kumaka Markets. I hear \$50 million for Kumaka but what is wrong with the others?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, there is nothing wrong with the others. As a matter of fact, we are trying to make everything right with the others and so, again, that is why we have invested. The Hon. Minister of Finance has been very generous with us to be able to accomplish the establishment of those hospitals in those communities and to benefit the residents fully from those markets.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I will make one more try with your blessing. What is the figure that is associated with the renovation and development of the Charity Market, Suddie Market, Leonora Market, Hydronie Market and Mon Repos Market? We already have from her \$50 million for Kumaka, just tell us the figures for the other markets.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member is emphasising the word ‘figure’ as if we are doing a bit of figure skating in here. But you know we have aggregated a sufficient sum for each market to be able to, again, have those markets properly established and in good condition for the residents.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, guided by you, I will only say beep and move on. In 2021, Parika Market was there. In 2022, Parika Market was there again. In 2023, Parika Market was there again. This morning, before I came to this honourable House, I took a long drive to the Parika Market and all I saw there, was the frame with a height that is not to the top of the walls at the side. Inside is basically naked and clearly the work is not completed at the Parika Market, but we do not see Parika Market reoccurring in the Volume 3 of the Estimates. Is there any consideration to complete the Parika Market in this year's subvention, Sir?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, I am very happy that you went to the Parika Market this morning. It is very sad that you did not actually get us anything from the Parika Market to share with us here in the honourable House. Indeed, the Parika Market has a very good frame and structure that is up right now. My Colleague and Friend, the Hon. Minister Indar, has been visiting that market very regularly. I think more regularly than you, Sir. He has also been engaging with the vendors and we are more than happy to let the vendors know that we will continue that market.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. I must say I butted up with Hon. Mr. Indar a number of times at the Hydronic Market, which is next door, not the Parika Market. Nonetheless, since we had it being mentioned in 2021, 2022 and 2023 and the Minister was kind enough to say that they will have some degree of completion here in 2024, can the Hon. Minister tell this honourable House how much money has been spent on the Parika Market thus far?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, the Government has expended moneys on the Parika Market, that is so. But, you know, again, Mr. Chairman, and I want the Hon. Member to understand very much because I do not think... I think he isolates issues and, you know, speaks from that angle. I want to say that, from 2015 to 2020, there were zero markets being rehabilitated or done by the previous Administration. This Government is continuing to invest. Not only will we invest in the Parika Market, but the Hydronic, Suddie, Charity, and Leonora markets. Markets where there are large populations that will benefit heavily from these markets.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, from 2015 to 2020, we did not have a trillion-dollar budget. With a trillion-dollar budget now, we are happy that we are making so much investment. What we want is accountability and transparency in the spending and the answering of the questions so that we will know how much money we are spending on these respective projects. I will try one more time with a different market, Sir, not the Parika Market, because clearly, I can say beep again. Let me move to the Mon Repos Market.

12.23 p.m.

Sir, the Mon Repos Market has been mentioned in 2021, 2022, 2023 and here in 2024, again, there is the Mon Repos Market. We did not get a figure of what will be spent for the upgrading, rehabilitation and construction to make it more comfortable for our vendors. The sums that we are spending at the Charity, Suddie, Leonora, and Hydronie Markets, we have not gotten those figures as yet. Could I ask for the figure that was spent on the Mon Repos Market so far?

Ms. Parag: The Hon. Member would also appreciate that when one is constructing or rehabilitating, it depends on the extent of the rehabilitation that will tell him/her the sum that has to be spent. Again, yes, not all markets will come from an equal sum because the rehabilitation will be determined by how much work has to be done. We are catering for the Mon Repos Market. As a matter of fact, I have visited the Mon Repos Market on two occasions. I did not see the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, at that market, but I was there engaging with vendors. I am very sure we will continue. I will commit this to the Hon. Member: when that market is fully done and is in a beautiful condition, I will take a picture and send it to him.

Mr. Mahipaul: I buy all my oranges, fruits and so from the Mon Repos Market. The vendors are very nice and courteous people. They sometimes give me good discounts too. Perhaps, the Hon. Minister and I should go a day and see if she would get the same discounts as I do.

Mr. Chairman: Do you have another market to ask the cost of?

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I go to a lot of markets.

Mr. Chairman: I am here at this market.

Mr. Mahipaul: I would not disagree with you.

Mr. Chairman: So, I was asking if you have another question with respect to another market that you want the cost for.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir. I am coming to another market. I must say this as a question formulating in response to the Hon. Member. What we are doing is building markets. If one goes to Parika, he/she will see there is a structure that is going up that was not there. The Ministry is building with frames, steels, putting over sheds and constructing. The same happened at the Mon Repos Market. It is a capital project. It is a new thing going down. Before you do that, Sir, you must have had a design. You must have had an engineering estimate. I am assuming that this went through the procurement process in terms of advertising, contractors bidding, and they were allocated the work at a sum of money. I am going to attempt one more time, Cde. Chairman, with your gracious permission, what is the contracted sum that was allocated to these very markets that I mentioned in 2021 – Parika, Charity and Mon Repos markets? We see the Parika and Mon Repos markets coming back in 2022, which means that the same contractor that got in 2021... It was a rollover project to 2022. In 2023, we see the Mon Repos and Parika markets projects rolled over again, but a new market was added, the Leonora Market. So, there is a new contractor there for the Leonora Market and a contracted sum that was awarded. This year we see the addition of the Hydronie, Kumaka and Suddie Markets. We got the sum for Kumaka – \$50 million; fantastic and excellent. What is the contracted sum for the other markets that I have mentioned here?

Ms. Parag: Again, I appreciate the Hon. Member's recognition of the Government's visionary leadership in building these markets and ensuring that our communities and farmers benefit fully from these markets. I did give the Kumaka sum. I will give the construction of the Charity Market. It is \$191,240,000.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I feel we made tremendous progress there because we did get Kumaka at \$50 million and, after continuously asking, I did get Charity to the extent of \$191,204,000. Sir, may I make one more attempt, expecting to get the figure for the Suddie, Leonora, Hydronie and Mon Repos Markets, please?

Mr. Chairman: Normally, I would stop people after the second time. Is that right?

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Mr. Chairman. But I realise we got the answer just now, so I am hoping that...

Mr. Chairman: I thought you were bringing a new market. I heard of all those, plus the Mon Repos Market. You promised me you were bringing another market to this market.

Mr. Mahipaul: I might have to start with the Dem Amstel Market.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have answered. I cannot tell you how to answer but you answered.

Mr. Mahipaul: Give us figures, Ms. Parag.

Ms. Parag: I have answered. This question has been put to me five times and I have answered all five times. I have exhausted my answers to those questions.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, beep, beep, beep and I move on.

Mr. Chairman: Beep, beep, beep...

Mr. Mahipaul: I move on to the next project code. Full accountability and transparency. Project code 1902900 – Project Development and Assistance, I see that the sum here is \$1 billion. What was budgeted for last year was also \$1 billion. Then, there was a supplementary where \$300 million was added. So, it became \$1,300,000,000 that was spent on Project Development and Assistance. What that really means is subventions given to the 70 Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) and the 10 municipalities. Last year, these Neighbourhood Democratic Councils got \$5 million as their subvention, which is the subvention that the Coalition left. When we were in Office, we raised it from \$2 million to \$5 million. Sadly, it has not been increased as yet in this trillion-dollar budget. The township of New Amsterdam and others got \$18 million. I am not sure what was the sum that was disaggregated for the other townships. Could the Hon. Minister say to this honourable House what is the figure that will now be given to the NDCs, municipalities and Georgetown which is normally treated separately from the nine other municipalities?

Ms. Parag: Well, again, you know, Mr. Chairman, this Ministry is committed to working with every local democratic organ that it has oversight over. We want to be able, again, to create development in the communities. This year we want to be able to outfit those municipalities with the amount of \$29,440,000. For the NDCs, there are varying figures. For Georgetown, there is \$49,040,000.

Mr. Mahipaul: I have no problem committing a couple of minutes for the Hon. Minister, if she so agrees, to tell us what those varying figures are for the respective NDCs. I am aware that \$5 million has been given across the board since 2016 to now. Now that I am hearing there are varying figures, could the Hon. Minister tell us what are these varying figures – which NDC is getting what?

Ms. Parag: I think the Hon. Member has good working knowledge of how this is worked out, in terms of the NDCs. It comes with a formula that is dependent on their submissions, *et cetera*, so I think the Hon. Member would appreciate that I do not have that formula with me now.

Mr. Mahipaul: The formula is found in the Fiscal Transfer Act. **[Mr. Indar:** You want to sound bright.] I am bright, unlike you. The Fiscal Transfer Act creates that formula for the Ministry to distribute from the sum that it has allocated as the whole number. So, if the Ministry had allocated \$5 million each, the formula requires it to give the first half and the second half is done through the calculation of knowing the number of people in the area, the amount of rates and taxes collected and so on. That will cause the Ministry to show how it has disbursed it. I would like to know what the wholesome figure is for each NDC. Is it still \$5 million? It is simply yes or no. If it is no, what is the figure for the respective NDCs? If she prefers to lay it over, I will accept that also.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, you know I have to start by telling the Hon. Member that I believe my Hon. Colleague and Friend, Mr. Indar, is quite a smart and intelligent gentleman and has worked with all of the NDCs and is committed to ensuring that the Region 3 NDCs will work with us as well. We have figures, again, allocated to these NDCs. I think, Hon. Member, in time to come you will know how much they have.

Mr. Mahipaul: Again, I say beep, beep, beep as I move to the next project code. I move to project code 1904300, Regional Economic Transformation. There is a sum there of \$5 billion. This is for the provision for community driven entrepreneurial interventions. May I ask the Hon. Minister to provide to this honourable House and nation the criteria that are being used to disburse assistance in the form of handouts, if I may use that word, for the Sustainable Livelihoods and Entrepreneurial Development (SLED) programme? Grants is a better word.

Ms. Parag: Again, Hon. Member, through Mr. Chairman, we have had a holistic plan, and it is not just a plan that we have had in our back pockets. We have had a plan that we have executed and

implemented to ensure that we empower Guyanese. This is one of those programmes that will empower small business owners. There is a very competent committee that is set up to do an evaluation of these persons. Depending on that evaluation, persons will benefit.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask the Hon. Minister, from the years 2021 to 2023, how many, in terms of number, small business owners benefited from this SLED Programme?

Ms. Parag: I do have the figure for 2023. It is 9,514 persons, Guyanese from all across the 10 regions.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am happy to hear that they are from all across Guyana. Could the Hon. Minister give us a breakdown as per region for this sum of 9,514?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, this Government continuously has committed to ensuring that equal opportunities are given to all Guyanese, irrespective of their geographic location, ethnicity or religious background. All programmes and policies are rolled out in very much that manner. Region 1 benefited from 405 persons in 2023; Region 2 – 605 persons; Region 3 – 697 persons; Region 4 – 4,194 persons; 615 persons in Region 5; 1,023, 101 in Region 7; 470 in Region 8; and Region 9 – 1,404. So, you have quite a number there.

12.38 p.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, is the Hon. Minister prepared to lay over the same information for the other years which she, unfortunately, does not have with her – 2021 and 2022?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, the years 2021 and 2022 are pretty much the same thing and I have laid it out to the public to understand how exactly this programme is run and how it is benefitted from, in terms of the numbers and from the regions. I will not be laying over.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, thank you. Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, you may have the floor.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. I thank the Hon. Minister for transparency and accountability, for accounting to the public for public funds. I say beep again and move to the other project code here, 3600300 – Solid Waste Disposal Programme. This is for the provision of solid waste management intervention. Perhaps, I can be guided by the Hon. Minister. It is to cater for some upgrading of these landfill sites that we have, including the Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill

site. Could the Hon. Minister provide us with some information referenced to what exactly will be happening at these landfill sites with the \$1.230,500 billion?

Ms. Parag: Some will be closed, Hon. Member, through Mr. Chairman, and some will be upgraded.

Mr. Mahipaul: Is that is all? Some will be closed, and some will be upgraded. Sir, the Legend of this budget tells us “Provision for studies and surveys”. Can we know what we are doing studies and surveys for? “Provision for regional landfill sites and waste management equipment”, could we at least know what kind of equipment we will be purchasing? “Upgrading of facilities – Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill Site”, could we at least know what the upgrading will be?

Ms. Parag: They are studies on the geotechnical and the hydrogeological surveys to be done and, also, for operational and maintenance purposes that we have the consideration of that figure.

Mr. Mahipaul: I do not know if my friend is burning out now, Sir, but I remind her that she has the entire day here with us. There is also here the waste management equipment. What kind of equipment are we talking about? The upgrade of the facilities at Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill site, what upgrade are we talking about?

Ms. Parag: As you know again, we are committed to ensuring that these sites are fully functional and those that are not, are closed. Under waste management equipment, we will be getting one portable tyre shredder, two stationary compacter bins for markets, two water and air quality testing equipment for landfills, skid bins and skid lift trucks, one truck and 25 skids and 211 litre bins.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, I thank the Hon. Minister and the competent staff at the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development

Programme: 134 – Local Government Development – \$20,635,800,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I know we had a late start and we have a long way to go, let us take the suspension now, even our kids were a bit hungry, so we allowed them to leave. I thank the Minister and the staff of Regional Development for taking us through the start. We will be back

here in one hour at 12.45. Let us express our appreciation to Mr. Nandkumar, General Manager (GM), and his staff for getting us started today.

Assembly resumed.

Sitting suspended at 12.43 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 2.02 p.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: I would like to invite the Hon. Member Ms. Sonia Parag Hon. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development and her staff for Region 1 to join us. Hon. Members, as we allow the Minister and her staff to get into position, we have had a late start due to unforeseen circumstances and I would not take a formal break for the rest of the day. But, as we would need to do what we have to do outside of the House, please feel free to do so. That way we would not unduly delay the staff of the different regions who have travelled to be here with us today. We have also had an extensive lunch break. The problem we have is trying to reconvene after a break. We have started the clock rolling at 2.04 p.m., Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul. I propose the question first, let us turn to pages 322 and 323. We may have to have a little exercise break to give the Minister a chance to work some of the other muscles in her body because she will be sitting there all the time. There will be no big break after this. The clock is starting at 2.05 p.m., Hon. Members.

Agency: 71 Region 1: Barima/Waini

Current Estimates

Programme: 711 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$395,320,000

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, good afternoon. Let me first of all take this opportunity to congratulate the Hon. Minister on her new appointment. We look forward to her rebranding that Ministry. There is no question under this programme Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Programme: 711- Regional Administration and Finance - \$395,320,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 712 – Public Works – \$652,112,000

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, line item 6117 – Temporary Employees, there is an increase of three members of staff. Could the Hon. Minister state who the additional three temporary staff members are, where they will be staffed, their responsibilities and how the RDC sees the additional staff members in influencing efficiency at the administration?

Ms. Parag: Thank you Hon. Member and thank you for your kind congratulations. This particular line item, with the three staff, would be three labourers and they are located in the admin compound.

Mr. Cox: Thank you very much. At 6231 – Fuel and Lubricant, the line item here represents an additional or an increase of \$30 million. Could the Hon. Minister provide the last cost of fuel, per litre, paid by the RDC at the end of 2023 and the anticipated cost for this fiscal year?

Ms. Parag: The sum there or the increase is for the expansion of electrical grids in Rincon, Mora, Moruca, and an establishment of electrical grids in Yarakita, Parakese, Warapoka, Kamwatta, Moruca and Kwebanna. It is to provide a generation of power for various communities across the region. We are very proud of the fact that, for the first time, we are able to give the expansion of these electrical grids and give electrical power to these communities. I think it is so necessary and we are very proud of this fact.

Mr. Cox: Follow up question: could the Hon. Minister provide a breakdown of this sum in relation to the areas mentioned with respect to the three sub-districts within the region? Thank you.

Ms. Parag: We want to be able to ensure that the community and... We know that different communities have different number of persons so the population may be less or more, dependent on that, obviously the sum aggregated would not be the same. We are so happy, again, to be able to bring this kind of development to Region 1.

For the Mabaruma Power Station, we have \$320,100,000; we have the Wauna Power Station – 14,520,000; Whitewater – \$3,960,000 total; Yarakita – \$3,960,000, this is new; Kamwatta – \$3,960,000; Parakese – \$4,536,000; Manwarren – \$4,536,000; Waramuri - \$3,024,000; Warapoka – \$4,536,000; Kamwatta – \$5,292,000; and Arakaka Power Station – \$9,000,000.

Mr. Cox: At 6251 – Maintenance of Roads, could the Hon. Minister state whether or not these roads that are mentioned, which obviously are in some deplorable state, whether this line item

covers these roads? We have from the Hosororo Hill Foot joining to the Wainaina Road. Barabina which was recently completed is back to the state it was. In Moruca, beyond the Hoobodia Public Road.

2.11 p.m.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Hon. Member. I am certain that the Hon. Member, who has been sitting here for five budgets, would understand that the Ministry of Public Works takes on the majority of the road work in the different communities across the country. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, from the regional section or department, will deal with some of the roads and their maintenances. These roads that the Hon. Member just called will be dealt with by the Ministry of Public Works – the central Ministry.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister then indicate which roads the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) will be catering for as opposed to those which she mentioned will be catered for under the Ministry of Public Works?

Ms. Parag: Again, we want to be able to go to all the sub-districts in Region 1 Starting with Mabaruma, we have Hobo Hill to Silver Hill, and this is a gravel surfaced road to the airstrip junction. We have Khan's Hill to Thomas Hill; Hosororo Waterfalls' road; the backstreet from the volleyball court to the guest house; Wauna stretch of road; Arucuru; the teachers' estate in Port Kaituma; train line from McDoom to estate in Port Kaituma; and the Oronoque new school, Port Kaituma. There are internal roads: Matthews Ridge Road. Those are, of course, from the Matarkai Sub-District. In Moruca, there are Parakese Kamwatta Hill, Haimaruni, Waramuri, Koko and the Four Miles Branch Road.

Mr. Cox: Line item 6253 – Maintenance of Drainage and Irrigation Works: Could the Hon. Minister provide a breakdown of the sum specific to the Mabaruma and Moruca Sub-Districts? Additionally, does the sum cater for desilting an area in Moruca, which was a project that started last year?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, this line item does cater for desilting and cleaning. We recognise that continuous works have to be done in terms of desilting, cleaning and clearing of drainage canals and creeks. So, this line item does cover that. I will tell you...Was this in relation to Mabaruma

and Moruca? In Mabaruma, there is cleaning and desilting from the boathouse to Aruka river. There is clearing of the creek shoulders of 99 Turns and Dark Bush Creek. Then, there is clearing of creeks at San Jose Bridge to Moruca. In Mabaruma, you have the drains on the left-hand side of the Kumaka junction to the Kumaka waterfront; the clearing of drains on both sides of the Hosororo stretch; and the clearing of short cut from Aruka River to Kaituma River.

Mr. Cox: Just a follow-up: Could the Hon. Minister confirm if the Kumaka stretch to the waterfront area has started? Could you provide an update on the status of this project?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, I am advised that it is a routine clearing. So, it has started, and it is continuous.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Members, under current expenditure, these are all ongoing stuff that are happening.

Mr. Cox: Yes, I just asked about the specific one in relation to Kumaka. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have no further questions.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. I thought you were going to mention that maintaining these waterways is like maintaining roads on the coast or in the city because boats are the main mode of transport.

Programme: 712 – Public Works – \$652,112,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 713 – Education Delivery – \$2,836,901,000

Mr. Cox: Mr Chairman, the first question is on line item 6111, Administrative. There is an increase of about \$63 million. There is an increase in staff members as well. I think it is 14. Could the Hon. Minister state the staff who will be employed here, their responsibilities and – especially for the Department of Education, by extension the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) – how they see them advancing the performance of education in Region 1? I am asking this because when you look in Volume 2, the indicators suggest that there is only about 23% of students at the national Grade Six level in Region 1 who passed 50%. The target for 2024 is 25%. With the elaborate expansion of education and the Hon. Ms. Manickchand’s vision for advancing education in

Guyana, I find it rather surprising that the region would only want to achieve 25% this year and not probably 40%, 50% or 60%.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Hon. Member for the question. Let me firstly answer on the line item. There is the appointment of eight Graduate Headmasters/Head Mistresses and there are six non-graduate head Masters/Head Mistresses. In keeping with Government's vision, emphasis and priority being placed on education, not only through the substantive Ministry but also through the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, in terms of implementing and delivering in the regions...Now, there was a target set of 23% and there is now a target indicator – as you said – of 25%. Now, 2% may look small but 2% as opposed to where we were five or six years ago is a huge feat. That is the minimum, but we are not limited to that percentage. Obviously, by training all of the teachers who are being trained in the country, we want to achieve 100% trained teachers to give the kind of delivery and have the kind of results that we are looking for in all of these regions. We know that our children in the hinterland regions have the potential, once they have exposure to the kind of learning that is necessary. So, while you might see a 2% increase, that is realistic. Also, in terms of the number of children and what we want to achieve, that 2% goes a long way. We are not limiting ourselves to 25%.

Mr. Cox: I am moving on to line item 6231, Fuel and Lubricants. Last year, the Department of Education's, and by extension the RDC's, allocation was depleted long before the end of the year. We had school buses down and we were not able to transport students for the latter part of the first term – that is, September to December last year. Does the RDC see this allocated sum as adequate this year? How does it plan not to have such reoccurrences at the end of the fiscal year?

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Hon. Member. That is exactly why we have an increase of \$87,900,000. It is exactly why we want to have the maintenance and the functioning of these vehicles, so that we could be able to, again, deliver to the people of Region 1.

Mr. Cox: For clarity, the issue was not the maintenance of vehicles. I recall visiting the office of the Regional Education Officer (REO), whom I frequent from time to time. She said to me that there was no fuel; and the regional budget for education had been depleted so they could not afford to transport students. The issue is not the maintenance of vehicles, but rather the budget for education.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, in relation to what the Hon. Member said, I do not know who he spoke of before, but this Government ensured that when that transpired, we came to this House and sought a supplementary budget to be able to accomplish that. It was accomplished.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, I recall that vividly. While we were passing that supplementary budget, the students were unable to be in school. Let us move on to line item 6242, Maintenance of Buildings. Could the Hon. Minister provide an update on the schools to be catered for under this line item – specific to Matarkai and Moruca? I have some specific schools in Mabaruma. Are they catered for under this line item? It is schools such as Koberimo Primary, St. Mary's Primary, Hosororo Primary and the Peter and Paul Primary School at Morawhanna. I know Peter and Paul Primary School will be having a new school, but in the meantime, there is maintenance for the existing building. Are they catered for?

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Hon. Member. We have a number of schools that are catered for. You are right; there will be a new Peter and Paul Primary School. I think that is a huge improvement. We want to be able to give our children there the opportunity to be in a space where the environment is good, and we have enough space available for them. We do have a number of buildings such as the St. Nicholas Nursery School, the Kwebanna Primary School, the Karaburi Primary School, Santa Rosa Secondary School, Santa Rosa teachers' quarters, Koriabo teachers' quarters, Chinese Landing Primary, Chinese Landing teachers' quarters, Warapoka Primary School, Warapoka teachers' quarters, Assakata Primary School, Kachikamo Primary School, St. Margaret's Primary, Barasina teachers' quarters, Lower Port Kaituma Primary School, Hobedia Primary School, Mabaruma Primary School, Mabaruma teachers' quarters, and the Port Kaituma Range. So, we have quite a number of schools and teachers' quarters.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, I am aware of the majority of the schools mentioned, but I asked about specific schools and those were not mentioned. So, I am assuming that they are not catered for under this line item. With respect to the teachers' quarters, I know that the Regional Health Department is presently occupying a lot of the teachers' quarters, which are the Ministry of Education's quarters for teachers, and teachers are not adequately accommodated when requested because of such arrangement. How does the region plan to address this issue of buildings?

2.26 p.m.

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, I am advised that there is no shortage of quarters for teachers there. As a matter of fact, because we had to have a resident medical specialist that they temporarily occupy. It is to bring health services to the people there, but it is not to displace anyone from the teacher's quarters.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, being a teacher and being a Guyana Teacher's Union (GTU's) representative for Mabaruma, I have different stories. I will speak with the Hon. Minister of Education, as I normally do, on those issues. I just wanted to highlight it here. Let us move on to line item 6281, Security Services. Mr. Chairman, security is very essential and all government agencies, government buildings and public buildings should be secured. This is just a simple question, though. Why does the Northwest Secondary School Annexe, which is the building that temporarily houses the North West Secondary school right now, not have security guards? There are absolutely no security services provided at that building.

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, I understand that both buildings are in the same compound and there is a security guard, but us being a Government that cares, we are going to place a security guard in the next building in the same yard, if it is necessary.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, just for confirmation, did the Hon. Minister say that the North West Secondary School Annexe's temporary building is located in the same compound with another school? Are you speaking about the Mabaruma Primary school?

Ms. Parag: Yes, the annexe and the Primary School are next door to each other.

Mr. Cox: Okay, thank you. Mr. Chairman, I know that they are next door to each other, but they are two very large institutions and, of course, one security guard is very insufficient. I know there is only one from time to time. So, again we request. You have already made a commitment and so we applaud you for that. Mr. Chairman, I am moving on to line item 6292, Dietary. Again, last year, the Department of Education witnessed another unfortunate situation in the region where its allocated sum for 2023 was depleted or exhausted before the end of the year. The North West Secondary School Dormitory had to resort to alternative means to cater for close to 100 students in the North West Secondary School dormitory. In one instance, the staff at the dormitory had to resort to taking their personal funds to buy stuff to cater for students. Could the Hon. Minister say how the RDC will seek to address this issue under line item 6292?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, there can be many, many statements being made in this House that are untrue or that have little basis for truth, and this is one of those statements. Meals have been provided, the staff are sitting right here with me, and the Hon. Member is coming to the House to be very political. This line item will cater for all the meals to be provided for these children as is the mandate.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Cox, be careful with respect to the claims being made because you will be asked to substantiate. If the Minister is saying to me that all are getting, the House has to accept that.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am guided by you, obviously. Mr. Chairman, I just want to say to the Minister, though...

Mr. Chairman: Do not say to her. Just ask her a question.

Mr. Cox: Ask her a question.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Cox: In asking her a question, could I say it?

Mr. Chairman: You could do your preamble and it would be apt for the Minister to respond with her own statements and answer.

Mr. Cox: Yes, once permitted by you, I am sure she will. I just want to say to her that I am a politician and so I am expected to be political. If I cannot be political, then I have no reason to be here. Anyway, Mr. Chairman, I do not have the documents, which I know exist, with me here and so I will withdraw that question. However, it still stands in my knowledge.

Mr. Chairman: I just want to know what still stands in your knowledge. You are withdrawing the question, but you made a statement about the non-provision of meals.

Mr. Cox: Sorry, Mr. Chairman. I withdraw the statement with regard to the meals at the dormitory. The comments, I withdraw that part.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Mr. Cox, you may proceed.

Mr. Cox: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Could the Hon. Minister state if debunching money for teachers are catered for under this programme?

Ms. Parag: I do not know if the Hon. Member does not know how this works, but any debunching would have to come from the Ministry of Finance and not through the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development's line items.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I conclude that the answer is no. Line item 6255, Maintenance of other Infrastructure: Could the Hon. Minister state whether the health centres in the riverine communities of Mabaruma, which are in need of repair, are catered for? I am specifically asking. Sorry, Mr. Chairman. Let me turn back my page.

Mr. Chairman: Could I put the education delivery programme to the vote now?

Mr. Cox: We are at line item 6255, Maintenance of Other Infrastructure. I went to the health programme, but the question should read: could the Hon. Minister provide a breakdown of what other infrastructure entails under this line item?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, of course, as a Government, we want to ensure that the primary schools in the environments are kept safe. In this line item, we have catered for repairs to the fence at Mabaruma Primary school, repairs to the fence at Kwebanna Primary school, repairs to the fence at Manawarin Nursery School, repairs to the fence at Waramuri Nursery School, and repairs to the fence at Sebai Primary School.

Mr. Cox: I have no further questions, Mr. Chairman.

Programme: 713 – Education Delivery – \$2,836,901,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 714 – Health Services – \$1,850, 869,000

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Line item 6292, Dietary. There is an increase there of about \$12 million, which is welcomed. Could the Hon. Minister state whether or not the persons employed, specifically at the three regional hospitals of the region, are trained nutritionists and is there a programme or timetable specific to patients in the hospital where they are catered for?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, through you, Hon. Member, there is a nutritionist, through the Ministry of Education, who is there to assist. There is also a food handler's certificate programme on hand.

Mr. Cox: Thank you. I have a follow-up. I notice the Hon. Minister said that there is "a". Is it one? I asked about the three main hospitals in the region. Are you saying that it is only one or is there one at each hospital?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, perhaps, in the future, we would be able to better this, but, in the regions and even on the coast, it occurs like this sometimes. There is a nutritionist who will move through the region and will be able to provide the necessary expertise, as they should. That is what is happening in Region 1.

Mr. Cox: Thank you. Mr. Chairman, I recognise the importance of health and, of course, there is no further question under health.

Programme: 714 – Health Services – \$1,850,869,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 715 – Agriculture – \$32,650,000

Programme: 715 – Agriculture – \$32,650,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: I thank the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, for cutting back on the time. I see he is in good discussion there with the Hon. Member.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 711 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$18,500,000

Programme: 711 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$18,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 712 – Public Works – \$313, 250,000

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Sir. Project code 1100200, Bridges: Could the Hon. Minister provide specification with respect to the scope of works for the bridges and Wanina and Matthews Ridge?

2.41 p.m.

Ms. Parag: The Hon. Member would be happy to know that the dimensions of that will be 7.62 metres by 6.1 metres and it will be a concrete reinforced bridge. So, we are building very sturdy bridges and very durable bridges and the money that is invested will obviously go to quality bridges.

Mr. Cox: We welcome the concrete reinforced bridge, and we know that those were started long before now. So, it is good that it is being continued. Project code 1400400: Roads. This allocated sum is for the payment of retention and rehabilitation of the road to Yarakita – a road that I know came into existence long before 2020. Could the Hon. Minister state whether there is a plan to upgrade this said road to a concrete road and not just pebbles? Additionally, could the Hon. Minister also state what percentage of this sum is retainage and for which contract?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, retention and for which contract.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member may have been a bit confused when he asked the question just now, but I will help him to clear this up. The retention is not in relation to the Yarakita project. The Yarakita project is a new project that is on board. I am very happy to be a part of a Government that is initiating new projects to have durable roads and bridges in the communities.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, I think the Hon. Minister did not understand the question. I asked if there is any plan to upgrade the Yarakita road, which has been just pebbles for a long time. Is there a plan to upgrade it to concrete? Then I asked, additionally, if the Hon. Minister could state what percentage of this sum allocated under this line item is going towards retainage and for which contract.

Mr. Chairman: Let us see if this answer can clear up confusion and misunderstanding.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, let us start with the Yarakita road and I will help the Hon. Member to clear up his misunderstanding of what this is. We are building a new road through a swamp that currently exists and so it is not an upgrade; it is a new road; a new project. It is not on an existing road. The retention is in relation to the construction of Arawansa road.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, Volume 3 of the Budget Estimates clearly state for this line item, rehabilitation of road at Yarakita; rehabilitation. There is a specific meaning to the term rehabilitation.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, further clarification of these misunderstandings.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, I will repeat, this is a new road that is going through a swamp. It is a new road. The Hon. Member sitting here on this side of the House is explaining to the Hon. Member sitting there on the other side of the House that it is a new road.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let us move on. Project Code 1902600, Infrastructural Development: Could the Hon. Minister provide details of these two projects and could she state if the landing and revetment at Kumaka is in Mabaruma or Moruca? We have two Kumakas in Region 1.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Hon. Member. It is Kumaka in Moruca.

Mr. Cox: Project Code 2601400, Power Supply: While we recognise the importance of extension for electricity, could the Hon. Minister state whether there is any provision for electricity in Canal Bank and Oronoque under this project code?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, we have electrical works for Barabina Mabaruma, Rincon, Moruca, Mora, Moruca and Kwebanna, Moruca. It is reliable electrical power.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, I read all these books and so I am aware of those, but I asked if, under this project code, provision is being given for Canal Bank and Oronoque. The answer is simply yes or no.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, if the Hon. Member does not like my answer, that is not an issue for me. I have answered the Hon. Member.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. You have answered the Guyanese and not me. They are all listening. Thank you. No further questions under this.

Programme: 712 - Public Works - \$313,250,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 713 – Education Delivery - \$208,500,000

Mr. Cox: Project Code 1202600 – Buildings: Could the Hon. Minister state the status of the new Peter and Paul Primary School that was mentioned earlier and whether or not it is catered for here in terms of the status of the building of that brand new school?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, yes, it is catered for, and it will be completed by February month end.

Mr. Cox: Thank you, and in relation to the Whitewater Primary School as well. Thank you.

Programme: 713 – Education Delivery - \$208,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 714 – Health Services - \$357,500,000

Mr Cox: Project Code 1202400 – Buildings: Under health, could the Hon. Minister provide a breakdown of the amount specific to living quarters at Mabaruma?

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Hon. Member. There is a \$60 million allocation here for construction of a living quarters – doctor’s quarters – at Mabaruma.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, a follow-up question. Could the Hon. Minister state how many personnel will be catered for and under this project code and is it adequate for all the personnel travelling from the Coast to Mabaruma in terms of expanding the health services there in the region?

Ms. Parag: The living quarters that will be constructed, Hon. Member, will cater for four personnel. It is four apartments for four specialists. We want to be very clear – orthopaedic, neonatology and intensive care would be a priority in this allocation that is in this project code. So, again, we are committed to bringing quality health care and health services to the people of Region 1 and Mabaruma in this case with the construction of the living quarters or the expansion. We are bringing specialists.

Mr. Cox: Land and Water Supply: Could the Hon. Minister state whether the boats and outboard engine, which are catered for under this project code, would be utilised centrally by the regional health officials or is this for communities to assist in their transportation from the referring communities to Central Mabaruma? If yes, which communities?

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Hon. Member. It is Land and Water Transport, I believe, and not Land and Water Supply. It will cater for the Port Kaituma maternal childcare, Tasawini, Hosororo, Tobago and Manawarin.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister confirm whether Region 1 has a functioning river ambulance in Mabaruma?

Ms. Parag: Yes, Hon. Member. As a matter of fact, there is one in Moruca and one in Mabaruma, and we are very happy again to be bringing that kind of service. And they are functioning.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, project code 2502800 – Furniture and Equipment: Could the Hon. Minister say if there is a routine maintenance of the equipment and could she provide further details on which equipment are maintained under this item?

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Hon. Member. I believe that there is a different project code that caters for that. It is not this project code.

Mr. Cox: Could the Hon. Minister state what are the equipment and furniture to be purchased? I need this to be specific to the Moruca District Hospital.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Hon. Member. I will, for the benefit of the public, let them be aware of exactly how much the allocation will be catering for. So, we will have one each to 50, this is the pharmacy dispensing window countertop. One each to one each to 50 health posts and centres within Region 1, that is 10 in Matarkai, 26 in Mabaruma, 14 in Moruca. In relation to the DDA cupboards, standards require that hospitals have a minimum of three – ward (1), pharmacy (1), and Accident and Emergency (A&E) (1). This will cover our five hospitals. Mabaruma, Port Kaituma, Kumaka, Pakera and Baramita. Water dispenser with backup, cup holder and bottles: one each to 50 health posts and centres within Region One – Matakai 10, Mabaruma 26, Moruca 14. Vital Signs Assessment Kit on Wheels: two each for the four health centres – Kwebanna, Waramuri, Whitewater and Arakaka; five each at Mabaruma, Kumaka and Port Kaituma hospitals; three at Pakera, three at Baramita, one at Kariako; manual Mercury Blood Pressure (BP) apparatus – one pair each at 49 health posts and six new for 2024.

Programme: 714 – Health Services - \$357,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

2.56 p.m.

Programme: 715 – Agriculture – \$30,000,000

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, I just have one question under this line item. While the Government in its Budget Speech spoke of an accelerated agricultural development plan, especially for regions across Guyana, this amount represents no significant increase over the last four years. Therefore, could the Hon. Minister outline the initiatives to be undertaken and how this will impact the farmers in Ararau, Wanakai and the other riverine communities?

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Hon. Member. We have a robust agriculture extension programme that is continuous, where seeds are given out, fertiliser, and all of those things. As a matter of fact, there is currently no plant propagation nursery in the Moruca subregion. This project will aid in increased plant propagation in the subregion and will increase crop yield while bolstering extension services. It will benefit – and I would like to repeat this for emphasis – it will benefit over 200 farmers in the Moruca area alone.

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

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, if I may continue...?

Mr. Chairman: Sorry, you are not finished.

Ms. Parag: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Parag: There is also the current land area which is inundated at high tide and causes significant loss of crops. This is the empoldering of 100 acres of farmland at Mabaruma. This project will construct a flood embankment and assorted drainage channels for 100 acres of land. This will benefit 50 households in Mabaruma. There is also the construction of storage facilities for chemicals and tools at Mabaruma and Port Kaituma. There is currently no storage facility for chemicals and tools in Mabaruma. This project seeks to construct a facility in each of these subregions and it will aid approximately 350 farmers in both subregions.

Mr. Cox: Just a follow-up question. I know the Hon. Minister mentioned in Mabaruma, but I asked specifically about the riverine communities. Mabaruma is a very large area. Could you just provide further details on the empoldering and which communities exactly in Mabaruma?

Ms. Parag: Three areas have been completed already in Mabaruma.

Mr. Cox: Could the Hon. Minister provide the names of those three areas just for the records?

Ms. Parag: They are Smith Creek, Unity Grant and Arukamai.

Mr. Cox: Mr. Chairman, I just want to say thank you to the Hon. Minister and thank you to all of my colleagues from the Barima–Waini Region. I just want to say that we will be working together because I will scrutinise the works. Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: You paid your compliments. Thank you.

Mr. Cox: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Thank you too.

Programme: 715 – Agriculture – \$30,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you Minister and your staff from Region 1. Have a safe trip back.

Agency: 72 Region 2: Pomeroon–Supenaam

Current Expenditure

Programme: 721 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$348,774,000

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

Mr. Holder: Holder

Mr. Chairman: ...Holder

Mr. Mahipaul: Chairman of the People’s National Congress/Reform (PNC/R).

Mr. Chairman: Chairman of the People’s National Congress/Reform.

Mr. Holder: I would like to direct the Minister to line item 6113, Contracted Employees: There is a revised sum in 2023 of \$11,835,000 and it moved to \$19 million plus. I see on page 337, for the

same contracted employees, there is an increase from five to nine. Could I get the designation of those new employees?

Ms. Parag: Could I ask the Hon. Member if he is on the right line item, Other Technical and Craft Skilled?

Mr. Holder: Line item 6116.

Mr. Chairman: Contracted Employees.

Ms. Parag: Line item 6116. That is not what was said. It was 6113.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you can sit and pull the microphone closer to you. It will be a bit louder. It is better that way.

Mr. Holder: I am a little cramped up. I think better on my feet.

Mr. Chairman: *Oh*, you think better on your feet. So, it is not where you stand.

Mr. Holder: The designation for the contracted employees, the four new employees.

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, there is one Expenditure, Planning and Management Analyst, an Accounts Clerk, a Cleaner and a Hinterland Affairs Worker.

Mr. Holder: Line item 6117 – Temporary Employees: There is an increase from 12 to 16. Are these employees part of the temporary jobs as announced by the Vice President or are they in a different classification?

Ms. Parag: These employees are part of the public service inventory and not the parttime workers.

Mr. Holder: Line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings: It is a bit strange that I am seeing \$20 million all the way through. When I say all the way through, it is from the budgeted and actual sum of 2022, the same for the revised sum, and now the Budget for 2024. Could you say which specific buildings are being repaired?

Ms. Parag: It is for the Regional Democratic office, the upper and lower flat; the Regional Accounting Unit building at the Regional Democratic Council (RDC); general repairs to the RDC main building; and the purchasing of building materials.

Mr. Holder: Line item 6281 – Security Services: There is a significant increase. Could the Minister explain the reason for it and the security company that is offering the service?

Ms. Parag: Every couple of years the rates of the security services go up. This morning I said it. In 2017 to 2018 the rates went up. As a matter of fact, the rates went up from 2015 onwards to 2020, so it is not uncommon. As a matter of fact, there was a drastic jump from 2017 to 2018. This is not so drastic, but the rates have moved from one level to the other level. That is what happened.

Mr. Holder: Could I ask the Minister if, in this Committee, did we not grant or cater for an increase through the 2023 Budget, the original budgeted sum, as well as the supplemental last year?

Ms. Parag: The fiscal year runs from year to year, and this is the Budget for 2024. It has to be catered for in this Budget.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Member, Mr. Holder.

Mr. Holder: I have no further questions on this.

Programme: 721 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$348,774,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 722 – Agriculture – \$563,516,000

Mr. Holder: Line item 6253 – Maintenance of Drainage and Irrigation Works: Could the Minister say where these would be done?

Ms. Parag: This will cater for 471 trenches totalling 935 kilometres. These will be maintained to provide efficient drainage and irrigation services because we really want to improve the surroundings of the communities in all regions; so we want to have this continuously be done. So, of course, this allocation is for that. Now you are getting the figure of 471 trenches.

Mr. Holder: Does this sum cater for both mechanical and manual cleaning?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member this will be done manually. Just to let the people of Guyana, and especially the people of Region 2, know this is going to provide employment for over 330 persons in Region 2. We are so happy to be able to put moneys in the pockets of people.

Mr. Holder: Is the Minister saying 330 new employees or is this a continuation of the same programme which this Government, by the way, inherited from the previous Government?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister are these new people and did you inherit them?

Ms. Parag: As a matter of fact, I have heard of all sorts of allegations being made about works that were started under the previous Administration when, in fact, that is very much not the truth and untrue statements. This here is providing for 330 persons who were employed under this Government in relation to manual maintenance of trenches to not only provide an income for them but, at the same time, be able to improve and develop our community's drainage system.

Mr. Holder: I am moving on, Cde. Chairman. Line item 6302, Training (including) Scholarships: There is a sum of \$800,000 all the way from 2022 right down. Could you give some specifics on the type of training that would be offered? There is a mention of scholarships. Would there be any scholarship under this allocation?

3.11 p.m.

Ms. Parag: In an effort to upscale employees and ensure that they are not only functioning at a basic level but have them be able to gain the kind of technical knowledge that we want them to have, this line item is catering for part-time employees to build capacity and geographic information systems (GIS). The GIS enables the officers to easily manage, reuse, share, and analyse data, saving time and resources.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Holder.

Mr. Holder: No further questions on this this.

Programme: 722 – Agriculture – \$563,516,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 723 – Public Works – \$193,758,000

Mr. Holder: Line item 6251, Maintenance of Roads: Could the Hon. Minister say which specific road is being done here?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, in addition to the 225 roads that we have done over the period of just three years, we are going to continue with Masjid Street, Mainstay Access Road, Onderneeming Access Road and purchasing.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Could you say if one of the main roads running from north to south in Henrietta will be covered? I am speaking about the road connecting the sideline all the way to Khan Street?

Ms. Parag: We are committed, again, to working for all communities in all of the regions. That road is included in the capital project code.

Mr. Holder: Thank you. That is good news because I have been making representation for that for some time. There is a perpendicular road to that. If you move from the sideline, it is the very next perpendicular road. There are some doctors living there, teachers: a church is being constructed there and persons there have been complaining for some time. I have been making the necessary representations at various levels for some time now. I am asking if that road too, that very important road, will be asphalted or given a concrete surface this time around, under this allocation.

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, that would be asphaltic. As a matter of fact, I just want to mention to the Hon. Member, in relation to the line item of roads, that the substantive or substantial amounts of roads will be done by the Ministry of Public Works, from the central ministry, but this Government has made a commitment that they will look at all community roads and all street lights to be done.

Mr. Holder: I am not certain, the Minister answered but I am still trying to ascertain whether that specific road is being done. Did you say, yes?

Ms. Parag: The last road that the Hon. Member mentioned is going to be dealt with by the Ministry of Public Works.

Mr. Holder: Thank you. There is one other road in that community, I think we call it the 'Barber Shop Street', would that also be included? People have been bombarding me with regard to the state of that road as well. I would like to know if that is also being catered for.

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, that road is being done under the capital budget of the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. It is 400 meters asphaltic road.

Mr. Holder: That is very good. Again, we have been making representation for that from time to time. There is another road, again, as we are on roads and these 225 roads. There is an incomplete road in Dartmouth. When you enter Dartmouth – the engineers and others will know – on the right-hand side it links Hoppie Street. It goes eastward and then connects perpendicularly to Hoppie Street. It is incomplete. Would that now be completed under this programme or any other programme?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, I can only speak for what I have budgeted under the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. There is a central ministry that deals with the substantial amounts of roads that we have in this country. I would ask the Hon. Member to perhaps refer his question.

Mr. Holder: I appreciate that the Hon. Minister might not know but, certainly, her staff within the region would have that detail or is likely to have that detail. When they are planning these projects, I cannot see that they would exclude the regional administration who are the persons within the region and with the oversight for the region. I will move on.

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, just to say, there are three roads that will be done in Dartmouth Village alone, under the Ministry of Public Works. As a matter of fact, I do know that there were 225 as opposed to 25 roads done during 2015 to 2020 – two hundred and twenty-five were done in three years. I am most certainly aware of what the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development will be doing.

Mr. Holder: Again, I am happy that roads will be done in Dartmouth. There are some specific roads there that the people have been calling for, for a number of years, for which you know that I have been making representations here for. I am happy and I welcome, through our oil funding, that we can do more roads. That will be all for this programme, Cde. Chairman. I will move on to the next programme to save some time.

Ms. Parag: Has the Hon. Member completed the programme? I think he said he has completed this programme.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Holder are you finished? Could I put the question?

Programme: 723 – Public Works – \$193,758,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Programme: 724 – Education Delivery – \$4,414,668,000

Mr. Holder: I would like to direct the Hon. Minister to line item 6281, Security services.

Mr. Chairman: You may have to come closer to the microphone or raise the volume.

Mr. Holder: Line item 6281 – Security Services: There is a significant increase there, from \$457,782,000 to \$591,686,000. What has occasioned this increase? I know that they have to cater for the ordinary increases, but I am not certain that that alone can contribute to such a significant increase.

Ms. Parag: Every couple of years the rates increase by a substantial amount. If I may take the Hon. Member back to 2017 to 2018, the rates of a security service raised from \$43... As a matter of fact, the amount allocated was \$432 million to \$762 million in 2018, which is a substantive/massive amount of increase. This here is due to the rates being increased.

Mr. Holder: The Hon. Minister continues to mention that increase during our time in Office, but I am advised that that increase is because we increased the level of security at all government buildings, in areas where there was no security prior. That is what occasioned that significant increase. It had absolutely nothing... It was mostly not due to the increase in rates. Suddenly, we are budgeting for security and then we come back to the National Assembly. We cater for those increases and then a few months later we come back again, yet again, and we increase it by tremendous amounts. **[Mr. Ramjattan: Is it 6.5?]** Yes, and it is way more than 6.5%. I do not know if the Hon. Minister can offer some other explanation other than it being due to increase in rates.

Ms. Parag: It is due to the rates. In some cases, it is due to the rates, as well as location and personnel. The Hon. Member comes to the House and says, ‘I am advised and in 2017, x, y, and z.’ This is \$300 million increase, which is a massive increase, from 2017 to 2018, and a substantial amount due to the rates.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Minister mentioned \$300 million increase. If you look at the Actual for 2022, that is \$270 million, and we look at what is being asked for in 2024, it is \$591 million. It is a tremendous amount of increase. It is over \$300 million. I do not know what the Hon. Minister is getting at when she refers to huge increase under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, he says what is this huge increase.

Mr. Mahipaul: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Stop the clock.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: You are back on. I think the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, was titivating hers and affecting yours.

Ms. Ferguson: That is not true, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am not certain what the Hon. Member is talking about this huge increase. It is from \$450 million, an approved budget to \$591 million for an approved budget in 2024.

Ms. Ferguson: A pleasant afternoon to you, Sir, and the staff at the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. A follow-up to this very line item. Would the Hon. Minister agree with me that these companies are bidding at a lower rate to secure the contract. Later down in the year they will then come back for supplementary provisions. Rather than going out back to tender, the very contractor... because the explanations that we get in this House is as a result of changes in the rate or increase in the rates. This is unacceptable. Would the Hon. Minister agree with me that these security services are bidding at a lower rate in order to secure the contract, and then come back to this National Assembly to request supplementary provisions.

3.26 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Would you agree with the Hon. Member, Hon. Minister?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, I wholly disagree with the Hon. Member. This is an open tender process that allows more than one company to bid and to bid according to the format and process of the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB), and that is what has been done. That is actually what has been done as opposed to the Hon. Member asking me to speculate what was done.

Ms. Ferguson: Therefore, Hon. Member, can you inform this Committee of Supply, before coming to the National Assembly for supplementary provision, whether you go out to invite security firms to bid?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, in a fiscal year tenders go out in June. I do not believe the Hon. Member probably knows this, but if there are increases then you bring it back to the honourable House, this National Assembly, to be debated upon and to be eventually passed, but it is, again, an open and very transparent process.

Programme: 724 – Education Delivery – \$4,414,668,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, turn to page 344.

An Hon. Member: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Let us keep the words very parliamentary.

Programme: 725 – Health Services – \$1,648,441,000

Mr. Holder: Line item 6117 – Temporary Employees: I am seeing a revised sum of \$43 million for 2023, but that has approximately doubled for 2024 to \$93,634,000. When you look at the number of employees, temporary employees, we are talking about here, the region is moving from 32 to 64 in the health service. Could you please explain the reason for this doubling of the number of temporary employees in the health sector? And are we substituting these temporary people in the place of professionals that have been resigning or leaving the job? Are using them to somehow prop up the staff or complement it in some way?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, being the former Minister of Public Service, temporary employees come on under the inventory of the public service with the intention of passing through the Public

Service Commission (PSC). They are only temporary until they go on the pensionable establishment. These are inventory positions under the public service that are intended for the temporary staff who will transition to permanent. They are not a part of the part-time programme, and these are not to prop up, this is to enable the efficient functioning of certain departments in the RDC and the region.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Chairman, I am pressed for time, but I am really interested in where these temporary employees will be placed within the health sector, and their designations.

Ms. Parag: I would be very happy to assist the Hon. Colleague... [Mr. Holder: Layover.]

No, I am not going to layover; I am going to spell it out for you right now so the public can hear it. We have one Accounts Clerk, one Statistical Clerk, six Hospital Porters, four Ward Maids, three Statistical Clerks, two Vehicle Drivers, one Electrician, one Supply Expeditor, one Medical Laboratory (Lab) Technician, one Nursing Assistant, one Pharmacy Assistant, four Patient Care Assistants, one Medical Technologist, one Staff Nurse, another Staff Nurse, one Pharmacist, one Blood Donor Attendant and one Orthopaedic Technician.

Programme: 725 – Health Services – \$1,648,441,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 721 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$66,000,000

Mr. Holder Cde. Chairman, Buildings, administration buildings, could the Minister disaggregate the \$34 million? There is a boat house and upgrading of electrical system there.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, currently, there is insufficient space to house boats and engines due to additional boat purchases, and having a boat house would provide security, protect, and avoid early deterioration of boats. In light of that, there is a rehabilitation and extension of the boat house at Charity, and it is 80 feet long by 40 feet wide.

Mr. Holder: Yes, and there is some there for electrical system upgrade. Is it associated with the same project, or it is a different project?

Ms. Parag: This is a different project, and it is a complete rewiring of the Regional Accounting Unit building at Anna Regina.

Mr. Holder: Cde. Chairman, Furniture and Equipment is \$32 million. Could the Minister disaggregate the individual sums and state the proposed use? Where they would be used?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, it is one generator with an automatic transfer switch, it is 200 kilo-volt-amperes (kVA). The current generator does not have the capacity, so it is being replaced by a 200kVA. It is due to the increase in additional equipment, a new building that requires a higher kVA, and, as a result, we would want to be able to have this in place, of course to have the efficient functioning of the RDC. There are 10 smoke detectors, 10 automatic sprinkler systems, 11 fire extinguisher extinguishers and one table model printer.

Programme: 721 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$66,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 722 – Agriculture – \$139,500,000

Mr. Holder: Cde. Chairman, Miscellaneous Drainage and Irrigation Works, there is \$100 million there. Could the Minister disaggregate the sum stating how much is for retention and for which project?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, we have the three rollovers, which are the revetment at Golden Fleece, revetment at Charity, and construction of revetment at Somerset cross canal. Then we have the upgrading of access dam at Devonshire Castle Phase II, construction of bridge at Devonshire Castle, and the construction of irrigation check at Aberdeen water course.

Mr. Holder: The bridge, access dam, and the irrigation structure, are these new projects? If not, what was the commencement date and what is the completion date?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, they are both new projects and as a matter of fact... all three of them that I stated, the latter three, those are all new projects and the beneficiaries of the upgrading of the access dam at Devonshire Castle Phase II, this is going to provide access to approximately 64 farmers with 1,400 acres of farmland, so I am sure the farmers will be very, very happy to know that this is going to be done. Then there is the construction of the bridge at Devonshire Castle. This

is a timber bridge that will improve access to the farmlands – that is the intention – and benefit approximately 150 farmers with 4,000 acres of farmlands. This is real improvement, real progress. Construction of irrigation check at Aberdeen water course, the beneficiaries... this will assist with the irrigation of approximately 750 acres of rice lands for 35 farmers. The current defective structure has caused wastage of water and so on which we want to correct and make right and have these 35 farmers be able to benefit from this irrigation.

Mr. Holder: I am happy with the explanations for those projects, except that the Minister did not give me a commencement date and a completion date. When she responds, she can still do so. But Minister, I have been making representation for the La Belle Alliance farm access road and I am wondering if that or why has that not been included. And since you are giving numbers to the Devonshire Castle area, could you say how many farmers or how many acres of land there are being affected by you not catering for provision for that access dam to be done?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, I do not think you understand what it means that there was a new project, so the commencement date has not been awarded as yet. You will appreciate that I cannot give you a commencement date for something that is now going to be awarded. Now secondly, there is no one that is being affected with the second issue that you just raised because – and let me finish – the region has been doing continuous maintenance work on that road for those farmers to have access.

Mr. Holder: Cde. Chairman, when one plans a project, the project has a process to go through and if you understand the process, you would know, there would be an expected time to start and to complete. Nevertheless, we can move on to Other Equipment, \$35 million. Could the Minister disaggregate the sum, please?

Ms. Parag: May I kindly ask the Hon... Mr. Chairman, if the Hon. Member is referring to project code 722, is it land and water?

Mr. Chairman: 44400800.

Mr. Holder: No, it is 4400800, Other Equipment.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This will cater for one motor grader – a grader.

Mr. Holder: Thank you. My memory is telling me that the region purchased a grader last year. Is there a problem?

Mr. Chairman: They could buy a second one.

Mr. Holder: Yes, and I understand that that they can buy a second or third, if required. But is there a problem with any of the existing graders?

3.41 p.m.

Ms. Parag: While that sounds great and like we are not doing any work, the actual grader that the Hon. Member is referring to is through the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) and not through the region. The region is purchasing its own so that it could be able to maintain over 500 kilometres (km) of access road.

Mr. Holder: It was not an insult to the Minister. I live in Region 2. I know the Administration gets the existing grader from NDIA to do its job. Anyhow, I welcome the provision for its own independent equipment. Let us move on to the next...

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

Ms. Parag: I think we have moved on, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: I was just distracted because we are having a problem with the microphone feed. We will see a technician shortly coming. Hon. Members, I have been a bit flexible, but we are now way behind for today. When you are asked to ask a question, I appreciate the thanks you are giving, but when I give you the floor it is for a question.

Programme: 722 – Agriculture – \$139,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 723 – Public Works – \$218,250,000

Mr. Holder: Could the Minister disaggregate that sum of \$71,500,000? At the same time – this is a rollover project – could the Minister state which are completed, which are in progress and what are yet to begin as well? I would like, specifically, to know which bridge in Richmond is being catered for here.

Ms. Parag: There is the construction of the bridge at Station Street – Anna Regina; the construction of the concrete bridge at Charity Amerindian Hostel; the construction of the wooden bridge at Reliance and the construction of the wooden bridge at Anna Regina. While these four have been completed, there is the retention for the rollover payable in March.

Mr. Holder: The Minister did not answer my question on the bridge in Richmond. I am seeing a number of other projects in Lima and Paradise. Those were not mentioned. Are they not catered for under this sum as stated in the description of the project?

Ms. Parag: There are seven new bridges. The ones that I stated were rollovers that have been completed; two wooden and two concrete. These are the construction of the bridge at Lima and the construction of a bridge at Sparta, Windsor Castel, Richmond, Affiance School Street, Paradise and Suddie. Those are new projects that will be coming onboard for 2024.

Mr. Holder: Moving along to roads – \$100 million is there. Could the Minister disaggregate the sum, state the retentions due for which project and the three roads listed? The Minister could state the name of roads to be done in these communities and also indicate which are already completed.

Ms. Parag: There are six roads that roll over. They are completed. Again, the retention is payable in April, 2024. There are Charity, Eastern Lima, Vilvoorden, Affiance, Daniels Town and another one in Daniels Town. Those were the rollovers. There is the upgrading of Cross Street – Vilvoorden, the upgrading of Muscle Street – Johanna Cecilia; upgrading of Barber Man Street in Henrietta and upgrading of Sluice Street – Taymouth Manor. Just to say, the upgrade of Cross Street which is to be in 2024, will benefit approximately 12 to 15 households in that area. Then, there is Muscle Street in which the beneficiaries are approximately 50 to 70 households. There is the upgrading of Barber Man Street in Henrietta which will cater for 30 households, churches, schools and businesses. Then, there is the upgrading of Sluice Street, Taymouth Manor, which will cater for approximately eight to 12 households. It has access to the sluice and pump station as well. We want to be able to bring relief, of course, and make life comfortable for clearly over 100 households.

Mr. Holder: I will move on to Infrastructural Development – \$36 million for wharves at Charity and Supenaam. The wharf at Charity is in a deplorable state. Students and people coming from Moruka and other riverine areas have been complaining. If you could bear with me, Cde.

Chairman, in fact, I spoke with a gentleman there just recently who complained that he lost his son and he blames the wharf that he fell over into the river and drowned. I am pretty much concerned. The people of Region 2 are also concerned about the state of that wharf, so I am asking if that particular wharf will be rehabilitated.

Ms. Parag: Before, I believe my friend had this interaction, the Government and the Region made an assessment in the Region as it relates to not only roads and bridges but also the wharves. These are not rehabilitation, but new construction of the farmer's wharf at Charity and Supenaam. The beneficiaries for the one at Charity will benefit approximately over 2,000 farmers and persons who are traversing there. Then, there will be beneficiaries for the other ones; Bethany, Supenaam, Wakenaam, Hamburg, *et cetera*, of 1,500 farmers.

Mr. Holder: For the farmers, we welcome the wharves. I welcome it but it is my hope that we could address the wharf that I spoke of as well. I would like to move on to the next programme.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, we are considering public works. Is that correct?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Ferguson: I note at Project Code 2601400, Power Supply: The region intends to expend \$100 million – provision for electricity distribution networks. The profile number 280 states here that provision for electricity distribution networks in Bara Bina. [An Hon. Member (Opposition): That is Region 1.] Is this Region 1? [An Hon. Member (Opposition): Yes.]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, please.

Ms. Ferguson: I stand corrected.

Mr. Chairman: Okay. The book fell. From the performance yesterday, you must give her tremendous credit for being here today.

Programme: 723 – Public Works – \$218,250,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 724 – Education Delivery – \$344,000,000

Mr. Holder: Project code 2401600 – Land and Water Transport: Cde. Chairman, on my last visit to the lower and upper Pomeroun River on 3rd December, I met with a number of parents who bemoaned the state of the school boat and the fact that many of them cannot afford to send their children to school. I had a first-hand look at the David G school boat and it was in a deplorable state. I am asking if this provision here... Oh, I should mention as well that at Kabakaburi, I spoke with a number of persons there, again. Those parents were complaining about the time their children reach home in the nights; very late. They had suggested that more boats be made available so that the children could get home on time to do whatever they had to do in the afternoons. My question is, does this provision caters for any of those two scenarios? I think at the cost of \$9 million, it might be catering for one boat, but I am not sure. The Minister could explain if the Ministry is covering these two situations in both the upper and lower Pomeroun River.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, with all that, is it sufficient?

Ms. Parag: Now, again, the Government is committed, whether it be through the education sector or the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development to ensure that the children in the region as well as those commuting on the river through land and water transport have adequate service. We already have 26 boats in the region. We are adding a cargo boat with a shed at this project code. Additionally, please, the boat that the Hon. Member spoke of, he very well knows that boat is unserviceable.

Mr. Holder: I do not know that the boat is unserviceable. That was not said to me. Moving on to project code 2502900, Furniture and Equipment – Education. There is \$35 million there. Cde. Chair, the Abram Zuil Secondary School is a project that we are proud of as a Coalition having initiated it to the stage of a contract. That school has been opened. I have received reports that the washroom not being in order; there is a water issue and that there also leaks. I do not know how true they are. I am wondering if there is any sum in this \$35 million to deal with that situation if the situations exist.

Ms. Parag: Just to say, having a plan and not executing it is not good enough. This project at the Abram Zuil Secondary School was not awarded until the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government. It is to enable the development of education and ensure that we have 100% secondary attendance.

3.56 p.m.

Now, we are committed to maintaining and ensuring that the quality is up kept in these schools so that our schoolchildren all across the country will benefit from that. Every allocation that is given whether under education delivery is for the progress of our children. Now, under this line item, we have fire extinguisher,100; automatic sprinkling systems, eight; smoke detectors, 20; fire ball, seven; electric sanding machines, four; combination furniture, 60; laptop computers and HDMI cables, eight; queen size bed and mattresses, five; double bunk beds and mattresses,12; teacher's table,11... I am so happy that the Hon. Member asked about this line item so I can state these things. ...plastic folding table,10; ...

Mr. Holder: Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, the Minister has the floor. Go ahead, Minister.

Ms. Parag: Teachers chairs, 59; office chairs with metal and with cushion, 10; executive chairs, six; refrigerator, eight; freezers, four; air conditioning units and installation of 18,000 British Thermal Units (BTU), eight; desktop computer systems, six; large cupboards, 20; small cupboards, 20; filing cabinets, five; 65-inch television, five; desk and benches, a-type, 50; desk and benches, b-type, 55; desk and benches c-type, 54; nursery sets, 15; six burner gas stoves; bottles and fittings, two; ... This is to cater for the primary teachers' quarters. All of these desks and benches will provide accommodation for students in the special education needs school. ...five, primary; 45 and radiograph, one; to cater for the department of education; chalk boards, 40; this will cater for four nursery schools, 19 primaries, 13 secondary and four special education needs school to provide chalkboards for a better classroom interaction. These are things that were not there but are being implemented and delivered by this Government. For project one there are 16 mattress single beds to cater for the Department of Education.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. Hon. Member, if you want to intervene while anybody is speaking, raise on a particular Point of Order, I will rule on the Point of Order, and then... Hon. Member Mr. Holder, you may have the floor.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. If we can quickly move to health because we lost a lot of time with something unnecessary there.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Holder, as you know, I am supposed to be the judge of when we waste time and what is unnecessary. This is a particular process in the passing of a budget which is necessary.

Programme: 724 – Education Delivery –\$344,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 725 – Health Services – \$188,350,000

Mr. Holder: I had a bad experience in December, in relation with a patient and a friend who died at Suddie before receiving the sort of attention that was required. He had to get a full body scan and Suddie Hospital, as I understand it, does not offer that service. By the time he got that, for the Hospital to diagnose what was wrong with him, he passed. I am asking, is there any provision in this sum for equipment that can do that sort of service? Also, I would like to ask as well, is there anything in the sum which caters for the full functioning of the operating theatre which was constructed under the previous Administration which was promised to become fully functional under this Government?

Ms. Parag: This Government is also committed to quality healthcare and that is why we are going to have 12 new high level quality healthcare, I emphasise, smart hospitals, world class hospitals. One of those will be in Region Two because we recognised that every community in this country deserves quality healthcare and quality education. Just like the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) building that was opened and there was a ceremonial function on several different days, what was built at Suddie by the previous Administration as they claim was a shell without anything that could not accommodate anyone or any patient on the Essequibo Coast.

As a matter of fact, since 2020 the Government has been expending money and we will continue to do that to ensure... matter of fact, the one that is being built at Coffee Grove, Lima, will have all of the necessary equipment to give quality healthcare to the residents of Region Two. All the talks are here now but nothing was done from 2015 to 2020 in healthcare and in education for the benefit of Guyanese people. Now that they have heard about all of these hospitals, they want to come here and make noise over a line item that is for the benefit of the people.

Mr. Holder: It is difficult not to respond Cde. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: No. You do not have to respond. This is not for a response; you have to ask a question but you are entitled to.

Mr. Holder: Cde. Minister, how can you say we did nothing when I just explained to you several projects. I asked of you, how is that you are following up on it through these budgetary sums. I have mentioned the Abrams Zuil Secondary for example where you falsely stated that...

Mr. Chairman: Okay, you cannot impute.

Mr. Holder: All right, I will take that back. ...which you inaccurately stated that we did nothing there, when in fact...

Mr. Chairman: Again, again if you are going to accuse the Minister of being inaccurate, you have to provide the evidence. This would be authority, right. Please, retract that and then let us get on with asking other questions.

Mr. Holder: I withdraw. The evidence for the school could be provided, Cde. Chairman. I will retract it but I am asking the Minister how can you say those things, when there are evidence all across the region? We built new schools; we repaired practically every school in the region, every health sector in the region we built a new theatre... How could you say that?

Mr. Chairman: You are making now a speech. I do not think you are leading to a question. Hon. Members, I think we have exhausted the questions on this item.

Programme: 725 – Health Services – \$188,350,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Hon. Members, join me in thanking Minister and the regional officials for taking us through the agency. I now draw your attention to pages 350 and 351.

Agency: 73 – Region 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara

Current Expenditure

Programme: 731 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$391,914,000

Ms. Alert: As the Minister and her team get settled, first let...

Mr. Chairman: Okay Hon. Member Mr. Duncan, you have been exemplary during this Budget presentation. Please, keep it that way. Hon. Member Ms. Alert, you may have the floor.

Ms. Alert: ...me thank the team from the region for being here. I appreciate your effort. Through you Mr. Chair, I noticed under line item 6113, other technical and craft skilled, there is a reduction. Could the Hon. Minister say if and how this is impacting the work in the Region of the team, whether positively or negatively?

Ms. Parag: I did not get the last part or what the question was exact. I know what the line item is.

Ms. Alert: There is a reduction there so, I am asking, is this impacting the work of the region? I may also apply the same to line item 6115, semi-skilled operatives and unskilled, is this impacting the work of the region, whether negatively or positively because I see a reduction there?

Ms. Parag: There are reductions there and, as you know, the public sector has employees who will rotate, employees going and coming, vacancies existing and vacancies being filled. Obviously, for the work to continue... Right now, it does not affect our work because we do have a structure with a certain number of persons. If there is a structure of 10 and a unit has eight, that unit can work efficiently. I do not see a problem.

Ms. Alert: Further, Minister on that, are these persons retiring or persons who are leaving the system?

Ms. Parag: These are persons who are leaving the system.

Ms. Alert: On that same line item, in the exit interview, the job leavers, how would they have rated remuneration as part of their decision?

Ms. Parag: Maybe the private works in an exit interview but usually if an employee wants to leave he/she will issue a resignation letter.

Ms. Alert: Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: There is a reasonable allocation there and a reasonable number of persons to be contracted. Could the Hon. Minister provide a rationale for employing these persons as contracted employees?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, I have been the former Minister of Public Service, the *Public Service Rules* allow you to either employ by contract or by pensionable establishment. There are some persons who prefer to benefit from a gratuity and be on a contractual basis and there are some persons who prefer to be on a pensionable establishment to make a pension later.

Ms. Alert: Could the Minister provide the positions these persons will be filling and their remuneration? Thank you.

4.11 p.m.

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. We have an Accounts Clerk II; two Sweeper/Cleaners; three vehicle Drivers; five Typist Clerks; one Equipment Operator; one Vehicle Driver; three Labourers; two Supply Expeditors; one Computer Operator; one Equipment Operator; two Stores Clerks; one Administrative Assistant; one Office Assistant; and one District Development Officer I.

Ms. Alert: Mr. Chair, may I remind the Hon. Minister of the second part of the question, the remuneration?

Ms. Parag: The Clerk II is at \$90,759; the Accounts Clerk II is at \$90,759; the Sweeper/Cleaners are at \$74,900; the three Vehicle Drivers are each at \$80,892; five Typist Clerks each at \$80,892; one Equipment Operator at \$122,840; one Vehicle Driver at \$96,274; three Labourers at \$80,892; two Supply Expeditors at \$80,892; one Computer Operator at \$84,662; one Equipment Operator at \$84,662; two Stores Clerks at \$80,892; one Administrative Assistant at \$111,628; one Office Assistant at \$80,892; and one District Development Officer I at \$96,974.

Ms. Ferguson: I have a follow-up to the response given by the Hon. Member earlier to my Colleague with regard to the officers opting for the Permanent/Pensionable Establishment or contracts. Could the Hon. Member point this Committee to the rule of the Public Service which states that persons have an option of being a contracted employee or a permanent staff within the public service? Thank you.

Ms. Parag: I will do better than that; I will lay it over.

Ms. Alert: I am turning to line item 6291, National and Other Events. I do not know if the Minister will answer here or choose to lay over the list of events that this allocation caters for. How much for each event? In addition to that, how are the riverain communities and islands of Region 3 budgeted for in these events?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have the floor. The Hon. Member has a cold and he is just nibbling on a little mint that I approved earlier. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Member, it works like this – the Wakenaam Island will submit an amount with its request and the region will allocate an amount to that for these national events.

Ms. Alert: Mr. Chair, does the Minister possess the dollar value information for that?

Ms. Parag: I beg your pardon, Mr. Chairman; I did not hear the last part of the question.

Mr. Chairman: Please, repeat, Hon. Member.

Ms. Alert: I was asking if the Minister has the dollar value of that allocation.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, again, the Island would request and it has not done so yet. There is no dollar value that is attached to that.

Ms. Alert: Could I follow up on that, Mr. Chair? This is to ask the Minister, how this allocation was derived? How was it determined that this amount and not half a million dollars more or \$100,000 more would go towards this line item?

Ms. Parag: There was an estimate that was submitted but this was not just by the Wakenaam Island. There was an estimate that was submitted by the region and this is based on that estimate.

Programme: 731 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$391,914,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 732 – Agriculture – \$675,119,000

Ms. Alert: Again, similar to the Regional Administration and Finance, there is line item 6115, Semi-Skilled Operatives and Unskilled, has the region, ministry or Minister determined the reason

for persons opting out of the region. I see there is just a slight deduction, but you know that we want to nip things in the bud early.

Ms. Prag: Hon. Member, it is for different reasons such as retirement; resignation.

Ms. Alert: Similarly, for the contracted employees, there is a reasonable increase over 2023. Could the Minister say, again, what are these designations and where are they going to be deployed?

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. The increase of course, is due to the new employees as well as the 6.5% increase to the scales of employment. There are one Overseer and three Sluice Attendants appointed.

Programme: 732 – Agriculture – \$675,119,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 733 – Public Works – \$233,031,000

Ms. Alert: I only have the question pertaining to the maintenance of roads. Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate this information and say specifically what percentage of this allocation goes to the area that we call the Patentia road end, pass Free and Easy and those communities? How many miles or kilometres of roads are going down there?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, may I ask the Hon. Member to clarify whether she is on line item 6242 or another line item?

Ms. Alert: This is line item 6251, Maintenance of Roads.

Ms. Parag: The Hon. Member is asking about a road going...

Ms. Alert: I am asking you to: one, disaggregate and then, state specifically what percentage of this allocation is for the roads from the Patentia road end going down along the river.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, I am going to disaggregate the sum here in relation to what the Government is going to be doing through the region. There will be repairs to Anand Street, Naamryck; repairs to the internal roads at Lenora; repairs to the internal roads at Hydronie; repairs to the internal roads at Uitvlugt; repairs to the internal roads in Fellowship; repairs to the internal

roads at Anna Catherina, North; repairs to the internal roads at Goed Fortuin; and the supply and delivery of road building materials.

Ms. Alert: Mr. Chair, I am hoping at some time the kilometres of roads can be provided. That is all for me on public works.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, do you have the length of these roads in the kilometres, miles, feet or inches?

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Sir. It is in metres. There is 330 metres for Anand Street; 300 metres for the Lenora internal roads; 300 metres for the internal roads at Hydronie; 250 metres at the internal roads for Uitvlugt; 300 metres of internal roads in Fellowship; 280 metres of internal roads at Anna Catherina, North; and 250 metres of internal roads at Goed Fortuin. Just for the benefit of the Hon. Member – maybe she will go on to ask another question – 200 residents will benefit from the repairs to the Anand Street; 250 residents will benefit from the internal roads at Lenora; 200 residents will benefit from the internal roads at Uitvlugt; 100 residents will benefit from the internal roads in Fellowship; and 100 residents will benefit from road and repairs to internal roads at Anna Catherina, North. We have more with the internal roads at Goed Fortuin as well as Hydronie. Several hundred persons will be benefitting from the repairs of these roads.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I have a follow up to the very line item 6251, Maintenance of Roads. The Hon. Member just provided to this Committee that several roads will be done in areas. For me, this is not helpful, Mr. Chairman. An area in Lenora may have about 10 roads and we need to know if it is road one, road two and road three; because we must monitor these projects to ensure that indeed road one or two will be executed. For the Minister to tell us ‘roads in Anna Catherina’ is not helpful.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Member.

Ms. Ferguson: We have our constituencies.

Mr. Chairman: You have to ask a question, even while we are very impressed with your knowledge and specificity.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes, Sir. Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Would the Hon. Member be kind enough to provide the specific roads that will be done in the areas she identified not so long ago? Thank you.

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, there will be repairs done to several roads in these communities. There will be several roads measuring at the distance which I gave just now.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, the response is quite unacceptable in my view. I would like for the Hon. Member to lay over the information regarding all the roads that will be done in the areas identified earlier.

Ms. Parag: I will not lay it over because I answered the Hon. Member.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Ms. Ferguson: That is unacceptable in this Committee.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, please, please.

4.26 p.m.

Ms. Alert: Mr. Chairman, if I may rephrase it; has the Minister been provided with the specificity of those roads, specifically which streets are being targeted? Has the Minister been provided with that information? Thank you.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, I have given the answer already, but for the benefit of a new Member asking the same question, basically, it is maintenance, filling a hole, patching this up, in all the internal roads of the areas I have just said.

Programme: 733 – Public Works – \$233,031,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 734 – Education Delivery – \$6,303,766,000

Ms. Alert: Line item 6133, Benefits & Allowances, I see a nice increase in the allocation there.

[**Mr. Mahipaul:** Handsome.] A ‘handsome’ increase as my Colleague has termed it. Could

the Minister kindly provide the increases and what additional benefits will be provided to teachers and persons in the teaching service?

Ms. Parag: We have three temporary qualified Masters who will benefit.

Ms. Alert: Okay. Line item 6112, Senior Technical, through you, Mr. Chairman, I see that there has been a reduction there. Could the Minister say what would have caused this reduction in Senior Technical? I am sure this would be a concern across the teaching service, across the education community.

Ms. Parag: There were four registrations from the non-graduate staff.

Programme 734 – Education Delivery – \$6,303,766,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme 735 – Health Services – \$2,701,070, 000

Programme 735 – Health Services – \$2,701,070, 000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: I really want to thank the Hon. Member Mahipaul for leading the ‘ayes’.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 731 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$18,000,000

Ms. Alert: Furniture and Equipment – Administration, what buildings are we targeting here? Could the Minister kindly provide that information?

Ms. Parag: The buildings that will be targeted will be the Administrative Department, extension to the Regional Administration Office, and the construction of vehicle shed at the Leguan sub-office.

Ms. Alert: If we can go on to programme: 732... No, sorry. I am waiting on you, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I will give you the floor.

Ms. Alert: Apologies, Mr. Chairman. Programme: 732 – Agriculture, could the Hon. Minister say the percentage increase in Drainage and Irrigation (D&I) services? How many acreages will benefit and the targeted increase in agricultural output from the region?

Mr. Chairman: Just a little clarification. We are at Regional Administration and Finance, Capital. That is where we are.

Ms. Alert: Yes, we are, and I am addressing programme: 732 – Agriculture and I am looking specifically at D&I. Are we not there yet? Oh sorry, Sir. I do not have any more questions.

Programme: 731 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$18,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 732 – Agriculture – \$119,000,000

Ms. Alert: Firstly, Mr. Chairman, my apologies. I heard you when you said to consider time. Now that we are addressing Programme: 732 – Agriculture, with specific reference to Drainage and Irrigation, could the Hon. Minister say the percentage increase in drainage and irrigation services and the acreage to benefit which would result in what is the targeted increase in agricultural output from the region?

Ms. Parag: The construction of timber ramp and landing at Zeelugt Middle Walk, Zeelugt, East Bank, Essequibo will provide a place for 50 farmers. To give a gender breakdown, it will be 39 males and 11 females who will cultivate 500 acres of land to offload their produce when they bring it out from their farmlands.

Ms. Alert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Programme: 732 – Agriculture – \$119,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 733 – Public Works – \$261,500,000

Ms. Alert: On the bridges, could the Hon. Minister disaggregate that amount and tell us the type of construction? Is it timber or concrete, what type of construction will be done as she disaggregates that amount?

Ms. Parag: All of what I am about to state are reinforced concrete. Construction of bridge at La Bagatelle, Leguan; construction of bridge at Sarah, Wakenaam; construction of bridge at Bank Hall-Friendship Wakenaam; construction of bridge at Health Centre Street, La Grange; Construction of bridge at Hauge Settlement; construction of timber boat ramp at Saxacalli; rehabilitation of timber bridge at Schoonhoven; construction of timber foot path bridge linking Unity Street to Canal Polder No.1 Road; construction of bridge at Tarla Dam – Meten-Meer-Zorg.

Mr. Chairman, these will benefit the construction of the Health Centre Street at La grange which will improve access for health centre and fire stations. The construction of the bridge at Hauge Settlement will improve access for residents and farmers of Hauge Back, approximately 60 households. The construction of timber boat ramps – Saxacalli will improve access for approximately \$150 residents. We have rehabilitation of timber bridge at Schoonhoven, improved access for farmers, loggers and residents, approximately 350 persons. Construction of timber foot path bridge linking unity street to Canal Polder No. 1 Road to improve access for 200 residents. Construction of bridge at Tarla Dam will improve access for 200 households.

It is disaggregated this way, Mr. Chairman. For the new projects, which is the construction of the Health Centre Street, La Grange – \$14 million; construction of bridge at Hauge Settlement – \$25 million; construction of timber boat ramp – Saxacalli- \$14 million; rehabilitation of bridge at Schoonhoven – \$35 million, construction of timber footpath bridge linking Unity – \$6 million; construction of bridge at Tarla Dam – \$16 million.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I had no intentions of standing, but I just want clarity from the Hon. Minister. the reinforced concrete bridge at Sarah – Wakenaam, could I have a precise location? This is because, based on my knowledge of the island, where I spent a considerable number of years, I know there is a reinforced concrete bridge there already at Sarah. Could I have clarity, please?

Ms. Parag: It is on the western side of Sarah at Wakenaam and it has been completed already.

Mr. Mahipaul: Has it been completed already? You listed...

Ms. Parag: This is the roll over. This is the retention sum.

Mr. Mahipaul: Oh, the retention sum, alright. Thank you because I know the bridges there.

Programme: 733 – Public Works – \$261,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 734 – Education Delivery– \$365,000,000

Programme: 734 – Education Delivery– \$365,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 735 – Health Services – \$267,650,000

Programme: 735 – Health Services – \$267,650,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Let me thank the Minister, my good friend, the Regional Executive Officer (REO), Mr. Somwar and his team for leading us through Region. 3. We will now invite the officials from Region 4 as the Hon. Member Seeraj takes the chair.

[Mr. Chairman left the Chair.]

[Mr. Seeraj assumed the Chair.]

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Members, I will direct your attention to pages 364 and 365 as we look at Region 4 – Demerara- Mahaica. First, we will take the Current Expenditure.

4.41 p.m.

Agency: 74 Region 4: Demerara/Mahaica

Current Expenditure

Programme: 741 – Regional Administration and Finance - \$285,021,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: I would like to turn the Minister's attention to the Staffing Details. I know there is a decrease of 10 staff members. Could the Hon. Minister say what has caused this decrease?

Ms. Parag: We have several line items here. The Hon. Member has not stated which line item she is referring to.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member you are required to state the line item so that the Minister can provide an appropriate answer. Go ahead.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Cde. Chairman, but I said the Staffing Details. I will go through each line item to show a total of 10 that is no longer there. We have one from 6111; one from 6112; two from 6113; five from 6114; 6115 remains the same; 6116, four less; 6117, you had zero and you had three. However, when you calculate it we have 10 less. I would like to know what caused the decline in the staff.

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, it would have been due to different reasons, some retired and some resigned.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Hon. Minister, how many of the 10 staff resigned and how many retired?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, I do not have that information with me.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you. I will turn your attention to the programme performance statement, Indicator No. 3. It says, "Number of skilled personnel recruited". You had three in 2023 and now, in 2024, you have a target of 30. I would like to know what the skills are that you are looking for, and what mechanism is in place to ensure that the 30 workers you are trying to attract would want to stay on the job?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, the purpose of this entire exercise is to disaggregate by line item, and specific headings, the amount of money appropriated for the particular sector to run efficiently. I do not believe the Hon. Member's question is applicable to this particular session.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, the Minister has answered. We can move on, please.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Mr. Chairman, the Minister has not answered my question. However, I will move on.

Mr. Seeraj: Go ahead.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6242, I see an allocation of \$12 million. I would like to know, will any of this allocated sum be used for the upgrade or maintenance of the sub-office at Timehri?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, what I have here, the sum of \$12 million is for the RDC's main office, the Enmore sub-office, the Cane Grove Craft Centre, the Grove Craft Centre, the living quarters and regional stores compound buildings.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, do you have another question?

Ms. Flue-Bess: Yes, I do. Based on the Minister's response, there is no allocation for the Timehri sub-office. Line item 6255, Maintenance of Other Infrastructure, could the Hon. Minister say what are the 'Other Infrastructure' that will be maintained under this allocated sum?

Ms. Parag: We have the weeding and cleaning of Government compounds; maintenance to fence, Cane Grove Craft Centre and landfilling; maintenance to external sanitary and water filter facilities; maintenance to fence, gates, Triumph living quarters.

Ms. Ferguson: On that very line item 6255, Maintenance of Other Infrastructure, Hon. Minister, in 2023, there was a voted provision of \$4 million and there is a revised sum of \$7.386 million for 2023. Can you explain to this Committee of Supply where this variance came from since I have no recollection of the region coming back to the Assembly requesting supplementary provisions? Could you explain how this \$7 million came about? Thank you very much.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Last year, there was a specific project that was being done and needed that.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, the response is quite unacceptable. This is taxpayers' money. We are here to give an account. The sum of \$4 million was voted on in 2023, you expended \$7.386 million, close to 50% of the voted provision. I am asking you, Hon. Minister, where did the additional 50% come from, since you did not return to this Assembly requesting additional funds for Region 4?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, as the Hon. Member would be aware, since she was a Minister before, one can do virement when one has to use additional points from the same budgetary allocation.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, you can only vired money, you know, probably from current expenditure. You should be able to have in your possession from which line item or line items in the current expenditure you would have vired these moneys from.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, line item 6271.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6281, Security Services, I note that there has been an increase of almost \$9 million. I would like to know if it is one or more than one security service that is being paid under this line item.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, it is an increase due to rates.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I note the Minister's response. But the Hon. Minister did not say if it is one or more than one security service.

Ms. Parag: It is one security service.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, on that very line item 6281, Security Services, you just responded to my Colleague that it is one security company that will be providing services. Can you say the name of the security service and, perhaps, it would be good for you to also say to this Committee of Supply, the names of the principals of the security company. Thank you very much.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, we are not normally in the habit of giving the names of companies, but I will allow the Hon. Minister to answer.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, all of these security companies, with respect to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and any other ministry, went through the National Tender Board at a national tender process and got their bid through a process that is recognised by our financial system and our financial laws – properly recognised by them. I do not and will not give the principals name, but I will give Security in Action Guyana Incorporated.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Cde. Chairman, I turn my attention to the programme performance statement. As far as I am aware and from the years I have been coming here, the budget books, all three, worked hand in hand. So, I have a question here. Under the strategies, I see promote the use of information technology. I would like to know where is this promotion being done and what is the current programme that is being used to facilitate this?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, again, if you are going to generalise your question, it is very difficult. This is because there is another process by which this is appropriated or the Committee of Supply operate with the defending of a budget. That is why you have specific line items under specific

programmes that points specifically to where the money is going. And so, the question is, how are you going to be using the money to expend on whatever programme or policy? That is a general question, Mr. Chairman. If the Hon. Member can be more specific, I would be happy, on that line item, to answer.

Mr. Seeraj: You are reminded, Hon. Members that, in order for you to get a comprehensive answer, you need to direct the Minister's attention to a particular line item when proposing your questions. Have we exhausted this agency?

Ms. Flue-Bess: Cde. Chairman, I would like you to have some clarity on that. Under Training, including Scholarship, line item 6302, does this line item cater for this strategy and for the use and promotion of technology?

Ms. Parag: What we have under this line item, Hon. Member, is training programme organised by the Ministry of Public Service and you will have professional secretarial science procurements, stores management, customer care, *et cetera*. You will have A Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) training, which is conflict management, conduct of meetings, procurement and so on. And then you will have handicraft training, procuring materials to support training programmes at craft centres in the region. Under this particular line item that the Hon. Member stated it is for the training.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, is it line item 6302, we are considering?

Mr. Seeraj: It was.

Ms. Ferguson: Good. Training including Other Scholarships. Thank you for the information you have just provided to us in terms of the areas staff are expected to be trained. Can you say how many staff are likely to benefit from this particular training and how many staff you would have trained in 2023? This is because I have noticed that, in 2023, \$1.8 million was budgeted and exhausted and then, for 2024, you got the same figure budgeted. I just need to get a sense as to how many persons benefited last year as against those that will benefit this year.

Ms. Parag: So, while you do have a budgeted amount from last year and the same budgeted amount this year, you will have different training programmes as opposed to last year, but the targeted amount would be about 220 persons.

Programme: 741 – Regional Administration and Finance - \$285,021,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

4.56 p.m.

Programme: 742 – Agriculture – \$472,526,000

Mr. Ramsaroop: Line item 6253 – Maintenance of Drainage and Irrigation Works – \$195 million, could the Hon. Minister say where the maintenance would be done?

Ms. Parag: This is for manual weeding and cleaning. Then you have mechanical excavation, maintenance of dams, maintenance of sluices and maintenance of pumps.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Do you specifically have where or in which communities or areas?

Ms. Parag: The weeding and cleaning will be throughout the region, so it is exhaustive in terms of everywhere. Mocha Arcadia is included, as well as Friendship, Republic Drive, Eccles, Herstelling, Clay Brick Road, Sugrim Road, Oleander Gardens and Victoria Road. There are different places.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Line item 6255 – Maintenance of Other Infrastructure, could the Hon. Minister say what ‘Other Infrastructure’ is catered for here?

Ms. Parag: Is it what ‘other structure’ is catered for?

Mr. Ramsaroop: Infrastructure.

Ms. Parag: Infrastructure. All that I have stated just now is what is catered for under this line item. There are repairs to bridge, walkway and fence; repairs to side fence and electrical room; repairs to back fence, side gate and walkway; sectional repairs to fence and guard hut; repairs to fence, driveway and security hut; and sectional repairs to chain link fence, gate and security lights. These are for Triumph, Golden Grove, Victoria, Joyce Phillips Cane Grove, Huntley and Cane Grove sub-office.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, do you have another question? I will move on to the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson. Do you have another question?

Mr. Ramsaroop: Thank you very much for that response. That was very specific. Under line item 6284, could the Hon. Minister say what is this budgeted for? Could you disaggregate it? Thank you.

Ms. Parag: Sorry, Mr. Chairman. I did not quite get the question.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Line item 6284 is Other.

Ms. Parag: I know that.

Mr. Ramsaroop: I am asking if you can say what this amount budgeted here is for? What is it for?

Ms. Parag: To provide relief to Sluice Attendants who are on leave. They are responsible for operating the sluice throughout the year to mitigate flooding and the cleaning of drains from unwanted debris and so on throughout the year.

Ms. Ferguson: To the Hon. Member, I would like to take you back to line item 6255 – Maintenance of Other Infrastructure. I note for 2021, 2022 and 2023, we had the constant figure of some \$4.5 million. I note for 2024, you have an increase by some \$2.5 million, which would now take it up to \$7 million. Am I to assume that you are doing more works in 2024 as against what you did in the last three years? Earlier you did provide the works for which this \$7 million would take care of, but you did not provide us with a disaggregation as to how the \$7 million would be utilised across the various projects. Could you provide that information to us please? Thank you.

Ms. Parag: We have some wooden buildings there and they constantly need maintenance, so the money was included to do continuous maintenance work.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, earlier, the Hon. Member, in responding to my Colleague, the Hon. Ramsaroop, stated guard huts, some fence, and all manner of things. All of that is included but you just said there are some structures with timber that needs to be replaced with concrete. All I am asking you to provide to us is a disaggregated amount that this \$7 million will cover for the various projects you identified earlier to the Hon. Ramsaroop's question. I also asked whether you are doing more work as against what you did over the last three years. This is because, over the last three years, you had a constant figure of \$4.5 million and now, for 2024, you are seeking an additional \$2.5 million more. That is all I am asking, accountability and transparency, my Friend.

Ms. Parag: In the interest of accountability and transparency, first of all, I did not say that we were replacing and making concrete. I said we were maintaining wooden structures. Secondly, you would appreciate also that the cost for maintenance and replacing things like wood, if you have to replace a board, is more than it was last year. So, the allocation is catering for that.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6231 – Fuel and Lubricants, I note that last year it was \$6 million and this year it is \$13 million. I would like to know if the 770 farmers that is stated in your Indicator 7 “Number of farmers within the region” will benefit from this allocation?

Ms. Parag: There is an increase, and it is in relation to effective monitoring and evaluating. We have additional field visits to do just that and to inspect project sites, and, also, to prepare the bills of quantities. It also caters for the extended working hours of the mechanical pump during rainy periods.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I am just wondering if I heard the Minister speak about the preparation of the bill of quantities and so on being covered under this sum or were you just referencing something? Is there any new or added equipment, vehicle or anything that comes under this line item that will have to use fuel and lubricants?

Ms. Parag: It is mainly for the extended hours of the pump being used, especially during the rainy season.

Ms. Ferguson: If I am to take our attention to line item 6281 – Security Services, for 2023, we had a budgeted provision of \$24 million and change, and then we had a revised figure of some \$32.5 million. There are two questions I would like to put to the Hon. Member. One, what would have caused this increase from \$24 million to \$32 million, and how was the variance taken care of since the region did not come back to the Assembly for any supplementary provision? I can stand corrected. Secondly, I note that the region is seeking an additional \$10 million for 2024. Could you explain to us the reason for the increase and fourthly, whether the region will return in 2024 for supplementary provisions? Thank you.

Ms. Parag: It seems to be a favourite line item of the Opposition, but I will answer anyway. The fiscal year would commence in April, not as a calendar year would in January so we have to include it in this Budget. **[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible).]** I am very sure that you are hearing

me. Also, the increase is due. Compared to what was happening from 2017 to 2018, it is a minimal sum of increase. We have an increase of personnel, rates, as well as locations.

Ms. Ferguson: The Hon. Member failed to respond to two other parts of my question. I would love for the Hon. Member to say to this National Assembly where the difference came from since you did not return to the National Assembly for the revised figure? You budgeted \$24 million in 2023 and you expended some \$32.6 million. Where did the difference come from, Mdm. Minister?

Ms. Parag: I have answered this over and over again. The rates have gone up so one will have to cater for that in the new fiscal year of 2024 and so you budget for that.

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

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, if I may? If the Hon. Member does not like my answer...

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, let us give the Minister a chance to answer the question.

Ms. Parag: If the Hon. Member does not like my answer, that is not my issue. I have answered the question.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I wish not to get into a fight with the Hon. Member, but I think my question is clear. If the House approved \$24 million in 2023 but you expended \$32 million in 2023, let us forget about 2024 with the new rates that you have just alluded to, all I am trying to get from you, Mdm. Minister, is the difference between \$24 million and \$32 million. Where did you get it from? Which other line item in this current expenditure for last year did you take the moneys from? Earlier you spoke about virement and all kinds of things. That is the response I am looking for. Did you return to the National Assembly in December or in August of 2023 for supplementary provisions for security services? That is what I am asking and trying to get from you, Madam.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, very much...

Ms. Ferguson: She needs to calm down.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon Minister, you have the floor.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, while the Hon. Member thinks that her question is quite clear, the Hon. Member also should probably tell this House how a budget of nearly \$300 million was passed in this House from 2017 to 2018 for a security service?

5.11 p.m.

Secondly, there was an open tender process in May. Then, the rates went up. A supplementary paper was brought to the House and was approved by the House and the money was taken from that. There is no underhanded business, as the Hon. Member wants to suggest. As a matter of fact, it is full accountability and transparency because everything is going through a national tender board process.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I would like to make it very clear to this Committee that I am not insinuating that some underhanded business has occurred. I asked a simple mathematical question. The difference between 24 and 32, where did it come from, since you did not return to the National Assembly for approved moneys?

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister, go ahead, please.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, I have answered this question over and over. A supplementary paper was brought here, and it was approved by this House and that is how the money was paid.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I recall that when I asked about line item 6231, the response given by the Hon. Minister was that this increase in fuel and lubricants is because the machines – the pumps or whatever – would be working continuously. I turn my attention to line item 6282, Equipment Maintenance. If we expect these machines to work over and over, why was there no increase in this line item?

Ms. Parag: We were under a line item for fuel and lubricants. The matter of increase under that line item was because of the additional hours that the pumps will have to operate, especially during the rainy season. I do not see how that is fully relevant to the maintenance line item when moneys are catered for under that line item for the maintenance of these equipment.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you. I am rising on point of order – Standing Order 40. The Hon. Minister has continuously, in her presentation, referred to the year 2017 to 2018 and this huge increase in

security allocation under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC). It was basically being suggested as though this rise happened just like that. Cde. Chairman, in 2017, every government institution did not have security services. What the APNU/AFC did was put a policy in place to ensure that every government institution had security officers. We increased it to 24-hour security service. The personnel, by virtue of that, increased significantly from one to three and catered for eight-hour shifts. That is how we got the 24-hour service, which led to that increase. Please let the record reflect that the increase was done not only to provide job opportunities for a number of people, but to ensure the security of the government infrastructure so it was not burnt down or destroyed in any other way, shape or form. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Member. Let us return to our business here.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, if the Hon. Member is going to stand on a point of order and clarify, he has to seek my permission before he can clarify. I would respectfully ask that that be expunged from the record because there is no such thing as that under Standing Order 40. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Seeraj: Let us have some order, please. Hon. Members, let us return to our business, please. *[Interruption]* Hon. Member, I recognise the Hon. Member, Ms. Flue-Bess.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. *[Interruption]*

Mr. Seeraj: Let us allow the Hon. Member to ask her question, please.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6282: The Hon. Minister responded to me earlier by saying that she did not see the relevance of line items 6231 and 6282. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Seeraj hit the gavel.]

I would like to know if I am not under the same programme of agriculture and if the maintenance of equipment will not be done for the machines or the equipment that is being used under this line item.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Minister, there was some disruption. I am not certain if you got that clearly. Would you like the Hon. Member to repeat?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member is asking about a line item that is for office equipment – computers and so on.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, would you like to rephrase? Thank you very much. I take that as a hint that I can now put the question.

Programme: 742 – Agriculture – \$472,526,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Programme: 743 – Public Works – \$265,318,000

Mr. Ramsaroop: Cde. Chairman, I was waiting for you to put the question.

Mr. Seeraj: I proposed it.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Under line item 6251, Maintenance of Roads, there is \$135 million budgeted. Could the Hon. Minister say if there is any provision for roads to be maintained in Victoria, Paradise, Nabaclis, Enmore North and Bachelor's Adventure?

Ms. Parag: The Hon. Member mentioned Victoria and ...

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, would you care to repeat the question, please?

Mr. Ramsaroop: The roads are in Victoria, Paradise, Nabaclis, Enmore North and Bachelor's Adventure.

Ms. Parag: What we have under this line items are repairs to Fourth Cross Street, Mon Repos South; sectional repairs to First, East/West Cross Streets, Enmore; sectional repairs to Gas Station Road, Success; Second East/West Cross along Gas Station Road, Success; repairs to Melanie; repairs to Jango Town; repairs again to Second North to South Cross Street, Jango Town; Second Cross Street, Greenfield North; Third to Last Cross Street, Goedverwagting; Third Cross Street on the (*inaudible*); repairs to Second East to West Cross Street, Strathsphey; sectional repairs to Earl's Court, La Bonne Intention (LBI); and repairs to Third North to South Cross Street, Strathsphey.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Members, we are now 40 minutes into this region. I am just saying that as a caution. We have 90 minutes allocated. We are still to complete the Current Expenditure and then to move on to Capital Expenditure. Please be guided accordingly.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Line item 6252: Under this, we have \$55 million budgeted. Could the Hon. Minister say if we have any bridges catered for in Victoria, Nabaclis Enmore North, Bachelor's Adventure and Paradise?

Ms. Parag: Again, this Government is committed to doing all roads in all communities, as well as bridges and streetlights. In this particular budget and under this line item, we have repairs to timber footpath bridge at Mon Repos; we have at Lusignan, Benkeney Alley; we have at Victoria Community Ground, Second Bridge; we have at Enmore Community Ground, Third Bridge; First timber bridge at Clonbrook; Second Bridge at Clonbrook, culvert at Strathavon, timber bridge at Tank Street, Grove; timber bridge at New Grove, Kaneville; timber bridge at Alliance, Timehri; second timber bridge, Ann's Grove Housing Scheme; and timber bridge at Third Street, President's College School road, Golden Grove.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6242, Maintenance of Buildings: I note there is a \$4 million increase. Was a new building added under this line item?

Ms. Parag: Again, it is maintenance of all of the buildings really. It is the Regional Democratic Council's (RDC's) four main buildings. It is to prevent the deterioration of the building. We have the Sparendam Living Quarters and we have the Golden Grove Living Quarters as well.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Based on the Minister's response, I guess the answer is no. I see at line item 6251, Maintenance of Roads, we have \$135 million. Could the Hon. Minister say which roads will be done on the Soesdyke-Linden Highway?

Ms. Parag: Under the previous line item, I believe I spoke on all of the roads on which we were doing maintenance.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I would like to know if the Hon. Minister can lay over a list of the roads because I was trying to follow all that she was babbling about, but I could not understand which roads.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, you could make a request if you so desire.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I would like to make a request to have the list of the roads that are to be done in the region under this line item laid over.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, I will not layover because I have stated and it will be on the record of the *Hansard*.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships): I would like to know what programmes will be available under this line item.

Ms. Parag: Under this line item, we intend to train 25 persons in the region in a fire safety training programme.

Programme: 743 – Public Works – \$265,318,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 744 – Education Delivery – \$8,324,889,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. Line item 6241 – Rental of Buildings: Which building is being rented under this line item?

5.26 p.m.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I heard the line item, but I did not quite get the last part of the question. I would ask the Hon. Member to repeat that.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, kindly repeat your question, please.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6241 – Rental of Buildings. Which building is being rented under this line item?

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. It is Dorcas Club at Sparendam Public Road.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I want to turn the Minister's attention to the staffing details. I note that at line item 6111 – Administrative, we had 341 for 2023 and 346 for 2024. Line item 6112 – Senior Technical: We had 1293 and now we have 1261. Line item 6113 – Other Technical and Craft Skilled: I note there were 494 in 2023 and 698 in 2024. Can the Hon. Minister say what has caused this 204 increase in employees?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member mentioned two line items in one question.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, please be guided. You are directing the Minister's attention, I think, to line item 6111. Am I correct?

Ms. Flue-Bess: I am directing the Minister's attention to line item 6113 – Other Technical and Craft Skilled: We had 494 in 2023 and now in 2024, we have 698. I am asking what has caused this increase of 204 staff.

Ms. Parag: There are new appointments, which are 58 Temporary Qualified Master III (TQM III) and there are 49 trained graduates. Then, there is a transfer of 35 TQM III and 62 trained graduates.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I turn your attention to line item 6282 - Equipment Maintenance. I note we have moved from \$6 million to \$12 million. What new vehicles or whatever were added to this particular line item to cause this increase?

Ms. Parag: This line item is referring again to office equipment and so on such as computers, air conditioning (AC) units, *etcetera*. So, the additional AC units and so have contributed to this increase.

Programme: 744 – Educational Delivery – \$8,324,889,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 745 – Health Services – \$2,117,485,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. I want to turn the Minister's attention to the staffing details again. I note that from line item 6111 – Administrative to line item 6117 – Temporary Employees, there has been a decrease of 28 staff members. I note that at line item 6115 – Semi-Skilled Operatives and Unskilled, we have moved from 101 to 89. Twelve staff were removed. As I look at this line item, I look at the performance statement and indicators. Number 5 of the indicators speak to number of trained health workers recruited, and there is a target of 25. Can the Hon. Minister say if any of these staff who left the agency fit into this 25 that you are looking to fill? I do not know how they have left – whether they have retired or resigned. Let me repeat the question. There was a total of 12 staff who left the agency. In your indicators, you are looking for 25. How will you fill this 25? What is your plan?

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, I will allow the Hon. Minister to answer but you know the rules. Go ahead, Hon. Minister.

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Again, the budget and the defending of estimates is in relation to a specific line item. A specific sum is appropriated or allocated to that line item and is specifically targeted to that line item. So, the Hon. Member is asking a question in relation to several line items to...

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, we went through this. I am kindly asking that you refer a question to a specific line item so that you can be clear, and so that the Minister will be in a position to answer clearly and in a manner that is satisfactory to all. Thank you, Hon. Members. I will... Dr. Cummings, sorry. Go ahead, please.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In the light that most persons are...there is an increase in contracted employees. I notice here, under line item 6116, there is a decrease in contracted employees from 34 to 30. But the amount budgeted or allocated is almost similar. So, could you explain why the amount budgeted for 2024 is almost the same when there is a loss of about four persons?

Ms. Parag: There was a 6.5% salary increase last year, in case it missed the Opposition. So, the additional sum is here.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, do you have a follow-up?

Dr. Cummings: No. Line item 6272 – Electricity Charges: There is an increase of close to \$8 million. What is the reason for it? Was it not paid last year and so you have to pay the charges this year or is it an increase in the rate? Could you explain why there is an increase of \$8 million for electricity charges under health?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, it is due to the new, additional buildings at Swan and Diamond and so on.

Ms. Ferguson: I turn the Hon. Member's attention to Line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships). I note for 2023, we had a budgeted sum of \$2.5 million, but in the revised column for 2023, there is \$3 million, a \$500,000 variance. Can you explain to this Committee of Supply

where the \$500,000 difference came from since you did not return to the National Assembly for supplementary provisions? Thank you.

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, there was a virement from line item 6265 – Other Transport, Travel and Postage. That accounts for that revised sum that you see there.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mdm. Minister.

Programme: 745 – Health Services – \$2,117,485,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 741 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$17,000,000

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Project code 1203500 – Buildings – Health: I notice there is a provision for health facilities and payment of retention. Could you... Sorry.

Mr. Seeraj: We are on Programme: 741 – Regional Administration and Finance, Capital Expenditure. Hon. Member, Mr. Ramsaroop.

Mr. Ramsaroop: Project code 1208800 – Buildings – Administration: There is a provision for the construction of a building. Can I ask the Hon. Minister where the building will be built and for what purpose?

Ms. Parag: There will be the construction of an office building at Triumph – a stores building.

Ms. Ferguson: Where?

Ms. Parag: Triumph.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Under the very project code 1208800 – Buildings - Administration, I note we have here 13,500,000. According to the project code, the project entails provision for a building. Therefore, it is one building. Okay. Thank you very much. Is it a flat building, a high two-storey building? What is the dimension of this building and where is the design? Where can I find the design?

Ms. Parag: It is the construction of a complete concrete building, inclusive of tiling, painting, and installation of ACs. It is 30 feet long by 20 feet wide.

Programme: 741 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$17,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 742 – Agriculture – \$57,000,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: I note that under project code 1701200 – Agricultural Development, the explanation given is that there is going to be revetments in Mahaica and Enmore and provision of sluice door structures at Unity and Buxton. Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate the sum for these different areas?

5.41 p.m.

Ms. Parag: For the revetment at Mahaica, it is \$13,780,000; the rehabilitation of the Unity sluice door and concrete structure – \$12,400,000; and the construction at Beezie Dam, Enmore – \$13,976,000, and this will benefit over 200 residents. The one before that, which was the Unity sluice door, will benefit over 400 residents and farmers within the area. The revetment at Mahaica will benefit over 300 residents and farmers within that area. The construction of the sluice door at Buxton is \$8,820,000. It will benefit over 400 residents and farmers within that area. There is also the construction of the revetment at the Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) road in Soesdyke and that is \$8,224,000. That is to prevent erosion of the NDC building foundation and the road shoulders. It will benefit over 200 residents and road users.

Ms. Ferguson: On this very project code 1701200, Agricultural Development, with the construction of the sluice and all the other things that the Minister has just highlighted, could she inform this Committee of Supply what method of procurement will be used for these projects?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, it was through an open tender process.

Programme: 742 – Agriculture – \$57,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 743 – Public Works – \$205,765,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: Project code 1100500 – Bridges: I am looking at the detailed description. The project is at Mahaica, Paradise and Great Diamond. Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate the sums?

Ms. Parag: The construction of the one at Mahaica is \$8 million and it will benefit over 600 residents, that is, school children, teachers and parents. There is the construction of the concrete culvert at 19th Street, Dazzle Housing Scheme. It is \$6 million and will benefit over 200 residents and road users. Then, there is the construction of the bridge at Diamond which is \$22 million. It will benefit over 900 residents. The bridge serves as a main access to the community. There is construction at Helena, Mahaica for \$8 million. The beneficiaries are over 500 residents and farmers within the area. There is construction of the bridge at First Street, Belmont, Mahaica. It will benefit over 600 residents and farmers within the area. There is the construction of the concrete vehicle bridge at Sixth Cross Street, Good Hope, Mahaica and that will benefit over 600 residents and farmers within the area.

Ms. Ferguson: On this very project code 1100500, I heard the Minister earlier identify where these bridges will be constructed. From the list that she has provided, Mahaica alone will benefit from three bridges. I did not hear anything for Paradise. Dazzle Housing Scheme is not a part of the areas to benefit, but I heard you make reference to Dazzle Housing Scheme and Great Diamond. These areas are relatively large and dense areas. So, it would be good for us to get the specificity of where these bridges will be constructed. I need to know where in Dazzle Housing Scheme, where in Paradise and also where in Great Diamond. What will also be helpful is the length because these days you all are building some footpaths. I need to know the width or the length of these structures. **[An. Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]** Both will be important.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much for your detailed question, Hon. Member. I will now direct your question to the Hon. Minister.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Hon. Member, for the specific or the targeted questions. As a matter of fact, I did not state Paradise. It is not here, but please keep in mind, Hon. Member, that bridges are also substantively done through the Ministry of Public Works, as you would know. For the construction of the bridge at Dazzle Housing Scheme, it is at the 19th Street, Dazzle Housing Scheme. **[Ms. Ferguson: (Inaudible) hearing (inaudible)]** It is 19th Street, Dazzle

Housing Scheme. There is an 18-feet by 12-feet bridge there. At Mahaica, there is 20-feet by 16-feet bridge. At Diamond, there is a 47-feet by 16-feet bridge. At 3rd Street Helena, Mahaica, there is a 16-feet by 14-feet bridge. At Sixth Cross Street, Good Hope, there is a 20-feet by 16-feet bridge.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, do you know that Diamond has about 21 streets or something to that effect? It would be good if the Hon. Member could tell me which street in Diamond would be benefitting from this bridge.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you for your follow-up, Hon. Member.

Ms. Parag: That bridge will be at Diamond by the burial ground. It is an access bridge.

Programme: 743 – Public Works – \$205,765,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 744 – Education Delivery – \$425,600,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: Project code 1203300 – Buildings: How much of this allocated sum would be paid for the retention?

Ms. Parag: It will be the sum of \$8,752,000 for six projects.

Mr. Ramsaroop: On the same project code 1203300, could I ask the Hon. Minister for some consideration to be given to Strathavon Nursery School for the fence and the security hut there?

Ms. Parag: It is not under this project code, but it is under the maintenance programme.

Mr. Seeraj: For your information, Hon. Member, it is under the maintenance programme. You had directed the Minister's attention to project code 1203300.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Project code 2503400 – Furniture and Equipment - Education: Does this sum cover furniture for teachers?

Ms. Parag: What we have on under project code and this particular sum is – all to benefit the teachers – the purchase of fire extinguishers; the purchase of fans; the purchase of water dispensers; the purchase of furniture for nursery schools; the purchase of teachers' chairs; the

purchase of teachers' tablets; the purchase of screens for nursery schools; the purchase of cots for nursery schools and daycares; the purchase of outdoor equipment for nursery schools; the purchase of whiteboards; the purchase of industrial arts work tables; the purchase of work tables for home economics; the purchase of library racks and bookshelves; the purchase of lunch kit racks; the purchase of laptops; the purchase of smartphones; purchase of floor model and multifunction printer; purchase of Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS) backup batteries; purchase of desktop computers; purchase of a 65-inch smart Television (TV); and the purchase of brushes. That is it.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister, for your detailed response.

Programme: 744 – Education Delivery – \$425,600,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 745 – Health Services – \$194,500,000

Dr. Cummings: Project code 1203500 – Buildings - Health: It is for the provision of health facilities and the payment of retention. The total project cost is \$222 million. Prior to 2024, \$128,500,000 was spent. There is a balance of \$93,500,000. Could the Minister give us an update on this building, where is it located and what is the status?

Ms. Parag: I think the Hon. Member is under the wrong project code. I have \$93,500,000 here.

Mr. Seeraj: As the remainder.

Dr. Cummings: As the remainder because it was spent prior to 2024.

Mr. Seeraj: That is right. So, the remainder – \$93.5 million – is to be spent in 2024.

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, let me give you a breakdown. It is for the construction of new health centre at Mon Repos; landfilling and concreting of yard at the new Mon Repos health centre; provision for steel cages and oxygen cylinders at Cane Grove, Victoria, Buxton, Lusignan, Eccles, Mocha, Enterprise, Golden Grove, Supply, Soesdyke, Dr. CC Nicholson Health Centre; construction of security huts for Mon Repos and Swan health centres.

5.56 p.m.

Extension of pharmacy at Cane Grove Health Centre, upgrade of electrical system at Mocha Health Centre, construction of dental room at Long Creek Health Post; upgrade of all electrical circuits, panels, wires at Grove, and this one here at Grove will benefit 1,350 residents; the ones at Mocha will benefit over 950 residents; and we have construction of shed and consultation room at Low Wood, beneficiaries of over 80 residents. I was recently at Low Wood so I do know what the area looks like there. Construction of base for water tanks and fence at Grove Health Centre will benefit over 1,350 residents, construction of base and shed for generators at Diamond Smart Health Centre will benefit over 1,000 residents, construction of base and shed for generator at Lusignan Health Centre will benefit over 900 residents, concreting of yard at Diamond Health Centre would benefit over 1,000 residents, upgrade of main access pathway to nurses training centre laboratory and the Regional Health Office's (RHO's) office at Paradise, extension of pharmacy bond at Kuru Kururu benefits over 350 residents, remodelling of building at Enterprise to create ultrasound room and waiting area will benefit over 1,400 residents, extension of pharmacy and dressing room at Melanie will benefit over 900 residents, landfilling of compound at Melanie benefitting over 900 residents, landfilling and concreting of compound at Enterprise will benefit over 1,400 residents, elevation of floor to training centre, grilling of windows and landfilling at Paradise Health Office for the staff and the nurses that are there.

Dr. Cummings: Project code 2407900, Purchase of Ambulance. Could the Minister say the specifications (specs) of the ambulance? Will this ambulance protect first responders? We have these Coronavirus diseases (COVID-19) emerging that come and we want to ensure... we do not want a minibus; we want a real ambulance with specs. I do not know if it is one with a Toyota land cruiser and mounted on a truck-style chassis and so. Could you give us some specs on this ambulance?

Ms. Parag: It is an ambulance 4x4 off-road type, and it will be benefitting the Linden–Soesdyke Highway, Long Creek, and St. Cuthbert Mission, now Pakuri Village.

Dr. Cummings: Lastly, Furniture and Equipment, project code 2503700, Provision of Furniture and Equipment to which facilities or which department? Thank you.

Ms. Parag: We have ultrasound machines to provide ultrasound services at the Diamond and Mon Repos Health Centres; we have the machine required to confirm and manually check the

haemoglobin; we have the packed cell volume (PCV) reader; we have the laboratory machine required for the lab at Diamond Smart Centre; we have supply and install of 60 kVA generators at Diamond Health Centre and Lusignan Diabetic Centre; we have the microalbumin machine at the Lusignan Diabetic Centre to assess kidney damage; we have the microscope for lab studies at Diamond Hospital; we have filing cabinets, office desks, laptops, portable vital sign trolley, stainless steel dressing drums, phlebotomy chair, examination beds, crash carts, operating bed and lights, grid tie solar photovoltaic (PV) system 10; cardiac beds, cardiac monitors with paediatric and adult settings; portable defibrillator; patient waiting chairs; jasper recliners; hospital beds; air conditioning units; medical examination lights; laboratory stools with backrest; office chairs, semi executive; television (TV) sets; dental chairs; wooden storage cupboards.

Programme: 745 – Health Services – \$194,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Seeraj: On your behalf, let me thank Members of Region 4, the Regional Executive Officer (REO) and his team, of course the Minister is there and will still be there, and members of the... I know Hon. Members that the Chairman had said that we are not going to break, and we are not going to break save and except for 10 minutes. As you know, the Minister has been sitting there for quite a while unbroken, so we will take a short 10 minutes' break. Members can feel free to stay here. But before we take the break, I think we have to go back into Assembly.

Assembly resumed.

Sitting suspended at 6.03 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.29 p.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: We will start with Region 5 or we should continue consideration of the regions; we are at Region 5. We are doing pretty good. In fact, if we go time wise, we are only half an hour behind. It is 6.30 p.m. and let me welcome the Hon. Minister and team, including REO Ms. Geneveieve Blackman.

Mr. Mahipaul: [*Inaudible*]

Mr. Chairman: Yes, be careful Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, it is my goddaughter, and she has been harassing me over the Cemetery Road project. Hon. Members, we turn to pages 378 and 379.

Agency:75 – Region 5: Mahaica/Berbice

Current Estimates

Programme: 751 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$292,646,000

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, at line item 6242, I would just like for the Hon. Minister, my good friend, Ms. Sonia Parag... [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] ...our good friend, to tell us about the buildings that will be maintained under this line?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, good friend, you may have the floor.

Ms Parag: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The line item 6242 caters for the maintenance of buildings and it is for the RDC main building, the RDC main office annexes, the RDC boardroom, the RDC subregion and four living quarters – Building B2, Building B104, Building B168 and Building B331.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, at line item 6281, could the Hon. Minister please state for us which are the security services that are catered for under this line item?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, it is SuperGraphics (Guyana) Inc.

Mr. Jordan: At line item 6231, Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Minister kindly say for us the number of vehicles that are catered for under this line item and their registration numbers?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, although I know the Hon. Member is already aware of these numbers, because he traverses the area very often and he would even be scoping out the regional office ever so often, they are PMM1635, PRR7765, PMM9165, PTT4262 – and I see the Hon. Member is nodding along with me; he is very aware of the numbers – PWW3052, PWW3090, PJJ6967 and PPP1695.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, I will move on to line item 6302, Training (including) Scholarships. Could the Hon. Minister state what are the training set out to develop the staff of Region 5?

Ms. Parag: We have strategic succession planning for managers through the Ministry of Public Service, the government accounting procedures through the Ministry of Public Service – when I say through the Ministry of Public Service with their training division but through the region’s budget – delegation and control, accounting basics for supervisors, contract management, procurement procedures and training for drivers.

Mr Jordan: Mr. Chair, could the Hon. Minister also say to us, after spending just over a million in 2023, what were the trainings done in 2023 and how many staff benefitted?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, that is not a part of this particular line item in this budget estimate. so I do not have that. But, of course, I am certain it would have been part of the budget estimate last year.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, I would go further to beg of you if I can ask the Hon. Minister to lay that document over.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, I am not going to lay that over, but we do have these programmes here that are catered for under this line item this year that I am defending this year. Thank you.

Programme: 751 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$292,646,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 752 – Agriculture – \$252,490,000

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, I notice at line item 6255 some \$12 million. Could the Hon. Minister state what are the other infrastructure works that will be done under this line item?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, we plan to do repairs to revetment at Eddy Singh Street and this is for or will benefit over 200 students and residents and the economic activity in the area – as my friend would very well be aware of because he, again, traverses that road in Region 5 – is cash crop, the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), cattle and livestock; and then the repairs to revetment at Mulchand Street that is to benefit over 100 students, farmers and residents. Again, this is an economic activity-based area with cash crop, GuySuCo, cattle and livestock.

6.38 p.m.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, we are now move back to line item 6251, Maintenance of Roads. So, those agriculture roads for \$64 million, could the Hon. Minister be kind enough to lay them over, please?

Ms. Parag: I am not going to lay it over, but I am going to state for the record, for the public to be aware, as well as my friend to hear – as he is right here – what we plan to use the sum in this line item for. So, it is for the maintenance to sections of the Wash Clothes main road. This will benefit over 450 residents who are mainly farmers and fishermen, *et cetera*. You have the maintenance of the farm to market access dam and the grading of road shoulders, and so, on at Champagne/Burma, and this is for over 200 residents. You have the maintenance of the farm to market access dam at Hyde Park that will benefit over 300 residents such as farmers and fishermen. There is the maintenance of the farm to market road at Cotton Tree for over 5,000 residents – students, fishermen, and farmers are all included. That is a huge number, Mr. Chairman, and they will benefit. There is the maintenance of the farm to market access dam at Britannia and that is for 200 residents, including students and famers. You then have the maintenance of sections of Line Top/Huntley for 60 residents. There is the maintenance of the farm to market access dam – when I say residents, I am definitely referring to households – at Recess, Mahaicony, for 60 residents such as farmers and fishermen. There is the maintenance of the farm to market access dam at Golden Fleece for 200 residents and farmers. You have the maintenance to a section of Zari Dam, St. John, for 150 residents. There is maintenance for the sideline in Number 9 Village for 125 residents, farmers, and fishermen. Residents there are farming rice, cash crop and livestock as well.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, for line item 6231, Fuel and Lubricants, again I would like to ask the Minister, how many vehicles are assigned or catered for under this line item and the programme and their registration numbers.

Ms. Parag: This particular line item is catering for three brush cutters, one mini excavator, a small dump truck and slashers.

Mr. Jordan: We will work around the dump truck. There is the line item 6252, Maintenance of Bridges for \$18 million. Could the Hon. Minister give us a breakdown of that, please?

Ms. Parag: For the first one, over 150 farmers and households are to benefit from the general repairs to a timber bridge at Good Faith, Mahaicony. There are repairs to a heavy-duty bridge at Ranch Dam, Perth, and about 75 farmers and households will be benefitting from that. You have

the maintenance of a bridge at Number 8 Village, West Coast Berbice, and about 120 farmers are going to benefit from that. You have repairs to the bridge in Huntley and about 200 students and residents who will benefit from that area.

Programme: 752 – Agriculture – \$252,490,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 753 – Public Works – \$211,982,000

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, line item 6242, Maintenance of Buildings: could the Hon. Minister state which building, or buildings are being maintained for the \$7 million?

Ms. Parag: So, we will have the Public Works Department at Fort Wellington, the B126 Living Quarter at Fort Wellington, the B132 Living Quarter at Fort Wellington, the B332 Living Quarter at Fort Wellington, the B333 Living Quarter at Fort Wellington, and the B216 Living Quarter at Fort Wellington

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, at line item 6251, Maintenance of Roads, I see some \$80 million. Mr. Chair, permit me to ask the Hon. Minister if the 12 streets in Number 28 Village, south of the public road, will be maintained under this line item; if the first and second cross streets at Union, south of the public road, will also be maintained; if Bowlin Street, Hopetown, will be maintained and DaSilva Lane.

Ms. Parag: So, as I have said before in this honourable Committee, our Government is committed to ensuring that all community roads, whether they are in Region 5 or any other region, are repaired, maintained, or built, as well as having streetlights placed in these areas. That is a commitment that we made to the people of this country. As we pass budget after budget, we include a number of roads. A lot of the roads, hundreds if not thousands, are being done under the Ministry of Public Works. What I do have here is at Number 28 Village; we have maintenance of the first cross street. That was specific to what you asked. It is the first cross street, north of the public road. We also have repairs that will be done to the sideline dam at Chester. We have maintenance of the school street at Woodley Park. We have the maintenance of sections of Blairmont main access. We have the maintenance of sections of the De Hoop Branch Road. With all these, we have about 50 residents, 300, another 50 and another 5,000 benefiting.

Then there is the maintenance of the church street at Zes Kinderen with 200 or so residents benefitting from that. There is the maintenance of the nurse school street at Belladrum and there are 200 residents or so who will be benefitting from that. There is the maintenance of the eastern sideline in Fellowship and about 300 residents will be benefitting from that. There is the maintenance of the sideline dam at Brahan and 125 residents will be benefitting from that. There is the maintenance of the main access at Zee Zight and 300 residents will be benefitting from that. There is the maintenance of the eastern sideline dam, south of the public road at Armadale – I think, to be specific – for 375 residents. You have the second cross street, north of the public road at Number 30 Village that will be benefitting at least 100 residents. I already told you about Number 28 Village. There is eastern sideline dam, south of the public road at Bush Lot and that will benefit about 200 residents.

Mr. Jordan: I am happy for the listing that the Hon. Minister provided. However, I want to ask of the Hon. Minister... during my political work and recent visit to Number 28, Trafalgar community, there is the Rose family where we know it as the 'Line', and the street is in a very, very deplorable state. The woman is about 80 years old, and she normally uses taxi to get in and out, with her being in a wheelchair. Could the Hon. Minister give kind consideration for that street to be done this year as part of her Government's programme?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, there is the Line.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That is not included in the particular line item that we are defending. I have said over and over that we committed to doing these community roads. I know that His Excellency was in Region 5 just recently, and he also mandated the Ministry of Public Works along with the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development to make an assessment of roads in several areas, so we will look.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, we have line item 6255, Maintenance of Other Infrastructure. Could the Hon. Minister state the roads and let us see if Trafalgar falls there now?

Ms. Parag: We have repairs to the revetment at Chandrika Street, Blairmont. We have maintenance work to the internal fence at the RDC living quarters under this line item. There are maintenance works at the Rosignol/Zeelust Community Market. There is the weeding and cleaning of the RDC compound and other government compounds. There are emergency repairs and

maintenance work across the region. So, we have several things that this line item will be taking care off. Again, Hon. Member, I do know that there were several commitments that we made across the country, and we will ensure that we go out and look at Region 5 as well.

Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Norton]: The Impacts section states that integrating regional plans in accordance to impact is to integrate regional plans in accordance with the national development plan. Could I ask the Hon. Minister, what are the elements of this national development plan; what are the elements of the regional plan; and how is the process of integration going?

Ms. Parag: To the Hon. Member, this is not a specific line item that a sum is under, but the holistic national development plan includes necessarily: education, infrastructural development, healthcare and services, tourism, agriculture, and several other sectors that are all here under different line items and particular programmes that have a specific sum appropriated thereunder and that will be expended for the holistic national development plan for the impact to benefit all Guyanese.

Mr. Norton: There is a part of the question that was not answered. How is the regional plan integrated into the national plan?

Ms. Parag: The regional plan is integrated into the national plan by the investment of finances in budgets like this one and the previous budgets, to enable us to meet all the deliveries that we wanted to be able to give to the Guyanese people and have that impact on the country.

Mr. Norton: Mr. Chairman, having listened, one presupposes there is a plan. Therefore, could I ask the Minister to make available to the Committee both the regional and national plans?

Ms. Parag: I would have also liked to have the plan from 2015 that was in the then President's back pocket and the many master plans that were in the Manifesto. However, we are defending a budget here by line item and I do not see that under a line item right now.

Programme: 753 – Public Works – \$211,982,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 754 – Education Delivery – \$3,511,080,000

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, I am looking at line item 6113, Other Technical and Craft Skilled. In 2023, the Government catered for 162 staff. In 2024, I see an increase of about \$113 million which is

catering for 275 staff. Could the Hon. Minister state the various positions that are now included in this line item?

6.53 p.m.

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much. There is the appointment of the Temporary Qualified Masters/Mistresses (TQMs). There is the appointment of 96 TQM III; the appointment of three then another 60 TQMs; 19 Temporary Unqualified Masters/Mistresses (TUMs); two TQM; one TQM, one transfer out of a TUM; two resignations; another seven resignations and then one; then the upgrade of one TQM to Assistant Master/Mistress (AM); upgrade of two TQMs to Untrained Graduate Masters/Mistresses (UGMs).

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, under that same line item, I just want to ask the Hon. Minister, does it cater for those teachers who are guidance and counselling officers?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, I am so advised that it does.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, since it caters for them, how many do you have in Region 5? What are the provisions that were made for them in terms of accommodation at the various institutions?

Ms. Parag: The region currently has nine of the Guidance Counsellors and that very same line item is where we cater for the package.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, outside of the package, in terms of the accommodation, I do not know if I should ask it here, but the Minister could guide me. Accommodations at the various institutions...

Ms. Parag: Wherever these nine persons are located, individually there are counselling rooms available.

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Minister name the schools that these nine persons are at and say whether all those schools have counselling rooms? What is the equipment given to these Counsellors and whether or not they received furniture?

Ms. Parag: This line item is specific to package of salaries and allowances for this specific type. To answer one part of the Hon. Member's question, they are at all nine of the secondary schools in the region, but the line item does not cater for the rest of your [*inaudible*].

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Chair, I will now move to line item 6231, Fuel and Lubricants. Could the Hon. Minister say how many vehicles are catered for under this line and their registration numbers?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, we have a 15-seater minibus, we have a motorboat, we have another motorboat, we have another motorboat, we have Nissan 4x4 cruiser, we have Nissan 4x4 cruiser, we have a Mitsubishi Canter Truck, a Toyota 30-seater bus, a canter truck, a motorcycle, a Toyota 30-seater, a Nissan Minibus, a Toyota 30-seater, and another Toyota 30-seater. It caters for these.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, could I ask the Hon. Minister, am I right to say that this line item caters for the two school buses that are working in Region 5?

Ms. Parag: Three school buses.

Mr. Jordan: Could you kindly tell me the three school buses normal route of commute?

Ms. Parag: I am not certain on what is the regular route, but they are working from Bygeval to Mahaicony, Belladrum to Bush Lot, and Fort Wellington to Ithaca.

Mr. Jordan: Sir, could the Hon. Minister tell me, to be specific, which one of the buses work the Rosignol area?

Ms. Parag: Bus PVV 1238.

Mr. Jordan: Alright, let me ask the question in full. Please give me the number for the three areas in which they work. Thank you.

Ms. Parag: I believe this line item, though, is for vehicle fuel and equipment for these vehicles, and you know we are catering for the continued movement and transport that these vehicles will provide. So, the question has been answered a long time ago.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, I am trying to confirm from the Hon. Minister the three buses that are working in Region 5 to transport our school children. She mentioned three areas. Could the Hon. Minister state the registration number for the buses in the various areas? I do not think it is hard under Fuel, which has to allow the buses to be moved, to be mentioned.

Mr. Chairman: While you do not think, Hon. Member, there are some guidelines which we are bound to observe. Hon. Minister.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Member, I believe that what is important is the fact that these buses... today you can have PVV 1228 running a route, tomorrow it breaks down and another one comes into the route and runs that route. The point of it all is that the children are benefitting from point A to point B with the fuel at the line item that we have provided for this sum to ensure that the vehicles are moving.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, I am happy that the Hon. Minister has mentioned that the buses are doing a great job in Region 5. But, Sir, under the Coalition Government, we had five school buses in Region 5. We had three David 'G' buses; we had one in the Mahaicony district, and we had one that was purchased to the end for those at Burma.

Mr. Chairman: And the question?

Mr. Jordan: I am coming to the question, Sir. I am coming to the question. Moving from five buses to three buses, I want to ask the Hon. Minister, are those buses adequate for the service of our school children on a daily basis?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, the issue was, these buses that were purchased, these '5Bs', under the '3Bs' or '5Bs' or whatever... [An Hon. Member: 'Five 'Bs'.] 'Five B's. I do not know. There are so many 'Bs' you forget them. The Five Bs were used vehicles, so at some point they broke down and they were very unserviceable. It is very much like what was happening in Region 2. But the region is committed to ensuring that our children have transportation, and through the Ministry of Education as well our Government has been ensuring that children get to school and build school so that they can be housed those schools as well.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, I am moving on to line item 6283, Cleaning and Extermination Services, and I see \$15 million. Sir, I suppose that this includes that service for the schools.

Ms. Parag: Yes, Hon. Member, it does. It caters for fumigation, sanitisation, treating education buildings and compounds, the cleaning of the carpets, rugs and so on.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chair, I beg of the Hon. Minister that she kindly ask those in Region 5 to ensure that, from this line item, the bats at the Number 29 Primary School be removed immediately. My recent visit proves that the children and teachers are severely affected by bats. I will ask that you spend part of this \$13 million to deal with that.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, as I said, this line item is there to cater for the sanitisation, fumigation, and so on, of the schools. We will ensure that the region carries out that mandate.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you very much my gracious friend. Mr. Chair, I want to move to line item 6242, Maintenance of Buildings. I want to ask the Hon. Minister to kindly give a disaggregation of that \$85 million that will go towards buildings.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, again, we are committed to maintaining our schools, whether it be nursery, primary or secondary schools. Rome was not built in a day. As we allocate sums in a budget to be able to go through a developmental phase, we want to be able to ensure that our schools are maintained regularly. On this list I have Liberty Hall Nursery School, Cottage Nursery School, Moraikobai Nursery School, Mora Point Nursery School, Bath Nursery School, Hopetown Nursery School, Bush Lot Nursery School, Carlton Hall Nursery and Primary Schools, Novar Nursery School, Seafield Nursery School, De Hoop Nursery School, Shieldstown Nursery School, Litchfield Nursery School, Airy Hall Nursery School, West End Nursery School, Blairmont Nursery School, Woodley Park Nursery School, Cotton Tree Nursery School, Calcutta Nursery School, and Number 5 Nursery School.

For the primary schools: Latchman Singh Primary School; Belladrum Primary School; Bath Primary School and Annex; Rosignol Primary School; Moraikobai Primary School; Hopetown Primary School; Number 29 Primary School; Strath Campbell Primary and Nursery Schools; Biaboo Primary School; Blairmont Primary School, Cotton Tree Primary School; District 10 Primary School; Mahaicony Primary School; De Hoop Primary School; Karamat Primary School and Head Master/Mistress (HM) living quarters; Mortice Primary School; Litchfield Primary School; Calcutta Primary School; and Gordon Table Primary School.

For the Secondary Schools we have Mahaicony Secondary School, Bush Lot Secondary School, Fort Wellington Secondary School, Belladrum Secondary School, Novar Secondary School,

Rosignol Secondary School, Number 8 Secondary School, Bygeval Secondary School, Woodley Park Secondary School, the Student Hostel and Hopetown Practical Instruction Centre (PIC).

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, before I put my follow-up question, let me say a pleasant evening and welcome the staff from Region 5. Could I turn our attention to line item 6231, Fuel and Lubricant. Earlier, in response to my colleague's question, the Hon. Member made reference to the school buses, *et cetera*. My question to the Hon. Member is whether she is aware that these school buses that had served many communities in the various regions were actually acquired without funding from taxpayers.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, are you aware?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, what I am aware of is, they were some used buses that broke down.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, I just cannot understand the responses coming from this Hon. Minister. A simple question that warrants either a yes or no response... I do not want to know the condition of the vehicle. Could I put the question again?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Member. Let me put the question. A simple answer, yes, or no?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, the knowledge that I have is that they were used buses that broke down.

Programme: 754 – Education Delivery – \$3,511,080,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

7.08 p.m.

Programme: 755 – Health Services - \$1,368,317,000

Mr. Jordan: Line item 6282 – Equipment Maintenance: I would like the guidance of the Hon. Minister on whether this \$9 million caters for the maintenance of equipment at the Fort Wellington and Mahaicony hospitals.

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, it does. For Fort Wellington, we have a portable suction Electrocardiogram (ECG); ultrasound machine fixed; X-ray machine, fixed digital; X-ray machine, portable digital; infant warmer; [*inaudible*] microscope; the digital rotator; air conditioner (AC) unit; blood bank refrigerator; biochemistry analyser; automatic water still;

electrolyte analyser; centrifuge haematology analyser; water bath; patient monitor; blood gas analyser; treadmill; doppler, ergometer bicycle; portable ultrasound machine; ultrasound machine fixed; refrigerator; autoclave; infant scale; adult scale; water treatment plant; incinerator; and a chill fridge.

For Mahaicony, we have AC unit; adult scale; amalgamator; anaesthetic machine; autoclave; automatic water still; biochemistry analyser; blood bank refrigerator; centrifuge; defibrillator; ECG; ergometer bicycle; fetal monitor; haematology analyser; incubator; infant scale; infant warmer; lab rotator; microscope; patient monitor; portable suction; treadmill; water treatment plant; incinerator; ultrasound machine, fixed; X-ray machine, fixed digital; and X-ray machine, portable digital.

At the primary healthcare we have AC unit; portable ultrasound machine; infant scale; and adult scale. Then, we have for the total maternal and child health dental chair; AC unit; compressor; wall mount; and X-ray machine.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, the very line item, I am in no way qualified or certified as a Medical Doctor to understand some of the terms or the names of the equipment. Sir, I want to ask the Hon. Minister whether the sterilising unit at Fort Wellington Hospital, the main one which is known to be down for approximately six months, complains by nurses and other staff... I also learned that the one at Mahaicony Hospital is down. The Region is therefore without a sterilising unit, except for that one in the food centre area. Could you Hon. Minister state whether this line will cater for repairs or replacement of those units?

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am advised that the first Fort Wellington, as a matter fact, it was working up until yesterday, but that will be repaired. Mahaicony is currently working, but this line item will cater for repairs and maintenance.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I just want to get one thing clear. Are you saying Hon. Minister that it was working up until yesterday?

Ms. Parag: That is correct, Hon. Member.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, just permit me. Did it break down this morning, conveniently, before the start of this House?

Mr. Chairman: Well, it depends.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, that is not the question to be answered under this line item.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, to be truthful to the people of Guyana, I want for the Hon. Minister, when was the last time the sterilising unit at Fort Wellington Hospital worked? Could the Minister provide the log of the equipment being sterilised and the date that they were sterilised before this Committee?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, in keeping with this defending of the *Budget 2024*, that comes under absolutely no line item at this point in time; as I have said, the sum appropriated under this particular line item will go towards maintenance of these types of machines.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, so I am asking the Hon. Minister now, is the one at Mahaicony working now?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, ditto.

Mr. Parag: I am advised that the one at Mahaicony is working.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, I know for a fact in the past we have visited a number of institutions. You can guide me; is it possible that we can visit Fort Wellington at Mahaicony Hospital at 6:00 in the morning?

Mr. Chairman: There is a committee in Parliament, the Hon. Member Dr. Persaud is the head of that committee that makes the social services visit. I would not, at this moment, want to suspend to visit the Fort Wellington or Mahaicony. I will ask the Hon. Minister to continue if she wants to amplify her answers.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, under line item 6221, Drugs and Medical Supplies, we have seen an increase of over \$30 million there. I want to ask the Hon. Minister, is this for both Fort Wellington and Mahaicony hospital or that of the other health centres?

Ms. Parag: This particular line item and sum appropriated under this line item caters for both hospitals as well as the health centres.

Programme: 755 – Health Services – \$1,368,317,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 751 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$16,000,000

Mr. Jordan: Project code 1208900 – Buildings - Administration: Could the Hon. Minister state which building or buildings will be built for the \$10 million?

Ms. Parag: The renovation and remodelling works will be done to building B291 at the Regional Democratic Council (RDC) main office.

Programme: 751 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$16,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 752 – Agriculture – \$135,000,000

Mr. Jordan: I just want to confirm from the Hon. Minister whether the farm-to-market roads at Mahaicony and Duke are those along the De Hoop Branch Road and if she could give clearly the other part of Mahaicony.

Ms. Parag: For the continuation of the Mahaicony Branch Road, which is 1,000 metres by 4.27 metres, that is from Green Mill to Waterdog Creek. Then, there is the construction of the farm-to-market road along De Hoop Branch Road which would be 106 metres by 3.05 metres.

Mr. Jordan: I have one other question under this project code. I would just like to ask the Hon. Minister, I see purchase of tubes. Could the Hon. Minister state how many tubes will be purchased, the sizes and where they will be used?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, it will be 20 in quantity and they are assorted in sizes of 24 inches, 18 inches, 12 inches and 15 inches.

Programme: 752 – Agriculture – \$135,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 753 – Public Works – \$147,950,000

Mr. Jordan: Project code 1400800 – Roads: I would just like to ask the Hon. Minister, the road catered for here at Calcutta, is that of the Calcutta Ball Field Street?

Ms. Parag: As a matter of fact, it does. It will be able to benefit about 30 households which connect to the second cross-street access to the playground.

Programme: 753 – Public Works – \$147,950,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 754 – Education Delivery – \$155,800,000

Mr. Jordan: Project code 1203600 – Buildings Education: I see a provision of \$109 million. Could the Hon. Minister state whether the Augsburg Primary School is catered for here and at what cost?

Ms. Parag: The Hon. Member as well as the residents surrounding the areas of Augsburg will be happy to know that it is our number one priority at \$34 million for the construction of that primary school.

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, permit me to also to thank the Hon. Minister for that. I want to ask her, in future, that children and parents must not have to move to protest in order to get a building. Thank you.

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, the protest was orchestrated by my Hon. Friend, forgetting that I am also...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you cannot impute here, please.

Ms. Parag: I will rephrase that.

Mr. Chairman: You will withdraw then you will restate something else. Thank you.

Ms. Parag: I will state something else. A school was offered to the students and it was refused. The Hon. Member was also a part of that team who refused. The children were then housed in another building that was close to the area. The Government have been trying at its utmost to ensure that the students still have structure that they can continue education.

7.23 p.m.

Mr. Jordan: I therefore say that the protest was effective. Sir, I want to ask the Hon. Minister about this building. Would it be for the nursery and primary and what way would it be done? Is it that the nursery would be beneath and the primary at the top? If possible, what is the size of that building?

Ms. Parag: It would be a one level building and it would have a dimension of 30.5 meters by 7.3 meters.

Programme: 754 – Education Delivery – \$155,800,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 755 – Health Services – \$235,300,000

Mr. Jordan: Project code 1203700 – Buildings - Health: I would just like to know what the retention is for specifically. I see \$110 million:

“Provision for health facilities and payment of retention.”

Ms. Parag: The retention is only in relation to one building and that is the health centre at District 10, Mahaica and which will be payable by March of 2024 at \$3 million.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member. Mr. Jordan, you have the floor.

Mr. Jordan: I have no further question, Sir. It was a pleasure working with my Hon. Colleague, Ms. Sonia Parag.

Programme: 755 – Health Services – \$235,300,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let us join in thanking the Hon. Minister and the staff of Region 5 for taking us through that agency. We are now turning over to Region 6. We invite the staff of the Regional Democratic Council (RDC), number six to join the Minister.

Agency: 76 Region 6: East Berbice/Corentyne

Current Expenditure

Programme: 761 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$260,691,000

Mr. Jaiprashad: Line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings: I see that the description is the Amerindian Hostel at Stanleytown. Could the Hon. Minister give us the detail as to the size of the building and the number of individuals this building would accommodate?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, this is for repairs to the roof, the walls, the floor and the closet system of Block ‘B’ Vrymens Erven. This is the RDC building. There are the repairs to the roof, the walls, the floor, the water closet system, the windows, painting and electrical. Then, there is the Amerindian Hostel at New Amsterdam repairs to the roof, the walls, the floor, the window and painting. Then, the personnel building, there are repairs to the ceiling, painting, repairs to walls, *et cetera*. The State House have plumbing works, minor repairs to the ceiling, government buildings and purchasing of wooden members, hinges, locks, screws, nails, paint, electrical materials and plumbing materials.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Could the Hon. Minister indicate the number or an average of persons who would be using the hostel?

Ms. Parag: There are 10 persons currently. There is usually 2,500. They would rotate and they would come out and go in.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Thank you very much. I have no other questions.

Ms. Ferguson: May I turn the Committee’s attention to line item 6256, Maintenance of Other Infrastructure? In 2023, we approved \$12.5 million and in the revised column here, I note the region expended close to \$3 million and change. Could the Hon. Member state for this Committee where the variance came from?

Ms. Parag: Line item 6256 does not exist in this Estimate.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, excuse me.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Ferguson: I am just confirming, are we not at pages 392 and 393 respectively?

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Ferguson: Good. Based on the document I have before me here, line item 6255 – Maintenance of Other Infrastructure, the sum of \$12.5 million was approved. [Ms. Parag: (Inaudible)]
Do not try making me anything Mdm. Parag.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, please.

Ms. Ferguson: All right, Mr. Chairman. In the revised column, I am seeing here \$16.981 million. The question to the Hon. Member, could she inform this Committee where the difference came from?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, the right line item now.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just to say that there was a virement from line item 6311 to that line item to enable that.

Programme: 761 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$260,691,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 762 – Agriculture – \$1,697,980,000

Mr. Jaiprashad: Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: We see an increase there of about \$4 million and with the actual number of employees increased by one. Could the Hon. Minister indicate the position and the emoluments for the individual or individuals?

Ms. Parag: This line item and the increase mostly caters for the 6.5 increase. There is an Agricultural Assistant who has been appointed and the salary is \$94,270.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Line item 6253 – Maintenance of Drainage and Irrigation Works: Could the Hon. Minister indicate the major areas that will be benefiting from this work?

Ms. Parag: We have 119 canals to be cleaned so I will just list those out for you. We have manual maintenance of Number 51 and Number 52 main drainage canal; manual maintenance of New Forest to Potoko; manual maintenance of Number 48 and Number 49 drainage canals; manual maintenance of Number 52 and Number 74 facade canal; manual maintenance of Maida to Eversham drainage canal; manual maintenance of Kitty Ketting dam canal; manual maintenance of Brothers west canal; manual maintenance of Kortberaad middle walk canal; manual cleaning of

Black Bush Polder front lands collector drain; manual maintenance of Branch canal; manual maintenance of Lochan Canal; manual maintenance of Joanna main drainage canal; manual maintenance of Kaboyari Creek to Torani tail; manual maintenance of Sisters western canal; manual maintenance of Sisters eastern canal; manual maintenance of Epsom/Dingwall drainage canal; manual maintenance of Ma Retraite west canal; manual maintenance of Rotterdam western canal; manual maintenance of Yakusari south front lands; manual maintenance of Mibikuri/Joanna distributary; manual maintenance of Mibikuri main drainage canal; manual maintenance of Numbers 51 to 43 facade first depth canal; manual maintenance of Letter Kenny irrigation canal.

I am happy to list these Mr. Chairman because the people would be so happy to know that all of this is being cleaned in Region 6. Manual maintenance of east Cumberland cultivation canal; manual maintenance of Ordinance/Palmyra Drainage canal; manual maintenance of Number 66 creek; manual maintenance of Grand Canal/Number 19 village area; manual maintenance of Philippi middlewalk canal; manual maintenance of Limlair/Adventure drainage canal; manual maintenance of Black Bush Pump Station to Manarabisi Pump Station; manual maintenance of channels in Gibraltar/Fyrish Farmers Association; manual maintenance of Bloomfield irrigation canal; manual maintenance of Enfield western canal; manual maintenance of Brothers eastern canal.

7.38 p.m.

Maintenance of Enfield Eastern Canal; manual maintenance of New Forest Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Alness; Number 21 Race Course Canal; manual maintenance of Johanna/Yakusari Distributary Canal; manual maintenance of Manarabisi Creek to Kaboyari Creek; manual maintenance of Torani Tail to Ekwarun; manual maintenance of Number 51 Middle Walk Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Number 35 and Number 36 Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Hack Canal; manual maintenance of Ma Retraite Canal; manual maintenance of Warren; Seawell and Borlam Pump Channels – I think the people out there are very happy to hear how their villages are being included – manual maintenance of Kortberaad eastern and western canals; manual maintenance of De Kinderendren and East and West Canals; manual maintenance of Rotterdam Sideline Canal; manual cleaning of Bengal Drainage Pump Canal; manual maintenance of Kildonan Nurney Canal; manual maintenance of Eversham Terrain Drainage Canal; manual maintenance of Friendship Eastern Sideline Canal; **[Mr. McCoy:**

What was the last one there?]

It is the maintenance of Friendship Eastern Sideline Canal - the manual maintenance of Friendship Western Sideline Canal; manual maintenance of Bush Lot Middle Walk Canal; manual maintenance of Limlair Eastern Canal; manual maintenance of Speculation Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Rotterdam Middle Walk Canal; manual maintenance of Germania East Canal; manual maintenance of Gongo Creek Canal; manual maintenance of Germania West Canal; manual maintenance of Potoko to Black Bush Polder Pump Station; manual maintenance of Sandvoort Drainage Canal; manual maintenance of Rising Sun to Bladen Hall Canal; manual maintenance of Dawn Robins to Seawell Drainage Canal; manual maintenance of Salt and Alness Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Deutchem East Canal; manual maintenance of Lesbeholden/Mibicuri Frontal Distributary; manual maintenance of Black Bush Polder Main Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Number 48 Middle Walk Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Number 47; Middle Walk Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Alness Main Drainage Canal; manual maintenance of Belmont Drainage Canal; manual maintenance of Germania Middle Walk Canal; manual maintenance of Vryheid Main Drainage Canal; manual maintenance of Kilmarnock Main Drainage Canal; manual maintenance of Wellington Park Main Drainage Canal.

Manual maintenance of Liverpool Drainage Canal; manual maintenance of Rosehall to Fyrish South Facade; manual maintenance of Bush Lot Southern Sideline Dam; manual maintenance of Bush Lot Northern Sideline Dam; manual maintenance of Nurney Canal; manual maintenance of Adventure West Sideline Canal; manual maintenance of Light Town to San Souci Facade Canal; manual maintenance of Rotterdam Middle Walk Canal; manual maintenance of Crabwood Creek facade Canal; manual maintenance of Crabwood Creek Main Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Rosehall to Fyrish North facade; manual maintenance of New Forest Drainage Canal; manual maintenance of Olverstown Western Sideline Dam Canal; manual maintenance of Manchester Eastern Sideline Canal; manual maintenance of Bush Lot/Kildonan Drainage Canal; manual maintenance of Limlair Canal; manual maintenance of Plegt Anker Drainage Canal; manual maintenance of De Kinderendren Middle Walk; manual maintenance of Lesbeholden/Mibicuri Distributary; manual maintenance of Crabwood Creek Crown Dam Canal; manual maintenance of Moleson Creek/Jackson Creek Canal; manual maintenance of Rotterdam to Highbury facade; manual maintenance of Numbers 48 and 47 Main Drainage Canals; manual maintenance of Number 5 Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Essex facade; manual

maintenance of Number 36 Brighton Drainage Canal; manual maintenance of Brighton/Kiltairn Canal; manual maintenance of Adventure to Bush Lot facade Canal; manual maintenance of Tarlogie Number 35 Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Good Land Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Number 36 Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Landcaster Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Maida Main Drainage Canal dual purpose; manual maintenance of Whim Irrigation Canal; manual maintenance of Letter Kenney/Bloomfield Main Drainage Canal; manual maintenance of Auchlyne Drainage Canal; manual maintenance of Auchlyne third and fourth Depth Canals, manual maintenance of Lesbeholden main drain...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I will have to interrupt you because I would like to call on someone to move that we suspend the Standing Order to go beyond eight o'clock to conclude the business of today. Hon. Minister Ms. Walrond, proceed.

Assembly resumed.

MOTION

Suspension of Standing Order No. 10

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Order No. 10 be suspended to enable this Sitting of the National Assembly to continue with its business beyond 8.00 p.m.”

[Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce]

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce [Ms. Walrond]: *[Inaudible]*

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Assembly in Committee of Supply

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

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I think I lost my number, so I will jump back.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. Let us ask for another question.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, how long more should we be enduring this – manual, manual, manual? We have to move on.

Mr. Chairman: That is a Point of Order.

Ms. Ferguson: They are eating into our time.

Mr. Chairman: I recognised your Point of Order, Hon. Member. I cannot dictate to the Minister how to answer.

Ms. Ferguson: I would like to ask my question before we move on.

Mr. Chairman: Sure.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Could I turn our attention to line item 6231, Fuel and lubricants? For 2023, we approved in this House, \$400 million. We have a revised figure of \$125 million, which brings the total to \$525 million. Could the Hon. Minister state for this Committee of Supply, where did the difference of \$125 million come from?

Ms. Parag: I have always admired the Hon. Member for sticking this out until whenever the Sitting is over and paying attention. Clearly, the Hon. Member did not remember or did not pay attention that there was a Supplementary budget passed in December, which catered for the difference.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Line item 6281 – Security Services: Could the Hon. Minister name the security company that will be offering services in Region 6?

Ms. Parag: It is Queensway Security Services.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Thank you. I have no further questions.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. It is now a very famous security company associated with a former security guard named Shamar Joseph.

Programme: 762– Agriculture – \$1,697,980,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 763 – Public Works – \$627,051,000

Programme: 763 – Public Works – \$627,051,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 764 – Education Delivery – \$6,903,100,000

Mr. Jaiprashad: Line item 6264 – Vehicle Spares and Services: Could the Hon. Minister indicate the number of vehicles that will be used for education?

Ms. Parag: The number of vehicles catered for under this line item is 13.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Could the Hon. Minister give the types of vehicles that will be used for education and their services?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, name the types of vehicles that are in this fleet.

Ms. Parag: We have a Hilux Surf, a Landcruiser, a minibus, a minibus, Leyland Daf truck, an Isuzu enclosed truck, a Region 6 school bus, a Region 6 school bus, a Region 6 school bus, a Region 6 school bus, a Region 6 school bus, a single cab van, a Region 6 school boat, a region 6 school bus, a region six school bus, a region six school bus, a region six school bus, and a Nissan Tida car.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Good evening. Line item 6241 – Rental of Buildings: Could the Hon. Minister tell us what are the buildings being rented? Where are they being located? What are their purposes?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, a princely sum of \$840,000.

Ms. Parag: It is the All Saints Anglican Meeting Hall, 11–14 Trinity Street. I was just about to state. It is to house the learners and teachers at the Trinity Street Nursery School.

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Ferguson, proceed.

7.53 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much for acknowledging me, Mr. Chairman. May I turn the Committee's attention to line item 6242, Maintenance of buildings? I note, for 2022 we had \$264 million, then we had for 2023, \$280 million, with a revised figure of 284 spent, however, for this

2024, the region is seeking \$300 million. Can I ask the Hon. Minister whether buildings that were maintained last year are catered for in this \$300 million now being sought? If not, which buildings will this \$300 million take care of for 2024? Thank you.

Ms. Parag: There is something called preventative maintenance, which of course by name means that you do not want to have issues with the buildings, so, to prevent that, you would affect maintenance works. That is what the line item is there for, and the money allocated is for continuous maintenance, but I would like the Hon. Member to note that I have 142 here, so I am going to just state them out to let her know which ones are going to be done. We have...

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Parag: I am not complete with my answer yet, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, just paused for a while. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, you need to stand on a Point of Order if you want to interrupt someone who is speaking.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay, Mr. Chairman. I was thinking about Standing Order 40.

Mr. Chairman: It has two sections.

Ms. Ferguson: I am trying to remember the other section, the main section. Yes, Sir, 40(a)

Mr. Chairman: One and two.

Ms. Ferguson: One, I will go with the first one.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, clearly, I do not want to put my good friend in a spot, so do you want me to help you read the Standing Order and then you can apply it?

Ms. Ferguson: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, sorry 40 has (a) it says.

“Subject to these Standing Orders, no Member shall interrupt another Member except:-

- (a) by rising on a Point of Order, when the Member speaking shall resume his or her seat and the Member interrupting shall simply direct attention to the point which he or she desires to bring to the notice and submit to the Speaker or Chairperson for decision;”

You have to submit your point to me, and I have to adjudicate whether it is a relevant Point of Order. And, if I so rule, then you get a chance to speak.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: The second part of that Standing Order... It might sound joking, but we have to stick to the rules.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you, very much, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: The person can interrupt if they want, “...to elucidate some matter raised by that Member...” who was speaking, “...in the course of his or her speech provided that the Member speaking is willing to give way...”.

I will have to ask, in this case, the Hon. Minister, to give way if you want to elucidate. You have two options, raise your point with me and I decide if it is applicable or ask for elucidation then I have to ask the Minister. I think you are safer with me rather than the Minister.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes. Sir, I will go with the first one.

Mr. Chairman: What is the point, Hon. Member?

Ms. Ferguson: Sir, in the interest of time.

Mr. Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Ferguson: This is because you know we do not have much time on this particular region.

Mr. Chairman: That is perfectly in order.

Ms. Ferguson: I would like to suggest to the Hon. Member, through you, Sir, to lay over the documents, rather than having her read out the 100-plus buildings. It would save us some time, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, very much, Hon. Member, I duly recognise your Point of Order.

Ms. Ferguson: Sir, may I add also that she has to take into consideration the staff. They have travelled some miles. Region 6, then come to Region 5 in order to get to Region 4, so we have to put that into consideration, Sir, the welfare of our citizens. Thank you, very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, very much. Hon. Member, while we are concerned about the welfare of staff and citizens, they also are committed to their work and we are not going to abuse it, but the point you have raised with respect to the applicable times that we have allocated, we can certainly raise that issue with respect to the answers being delivered. Can I now put the question on Education Delivery? Thank you, Hon. Members. Just as we are watching the clock, we only have 30 minutes remaining on this head.

Programme: 764 – Education Delivery – \$6,903,100,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 765 – Health Services – \$3,268,743,000

Mr. Jaiprashad: Line item 6264 – Vehicle Spares and Service, can the Hon. Minister indicate to us the number of ambulances that will be receiving services for the year?

Ms. Parag: This line item will cater for the regular maintenance and repairs to 29 vehicles, plus three new vehicles in the budget for 2024.

Mr. Chairman: Are any ambulances included?

Ms. Parag: Yes, please, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: I think the Hon. Member asked specifically how many ambulances.

Ms. Parag: I can list those out too.

Mr. Chairman: No. He asked how many and that is a quantity.

Ms. Parag: We have the New Amsterdam Hospital ambulance; the New Amsterdam Hospital ambulance, that is two; the New Amsterdam Hospital ambulance, that is three; Mibicuri Hospital

ambulance; the Mibicuri Hospital ambulance; Port Mourant Hospital ambulance; Skeldon Hospital ambulance; and Skeldon Hospital ambulance.

Mr. Chairman: That is how many, Hon. Minister? I want to know the quantity. Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, you have the floor.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Line item 6113 – Other Technical and Craft Skilled, under Staffing Details, Chart of Account, I notice there is a whopping loss of 17 staff members there. Was it due to resignations? What was the reason for 17 persons being lost – Other Technical and Craft Skilled? I also noticed in part two there is a whopping increase of \$9 million.

Ms. Parag: The whopping increase would also cater for the 6.5% salary increase. In relation to the other question that you asked, because there were two questions, there were some retired, one Community Health Worker died and there were some resignations.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees, I noticed there is an increase of \$8 million. There are other losses here, is it that some of the members would have gone on to the contracted... they have been in the contracted area or field, rather than going on the fixed establishment? Secondly, could you, also, account for the \$9 million increase in this? Is it due to salary increase?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, was there a first question? I understand it to be why there was an increase because the first question seemed to say that...

Dr. Cummings: Yes. I note that there is an increase in the contracted employees, so I want to know if there is any movement from the other areas, like from the permanent establishment to the contracted establishment.

Ms. Parag: This would cater for salary increases and new vacancies being filled.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I do not want to restate, but the Hon. Member sees a number of decreases in the staffing but contracted went up. All she asked was if there was movement from the establishment to contract. That is all.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister? Hon. Dr. Cummings, you have the floor.

Dr. Cummings: I will move on. Line item 6241 – Rental of Buildings, I noticed there is an increase here... Sorry, line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings. I guess the Minister might say it is preventative maintenance. Could you tell us which buildings they are and disaggregate the amount that is going to each of the buildings for maintenance?

Ms. Parag: We do have a number of buildings here and since they were called for disaggregation, I would like to state them out so that we can know who is benefiting. We have the New Amsterdam Hospital which is \$20 million and that will cater for about 250,000 patients across Regions 5 and 6 to access better healthcare facilities in a clean and tidy environment. There is the Skeldon Hospital – broken sanitary facilities, discoloured concrete building, repairs to those which is the sum of \$10 million. Fifteen thousand patients or there about are expected to benefit across Region 6 accessing better healthcare facility. There is the Port Mourant Hospital, repairs to the roof, carpentry, plumbing, electrical, walls, floors, ceiling, painting, tiling, lab, supply, and installation of windows and sanitary system. That is \$15 million and about 25,000 patients within that area are to access better healthcare facility. Then there is the Mibicuri Hospital at Black Bush Polder, and you have repairs to the walls, floors, roof, plumbing, electrical and painting, and that is \$15 million. That will cater for about 10,000 patients within the area to access better healthcare facility. There is the National Psychiatric Hospital, and they are doing repairs to buildings, roof, walls, tiling, painting, electrical and sanitary systems.

If I am just to say, Mr. Chairman, that the Hon. Member is very correct that they are preventative maintenance and that is what it is called. There is the Doctors' living quarters, which are repairs to building, roof, walls, tiling, painting, electrical and sanitary systems, that is \$3 million. There is the Doctors' living quarters number two, main and asylum, \$3 million; doctors' living quarters number three, main and asylum, \$2,000,500; doctors' living quarters number four, main and asylum, \$2,000,500; doctors' living quarters number five, main and asylum, \$2 million; doctors' living quarters number six, public road and asylum, \$2 million; Port Mourant living quarters number five, \$4 million. Mibicuri Health Centre, \$1,000,500; Skeldon Health Centre, \$2 million and this will actually cater for about 4,000 patients within the area to access better healthcare facilities; Health Centre, New Amsterdam, that is \$2,750,000 and will benefit 15,000 patients or there about within the area; there is Eversham, repairs to walls, windows, floors, ceiling and paint, \$1.2 million, 800 patients will have access to better healthcare facility; Lan-Liv-Man Health

Centre, Liverpool, that is \$1,150,000, and 750 patients benefiting from within the area; Angoy's Avenue New Amsterdam \$1 million to benefit 8,000 patients within the area; Bush Lot, \$1,200,000 to benefit 3,000 patients within the area; Port Maurant Health, \$850,000 to benefit 7,500 patients within the area; and Williamsburg Health Centre, \$850,000, 7,500 patients.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I just want to go back two. Did you say 800 and something thousand and 95,000 people benefited?

8.08 p.m.

Ms. Parag: It is 7,500.

Mr. Chairman: Did you say 7,000?

Ms. Parag: It is 7,500 persons. Williamsburg Health Centre – \$885,000 benefiting about 7,500 patients as well; Number 65 Health Centre, \$1,800,000, benefiting 6,200 patients within the area. We have Whim, \$1,800,000, and that should be benefiting 7,200 patients within that area. Brothers, East Bank Berbice, \$1,800,000, and about 5,400 patients to benefit. Fyrish Health Centre, \$3500,000, to benefit about 7,600 patients. Cumberland Health Centre, \$1,950,000, to benefit 9,300 patients. Number 47 Village Health Centre, \$3,500,000, to benefit 6,500 patients. Number 56 Village Health Centre, \$1.780 million, to benefit 6,501 patients. Bohemia Health Centre, \$1.5 million, to benefit 2,600 patients. Yakusari/Black Bush Polder Health Post, \$1.5 million to benefit 3,600 patients. These are all repairs.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. I think we have a fairly good idea of the widespread of the benefits and the extensive repairs that will be done.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6281 – Security Service, there is a whopping \$98 million increase here. Are there more locations, is there an increase in the rate of charges? Could the Minister name the security service?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, it is an increase in security guards or personnel from 107 to 197 guards, as well as there is an increase in rates. It is Queensway Security Service.

Dr. Cummings: Lastly, for me, line item 6282, Equipment Maintenance. There is an increase of \$10 million there. Could the Minister tell us which equipment is being maintained?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, you, as well as the residents of Region 6, would be happy to know that we will be placing a mobile X-ray unit, Phillip X-ray main unit, automatic processor, X-ray film eliminator, Konica monitor automatic film processor, defoliator, microscope, anaesthetic machine, ventilator unit, patient cardiac monitor, suction unit, diathermy unit, autoclave machine (medium), autoclave machine (small), suction pump, computers (50), air conditioners (100), computed tomography (CT) scans, a central sterilisation unit, haematology machine, biochemistry machine and fogging machine.

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, I just want the Minister to find out if there is a biomedical personnel there to repair these equipment, or whether they will have to come to the Ministry.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, do you have the relevant technical skills to repair?

Ms. Parag: I am advised that there is personnel with the technical skills.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships), could the Hon. Minister say if this \$13 million caters for any training for the nurses at the New Amsterdam Hospital who do not speak English?

Ms. Parag: Just one second. [Hon. Members: *(Inaudible)*]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, please, do not impute on the Hon. Minister. She has done an excellent job sitting here with her staff for the last nine hours. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Ms. Parag: There are several trainings under line item 6302. That particular training is not there in the 2024 Budget.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Could I ask the Minister if there is any system in place to ensure that the nurses who do not speak English are trained or something so that they can relate to patients in whatever language they speak, which is English Language?

Ms. Parag: There is no line item here, but if I might just appraise the Hon. Member. There is a project that is coming in the 2024 Budget that will engage all public servants, inclusive of nurses, with Spanish.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Cde. Chairman, let me ask you the question so you can understand what I am saying.

Mr. Chairman: But I cannot answer.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Perhaps, you will put it over so that the Minister can understand. There are a number of nurses who are not Guyanese and who do not speak English. There is a language barrier between the nurses and the Guyanese population that visit the hospital. I do not want to go into the details of what has happened because of that. I am asking if the region, under line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships), has any mechanism in place to train these nurses to speak English Language so that they can relate with the people in the region. That is the question I am asking.

Mr. Chairman: So, my job is to take it from you and put it to the Minister, not to interpret though. The Minister did say that there is a programme that will come on stream but is not included here. You have a chance to proffer an answer again. Hon. Minister, you could start after she finishes.

Ms. Parag: I was also about to say that the region will not do so but the central Ministry will conduct training programmes to enable these things to happen.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Programme: 765 – Health Services – \$3,268,743,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: This leaves us with 11 minutes to conclude this agency. I just want to caution, again. Persons have a tendency of asking a question and as the Hon. Ministers begin to speak, from their seats, not given the floor, they are throwing other questions/observations. An Hon. Member has to ask the question and Standing Order 40 speaks to the issue of order in the Assembly with respect to not interrupting the person on the floor.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 761 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$36,440,000

Programme: 761 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$36,440,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 762 – Agriculture – \$81,985,000

Programme: 762 – Agriculture – \$81,985,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 763 – Public Works – \$391,650,000

Programme: 763 – Public Works – \$391,650,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 764 – Education Delivery – \$287,980,000

Mr. Jaiprashad: Project code 2402000 – Land and Water Transport, the sum of \$24 million is allocated here for the provision of buses. Would the Hon. Minister indicate if this amount will be enough for the four buses for Region 6?

Ms. Parag: I do not know where the Hon. Member got four buses from, but we have one 30-seater bus catered for under this project code.

Mr. Chairman: It is one bus.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Thank you. One bus.

Programme: 764 – Education Development – \$287,980,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 765 – Health Services – \$311,400,000

Mr. Jaiprashad: Project code 2402000 – Land and Water Transport, it is for the purchase of vehicles and an ambulance. Would this ambulance be used for the Fort Canje Hospital?

Ms. Parag: The bus will be used for Fort Canje.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Thank you, very much.

Programme: 765 – Health Services – \$311,400,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Let me thank the Hon. Minister, the Regional Executive Officer (REO) – Mr. Narindra and the staff at Region 6, Regional Administration, for taking us through those estimates. As they depart, let us invite the REO – Mr. Ramotar and staff of Region 7.

Agency: 77 Region 7: Cuyuni/Mazaruni

Current Expenditure

Programme: 771 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$439,172,000

Dr. Hasting-Williams: Good evening, everyone. Line item 6255 – Maintenance of Other Infrastructure, could the Hon. Minister tell the Committee what other infrastructure she plans to earmark for the \$40.5 million?

8.23 p.m.

Ms. Parag: Under this line item, there is maintenance to solar systems at the Regional Administration and Finance building; maintenance of the mooring facility at the Administration compound; maintenance of lighting system at Kamarang; maintenance of lighting system at Paruima; maintenance of lighting system at Isseneru; facility at Paruima Landing Falls bottom; maintenance of Abou Landing; maintenance of Paruima Community Ground; and clearing of all Government compounds, brush cutting, cleaning, pressure washing of compound and Bidrabu multipurpose building.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Cde Chairman.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister turn her attention to line item 6281 – Security Services. My question is, could the Hon. Minister say what is the current contracted period for the security firm under this line item and if there is more than one for the security firms?

Ms. Parag: There is one security service, and it is from May to April, the contracted period.

Ms. Fernandes: Hon. Minister, you said from May, 2023 to April, 2024. Could the Hon. Minister say and I just want to have some clarity because we did have a supplemental in 2023 for this very security firm, which is RK Guyana Security Services. When I asked the then responding Minister,

if he could give the contracting period, he said, ‘Mr. Chairman, it is from June, 2023 to May, 2024’. Could I have some clarity on that?

Ms. Parag: Because the tender was awarded in May, the contract rate was x, y, and z, so we had to be able to cover that.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say, for the year 2024, how many additional security guards are being catered for under this line item?

Ms. Parag: There are no new personnel for the security guards catered for this year.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you. Could the Hon. Minister say if there are no new security personnel being catered for, then what will be accounting for the difference in the charges as being highlighted here? Because we had a revised sum in 2023 at \$77,694,000. This year, we have it at \$97,371,000, which is a difference of \$19,677,000. If there is no additional security, could you say what is catering for this increase?

Ms. Parag: This year’s budget is catering for what is happening this year, in terms of the increased rate that was still given from last year.

Ms. Parag: Is the Hon. Minister saying that all the locations are covered, currently? Thank you.

Ms. Parag: Yes, all of the locations are covered.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Programme: 771 - Regional Administration and Finance – \$439,172,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I will ask Hon. Mr. Seeraj to take over and he can put the next programme.

[Mr. Chairman left the Chair.]

[Mr. Seeraj assumed the Chair.]

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Members. Hon. Members, may I direct your attention to pages 408 to 409.

Programme: 772 – Public Works – \$234,748,000

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Ms. Dawn-Hasting, you may have the floor.

Ms. Hastings: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. At line item 6251 – Maintenance of Roads, could the Hon. Minister be kind enough to tell the Committee if there is any provision made under this line item for the Kako to Kamarang Road? If so, could you provide the total sum of contract for works to be done?

Ms. Parag: There is maintenance at the Kamarang/Waramadong, farm-to-market road, it is in the sum of \$9 million. As you know, we did make a commitment to ensure that farm-to-market roads are done and maintained so that farmers have that access to be able to bring their produce. We are continuing that. We also have the maintenance to Kako/Waramadong and farm-to-market road.

Programme: 772 – Public Works – \$234,748,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 773 – Education Delivery – \$2,420,752,000

Ms. Hastings: Line item 6241 – Maintenance of Buildings, Hon. Minister, is there any provision...

Mr. Seeraj: That will be 6242.

Ms. Hastings: Yes, 6242. Sorry. Could the Hon. Minister be kind enough to tell this Committee if there is any provision made for the repairs or rehabilitative work to be done on St. John the Baptist Primary School?

Ms. Parag: In this particular line item, it does not cater but I would like the Hon. Member to be aware that maintenance is currently being done on the school and is expected to be completed by tomorrow in relation to the windows of that school.

Ms. Hastings: Thank you, Hon. Minister. That is commendable.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chairman, may I have the floor?

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, you may have the floor.

Ms Fernandes: Thank you. A follow up first, Sir. I am aware and I would like to thank the Hon. Minister for giving the update that works are to be completed tomorrow at the school. However, Sir, the works and the contract that is expected to be completed tomorrow does not cater for the extension of the roofing that was requested from the Head Teacher. This is because the short zincs that were used did not do an adequate job. Could I ask the Hon. Minister if there is any plan to revisit the maintenance work that is being conducted right now so that the extension of the roof could be catered for? This is because any downpour of rain, the students will still get wet even after the current maintenance is done.

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, I appreciate you asking for the consideration, but we do have the staff who is the Regional Education Officer (REDO) for the Region 7 area. She has explained to us that she requested repairs and based on the request for repairs, the contract was given to be able to do the roof as well as the windows. I understand that the roof was done and that the windows are to be... well, we have given [*Inaudible*] we finish by tomorrow.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Ms. Fernandes, do you want to follow up?

Ms. Fernandes: Yes, Sir. I have a couple more questions.

Mr. Seeraj: Go ahead.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just want to know if the Minister could commit that consideration be made under this allocation here for that extension of the roof because I do note that the contract as is, will be completed but I also note that when the rain falls, again, if the roof is not extended, we will have a similar situation. So, definitely we need to have another small contract allocated for the extension of that roof. I am asking for that consideration to be included here.

Ms. Parag: I am advised that after the windows would have been in and secured, there will be no rain that is coming in on the children, We of course do not want a situation like that. This particular line item caters for many things; however, we will continue maintenance of schools throughout the country and the regions and ensure that our children are in a comfortable environment.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Ms. Fernandes, because of the position of your microphone, I am unable to see if the light is on or off.

Ms. Fernandes: I am not taking it off, Sir.

Mr. Seeraj: Right. That is why I was recognising the Hon. Member, Dawn Hasting-Williams, but go ahead.

Ms. Fernandes: Okay. Sir, thank you. On the same line item, I would like to know if there is any allocation here for the removal of grills or wooden bars from schools and dorms within the region?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member we do have an allocation for the maintenance of dorms, which we will utilise.

Ms. Fernandes: A follow up Sir? I want to know specifically, Mr. Chairman, through you, if there is any plan and, as a result, any allocation under this sum that will cater for the removal of grills or wooden bars from the schools and dorms within the region? I want to know specifically for this. This is because I do know that when it comes to the decentralisation of education, the list is a Ministry that has to be responsible for that particular action.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you for your inquiry, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister, you may have the floor.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, what we do have in our budget is maintenance of the dorms and we will ensure that will happen. We will also ensure that safety measures are taken in relation to these dorms as well as the schools.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. I will be following up with the Minister on this. Thank you so much Minister for that response.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: I would like to turn our attention back to 6242 and 6255 – Maintenance of Buildings and Maintenance of Other Infrastructure. In the interest of time, Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister disaggregate the sums and lay it over to the House? That is for line items 6255 and 6242.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, as much as the Hon. Member is asking to lay over, I want to be able to state what I have here and give the answers as I have them on paper here. What we have for 6255 is the Bartica teacher's quarters; we have the Jawalla Village, Upper Mazaruni...

Ms. Hastings: Is it the bridge?

8.38 p.m.

Ms. Parag: The sanitary block and water system, we have maintenance to the sanitary area and water system at Kamarang Nursey School; the maintenance to sanitary block and water system at Beach View Nursery School; maintenance to sanitary blocks and water system at Hill View Nursery School; maintenance to sanitary blocks and water system at Precious Gems Nursery School; maintenance of sanitary blocks and water system at Little Achievers Nursery School; maintenance to sanitary blocks and water system at Holy Name Nursery School; maintenance to sanitary blocks and water system at Kako Nursery School; maintenance to sanitary blocks and water system at Paruima Nursery School; maintenance to sanitary blocks and water system at Waramadong Nursery School; maintenance to sanitary blocks and water system at Future Builders Nursery School; maintenance to sanitary blocks and water system at Phillipai Nursery School; maintenance to sanitary blocks at St. Anthony's Primary School; maintenance of sanitary blocks and water system at Potaro Primary School; maintenance of sanitary blocks and water system at St. John-The-Baptiste Primary School; maintenance of sanitary blocks and water system at Agatash Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block and water system at Two Miles Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block and water system at Kaikan Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block and water system at Batavia Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block and servicing of water system at Itaballi Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block at Karrau Creek Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block at Kartabo Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block at Kangaruma Primary; maintenance to sanitary block at Isseneru Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block at St. Martin's Primary School; maintenance to sanitary block, fence and gate at Phillipai Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block and water system at Kako Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block and water system at Kamarang Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block and water system at Paruima Primary School; repairs to pit latrines and water system at Wayalayeng Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block and water system at Chinoweing Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block and water system at Arau Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block and water system at Kurutuku Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block, plumbing and water system at Imbamadai Primary School; maintenance of sanitary block and water system at Quebanang Primary School; maintenance to sanitary block and water system at Waramadong Primary School; maintenance to sanitary block and water system at St. Mary's Primary School; maintenance....

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Mr. Chairman, I think we have had enough. I asked her to lay it over.

Ms. Parag: There is the maintenance to the sanitary block at Wineperu Primary School; maintenance to the sanitary block at Wax Creek Primary School; maintenance to sanitary block at Makouria Primary School; maintenance to sanitary blocks at Holy Name Primary School; washing and cleaning of water tanks and reservoir used for drinking purposes once per term...

Ms. Fernandes: We heard the Holy Name Primary twice, Minister. Twice you read Holy Name Primary.

Ms. Parag: It is the nursery and primary. There is the maintenance to the sanitary block at Eteringbang Primary School; maintenance to sanitary block at St. Martin's Primary; weeding and cleaning of school compound twice per term; maintenance to sanitary block at Falmouth Primary School; cleaning of external drains at two secondary schools and two dormitories; weeding of three secondary schools and dormitories twice per term; maintenance of D.C. Caesar Fox Secondary School; and the maintenance of Bartica Secondary School.

Ms. Fernandes: On a Point of Order, Sir – Standing Order 40(1).

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, you have the floor.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. The question asked by the Hon. Member, Ms. Hastings-Williams, was for the Minister to lay over the information. Sir, we must appreciate the fact that Region 7, which we are examining right now, is allocated 30 minutes. While the Minister may want to take up the time so that we do not get to the other areas, we need to manage our time carefully. I am asking that the information be laid over so that we manage our time efficiently to get in questions under the other headings.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, I cannot direct the Minister on how to answer the questions. I can only facilitate the asking of the questions and for the answers to be provided by the Minister. The Minister can choose how she answers the questions.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: I specifically asked for her to lay over. I asked for her to lay it over.

Ms. Fernandes: She can say that she does not want to lay it over.

Mr. Seeraj: As I said, Hon. Members, the Chairman can facilitate the asking of questions and seek to get the Minister who is answering to provide the answers. Hon. Member, Ms. Hastings-Williams, if it is that the Minister chooses not to lay over but give the information here, the Chair is limited in that regard. The Hon. Minister can inform the Chair if she is prepared – and this has happened in the past – to lay the information over. Can we proceed?

Ms. Hastings-Williams: She can continue with the secondary schools.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, Ms. Hastings-Williams, you have the floor. We are on Programme 773.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: I have no further questions on the current expenditure.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you. Hon. Members, I think this is an appropriate time to now put the question.

Programme: 773 – Education Delivery – \$2,420,752,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 774 – Health Services – \$1,174,597,000

Programme: 774 – Health Services – \$1,174,597,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Seeraj: We now move on to pages 414 and 415.

Programme: 775 – Agriculture – \$32,950,000

Programme: 775 – Agriculture – \$32,950,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Estimates

Programme: 771 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$14,750,000

Programme: 771 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$14,750,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 772 – Public Works – \$141,700,000

Programme: 772 – Public Works – \$141,700,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 773 – Education Delivery – \$274,900,000

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. For the completion of the Waramadong Primary School, could the Hon. Minister tell this Committee what the total contract sum for the completion of that school is. Two, could she tell the Committee what is her expected completion date?

Ms. Parag: The total contract sum to compete this is \$12,681,000 and the expected completion date is 5th September, 2024.

Ms. Fernandes: Could I turn the Hon. Minister’s attention to project code 2402100, Land and Water Transport? The details state:

“Purchase of vehicles, boats and engines.”

Could the Hon. Minister say which area will be benefitting from this?

Ms. Parag: To the Hon. Member, the two areas that will benefit will be Arau and Quebanang.

Ms. Fernandes: Could you say it again?

Ms. Parag: I am sorry; it will be two boats.

Ms. Fernandes: There will be two boats. All right. Project code 2504400 – Furniture and Equipment – Education: It states here that an allocation of \$50 million is going towards the purchase of furniture and equipment for schools. Could the Hon. Minister say how much of this \$50 million allocation will cater for furniture at the Bartica Secondary School?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, there are different things being catered for. There will be gas ovens for the Bartica Secondary School’s dormitories; 75 type A hard plastic combination sets for the Bartica Secondary School; 50 tablets; 10 carbon dioxide fire extinguishers for the dormitories; 36 dry chemical fire extinguishers for the secondary as well as the dormitories; three fire alarms for the Bartica/Three Miles Secondary School’s dormitories; automatic sprinkler system for that; and seven air conditioning units which will also be in the Bartica Secondary School’s staff room. There are several others but to do that, I will also have to list all of this that I have here.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Ms. Fernandes, are you finished?

8.53 p.m.

Ms. Fernandes: I am still on the floor, Sir. I am asking specifically about the furniture for the Bartica Secondary School because, as it is right now, at the Bartica Secondary School, there are several classrooms in which the students have to sit on a rotation basis because there is not enough furniture in the school. I want to turn the Hon. Minister's attention to *Volume 2* of the Estimates, page 377 and indicator number 5. The matriculation rate, as it was reported, for Region 7 for 2023 was 14.5%. The target for 2024 is 25%. The 14.5% matriculation rate in Region 7 is less than half of the national matriculation rate, which is 34%. The Bartica Secondary School, of the three secondary schools in the region, had the lowest matriculation rate. If we actually want to get to this target of 25% for 2024, we have to provide a conducive environment for students to be able to learn. I am asking specifically if there was any consideration given or if there was a budgetary consideration for furniture at the Bartica Secondary School.

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I know the Minister of Education has been working assiduously for every single region in terms of development for our children. With respect to this, I do not believe the Hon. Member was listening before when I said that there are 75 type A hard plastic combination sets catered for in this budget, and we will continue to ensure that the schools are equipped with furniture and other things so that children can develop. Right now, what we do have are 75 type A hard plastic combination sets.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chairman, the answer will have to speak for itself. Continuing with the indicators, I am looking at indicator number 11. 1. It states:

“Grades 1-4, a minimum of 5 textbooks per child”

Sir, the indicator states that in 2023, 100% of this was accomplished and the target for 2024 is, again, 100%. Does this 100% indicate that five textbooks were given to every child or were five textbooks allotted to every school in the region for every child?

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. That is not in the line item under the region's budget or in the Ministry of Local Government...

Ms. Fernandes: It is a policy.

Ms. Parag: It will come from the central ministry.

Mr. Seeraj: The Speaker had ruled on this matter before in relation to *Volume 2* and the use and it can spark a debate. If Members want to go down that road, the Chairman will have to facilitate that based on the Standing Orders. Our purpose here is to consider the estimates, line by line. If I allow the Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, to make a presentation on this issue... Like I said, the Standing Orders provide for a debate. I do not think we want a debate at this point in time. We have already gone over the time for this by six minutes. Members have to be cognisant of that. We have time in the bank, which we are already drawing down on. It is just that you know. Hon. Minister, would you care to respond?

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I believe I responded already.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chairman, for my own clarity, are you indicating that although we have programme performance statements in *Volume 2* and I am asking a question specifically under programme 773 – Education Delivery, as we are questioning that programme, I cannot ask questions based on the indicators highlighted here?

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member, I clearly said you can, but it is not related directly to a head and the Standing Orders provide for a debate. If you want to have a debate at this point in time, when we are already over the time allocated for this head, then the Chairman will have to facilitate, and we can have a debate, in keeping with the Sanding Orders.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. I would like to take the Committee's attention to Buildings. Hon. Minister is there any provision made under this heading for other educational facilities? Is there any provision made under this project code for extension of the existing dining hall at Desrey Fox Secondary School? If not, I am aware, and I think the Regional Executive Officer (REO) and everyone is aware that the children do not have anywhere to sit and enjoy their meals when the day comes. The small dining hall is being used to accommodate some of the classes.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I did not hear you quote the number for the project code. You said "Buildings", but I did not get the project code.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: (*Inaudible*).

Mr. Seeraj: That is the first one. It is project code 1204100.

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much Mr. Chairman. We have always taken our children as priority in this country. Under the project code, we have catered for the construction of the female dormitory at the Desrey Fox Secondary School.

Programme: 773 – Education Delivery – \$274,900,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 774 – Health Services – \$227,900,000

Programme: 774 – Health Services – \$227,900,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 775 – Agriculture – \$35,000,000

Programme: 775 – Agriculture – \$35,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Seeraj: On your behalf, I would like to thank the Members of the Regional Democratic Council – the REO and his team – for their attendance here this evening. We will now move on to Agency 78, Region 8 – Potaro/Siparuni. I direct your attention to pages 420 and 421. We will allow the REO and his team to join the Minister and the Permanent Secretary and team. It is now 21:03 hrs.

Agency: 78 Region 8 Potaro/Siparuni

Current Expenditure

Programme: 781 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$227,732,000

Mr. Sinclair: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to turn your attention to line item 6264, Vehicle Spares and Services. Could the Hon. Minister account for the amount of money apportioned under this line item, please?

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Under line item 6264, Vehicles Spares and Services, we have \$2,650,000.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Seeraj: Let us allow the Minister to respond.

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The line item was 6264, Vehicles Spares and Services, and the sum allocated is \$2,650,000 for routine maintenance of the vehicles and All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs).

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, line item 6255, Maintenance of Other Infrastructure: Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to tell us what are the other infrastructures expected to be maintained?

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member. This will cater for maintenance of trestles, fences around the living quarters of the administrative staff and the Regional Democratic Council compound, repairs to fence at the staff quarters and repairs to driveway of the Mahdia RDC.

Ms. Ferguson: May I turn the Committee's attention to line item 6272, Electricity Charges? There was a voted provision of \$9 million in 2023 and the revised column is showing a sum of \$41.939 million for last year, 2023. Could the Hon. Minister provide an explanation for this variance? Since it is current expenditure, where did the difference come from since I cannot recall the region coming back to the Assembly for supplementals in 2023?

Ms. Parag: There was a supplementary budget to cover this amount and it was really because there was an indebtedness left by the previous administration, from 2015 to 2020, which this Government had to pay off. So, we had to come for a supplementary budget and that was done.

9.08 p.m.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I do not think I would want any *tit for tat* or dog fight with the Hon. Member. But if you look clearly at 2022, there was nine point something...approved in this National Assembly. Was it only in late 2023 that you discovered that the Coalition had outstanding sums for some electricity thing – some three years after? This is unacceptable. Mr. Chairman, I will move on. So, I will ask that the question be put.

Mr. Seeraj: So, is there no question, Hon. Member? Hon. Minister, there is no question.

Ms. Ferguson: Well, I can probably ask a question or follow up.

Mr. Seeraj: You are allowed. We are going through the estimates.

Ms. Ferguson: Would the \$41 million, which they expended late 2023, suffice and take care of all the outstanding moneys that the Coalition Government, as they claim, owed some electricity...and we would not see a revised in 2024?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, the indebtedness was paid off and the discovery was made early. However, the moneys were budgeted in 2023, as money came, to be able to pay off that indebtedness that was left so callously by the previous administration for this administration to pay. The Hon. Member should not be allowed to make a statement on the floor without asking a question. Just for the record.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Mr. Chairman, just for clarity, is the Hon. Minister saying that the Regional Democratic Council of Region 8 did not make this discovery in 2020, 2021 or 2022?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, there was an invoice submitted in 2023, because of records, that showed the period of indebtedness and the breakdown. That is why we had to come back for a revised budget to be able to pay that indebtedness off.

Programme: 781 – Regional Administration and Finance- \$227,732,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 782 – Public Works - \$208,769,000

Mr. Jones: Mr. Chairman, line item 6255, Maintenance of Other Infrastructure: Could you indicate what are those infrastructure?

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member. The maintenance of other infrastructure includes maintenance of two generator rooms and one trestle and septic tank, repairs to trestle and septic tank, staff quarters, repairs to generator room, Kato, and generator room, Mahdia.

Programme: 782 – Public Works - \$208,769,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 783 – Education Delivery - \$1,759,311,000

Mr. Jones: Line item 6294, Other: We note that in 2023, it was 0 and the revised was in 0, but in 2024, a request is now being made. Could the Hon. Minister indicate what this sum is going to be used for?

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member. This line item is now introduced for the first time for the region. The provision under this line will be utilised to offset the cost incurred to cash salary cheques at the Mahdia Post Office for education staff since there is no bank in the area.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6283, Cleaning and Extermination Services: I note that there is a decrease in the allocated sum. Why this decrease?

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member. The decrease in this line item is as a result of the payment for services such as weeding of compounds, washing of water tanks and emptying of septic tanks being removed and catered for under another line item which is 6255.

Mr. Jones: Thank you very much. Cde. Chairman. Line item 6133, Benefits and Allowances: We note a sharp increase from \$64.271 million to \$114.057 million. Could the Hon. Minister indicate what has occasioned this increase?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, may I ask the Hon. Member if the line item is 6133?

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. Cde. Minister, line item 6133, Benefits and Allowances.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is for the increase in Remote Areas Incentives (RAIs) for the teachers as well as for the Whitley Council payment to be made.

Mr. Jones: Just a follow-up. Is this an indication that the teachers' complement has increased, hence the amount of money requested?

Ms. Parag: As a matter of fact, Hon. Member, it is for the promotion of teachers. Teachers were promoted.

Mr. Jones: Just a final follow-up. Could you indicate how many teachers were promoted?

Ms. Parag: It is 34 teachers.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, may I quickly turn the Committee's attention to line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships)? In 2023, we had a budgeted sum of \$8.5 million and the revised column is now showing that the region expended some \$12.3 million. Can the Hon. Member state to this Committee where the variance came from? I cannot recall the region coming back to the Assembly for supplementary provisions in 2023.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Hon. Member. It was awarded in a supplementary provision.

Ms. Ferguson: For my clarification, which one of the papers? We had five Financial Papers last year. Which one of the Financial Papers?

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much. It was December. It was the last one.

Mr. Jones: Line item 6241 – Rental of Buildings: We note that the actual in 2023 was \$3.6 million, the revised is \$102,000 and we note that the Regional Democratic Council is now requesting a \$3.6 million once again. Could the Hon. Minister indicate?

Ms. Parag: The increase will cater for the provision of accommodation for teachers and officers who are appointed to perform duties in the region but reside in other regions since the region does not have adequate accommodation.

Programme: 783 – Education Delivery - \$1,759,311,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 784 – Health Services - \$627,587,000

Programme: 784 – Health Services - \$627,587,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 785 – Agriculture - \$61,731,000

Programme: 784 – Health Services - \$61,731,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 781 – Regional Administration and Finance - \$15,500,000

Programme: 781 – Regional Administration and Finance - \$15,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

9.23 p.m.

Programme: 782 – Public Works – \$111,200,000

Mr. Seeraj: I will...

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, if I may?

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

Ms. Ferguson: Take Mr. Mahipaul.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, you have the floor.

Mr. Mahipaul: This building, \$13.5 million:

“Construction of building.”

The living quarter that is being constructed there, is it to cater for the schoolteachers? If not, who are we catering for?

Ms. Parag: This allocation would allow for additional or living accommodation for staff of the public works department stationed at the North Pakaraima Mountains.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Mr. Mahipaul, do you have a follow-up or...? Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, you have the floor.

Ms. Ferguson: On that very project code, could the Hon. Member inform the Committee of the dimension that would cost \$13.5 million?

Ms. Parag: It is a 20 by 30 feet dimension flat. It is a one level building, 20 by 30 feet.

Mr. Seeraj: The length and width, Hon. Member. Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, you have the floor.

Mr. Mahipaul: I move to the other project code 1401200:

“Provision for roads.”

The description tells me it is for roads at Kato, Paramakatoi (PK) and Monkey Mountain. May I ask the Hon. Minister for the length and width of the roads that are stated to be completed at Kato, Paramakatoi and Monkey Mountain?

Ms. Parag: For the rehabilitation of the internal roadway and trails at Kato village, it is 2 kilometres (km) by 12 feet. Then the rehabilitation of the roadway and trails at Paramakatoi village which is 2 km by 12 feet and the rehabilitation of an all-weather road from Kato to Paramakatoi, phase one, 8 km by 12 feet.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Mahipaul.

Mr. Mahipaul: You can put, Sir.

Programme: 782 – Public Works – \$111,200,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 783 – Education Delivery – \$292,000,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Project code 1204400 – Buildings – Education, the sum of \$238,000,000. There are three different descriptions here: payment of retention, completion of dormitory (dorm) at Kato Secondary School and provision for schools and educational facilities. May I ask the Hon. Member to, first of all, disaggregate this sum in the three categories?

Ms. Parag: We have, for the retention, the construction of the dormitory facilities at Kato Secondary School and the payment was for 31st December and rolled over, and we have a retention.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir...

Mr. Seeraj: Hold a bit, Hon. Member.

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Then the Karisparu Primary School with a retention of \$2,863,000; the construction of the primary school – and these are the new projects –

at Kuribrong/Wailang, Potaro River; the teachers' quarters at Kuribrong/Wailang, Potaro River; construction of the primary school at Penak, North Pakaraima; the construction of the teachers' quarters at Penak; a construction of the primary school at Red creek...

Mr. Mahipaul: I need the disaggregation, the figure that is associated with each project.

Ms. Parag: The primary school for Kuribrong/Wailang – \$20 million; the teachers' quarters – \$13.5 million; the primary school at Penak – \$20 million; the teachers' quarters – \$13.5 million; the primary school at Red Creek – \$20 million; teacher's quarters at Red Creek – \$13,500,000; the construction of a secondary school at Monkey Mountain – \$26,500,000 and a primary school at Kamana – \$13,789,000.

Mr. Mahipaul: I did not hear what was the sum allocated for the completion of the dormitory at Kato Secondary School.

Mr. Seeraj: A follow-up question, Hon. Minister.

Ms. Parag: That is \$94,348,000

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask if it is for the completion of the dormitory? Could the Hon. Minister tell us how much money was spent before this \$94 million?

Ms. Parag: The sum of \$190,652,000.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask what are the specifications (specs) for this dormitory? Sir, as you know, this entire country faced a very unfortunate situation at another place in Region 8 reference to a dormitory. It is prudent on our part that we ensure it is constructed in such a way that we do not have a repeat of such, and all measures to mitigate any activity of such again must be put in place. Could the Hon. Minister tell us what the specifications are with reference to...

Ms. Parag: I do not have that with me right now.

Mr. Mahipaul: At least in the interest – and I respect the fact that the Hon. Minister does not have the answer right now – of what happened in this very region before, and considering the importance the gravity of matters of this nature, would the Hon. Minister for the first time, at least, agree with our request for her to layover the specifications?

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister, there is a request.

Ms. Parag: I am being informed by the region it would be a modern facility outfitted with the necessary fire prevention mechanisms and safety measures.

Mr. Mahipaul: We are grateful for the answer. However, given what has happened before – and I keep stressing this because we lost 20 of our future, I should say, in a fire with a dormitory – the Opposition wants to see the specifications. We do not want to hear from the Hon. Minister and use that as a guarantee. We would love to see the specifications and for it to be examined by us upon getting it, and we will draw the conclusion if it is done in keeping with international standards. Could I please...? This is for the second time.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister, there is a request by the Hon. Member.

Ms. Parag: I have answered the question, but just to say that the construction of the dormitories will be built... I am getting that commitment from the region that it will be built as a modern facility outfitted with the necessary safety measures.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, do you have a follow-up?

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir. Thank you very much, Sir. This country has a number of dormitories across it, such as in Regions 1, 2 and you can go down. It is only fitting for us as a nation to be guaranteed that indeed the construction of a dormitory at Kato Secondary School is done properly. I am asking you kindly, Sir, for the Hon. Minister, instead of dabbling in politics and telling us, with colourful cosmetic language, it will be done to specification, what is so difficult for the Hon. Minister to provide us with the scope of work, a document of a dormitory that was already awarded a sum, already in construction and already there being constructed by a company and by a contractor? All the documents are there. What is so difficult in making it public so the public can have that confidence? We had a tragedy under the PPP/C with a dormitory and we do not want a recurrence of that. Could the Hon. Minister guarantee us, by way of providing the document for us to see, that it is going to be built to specification? I am asking one more time and if the Minister does not want to submit it, the public will have to judge her for that.

Ms. Parag: While this was very unfortunate and most tragic, I do not believe anyone in this House will want to use that as any cheap political point at this point in time. I do not believe anyone should be using that and grandstanding at this point about it. The Government will take all necessary measures and I will... As a matter of fact, whatever we are building we will lay it over. Aside from that, all of the grandstanding was to say... Do you know what? Mr. Chairman, that dormitory existed during the time from 2015 to 2020. It was visited by the previous Administration and they did nothing about it. Now they come here and want to grandstand. Do you know what? It was unfortunate and it was very tragic, but we are putting measures in place in the dormitories to ensure the safety of our students.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Minister tell this House the name of the contracting firm that is currently constructing this dormitory?

Ms. Parag: I believe it was awarded to Reaz Ackbar General Construction.

Mr. Mahipaul: A follow-up: Could the Hon. Minister tell this House the percentage of completion of this dormitory?

Mr. Parag: It is about 65% completed.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Minister tell this House where are the students who go to the school and would have to be catered for staying currently?

Ms. Parag: At the primary top and the existing dormitories.

Mr. Mahipaul: Did the Hon. Minister mention another dormitory that they are staying at, that is, the existing dormitory? May I ask the Hon. Minister to provide this House with a completion date for his project?

Ms. Parag: The estimated completion date or the completion date would be 31st August.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask the Hon. Minister, this dormitory that is being constructed, is it for females alone, males alone, or males and females?

Ms. Parag: It is a complex that would be separate buildings but accommodating both male and female.

Mr. Mahipaul: The existing dormitory right now that is housing the children, both male and female, may I ask the Hon. Minister how many dormitory parents are at the female and how many dormitory parents are at the male? Could she also tell us the quota of children that are staying at the male and female in the two separate buildings?

9.38 p.m.

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Minister.

Ms. Parag: I have answered in relation to the appropriated sum under this line item, everything for 2024. What the Hon. Member is trying to do now is to see how much he can nitpick and nitpick.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I am trying to assure myself and that of the APNU/AFC, and even this nation, that our children are having the best care existing right now. For the Hon. Minister to say I am nitpicking on an issue that has to do with the lives of our children is very unfortunate. The question is straightforward, and it is a follow-up from the answers that she has provided. She indicated that it is a complex with two separate buildings. I am asking, for the world to see and to know, whether our children currently, given that tragedy, are being taken care of properly. It is not difficult for us to know the quota, in terms of how many boys are in this dormitory, how many girls are in this dormitory, and the dormitory parents, whether the amount is good enough for them to manage as dormitory parents. It is a simple request.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, you are allowed to ask the question. If you are going to make speeches, then I will have a difficulty constraining the other party. I now give the Hon. Minister the floor.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Your Honour...

Mr. Seeraj: Hon. Minister Manickchand.

Ms. Manickchand: I think it is a very important issue. I think that it is unfortunate that it is being used in this way. The Cabinet has taken a policy position, which has been disseminated to all of the regions, that the... [An Hon. Member: What Standing Order is that?] Do you want an explanation? If you want an explanation, I will give it to you. There must be X dormitory parents to a particular number of students. It is clear to me... [Hon. Members: (Inaudible)]

Mr. Seeraj: The Hon. Minister is responding to a question by the Hon. Member.

Ms. Manickchand: ...that the APNU/AFC does not want an answer. They want to stand here and grandstand. If you want an answer, I am prepared to give it to you now. [Mr. Mahipaul: I

am listening to you.] There is a ratio of dormitory parents to students. The Cabinet has disseminated its policy to all of the regions that this ratio must be met. The regions now have to comply with that by finding persons local to the regions to do it. The standards and specifications that the Hon. Member is speaking of, has been adopted and publicly declared to be what we are adopting across the regions right now in various dormitories. We will be happy to sit down with you and go through what those are so that you can feel the level of comfort we do when we are making these investments.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much for your intervention, Hon. Minister of Education, Ms. Manickchand. Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, do you have a follow-up?

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I want to thank the Hon. Minister of Education for coming to the rescue of the Hon. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development.

Mr. Seeraj: It is a matter of education.

Mr. Mahipaul: I want to further say, Sir, that I welcome the invitation for us to sit and ensure that it is done to satisfaction where we can all enjoy the comfort and guarantee that our children are safe. Thank you very much.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Just to inform you that we have gone nine minutes over the allocated time, so we are going into the time saving. Hon. Member Mr. Jones, I did not notice your microphone on, so your comments have not been recorded. If you wish them to be put into the record, you could put your microphone on.

Mr. Jones: That is okay, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Mr. Jones.

Programme: 783 – Education Delivery – \$292,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Programme: 784 – Health Services – \$236,000,000

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, project code 2402200, Land and Water Transport. Could the Hon. Minister tell us about the vehicles that are being purchased, the specifications of the vehicles?

Ms. Parag: This particular line item will purchase 4x4 ambulance vehicles at \$12 million that are required by the Paramakatoi Health Centre.

Mr. Seeraj: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. I think it is suitable for the terrain. Hon. Members, I will now put the question.

Programme: 784 – Health Services – \$236,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Programme: 785 – Agriculture – \$15,000,000

Programme: 785 – Agriculture – \$15,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Mr. Seeraj: We will now move on to Region 9. On your behalf, I thank the Members of the Regional Democratic Council of Region 8. We will make way now for the team from Region 9. Mr. Chairman will take over. Thank you all very much.

[Mr. Chairman resumed the Chair.]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we will take a five-minute suspension.

Assembly resumed.

Sitting suspended at 9.47 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 9.52 p.m.

Assembly in Committee of Supply

Hon. Members, I think when we were breaking someone made a comment that the two speakers were having a powwow. We are now inviting Region 9, where the word *pownar* is very popular.

Agency: 79 Region 9: Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo

Current Expenditure

Programme: 791 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$375,681,000

Pownar, Hon. Member, Mr. Vincent Henry. Technician. We have not started the clock, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Henry: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Henry: Line item 6115, Semi-Skilled Operatives and Unskilled, listed as 18 employees. Does the list of duties of these unskilled employees include working as labourers during normal working hours on private farms or senior regional officers' farms?

Ms. Parag: This line item caters for semi-skilled operatives and unskilled. These are persons who are employed by the region to effect the regional development programme.

Mr. Henry: Therefore, Hon. Minister, I would like to ask if all regions can be reminded of their duties. Thank you. Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: Hon. Minister, according to Staffing Details provided in 2023, there were 46 contracted employees with wages and salaries amounting to \$47,964,000. In 2024, there will be 45 employees, one less than in 2023. However, the wages and salaries for the 45 employees, one less than 46 in 2023, is \$75,664,000. There is a vast difference of over \$27 million with the one less contracted employee. Could the Hon. Minister shed light on this anomaly, please?

Ms. Parag: I beg to differ with the Hon. Member. It is not an anomaly but it is due to the 6.5% increase in salary.

Mr. Henry: I did not get that explanation, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Chairman: Repeat, Hon. Minister.

Ms. Parag: It is due to the 6.5% increase in salary. It is not an anomaly. It also caters for gratuity and so on.

Mr. Henry: Thank you. Line item 6211, Expenses Specific to the Agency – \$40 million. Could the Hon. Minister say what the stipend for teachers was in 2023, and whether or not the Toshaos will be given an increase or increases on their monthly stipends in 2024?

Ms. Parag: This Government has always, of course, held Toshaos in high esteem and we have definitely, in the National Toshaos Council and Conference, given priority during those times as well as the rest of the year in terms of allocations. There are 34 Toshaos benefitting from \$45,000, 34 Deputy Toshaos benefitting from \$30,000, 23 Senior Councillors benefitting from \$25,000, and 13 Regional Councillors benefitting from \$30,000.

Mr. Henry: Hon. Minister, the question is, can they expect an increase in their stipends in 2024?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, indeed that is a policy issue, and it is not dealing with this particular line item.

Mr. Henry: Thank you very much. Line item 6281, Security Services: Could the Hon. Minister say why or state...? The cost of this in 2023 was \$35,778,000 and now in 2024 it has moved to \$60,542,000. If it is for more security details, then, could the Hon. Minister say what are the new locations that will be serviced with security?

Ms. Parag: Hon. Member, this line item and sum appropriated is for 12 new locations.

Mr. Henry: Could the Minister be kind enough to supply us with the names of the locations?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, the Lethem RDC Guest House, RDC main office, Lethem; Annai sub-office; Aishalton sub-office; REO Quarters; Administration Training Centre; RDC Stores Lethem; Sub-Treasury Lethem; Karasabai sub-office; Sand Creek sub-office; Regional Chairman's Quarters and Amerindian Hostel.

Programme: 791 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$375,681,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 792 – Agriculture – \$115,960,000

Mr. Henry: Mr. Chairman, just a simple question. Line item 6254 – Maintenance of Sea and River Defenses: \$8,000,000: Could the Minister describe what exactly this will be used for? That is it.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, it will be for repairs of the riverbank to prevent overtopping at Tabatinga and Moco Moco settlement farmland.

Mr. Henry: Mr. Chairman, just would like to say that we wish that this budget for agriculture could be three times larger. That is all I have to say. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: You could have framed that in a question. Could not this budget be three times larger? Hon. Minister, do you need to comment on the comment?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, just to say that central government has made this investment for the people of Region 9 in agriculture.

Programme: 792 – Agriculture – \$115,960,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 793 – Public Works – \$308,145,000

Mr. Henry: Mr. Chairman, together, line item 6251, Maintenance of Roads – \$82,000,000, and line item 6252, Maintenance of Bridges – \$57,000,000: Could the Minister state if these amounts do cater for upgrading of the bridge and road that connect Lethem to St. Ignatius and the South Rupununi plus used by students to travel to school daily? Please note that during high floods the current road and bridge are inundated by high water.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, I am advised that there is already a contract at the Ministry of Public Works that will do that bridge as well as deep South Rupununi.

Programme: 793 – Public Works – \$308,145,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 794 – Education Delivery – \$2,892,544,000

Mr. Henry: Mr. Chairman, line item 6242, Maintenance of Buildings – \$80,000,000: Could the Minister say whether or not this line item covers the removal of the grills from the St. Ignatius Secondary School and to make secondary schools in Region 9 compatible with the recommendations made by the Commission of Inquiry for the recent Mahdia fire that claimed 21 Indigenous lives?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, the school does not have grills.

Mr. Henry: Mdm. Minister, the dormitories were the ones that were affected and the dormitory there has grills all around.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, right now we have alarms, we have fire extinguishers, we have security guards, and these were all new developments that have been placed there for safety measures at the dormitory.

Mr. Henry: Minister, the grills are still there, and that is the question I am asking: Will we be removing them or just leaving them there and have all the other things that you talk about?

Mr. Chairman: Is this budget catering for removing the grills?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, this line item caters for repairs to Learning Resource Centre, Lethem; repairs to Kumu Nursery, Central Rupununi; repairs to Karasabai head teachers' quarters in the South Pakaraimas; repairs to Parikwaranau Primary School, South Central; repairs the Hiawa head teachers' quarters, Central Rupununi; repairs to Karasabai head teachers' quarters; repairs to Katuur head teachers' quarters...

Mr. Chairman: Potarinau?

Ms. Parag: Katuur.

Mr. Chairman: Katuur.

Ms. Parag: Repairs to Aishalton Secondary School, Deep South Rupununi, and repairs to Karasabai Nursery.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. She did not call Katoonarib, Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, she said Katuur, small Sand Creek in other words. Hon. Member Mr. Henry.

Mr. Henry: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman; because of the seriousness and the importance of this question, I beg the indulgence of the Minister. Will there be any funds available to remove the grills and to make the female dormitory in St. Ignatius become something more acceptable?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, what is appropriated here, I have already listed all of what this appropriation (*inaudible*).

Mr. Henry: Thank you. As was said before, we cannot force the Minister to answer questions. Line item 6281 – Security Services – \$125,121,000: Could the Minister say if this amount caters for security services for educational facilities in villages in Region 9? [Ms. Manickchand: He write that down.] So what?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, this will cater for 44 locations.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Henry, do you have a next question?

Mr. Henry: I have to learn not to listen elsewhere. Thank you. Line item 6292, Dietary – \$395,000,000: Could the Minister say if this amount covers the provision of meals, including a daily lunch for all students in Region 9 attending secondary schools and including those attending St. Ignatius Secondary School and Annai Secondary School?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, this caters for the dormitory students.

Mr. Henry: Mr. Chairman, could the Minister state if there is in anywhere in this budget here—again, with her indulgence – that these children can be able to get lunch when they attend schools that are far away from their homes?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, we know you have a lovely voice, but you and the Hon. Ms. Priya Manickchand, you are not supposed to be interrupting speakers. The Minister of Local Government and Regional Development has the floor.

Hon. Members: (*Inaudible*)

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have the floor. Do not mind the interruption from both sides of the House.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, I am advised that lunch is being catered for 322 non-resident students in Annai, so that would pretty much cater for the entire school.

Mr. Henry: Thank you very much. *Half a loaf is better than a whole loaf*, but what about St. Ignatius students who live in Lethem?

Ms. Parag: Just Annai at the moment.

Mr. Henry: I will not make any other comment there. Line item 6265, Other Transport, Travel and Postage: Could the Hon. Minister say if this line item or any other line items cater for transporting secondary school students, including those from Lethem and Annai, to and from their classes on normal school days?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, this caters for the transport of the students to and from the dorm every term to whatever village they are from.

Mr. Henry: Thank you. Just to say that the hinterland is listening. Thank you. I think I am finished with that.

Programme: 794 – Education Delivery – \$2,892,544,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 795 – Health Services – \$1,260,587,000

Mr. Henry: Mr. Chairman, line item 6281, Security Services – \$72,651,000: Could the Minister say whether or not the health facilities in the outlying villages in Region 9 will be accorded security services *via* this amount?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, there will be 12 locations that will have the benefit of the security service, and that is Lethem Public Hospital, Sand Creek Health Centre, Annai Health Centre, Karasabai Health Centre, Aishalton Sub-District Hospital, Yupukari Health Centre and Nappi Health Centre.

10.14 p.m.

Mr. Henry: Line item 6292 – Dietary: There is a sum of \$49 million. Could the Minister say if this amount will cater for Aishalton, Karasabai and Annai hospitals' dietary needs? If so, how much will be allocated to each of these remote district hospitals in Region 9?

Ms. Parag: Yes. It caters for all of the patients. I cannot say the disaggregated amount at the moment but this sum, under this line item, will cater for all of the patients.

Ms. Ferguson: Could I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6281, Security Services? I noted there was a budgeted sum of \$38 million and with a revised figure of \$40 million. I noted for 2024, the region is now seeking an appropriation of \$72 million. Could the Hon. Member explain to this Committee why the vast increase? What led to this high increase? Where exactly are these security services stationed in the region?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I think the last part you answered.

Ms. Parag: That is correct, Mr. Chairman. There are 12 new locations as well as an increase for the region.

Programme: 795 – Health Services – \$1,260,587,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 791 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$20,000,000

Programme: 791 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$20,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 792 – Agriculture – \$44,000,000

Mr. Henry: For Programme 792 – Agriculture, project code 1701400, Agricultural Development, it is \$44 million and is for the provision of agriculture development initiatives. Could the Hon. Minister say if this amount caters for improving cassava production in Region 9, bearing in mind the ongoing severe shortage of this staple crop and its byproducts such as farine and cassava bread in most villages?

Ms. Parag: This particular project code does not cater for that, but the Ministry of Agriculture has been fully supplying the regions with cassava sticks as necessary and trying to get the farmers on board to produce a lot of cassava.

Mr. Henry: Just for the record, I want to say that the problem still exists. We do ask the Government to give some sort of assistance to our people.

Ms. Parag: The villages that have benefitted so far from the Ministry of Agriculture are Toka, Surama, Aranaputa, St. Ignatius, Kumu, Quarrie, Sand Creek, Parikwarwaunau and Karaudarnau. This represents 154 acres of production that have been assisted ably by the Ministry of Agriculture.

Mr. Henry: That list is just a very small number of the total number of villages in Region 9. Again, I encourage the Minister of Agriculture and others to please help the people of Region 9. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, this is the question time. You are allowed to make some statements; a debate is allowed, but you have to ask a question. I do not mind doing a session and asking questions but the question there is for the X number of villages, this is just a small number and you need to do better; increase it. Would you increase it? Hon. Minister, do you want to give a comment?

Ms. Parag: Yes. The Ministry of Agriculture has been continuously helping farmers with cassava sticks. I believe that it will continue to do so in different villages over the period of 2024 as well. I believe the Minister of Agriculture, in this debate last week, stated that.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, she said the Minister of Agriculture has additional funds and can meet your request.

Programme: 792 – Agriculture – \$44,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 793 – Public Works – \$261,400,000

Mr. Henry: Project code 1100900 – Bridges: There is \$65 million. Could the Minister say if the bridges will be made of cement and steel or of wooden quality?

Ms. Parag: This bridge will be concrete and steel structure.

Mr. Henry: We will be looking on. Public works continue. Project code 1401300 – Roads: There is \$110 million. It is for the provision of roads. Could the Minister say if the roads will be built using innovations that will allow them to withstand the effects of the normal but harsh rainy season in Region 9?

Ms. Parag: Asphalt concrete will be done, so it will be good roads.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, it is asphalted concrete great/good roads.

Mr. Henry: This is the first time I smiled for the day.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, you just brought a smile to the Hon. Member.

Programme: 793 – Public Works – \$261,400,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 794 – Education Delivery – \$273,000,000

Programme: 794 – Education Delivery – \$273,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme 795 – Health Services – \$250,000,000

Mr. Henry: Project code 2402300 – Land and Water Transport: There is \$30 million. It is for the purchasing of an ambulance and vehicles, *et cetera*. The 2022 Report of the Auditor General sections 600 and 601 on procurement cited that contracts including the purchase of a vehicle for Region 9 was awarded to a blacklisted contractor. Could the Minister give assurances that these contracts that are under this project code will not be awarded to any blacklisted contractor?

Ms. Parag: The Hon. Member would be aware that there is a national tender process that is in effect for these sorts of purchases. This land ambulance as well as the all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) will be purchase through that system. There are systems in place to ensure that proper vehicles are brought and ATVs also [*inaudible*] acquired.

Mr. Chairman: By qualified contractors.

Programme 795 – Health Services – \$250,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

I want to thank you very much, Hon. Minister, Regional Executive Officer (REO) and staff of Region 9 for taking us through that agency. Hon. Members, let us turn our attention to Region 10. I want to welcome the REO and his staff joining their Minister. Turn to pages 448 and 449.

Agency: 80 Region 10: Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice

Current Expenditure

Programme: 801 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$341,719,000

Mr. Figueira: Line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings: I would like to besiege the Hon. Minister who has been on it for quite a few hours to be very succinct in her response to the questions and please do not succumb with your responses.

Mr. Chairman: If you besiege her, she might react in equal.

Mr. Figueira: For the maintenance of buildings, the Minister will be fully aware that Region 10 has made requests for a new regional headquarters. This request was made in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and definitely in 2024. The need for it is because the hardworking public servants of the Regional Democratic Council are in dire need of a new facility. This very facility was dubbed by the Guyana Fire Service as being unsafe.

10.29 p.m.

Given the reality of us not being afforded a new building, I recognised that there is a paltry increase of a mere \$4.9 million, an increase of \$100,000. Could you say what is the level of maintenance that will be done to upkeep this building, Hon. Minister?

Ms. Parag: This does not fall under this line item which is 6242, Maintenance of Buildings. The Hon. Member is claiming that there was a request made for a new building which I believe will come under a capital item. This is not for this.

Mr. Chairman: He did make a statement for the need. The Hon. Member was asking what you are going to do with the paltry increase of \$100,000 to \$4.9 million.

Mr. Figueira: Pay attention; I know that you are tired.

Mr. Chairman: I hope I paraphrased it properly.

Mr. Figueira: Most definitely, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, it is not a paltry increase of \$100,000. There is the figure of \$4,900,000 which is still there for 2024. I think the Hon. Member is just looking at the increase and not just the overall figure that is there for 2024 for maintenance of buildings.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Chairman, it is an increase by \$100,000. Irrespective of the wholesomeness of the figure, it increased from \$4.8 million to \$4.9 million, so the increase is by \$100,000 but you still did not answer the question. **[Bishop Edghill: (Inaudible)]** Of course not; that is why I asked, what will this do with regard to the maintenance of the building as it is?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, what will \$4.9 million do?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, it will maintain things that need to be maintained, such as things for the facility, works to be done on the washroom and purchase of door locks, polyvinyl chloride (pvc) paste. Those are things that are in need of repairs and maintenance. I believe those were requested by the region.

Mr. Sears: I would like to turn our attention to line item 6117, temporary employees. Of course, as representatives of Demerara/Berbice, we champion employment opportunities. However, we have noticed that in this particular line item, those temporary workers have dropped from eight to four. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister if these jobs that were lost were attached to temporary employees, those 10 days workers?

Ms. Parag: First of all, the decrease is by two and not four. It is six to four. Also, these temporary employees, again, come under the public service inventory. It is not a part of the part time programme.

Mr. Sears: Hon. Minister, could you please share what those employees?

Ms. Parag: We have now: the Handyman, Office Assistant, Checker and Caretaker.

Mr. Sear: I would like to ask the Hon. Minister, according to line item 6264, vehicle spares and services, there is a noticeable reduction in spares and supplies. Is this an indication of a repairable or depletion of the vehicle fleet?

Ms. Parag: May I ask the Hon. Member about what he said? Is it decrease or increase?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, did you say increase or decrease?

Mr. Sears: I said decrease.

Ms. Parag: This line item caters for an increase in the 2024 Budget. I am looking at line item 6264. In 2024... Yes. there is a decrease.

Mr. Chairman: Which line item are we on?

Mr. Sears: We are at line item 6264, vehicle spares and services.

Mr. Chairman: At line item 6264, decrease from the revised.

Ms. Parag: There is [*inaudible*].

Mr. Sears: With regard to line item 6281, security services, could the Hon. Minister please give an overview? This would be if any Linden company has been awarded this contract.

Ms. Parag: Again, this security contracts went through an opened tender process, through the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) and was awarded to the security service that is there.

Mr. Sears: Line item 6312 – Subventions on Local Authorities: Could the Hon. Minister share which local authorities are benefitting from this line item?

Ms. Parag: The increase in this line item is to maintain the Ituni and Kwakwani sub-district.

Programme: 801 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$341,719,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 802 – Public Works – \$253,364,000

Mr. Figueira: Line item 6251 – Maintenance of Roads: Could the Hon. Minister state which roads are to be maintained? Which part of the community those roads are located?

Ms. Parag: This will be maintenance of First Street, South Amelia's Ward and also Wisroc, second left Wismar Housing Scheme.

Mr. Figueira: Did you say Second left of Wisroc?

Ms. Parag: I said Wisroc Second Left Road.

Mr. Sears: To the Hon. Minister, I would just like to confirm that no roads will be maintained in Ituni, Rockstone, Block 42 or Kamaka.

Ms. Parag: That will come under the Ministry of Public Works, I am advised.

Mr. Figueira: Line item 6252, maintenance of bridges: could you identify the bridges for me?

Ms. Parag: This will be in Sunflower Street Wismar. There will be repairs and maintenances to Sunflower Street access bridge which will provide access to residential area, nursery school and farming area. The beneficiaries are approximately 2,500 residents.

Mr. Figueira: Line item 6253 – Maintenance of Drainage and Irrigation Works: Where exactly this will be done?

Ms. Parag: This will be about 560ft at Independence Avenue McKenzie. The repairs are to the failed section of drainage walls, impeding flow resulting in flooding of private properties, trying to alleviate that problem and this would benefit about 20,000 residents.

Mr. Figueira: This maintenance here with regard to the drainage and irrigation, would the region be seeking advice from the Guyana Water Inc (GWI)? Linden is peculiar with regard to drainage and irrigation, and the laying of pipes. There are the Seamac Piping Solutions Inc. who put down pipes and the Ministry of Housing put down pipes. There is a mix up of the network of pipes layout. We have water sometimes going nowhere. The GWI has done some work to ensure the mapping out of the area as well as, ensured there was no wastage. That is why I am asking if there would be some collaboration with GWI here with regard to this.

Ms. Parag: I am also advised and informed that there will be collaboration with the GWI.

Mr. Sears: Line item 6254 – Maintenance of Sea and River Defences: I would like to ask the Hon. Minister if any work along this line item will be done along Burnham Drive, Wismar. Currently, there is a situation whereby the ships come in and, at a fast pace at times, it is washing away and causing erosion.

Ms. Parag: Yes. In fact, this does apply to the Burnham Drive.

Mr. Sears: Could the Hon. Minister share the amount that is allocated to that specific project?

Ms. Parag: It is \$10 million.

Programme: 802 – *Public Works* – \$253,364,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the *Estimates*.

Programme: 803 – Education Delivery – \$4,426,950,000

Mr. Sears: Line item 6113 – Other Technical and Craft Skill: There is a noticeable increase of the staff complement to basically amounting to 239. Could the Hon. Minister state which positions have been opened during this period?

Ms. Parag: Let me just understand the question, is it in relation to why the increase?

Mr. Sears: The positions and, of course, you are going to say why the increase.

Ms. Parag: We have two welfare officers employed. For the nursery: one Temporary Qualified Master/Mistress (TQM) and two temporary unqualified master/mistress, 56 temporary qualified master/mistress, three. For the primary: temporary qualified master/mistress, one; temporary qualified master and mistress, three; temporary unqualified master/mistress librarians. For the secondary: TQM, one; TQM, two; and TQM, three. For the TQM, three, for the secondary school it is 99.

10.44 p.m.

Mr. Figueira: A follow up. on the same line item, Mdm. Minister, does this line item also cater for Guidance Counsellors and Social Workers?

Ms. Parag: Yes. It does, please.

Mr. Figueira: Could you state how many schools these Guidance Counsellors and Social Workers are servicing?

Ms. Parag: All seven of the schools have Guidance Counsellors. So, that is seven.

Mr. Figueira: Is it catering primarily for the secondary schools?

Ms. Parag: Yes.

Mr. Figueira: How many did you say?

Ms. Parag: It is seven.

Mr. Figueira: Could you disaggregate how many Social Workers are at the respective seven schools you mentioned?

Ms. Parag: There is one Social Worker at each school.

Mr. Figueira: There is one Social Worker; are you certain about that?

Ms. Parag: The schools have the Guidance Counsellors as well as Welfare Officers.

Mr. Figueira: Why I am asking – I am aware that the Ministry of Education embarked on a programme to incorporate Social Workers in the schools. The fact of the matter is that we have several trained teachers who did the programme and are also qualified as Social Workers. I am wondering if the skillset of the teachers who are in the school already and have the qualifications is being utilised. Is that being accommodated? Is the fund that has been allocated caters for the extra work those teachers will likely have to do?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you seem to have some volunteer Social Workers.

Mr. Figueira: Yes.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, what we have are Guidance Counsellors for each school. I am advised now that we have three Welfare Officers attached to the department. This caters, under this line item, for these numbers of teachers who we have as well as the Guidance Counsellors.

Mr. Figueira: Is there a designated room that caters for the services of the Guidance Counsellors at those respective schools?

Ms. Parag: Four of the schools have rooms. They are in the process of creating that space for the Guidance Counsellors in the other schools.

Mr. Figueira: Mdm. Minister, could you give a sense of how these rooms are furnished to facilitate the counselling that will be required? Is it a regular classroom or is it outfitted with the type of

furniture and environs that will cater for children to be relaxed and, moreso, facilitate confidentiality between the victims and the Guidance Counsellors?

Ms. Parag: This particular line item does not cater to the furnishing of that room. As the Hon. Member is on the floor asking, there is a desk along with two chairs that will accommodate the Guidance Counsellor as well as the person who would be counselled.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, you are on a particular line item and what you are asking about is catered for under another line item.

Mr. Figueira: I will follow-up with the Minister of Education.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Chairman, I turn your attention to line item 6116 – Contracted Employees. There is an increase from 156 to 211. It is commendable I must say. I would like to have an overview of who these new employees are. Also, to go as far as asking if any of them might be attached to Wikki/Calcuni and Wairuni.

Ms. Parag: These contracted employees are Cleaners in the administration, the nursery, primary and the secondary schools.

Mr. Figueira: Line item 6292 – Dietary: We have seen a significant increase in the allocation. There is \$67.36 million for Dietary. Is this going to cater for all levels of the schools for the children in Region 10?

Ms. Parag: I am advised that this will cater to breakfast for the dormitories as well as six secondary schools for the first time.

Mr. Figueira: Let me allow the Minister's clap to register. Which dormitories are these? Could you identify them? We have several dormitories.

Ms. Parag: This will cater for the dormitories in Amelia's Ward and Kwakwani.

Mr. Figueira: The Regional Executive Officer can guide you, Mdm. Minister. There is also a dormitory that is supposed to be catered for at the Linden Technical Institute (LTI). Would this allocation cater for those students as well?

Ms. Parag: This is catering for the secondary school dormitories students at Amelia's Ward and Kwakwani. The breakfast programme has now been taken to six new schools – Harmony, Wisburg, New Silvercity, Linden Foundation, Kwakwani and the Christianburg Wismar Secondary Schools.

Mr. Figueira: Is it catering for the entire school population of the respective schools?

Ms. Parag: I am also advised that it is for vulnerable students and those who have expressed a need for breakfast.

Mr. Figueira: Is the Department of Education furnished with the information on how many children in the respective schools are considered to be vulnerable? How was that measured? Was there a Means Test?

Ms. Parag: This caters for 465 students in total.

Mr. Figueira: Is this in total? Could we have a disaggregation for this?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I have been a bit lenient with you.

Mr. Figueira: You have my apologies, Sir. The Minister is very accommodating.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, please. Hon. Minister, are you finished with the answer? Thank you. Hon. Member, now you may ask.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. Could you disaggregate the total number for the respective schools?

Ms. Parag: We have for the Amelia's Ward Student Hostel – 80; Kwakwani Student Hostel – 50; Harmony, 80; Wisburg Secondary School – 60; New Silvercity Secondary School – 50; Christianburg Wismar Secondary School – 45; the Linden Foundation Secondary School – 50; and the Kwakwani Secondary School – 50.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you. Additionally...

Ms. Parag: The Hon. Member would appreciate that this is a work in progress and that we have started with six new schools.

Mr. Figueira: Is the provision of the meals five days a week or is it staggered?

Ms. Parag: It is five days a week.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you. The preparation of the meals – is it going to be guided by a Nutritionist to ensure that the children are given nutritious meals?

Ms. Parag: It is guided by a Nutritionist.

Mr. Figueira: The schools, in particular, the secondary schools, have Home Economics Departments. Is it going to be given to the Home Economics Departments to prepare the meals or is it going to be a tender process?

Ms. Parag: It will be done through a tender process.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you.

Mr. Sears: For line item 6242, Maintenance of Buildings, I would like to ask the Hon. Minister – is the teachers' quarter at Kwakwani catered for? Currently, those teachers there are living in a deplorable state. They are forced to endure bat droppings and mosquito infestation because of the water that is settled under their accommodation. I am just asking the Hon. Minister if this is catered for.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, may I ask the Hon. Member to just refer me back to if he was speaking about the Kwakwani Primary or Nursery School?

Mr. Sears: I was talking about line item 6242, Maintenance of Buildings.

Ms. Parag: Yes.

Mr. Sears: I am asking for clarity – if the Kwakwani teachers' dormitory is catered for.

Ms. Parag: I am advised that work is currently ongoing and is to be completed shortly on the Kwakwani teachers' quarters.

Mr. Sears: I just have a quick follow-up question on the same line item, Mr. Chairman. Could the Hon. Member state which schools are being maintained in the Indigenous communities according to this line item?

Ms. Parag: Yes, Mr. Chairman. We have Kwakwani Park Nursery School and the Kamaka Nursery School. Those two are on this list in addition to many others.

Mr. Sears: Could you just repeat? It is the Kwakwani Park Nursery and which other school?

Ms. Parag: It is the Kamaka Nursery School.

Mr. Sears: It is the Kamaka Nursery School.

Mr. Figueira: Line item 6284 – Other: Could the Minister give us an understanding with regard to what this allocation will be utilised for?

Ms. Parag: Thank you very much. For Other, we have the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA); the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC); the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE), the Guyana Technical Education Examination (GTEE), the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE); education management; the payment of four Mathematics and English Specialist; the payment of five Primary Education Improvement Project (PEIP) Facilitators for the NGSA; the payment for cooks on the breakfast programme at secondary schools; service contracts; employees' National Insurance Scheme (NIS) contributions; and the payment of board members. That caters for those.

Ms. Figueira: Did I mishear you, Minister? Did you say the payment of NIS? I am looking at line item 6134, National Insurance, where there is a significant increase of \$48.245 million. Could you give greater clarity with regard to what you just mentioned and then come to this particular line item which speaks specifically to NIS?

Ms. Parag: I am advised that the NIS contributions for the Handyman, Boat Captains and so on are paid under this line item.

Mr. Figueira: Is that for line item 6284, Other?

Ms. Parag: Yes.

Mr. Figueira: All right, could you give greater clarity with regard to this increase of \$48.245 million at line item 6134 that deals with NIS?

Ms. Parag: That will accommodate all the other NIS payments.

Mr. Figueira: Pardon?

Ms. Parag: That will accommodate all of the other NIS payments.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, please, now let us come through the Chair. If you want to take this outside after we finish that is fine. Come on. Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, you have the floor.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you. Thank you. I am trying to understand the increase.

10.59 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: I see you think a lot on your feet, like the Hon. Member, Shurwayne Holder. Maybe, you will let us put all these questions on the floor because to have the conversation going on between the two of you and leaving us out, I cannot permit that.

Mr. Figueira: Okay, Mr. Chairman, let me go a bit slower.

Mr. Chairman: I can give you the floor, we will go the tedious process, give the Minister the floor, come back to me, I will give you the floor...

Mr. Figueira: Are you giving it to me now?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you. Line item 6134, National Insurance Scheme (NIS), we would have seen...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, NIS ...

Mr. Figueira: I am not finished.

Mr. Chairman: No. I am just telling her because she seems distracted.

Mr. Figueira: It is a build-up, hold on. There was \$58.546 million, then I see an increase of \$206.89 million. An increase of \$48.245 million. I am trying to figure out who this extra \$48.245 million will be catering for. Is there any increase of employees? I need to have an understanding there.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, have we moved on to a different line item because we were previously under a line item that dealt with NIS? Have we moved on to the NIS line item.

Mr. Chairman: I do not know if we have moved on. That is what I was cautioning the Hon. Member about previously. Let us identify the line item.

Mr. Figuera: When I asked the question on ‘Others’ – 2945, the Minister made mention of NIS. She clarified stating that it is to cater for the boat operators and the labourers, I believe. Am I correct? [Ms. Parag: *Inaudible*] Good. That brought my attention to the allocation of 6134 which deals specifically with NIS. This line item has an increase of \$48.25 million. I wanted you to give clarification with regards to how this increase came about and who will it cater for.

Ms. Parag: It seems we are now answering the question under another line item.

Mr. Chairman: Exactly.

Ms. Parag: That NIS with a 6.5% increase or any increase, will become an increase in NIS. You will have a jump in that amount.

Mr. Figueira: Line item, 6302, Training (including Scholarships), could the Minister indicate to us what level of training the \$7.5 will be utilised for or I see scholarship? What would it be used for?

Ms. Parag; We will have a training with the mothers’ forum. This is to equip mothers with the skills needed to help support the schools’ curriculum at home; conduct nursery headteachers meetings; facilitate training on the alphabetical principles to equip teachers.

Mr. Figueira: Mothers’ forum?

Ms. Parag: We are under Education Delivery, so... To equip teachers with the knowledge, skills and understanding to effectively teach the alphabet and to facilitate fathers with the skills needed to help support the schools’ curriculum at home; to allow heads of department to meet on a monthly basis to strategize on training, professional development sessions with teachers and how they can effectively impart their knowledge and literacy focus.

Mr. Figueira: You said the mothers' forum, is this a new introduction? If so, who are these mothers? Is it the mothers of the children of the schools or is it teachers who are mothers?

Ms. Parag: It is not something that is new. It is the mothers of the community. For example, this is catering for about 60 mothers who are participants. It is a continuous programme. It is not for the first time. It is also for the fathers.

Mr. Figueira: What are you training these mothers for? Is it Information Technology (IT)?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, I did not ...

Mr. Figueira: My apologies, Sir.

Ms. Parag: These trainings are to equip the mothers with the necessary skills to help them to support the schools' curriculum at home. When your children go home, the mothers can be able to effectively teach their children at home as well. I think it is a wonderful initiative.

Mr. Figueira: I really appreciate your tone and your cordiality with me, unlike Mr. Mahipaul. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, I think you have exhausted your time. You want to carry on a conversation with the Minister who is looking...

Mr. Figueira: That is my preamble to the question, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: No, but you are not talking to me.

Mr. Figueira: Am I not entitled to a preamble, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: This is the preamble, "Mr. Speaker, Mr, Chairman, I would like to ask the Minister if she can...". Not you pointing to the Minister. I am not an appendix here. Come on.

Mr. Figueira: I hear you. Once again, Mr. Chairman, I take your guidance. Mr. Chairman...

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Figueira: I was saying to the Hon. Minister...

Mr. Chairman: No, say it to me.

Mr. Figueira: Cde Chairman, I appreciate the Hon. Minister's cordiality and her calm demeanour in response...

Mr. Chairman: Yes, and *familiarity breeds contempt*.

Mr. Figueira: I trust that my Colleague will learn something from it. Mr. Chairman, I would like to give way to my other Colleagues.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, very much. You think well on your feet. Hon. Member, Mr. Sears, you may have the floor.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Chairman, I would like to go back a bit. Line item 6254, Maintenance of Sea and River Defenses. There is a notable increase from 0 allocation to \$30 million. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister what constitutes this increase and if this is an appropriate allocation? This is because, traditionally, Sea and River Defenses fall under Public Works.

Ms. Parag: This is actually not an increase. It is a new line item that is being introduced now. It is for repairs and maintenance to existing structures, strengthening revetment and stelling, repairs to pressure pumps, repairs to the damaged sections of the stelling... [Bishop Edghill: Flood protection.] Yes, flood protection and general repairs and maintenance.

Mr. Sears: Could you share where exactly this project will be executed, which schools or educational department?

Ms. Parag: It will be Kimbia Primary School, Berbice River; Gaetroy Primary School; Sandhills Primary School; and Hururu Primary School in the vicinity of those rivers.

Mr. Sears: Hon. Minister, I really appreciate this new initiative because those students are in dire need of these kinds of support.

Mr. Chairman: I know it is getting late, but you cannot decrease the volume. We are not hearing.

Mr. Sears: Alright, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: If you decrease the volume you have to come closer to the microphone.

Mr. Sears: Thank you, very much. Line item 6291, National and Other events, I would like to ask the Hon. Minister which other national events, other than Mashramani, does this line item cater for?

Ms. Parag: There are several things it caters for. You have the conduct of regional secondary spelling bee; secondary competitions; seminars for International Women's Day, International Men's Day; Mother's Day and Father's Day activities; to facilitate literacy exhibition in observance of International Literacy Day. There are several different programmes.

Programme: 803 – Education Delivery – \$4,426,950,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 804 – Health Services – \$1,231,786,000

Mr. Sears: Line item 6221, Drugs and Medical Supplies, I would like to ask the Hon. Minister, if I may, on a policy base, at what percentage are drugs replenished or the request made?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, the policy on replenishment of drugs.

Ms. Parag: There is a 25% benchmark for the replenishment. Also, I do believe there is a 'NIL' list that is produced by the different health centres and the hospitals that assist in telling you what is needed.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Chairman, outside of education and employment, healthcare is indeed an area of focus on the interest for the residents of Region 10. There has somewhat been a noticeable increase of out-of-town patients requesting the services of the Linden Hospital Complex and health centres. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister if the allocation or further provision of drugs is sufficient to accommodate those new patients?

Ms. Parag: That would be a matter for the Ministry of Health's budget. The Linden Hospital comes under the Ministry of Health.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Chairman, I know that I should not be asking about policies, but with regards to the Indigenous...

Mr. Chairman: Yes, you can ask about policies for which the appropriation is being sought.

Mr. Sears: Okay, thank you. With regards to the Indigenous villages, what mechanisms are in place for the distribution of drugs?

Ms. Parag: I am advised that when they receive drugs from Materials Management Unit (MMU), it takes a two-week period for distribution to the health centres as well.

Mr. Figueira: I have a follow up on that said question, with regards to the request from MMU. This was flagged in the *2022 Report of the Auditor General*. One of the observations of the Auditor General with regards to the breaches in the Procurement Act for Region 10, where the maximum for the three quotes is \$3 million, there was a total of 11 breaches, amounting to \$66.791 million. You made mention of the request to MMU. Cde. Chairman, the reality is that because of the chronological order of how these drugs are requested, Region 10 usually gets its request last.

[**Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*] That is in the *Report of the Auditor General*. Tell the Auditor General (AG) that, not me.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, somehow, maybe, we will need to get some medication for you.

Mr. Figueira: Yes, Mr. Chairman, because of this observation by the Auditor General of Guyana, it is a matter of concern for us in the region, given the fact that we have the finances to procure the drugs but when those requests are made and because of the chronological order, based on what the AG has said, we usually get no drugs, or we get it late. How could this be addressed? [*Interruption*]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, please...

[*Mr. Chairman hit the gavel.*]

Hon Member, Mr. Figueira, we are dealing with the line item here that speaks to Drugs and Medical Supplies, line item 6221, under Health Services for Region 10. If we are going to deal with the Materials Management Unit that central purchases come through the Ministry of Health...

11.14 p.m.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Chairman, respectfully, Sir, this is dealing with the supply of drugs for Region 10, the allocations to Region 10 - portions of it...

Mr. Chairman: All I am saying to you, Sir, is that...

Mr. Figueira: I am saying a portion of it is warranted to the Ministry...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, all I am saying to you is, there are two different heads. One that we have been speaking about, the MMU, does not fall under this. So, the Auditor General Report that you are reading from – the MMU – that is a different process. The regions do get money to buy drugs also. So, you could apply the same principle, as in the MMU, but you are using them synonymously, as far as I can understand. Let us confine our comments to the drugs being purchased under this programme and under this line item.

Mr. Figueira: I agree. I am saying to you, Cde. Chairman, that we are dealing with line items that deal with drugs and medical supplies. The drugs that have to be supplied to Region 10 comes from MMU. I am saying that the process puts the region at risk of not having the drugs on time.

Mr. Chairman: All I am saying, and the Minister has alluded to earlier, this is the drugs that is purchased by Region 10.

Mr. Figueira: No further questions.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Chairman, I just want to touch on line item 6224, Print and Non Print Materials. Of course, there is almost a consistent allocation here, but I would like to just ask the Hon. Minister, if you may permit me, Sir, with regards to... Because Region 10 is so large and we have a lot of Indigenous communities, the methods that possibly are being used to disseminate information, might not be the same as those living in Kwakwani or Linden. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister what mechanisms are in place with regard to those outreach communities.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, there is an educational corner in all of the health facilities I am advised. They would have a lot of posters that can educate the public in relation to several health-related issues.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Chairman, just one consideration, I hope that the Minister can have with regards to this line item. There are some folks within those Indigenous communities that cannot read. I am just suggesting, if I may, Sir, that, maybe in-person sensitisation might be more effective than posters. That is just one consideration I hope that you will make, Minister. But just wrapping up

this, I would just like to, Mr. Chairman, if we can turn to 6261, Local Travel and Subsistence and this feeds into outreaches. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister, for the year 2024, how many scheduled medical outreaches is Linden being catered for – Region 10, Sir.

Ms. Parag: Outside of the Print and Non-Print line item, which we are under right now, there is a medical team that conducts outreaches in all of the villages. I am also advised that, for 2024, it will be a monthly and it is a monthly activity already and will continue as a monthly activity. For every quarter, there is specialised outreach to the outlining areas.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, so, those visits are under 6261, a different head?

Ms. Manickchand: Different – exactly.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, please, if we are using one head and you want to move on, we have a lot of time remaining, 80 minutes, so we can go until midnight. You can go, but just do not switch without identifying where the question is coming from because...

Programme: 804 – Health Services - \$1,231,786,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 805 – Agriculture – \$44,721,000

Programme: 805 – Agriculture - \$44,721,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 801 – Regional Administration and Finance – \$3,000,000

Mr. Figueira: I have one question for this project code 2505500 – Furniture and Equipment, which is for the improved operational efficiency of the Regional Democratic Council (RDC). Can the Hon. Minister identify, not the furniture, but what equipment will be procured for the improved efficiency of the work of the RDC.

Ms. Parag: We will have one heavy-duty copier, four computers with a complete backup system, and one laptop and that is it for equipment.

Mr. Figueira: Those four computers, can you state which department they will be put for use?

Ms. Parag: It will be two for accounts, one for registry and one for the Ituni sub-office.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Chairman, I want to ask the Hon. Minister if there are any provisions for a vehicle for the Vice Chairman. I withdraw.

Programme: 801 – Regional Administration and Finance - \$3,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 802 – Public Works – \$135,050,000

Mr. Figueira: Cde. Chairman, project code 1101000 – Bridges, I recognise that there is going to be an upgrade of the bridge at Dallawalla. Can the Minister state what type of bridge it will be? Will it be concrete or wood? What is the length and the width of this bridge? And, additionally, can it facilitate the use of vehicular traffic?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, it will be a timber bridge, 51 feet in length and 16 feet...

Mr. Figueira: I was distracted. Cde. Chairman, could you please repeat?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, can you start over.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, I am answering the line item for the Dallawalla Bridge. It is timber, 51 feet in length and 16 feet width.

Mr. Figueira: Project code 1401400 – Roads, could the Minister indicate to us how many roads will be built in Amelia's Ward, in Wisroc, at Mackenzie, where in Mackenzie and where in Wismar? Could you also say simultaneously, in your response, would it be concrete or asphalt road or would it be both?

Ms. Parag: You will have the rehabilitation of Creek Road, South Amelia's Ward and that is asphaltic concrete, and it will benefit approximately 15,500 residents and commuters. You have the rehabilitation of Louis Street, Wisroc, and that is also asphaltic concrete, and that will benefit about 25,000 residents. You will have the Community Centre Road, Central Amelia's Ward, Main Street to Grahams Avenue, that will also be asphaltic concrete and it will benefit approximately 15,000 residents. Then you have upgrading of carriageway at Success Avenue, Linden and that will be asphaltic concrete and benefiting about 1000 residents. Then you have upgrading of Well

Road, South Amelia's Ward, asphaltic concrete, approximately 10,000 residents will be the beneficiaries and you have upgrading of carriageway, Redwood Crescent Republic Avenue, asphaltic concrete, benefiting approximately 40,000 residents.

Mr. Figueira: I appreciate your response, Hon. Minister. The roads that will be built, will all of those roads facilitate the traversing of two vehicles simultaneously on the road, can you specify if all of the roads will have the same width, and what would that be?

Ms. Parag: It will accommodate two vehicles at the same time on the road.

Mr. Figueira: Yes, can you say what is the width? Additionally, to that, since I am on the floor Cde. Chairman, would all of those roads be bordered with drainage or shoulders.

Ms. Parag: Shoulders, please.

Mr. Figueira: I did not get the width, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: It can accommodate two cars, she said.

Mr. Figueira: Yes, but different widths can accommodate two cars too.

Ms. Parag: 16 feet.

Mr. Figueira: Will all of the roads that you made mention of, Cde. Chairman, have the identical width?

Ms. Parag: Yes, please.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Chairman I would just like to turn to project code 1901700, Infrastructure Development, with the key focus on particularly Wismar. It says here, "Provision for upgrading of drainage". I would just like to ask the Hon. Minister to share with us which drainage systems are being upgraded on Wismar shore.

Ms. Parag: We will have continued upgrading of drainage system and associated structures, culvert, headwall, wing wall and bridges, Sharon George Road, Wismar, Linden. We will have continued upgrading of drainage system and associated structures at Purple Heart Street. You will also have the same at Planka Road, Wismar area.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Chairman, in this allocation for Mackenzie, is consideration given to Republic Avenue whereby, when we have heavy rainfall, certain parts will be flooded?

Ms. Parag: The ones that I have just listed is what is here for this line item.

Mr. Figueira: I did make mention, Cde. Chairman, with regards to the drainage upgrade, and the importance of Guyana Water Incorporated's (GWI's) involvement in the mapping out of this area because of how Linden was given different piping network from Seamac Piping Solutions Incorporated (Inc.) and housing, and different institutions. Can you state, specifically, if GWI will play an integral role in giving guidance to the laying of these drainage network.

11.29 p.m.

Additionally, would it be facilitating the installation or would a space be provided for the installation of fire hydrants in those upgraded drainage network that this particular project code would be catering for?

Ms. Parag: I am advised that GWI will be collaborating with the RDC.

Mr. Figueira: Would the design facilitate the idea of catering for fire hydrants in those particular communities where this will be put? There is none and we have seen a plethora of fires across the country, and we definitely need to put measures in place to preserve people's homes.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister, you have the floor. Fire hydrants? No, Minister. Hon. Members, I think we have exhausted the questions and I now put the question that the sum stated for programme 8...

Mr. Sears: Mr. Chairman, if I may?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Sears, you have the floor.

Mr. Sears: Just a quick observation with regard to the...

Mr. Chairman: I need a question and not an observation.

Mr. Sears: Yes, and which leads to a question. This is with regard to roads. This is going back to what the Minister had mentioned earlier with regard to the roads that are being done in Amelia's

Ward, particularly, which the Hon. Minister mentioned would benefit 25,000 people. In Region 10, we have just about 40,000 people. Is the Hon. Minister saying that there is evidence of 25,000 people or residents living in Amelia's Ward?

Ms. Parag: It is referring to residents and commuters, those who will be traversing that area.

Programme: 802 – Public Works – \$135,050,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I have been impressed upon by certain persons who helped to control these schedules to allow five more minutes and to take ten minutes extra for this because the savings will go over to tomorrow. You started at 10.27 p.m. and we should finish at 11.27 p.m. We are now at 11.33 p.m., so you just have a few minutes to wrap up.

Programme: 803 – Education Delivery – \$485,000,000

Mr. Sear: Mr. Chairman, I would like to look at project code 1205200 – Buildings – Education. I would like to ask the Hon. Minister, out of this allocated sum, how much is designated for the continuation of the Bamia Primary School?

Ms. Parag: It is \$127 million.

Mr. Figueira: A follow up on that very project code. You said \$120 and how much million?

Ms. Parag: Seven

Mr. Figueira: Seven million. When would the project start or continue and when is it likely to conclude for this particular school?

Ms. Parag: The project is happening as we speak, and it is going to a point of completion.

Mr. Figueira: Yes, I am aware of that but that is why I wanted to know. There had to be a contract that was signed, so what date is the completion of the contract? We had experience where you gave a contract and a completion proposed date and it never happened. We do not want that to happen because a lot of kids are being disenfranchised.

Ms. Parag: The completion date is 1st April, 2024.

Mr. Figueira: Is it going to be completed in April?

Ms. Parag: On the 1st April, 2024.

Mr. Figueira: Seriously, I do not know if you are aware. Could you tell the House what is the percentage of the building of the school right now?

Ms. Parag: We are at 65%.

Mr. Figueira: Sixty-five per cent. I am flabbergasted. Thank you.

Mr. Sears: On the same line item, I would like to ask the Hon. Minister if there are any provisions for Wiruni in this line item and, if so, could you please share?

Ms. Parag: There is a construction of the Wiruni Secondary School with a retention date of 15th March. It started in 2023.

Mr. Figueira: Could I have the floor, Cde. Chairman?

Mr. Chairman: The Minister has the floor. She is still answering.

Mr. Figueira: All right.

Ms. Parag: The retention date is 15th March, 2024.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, we have one minute and ten seconds to complete this section. I allowed the gaff between the Hon. Member and the Minister just now, since they wanted to carry it on. Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, you have the floor.

Mr. Figueira: We will request out of the time pool that we have... We will request until I finish. With regard to Buildings – Education and the very...

Mr. Chairman: Opposition Chief Whip, your Hon. Member is requesting a further 10 minutes of the savings to continue from the bank. Thank you, very much. You have five minutes.

Mr. Figueira: Added to the time you were asking, so it is six. I am flabbergasted by this particular line item, Cde. Chairman, where the Minister indicated that this school would be completed on 1st April. She said it is 65% completed. Let us assume it will actually be completed on that date, is

there any allocation in the regions' allocation for the school to be furnished? As a matter of fact, answer the question. After its completion, when would students be in a position to occupy it?

[An. Hon. Member (Government): *(Inaudible)* Your time is coming you know, tomorrow.

Ms. Parag: What has been allocated under this project code is a sum to complete the construction of the school.

Mr. Figueira: I am finished with education.

Programme: 803 – Education Delivery – \$485,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 804 – Health Services – \$196,312,000

Mr. Figueira: Project code 2403500 – Land Water Transport – Health: The allocation here is for the purchase of a boat and for it to be outfitted with an engine, as well as a bus. Could we be provided with the information with regard to what the seating capacity is of the bus, as well as the boat?

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, what is catered for under this project code is the procurement of an ambulance and an all-terrain vehicle (ATV).

Mr. Figueira: What is it?

Ms. Parag: An ATV.

Mr. Figueira: Did you say it was for a boat ambulance?

Ms. Parag: Yes. Mr. Chairman, sorry. Under health and this project code what we have is a procurement of an ambulance and an ATV. I am not certain whether the Hon. Member is looking at the right project code or programme.

Mr. Figueira: With regard to the ambulance, Cde. Minister, through the Chairman, would it be outfitted with all of the paraphernalia to ensure that there is a first response to save a life? We have seen ambulance taxis. Would it be outfitted to actually save lives, rather than to just transport the victim to the hospital?

Ms. Parag: This is an offroad ambulance. I think what the Hon. Member is maybe referring to is a boat with a shed. This is an offroad ambulance.

Mr. Figueira: The same thing. Would it be outfitted?

Ms. Parag: It will be outfitted and equipped with everything.

Mr. Figueira: Which Community would it be serving?

Ms. Parag: Hururu.

Mr. Figueira: Hururu. All right.

Ms. Parag: Also, Landersville and Kwakwani.

Mr. Figueira: You said that it would be outfitted. Could you state what are the lifesaving equipment it will be outfitted with?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, what is the lifesaving...

Ms. Parag: It would be procured fully equipped, Hon. Member, through Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Figueira: Pardon me?

Ms. Parag: It would be procured fully equipped.

Mr. Figueira: You do not know what is going to be in it.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Chairman, I will try to utilise...

Mr. Chairman: You have a minute to wrap up.

Mr. Sears: Yes. I will try to utilise the...

Mr. Chairman: Unless you want a further five minutes from the bank.

Mr. Sears: This is project code 2505600, in terms of equipment, what new equipment is being purchased and is there in the project code a consideration for – I am not sure, it is very expensive – the provision of a Computed Tomography (CT) scan for the Linden Hospital Complex?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, this is your final answer for the evening and the day.

Ms. Parag: Mr. Chairman, if I may just refer to the question by the Hon. Member, Region 10 does not deal with that. The Ministry of Health will deal with that, the central ministry.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have now exhausted the five extra minutes from the bank.

Programme: 804 – Health Services – \$196,312,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, on your behalf and my own, let us thank the Hon. Minister, the Regional Executive Officer (REO), Mr. Dwight John, and his staff from Region 10. Thank you very, very much Minister. You did exceedingly well. Thank you very much.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, you have the floor.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on Friday, 2nd February, 2024.”

[Prime Minister]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: I request we adjourn until 10.00 a.m. tomorrow.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly stand adjourned to 10.00 a.m. tomorrow. Have a safe trip back. Good night.

Adjourned accordingly at 11.43 p.m.