



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 (2020-2025) 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*

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92<sup>ND</sup> Sitting

Friday, 24<sup>TH</sup> January, 2025

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**PARLIAMENT OFFICE  
HANSARD DIVISION**

*The Assembly convened at 10.40 a.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

**MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)**

**Speaker (1)**

\*Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P.,  
*Speaker of the National Assembly,  
Parliament Office,  
Public Buildings,  
Brickdam,  
Georgetown.*

**MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)**

**(i) MEMBERS OF THE PEOPLE'S PROGRESSIVE PARTY/CIVIC (PPP/C) (38)**

**Prime Minister (1)**

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*Prime Minister,  
Prime Minister's Office,  
Colgrain House,  
205 Camp Street,  
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**Vice-President (1)**

+ Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P.,  
*Vice-President,  
Office of the President,  
New Garden Street,  
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*[Absent – on leave]*

**Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)**

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

\* **Non-Elected Speaker**

## **Senior Ministers (16)**

+ Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,  
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*Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.*  
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*Office of the Presidency,*  
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*Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation,*  
*Ministry of Foreign Affairs,*  
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+\*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,  
*Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance*  
*and the Public Service,*  
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*Main & Urquhart Streets,*  
*Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,  
*Minister of Public Works,*  
*Ministry of Public Works,*  
*Wight's Lane,*  
*Kingston,*  
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*Minister of Health,*  
*Ministry of Health,*  
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+ Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P.,  
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+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Minister**

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*Ministry of Agriculture,*  
*Regent and Vlissengen Road,*  
*Bourda, Georgetown.*

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*Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,*  
*Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,*  
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*Ministry of Labour,*  
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*[Virtual Participation]*

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*Minister of Human Services and Social Security,*  
*Ministry of Human Services and Social Security,*  
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+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Minister**

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*Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports,*  
*Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports,*  
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*(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),*  
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*Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,*  
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*Ministry of Housing and Water,*  
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*Ministry of Public Works,*  
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*Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,*  
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*Office of the Prime Minister,*  
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Hon. Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P.,  
Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),  
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No. 66 Village,  
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Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,  
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Hon. Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.,  
Lot 340 East Street,  
South Cummingsburg,  
c/o Freedom House,  
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55 AA Victoria Avenue,  
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Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,  
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\* Hon. Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,  
Parliamentary Secretary,  
Ministry of Agriculture,  
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Lot 72 Jagan Street,  
Enterprise,  
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*[Absent – on leave]*



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*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),  
Lot 80 Babu John Road, Haswell,  
Port Mourant, Corentyne Berbice.*

*[Virtual Participation]*

Hon. Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),  
Lot 17 Block 1, Section F,  
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Hon. Ms. Beverley Alert, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)  
Lot 169-170 Stanleytown,  
West Bank Demerara.  
c/o Lot 13 A, New Providence,  
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 8 –Potaro/Siparuni)  
Church Street Mahdia.  
Lot 4 Public Road,  
Stewartville,  
West Coast Demerara.*

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

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

Hon. Dr. Asha Kissoon, M.P.,  
*Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly,  
Lot 855, 3<sup>rd</sup> Field,  
Cummings Lodge,  
Greater Georgetown.*

## **Officers (2)**

Mr. Sherlock E. Isaacs, A.A.,  
*Clerk of the National Assembly,*  
*Parliament Office,*  
*Public Buildings,*  
*Brickdam,*  
*Georgetown.*

Ms. Hermina Gilgeours,  
*Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly,*  
*Parliament Office,*  
*Public Buildings,*  
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*Pre –Press Technician*

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*Audio Technician*

Mr. Daison Horsham,  
*Audio Technician*

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

### Condolences to Member of Parliament (MP), Mr. Roysdale Forde

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, I made a note last Friday to mention that the Hon. Member. Mr. Roysdale Forde, Senior Counsel (SC) was absent due to the passing of his mom. Today, we send our condolences to the Forde family on her passing.

### Appreciation for Contribution of Dr. Mahadeo

I also want to mention the contributions of Dr. Mahadeo. Last year and the previous years, we had some issues with air conditioning and filter and we had to seek Dr. Mahadeo's intervention. We had the filters changed and some work will be done again this year. New filters will be installed tomorrow. We are trying to see if we can get an air purifier for the Dome because we are going to be here continuously for a prolonged period over the next two weeks. Thank you, Dr. Mahadeo and the General Manager of the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC), Mr. Nandkumar, and his staff, for their always kind and prompt attention to our needs.

## QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

### [For Written Replies]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we have one question on notice, and it is for the Hon. Member, Minister Manickchand. She has indicated that the answer to that question has been circulated. Minister, please.

**Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]:** It is being photocopied to be circulated, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister, for your response.

### (1) TEACHER'S SALARY

**Mr. Sinclair:**

- (a) Can the Minister inform the National Assembly how many teachers in Regions (1-10), net salary per month is less than One Hundred and Fifty Thousand (\$150,000) for nursery, primary and Secondary schools?
- (b) Can the Minister also inform the National Assembly how many teachers in Regions (1-10), net salary per month is more than One Hundred and Fifty Thousand (\$150,000) but less than Two Hundred Thousand (\$200,000) for nursery, primary and secondary schools.

- (c) Can the Minister further inform the National Assembly how many teachers in Regions (1-10), net salary per month is more than Two Hundred Thousand (\$200,000) but less than Two Hundred and Fifty Thousand (\$250,000) for nursery, primary and secondary schools?

*[See Appendix 1 for answers]*

## PUBLIC BUSINESS

### GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

#### Motion

### MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2025

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 2025 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on January 17, 2025, 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 2025 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 2025 of a total sum of one trillion, two hundred and ninety-eight billion, three hundred and forty-six million, nine hundred and eighty thousand, and one hundred and eighty-one dollars (\$1,298,346,980,181), excluding eighty three billion, eight hundred and three million, five hundred and fifteen thousand, six hundred and seventy-six dollars (\$83,803,515,676) 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 2025 as stated in Schedule 2, amounting to a total sum of eighteen billion, nine hundred and forty six million, five hundred and sixty-two thousand, and one hundred and seventy-three dollars (\$18,946,562,173) 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 2025.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the sum of \$512,436,702,092 equivalent to US\$2,463,889,710 to be withdrawn from the Natural Resource Fund for the financial year 2025 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 resumed budget debate.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, we will now resume the debate on the Motion for the Approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for the Financial Year 2025. The first speaker on our list today is the Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes. Hon. Member, you may take the floor.

**Ms. Fernandes:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

“It is better for a government to help a poor man to make a living for his family than to help a rich man make more profit for his company.”

Those are the words of Theodore Roosevelt. I rise in this honourable House today, carrying the weight of hundreds of thousands of Guyanese voices – voices that this Administration’s economic policies have systematically silenced. Before I begin my analysis of *Budget 2025*, I want every Member of this House to understand that behind every statistic I present and every number I quote, real Guyanese families are struggling to survive in what should have been their moment of prosperity. I stand before you today, not merely as a Member of Parliament (MP), but as a daughter of Guyana, who has lived through the struggles of our people. When I was a child, our budget was \$3.4 billion with a poverty rate of 43.2%. Today, despite oil wealth flooding our treasury and a massive budget of \$1.382 trillion, our poverty rate is 48%.

*10.47 a.m.*

This is the stark reality of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s (PPP/C) governance, where spending over \$3 trillion in oil revenues, from 2020 to 2024, has left our people poorer than they were before. By the end of 2025, the PPP/C will have spent \$4.7 trillion – over \$22 million per household. Yet, walk through any community in Guyana, speak to any family, and ask them, are you \$22 million better off? The answer echoes through every market, every street, and every home – no. Instead, working families struggle harder than ever to survive in a country that, paradoxically, boasts the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita.

This Administration has mastered the art of grand announcements and hollow promises. It trumpets billions in spending while our people queue for basic healthcare and handouts. It celebrates GDP growth while our children’s education crumbles. It boasts of development while our elderly choose between medicine and food. It is not just mismanagement. This is a systematic betrayal of the Guyanese people. Today, I will present clear evidence of how this Administration has failed our nation across every critical sector; how it has created an economy that enriches the few while improvising the many; and how its policies have transformed our oil blessing into a curse for the ordinary Guyanese man and woman. In this regard, it is not only important, but it is an absolute necessity for us to conduct a performance audit of the PPP/C’s tenure from 2020 to 2024.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to examine a few key sectors and indicators that will paint a clear picture of how Guyanese are surviving under the current Administration's mismanagement. Let us first look at the cost of living – inflation versus wages and salaries. Inflation numbers are used to estimate how much purchasing power a dollar has over time. Inflation numbers are used to adjust wages and pensions to account for changes in the cost of living.

According to the Guyana National Bureau of Statistics (GNBS), data from the Urban Consumer Price Index shows that from 2019 to 2024, inflation went up by 20%, and worse, from 2019 to 2024, food inflation went up by 44.8%. Inflation in food items does not affect the wealthy. It affects the working class and is detrimental to the working poor. With the inflation rate of food at 44.8% from 2019 to 2024, the current Administration was proud to announce wages and salaries for the period of just 35%. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) Administration, from 2015 to 2019, increased wages and salaries by 77% when inflation only increased by 5.4%. This is how you add disposable income to the hands of people who need it, by increasing wages and salaries, not only to cushion inflation but enough for vulnerable groups to be able to raise their standard of living. This is how a caring government operates.

Inflation numbers are showing that the purchasing power of our dollar is significantly less than it was in 2019, and yet this Administration is not taking inflation into consideration when adjusting wages, salaries, and pension. *Budget 2025* is now proposing an increase in pension of \$5000 and an increase in public assistance of even less, \$3000. With a budget of \$1.382 trillion, there is no adjustment to the minimum wage mentioned. Not for one second did they stop to consider the lowest-earning public servant in this country who is facing a 44.8% increase in the price of food items in this country.

Mr. Speaker, in 2002, when the International Republican Institute (IRI) report was published, it documented that 57% of Guyanese either had enough to merely survive or had trouble feeding themselves and families. The PPP/C ran out and criticised this report – you would remember – but yet in this very budget report, presented to the National Assembly by the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, the malnutrition rate has gone up. From 2020 to 2024, the PPP/C has budgeted \$393.1 billion for the health sector. I would repeat that for emphasis. The PPP/C, from 2020 to 2024, has budgeted \$393.1 billion towards the health sector. Yet, from 2020 to 2024, the data shows that the severely malnourished increased from 0.1%

to 0.5%, and the moderately malnourished moved from 0.5% to 1.5%. These are the numbers presented to this House by none other than the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh. When audited on their ability to reduce inflation, the PPP/C Administration has failed this nation. When audited on their willingness to increase wages and salaries, the PPP/C Administration has failed this nation. When challenged to show compassion for pensioners and the most vulnerable in society, the PPP/C Administration has failed Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, let us look at jobs and education. The PPP/C does not want us to talk about jobs. That is why they abandoned the labour market survey for years. To tackle the high and increasing cost of living, *Budget 2025* is now proposing that every citizen either work longer hours or get an extra job to cover their expenses in oil-rich Guyana. In addition, this Administration proudly claims that its idea of job creation is creating ways for the building of hotels. Mr. Speaker, to work in 2025, with the largest GDP per capita, the PPP/C Administration's bright idea of job creation is for its citizens to wash hotel sheets or mop hotel floors. Further, their idea of job creation is for our citizens to work in a country and work in hotels in which they cannot afford to stay. This is the reality of the PPP/C Administration.

Let me not forget the \$11 billion that is being allocated for the continuation of a 10-day work programme – a programme that pays \$40,000 for 10 days of work. To further add insult, many of the workers are then politically exploited because they are facing the harsh reality that many of them are barely surviving the indignities of poverty in this country. At formulation, this policy was set to be aimed at providing temporary solutions for young people as they transitioned into more permanent jobs. An evaluation of this programme would show the resounding failure to meet its objective. This 10-day work is now counted as the so-called job creation in Guyana. This Administration is boasting about job creation and counting the 23,000 persons they are employing in a 10-day work programme. How could you boast about 23,000 Guyanese being paid enough just to survive? How could you boast about 23,000 Guyanese being paid enough to live in poverty? How could one's standard of living rise with \$40,000 a month?

One way of tackling poverty is through education. I am a living example. Like thousands of Guyanese, I struggled as a child throughout and I was able to attain a higher education and climb that social ladder. I wrote the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examination and then went on to do my bachelor's degree and master's, something that some Members do not know about. The

matriculation rate, this being the number of children who are able to meet the criteria to pursue higher education, is important to look at. When we look at the matriculation rate for 2019, under the APNU/AFC Coalition, with a budget of \$52.2 billion for education, the corresponding matriculation rate was 49%. Fast forward to 2023, under the PPP/C, with a budget of \$94.4 billion for the education sector, the corresponding matriculation rate was 26%. Last year's education budget was \$100.5 billion, and the PPP/C Administration has set a target of 28% for matriculation rate. Go to Volume 2 of 2025 Budget Estimates. We are not making this up.

From 2020 to 2024, a total of \$382 billion was budgeted for the education sector, and the matriculation rate fell from 49% to 26%. The number of Guyanese who have attained the necessary certification for them to access higher education has decreased by 23% under the PPP/C Administration. When audited on value for money in the education sector, a performance audit would show the PPP/C incapable of delivery. It was Ralph Emerson who said:

“Government exists to defend the weak and the poor and the injured party; the rich and the strong can better take care of themselves.”

It is in this light that a budget should be formulated. When it comes to health, the most vulnerable in society, the poor, depend on the Government to make decisions and formulate policies that would improve access to quality public healthcare. The health sector is one of the most critical sectors when it comes to caring for our most vulnerable citizens. A healthy nation would certainly be a sign of development. In *Budget 2025*, the PPP/C had the audacity to budget \$5 billion under the headings:

“b. Supporting the Vulnerable

iii Universal Health Voucher”

This will be a direct transfer to their friends in private healthcare. This is the same Administration that is boasting about how many new hospitals it is building, and yet, it is budgeting billions in *Budget 2025* towards private healthcare. The sum of \$393.1 billion was spent by the PPP/C for healthcare and the doctor at the Timehri Health Centre does not have Panadol or gloves or blades. Some \$393.1 billion later and that doctor has to fetch water to flush the toilet, while \$5 billion is being budgeted in *Budget 2025* that is directed for private hospitals. This is the reality of the PPP/C Administration. The doctor at the Timehri Health Centre has reported on the value received for the billions

spent in the health sector – shortage of medication and medical supplies, and poor working facilities and working conditions. When audited on the value received for the \$393.1 billion spent in the health sector from 2020 to 2024, the PPP/C is found wanting.

Power Generation: I saw our Hon. Prime Minister speaking about *Budget 2025* and his eyes sparkled as he alluded to the trillions of dollars that are being spent by the PPP/C Administration, and how much more it intends to spend.

11.02 a.m.

Throwing money at incompetence has only proven to breed more incompetence and such is the case of the Guyana Power and Light, Inc (GPL). Believe it or not, two power ships and \$16 billion later, we are now dealing with increased blackouts. It seems like the more we spend on power and the more we spend on power ships, the more blackouts we are getting. The Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh, presented his idea of hope for this nation. The Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, stood in this House last Friday and boldly announced two measures to aid in this regard. He said:

“Our Government is committed to reducing the cost of electricity for every consumer in Guyana by 50% once the gas to energy project is completed”.

What measure is this? In which country or budget, do you come to the National Assembly to say, we are going to reduce electricity cost by 50% given that this project is completed? The People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) is notorious for not completing projects. With a budget of \$25.5 billion for power generation, the PPP/C are bringing a conditional measure into *Budget 2025*, a measure void of any real benefit to Guyanese. To further display their confidence in their inability to both complete the gas-to-energy and to cut electricity costs in half, they introduced another measure. They will now be removing value-added tax (VAT) on backup generation. I cannot make this up. You cannot make this up. This is *Budget 2025* as presented in this National Assembly. When audited on their ability to provide reliable electricity and power, it is found that the PPP/C have left all of us in darkness.

Supporting small businesses – the story of the Linden Enterprise Network (LEN). Small business development should be a key focus for any government who talks about private sector initiatives. Let us speak about how the PPP/C have been supporting small businesses. In particular, let us look at the Linden Enterprise Network. It is none other than the Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh, who, from *Budgets 2020* to



2024, stood in this very House, year-after-year and made a mockery of the establishment of the board at LEN – a board that is necessary for small business owners in the township to be able to access loans. Almost \$300 million is sitting in LEN's bank account and not one small business in Linden was able to access a loan from it because the board was not appointed. Persons would know; we spoke about this. Every Budget, from 2020 to now, we have questioned in this House. Every budget, they promise to put it in place. In 2025, it is still not done. The 2025 national Budget is allocating \$335 million to the Small Business Council and Bureau, while simultaneously shutting out and restricting almost \$300 million from the small businesses in Linden. This is the level of business that exists under the PPP/C Administration. An audit of accessibility to financing for small businesses in Guyana would show that the PPP/C Administration only allows access to selected few, while restricting access to others.

Let us look at the debt and Gross Domestic Product (GDP). To borrow from Dr. Martin Luther King, the Guyanese poor who represent a rapidly growing portion of Guyana's population, thanks to the PPP/C Administration, have been left to live on an island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. To the detriment of Guyanese, the wealth that the PPP/C is denying our people comes at a cost which the PPP/C is more than happy to chain to us all. Over its term in Office, the Government's mismanagement, the PPP/C have increased Guyana's public debt from US\$1.698 billion in 2019 to US\$7.637 billion in 2025 – an increase of US\$5.939 billion or \$1.24 trillion. Allow me to put that into context for the benefit of the Guyanese public and for the Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton. From 2020 to 2025, the PPP/C added a debt burden of \$5.9 million to every household in Guyana. The sum \$5.9 million is not a small amount to the struggling families who are barely surviving from pay cheque to pay cheque.

The sum of \$5.9 million should have been used to take people from below the poverty line and provide them with a decent standard of living. Instead, the increasing debt is being used to further enrich the wealthy, while leaving the poor to help pay that bill. While 57% of Guyana's population cannot afford anything beyond their most basic essentials of life, this heartless Government have decided to saddle those very people, people who are struggling to survive in the indignities of poverty in this country, with \$5.9 million debts per household, while giving them none of the benefit that this mountain of debt is being allotted for. The Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh, stood in this House last Friday and presented a comparison of debt to GDP using non-oil GDP

during the Coalition's Administration and compared that to oil-included GDP under the current Administration. How disingenuous of Dr. Singh, Hon. Member.

Examining non-oil GDP is crucial for any prudent economic management because it provides a more accurate picture of the country's economic diversification and long-term sustainability, especially for oil-rich nations such as Guyana, as it excludes the volatile fluctuation in oil prices which can significantly skew the overall GDP figures, giving a false impression of economic health, when heavily relying on oil-related activities. Essentially, it indicates the strength of the economy beyond the oil sector and highlights the development of other industries, signifying a more resilient economic base. This is the comparison that Guyanese are looking for. There is no Economist out there who is worth their salt or who will stand and say it is okay to compare oil GDP with non-oil GDP – nowhere.

From 2020 to 2024, the non-oil economy of Guyana grew 36% in total. In that same period, the stock of debt grew by a staggering 253%, which is a 7% growth in debt for every 1% growth in the economy. These are the real numbers. To put this into context, in the period 2015 to 2019, Guyana's GDP grew by 19%. The same period total debt grew by a tiny 14%. For every 1% growth in GDP, the Coalition increased debt by 0.7% which is not even a full per cent. This is the reality of our economy today and before. As shown by A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government, debt can be a useful tool for funding development when utilised and managed in a competent way by a competent administration. The PPP/C literally increased the national debt by 18 times as much as the Coalition Government; spent \$2.1 trillion more than the Coalition did; and only delivered 17% more growth than the Coalition did. This is the brilliant authors who the PPP/C boasts about. This is what they have delivered to this country. The PPP/C's incompetence can be truly astonishing at times. When audited on their management of debt-to-GDP, this reckless Government have drastically increased the debt burden, while failing to achieve economic growth above what they should have.

In closing, we are living in a country that is on the world map because of our oil revenue. Instead of enjoying the fruits of oil revenues, we are living in a country that is now characterised by high inflation; low wages and salaries; high unemployment; poor matriculation rate; a country in which private healthcare is budgeted; while public health centres are poorly equipped; a country plagued by unreliable power supply, a country in which the Government is deliberately

shutting off resources to small businesses. [Mr. McCoy: Wow. Wow.] Mr. Speaker, I am being distracted a bit by the Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy.

We are living in a country that we are blessed with oil resources, but this Parliament is cursed with waste oil. We are living in a country with a budget of \$1.382 trillion in 2025. This country is not void of finances. We are not void of financial resources. This country is void of competent leadership. This country is void of a government who prioritises its people over its own private business ventures. We are living in a country in which the government operates against its own people as economic gangsters. Thank you. [Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, very much, Hon. Member. Congratulations on your most effective and efficient use of your time. Our next speaker is the Hon. Minister, Ms. Rodrigues, Minister in the Ministry of Housing and Water. Hon. Minister, you may start now.

**Minister in the Ministry of Housing and Water [Ms. Rodrigues]:** Mr. Speaker, I rise to make my contribution to *Budget 2025* and I take this opportunity to congratulate the Senior Minister, Hon. Dr. Singh, and the Ministry of Finance for another phenomenal, transformational budget – a budget that will guarantee a secure, prosperous and sustainable Guyana.

I am a young female professional who is still fairly new to politics. I come from a working-class family, a grandmother who scrubbed floors and cleaned people's houses for a living; and a grandmother who worked in the kitchens of *Del Casa*, a restaurant that does not exist anymore for the young people who are listening. I listened to my Colleague on the other side of the House disparage people who work honest jobs. Every job has dignity. I want the people at home to see, this is the mindset of the people who make up the Members of the Opposition. In 2015, if we go back before, my family, as I mentioned, started off as a poor family. Through sheer hard work and grit, my parents lifted our family out of poverty, under a People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration.

11.17 a.m.

Sir, in 2015, this group of people who make up the APNU/AFC Administration went to the young people who had mostly grown under the PPP/C Government and said to them, we will give you a good life; we will deliver a good life for you. Immediately – immediately – after assuming Government, we had buyer's remorse. We saw, immediately,

the destructive nature of the APNU/AFC. We saw, immediately, how they destroyed the economy. They sent home 7,000 sugar workers putting them and their families – 28,000 people – on the bread line and they come here to feign concern for poor people. They sent home 2,000 Community Service Officers (CSOs), which put those young Guyanese Amerindian people out of a living.

Their idea of job creation, former President Granger said, they must go and make guava cheese and plantain chips. That is the truth. Where was the outrage from young people such as Ms. Juretha Fernandes in the 2015–2020 period? Where was her voice? Where was the voice of all the people who make up the Members of the Opposition when they were wreaking havoc in this country? Where were they when people could not find jobs, when people were sent to the bread line, when the private sector was closing businesses? There was no interest in this country. There was no demand created for people to open new businesses. Where was the support for small businesses when they slashed the grant for the small businesses? Where were their concerns then? We listened to the Opposition Members. They will come to this National Assembly and distort the reality of what people faced in this country under the APNU/AFC's tenure in Office. This was just five years ago – just five years ago.

I am so disappointed that young people such as Ms. Juretha Fernandes would come to this House and make excuses for the APNU/AFC. That is why the young people at home who once thought they could have given them a chance, saw the destruction of the economy during those five years. They broke all their promises to the young people. They broke their promises to all of the people of Guyana. They broke their promise to the farmers. They said rice is private business. We can go through a list of all of the promises they made and even to the young people. They are talking about support for education when they raised the fees at the University of Guyana (UG); where they put VAT on education; where they took away the grant from the schoolchildren. That is their philosophy; that is their ideology; that is their track record. That is what the people of Guyana have to remember, when the Opposition come to this House to pretend to care and pretend to care for children, women and young people.

Even my Hon. Member recently contested for the chairmanship of her party and lost. Worst yet, look at whom she lost to – an older gentleman but someone with a lot of baggage. The Hon. Member's party did not give her a chance, contrast that with us on this side of the House. Recently, a seat became vacant in this National Assembly

with the resignation of the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj. Who did we replace him with? The replacement is a young, vibrant and hardworking man – Member of Parliament, Mr. Suresh Singh. This is how we treat young people on this side of the House. We reward them. We recognise their hard work and contributions that they have to make. We have given him a seat. We have other young people and young women such as Ms. Sarah Browne who is a young hard-working, Guyanese Amerindian woman. She works hard and fights hard for the rights of Guyanese Amerindian people. She sits in this House as a young Member of Parliament. That is our track record. That is our inclusivity of young people and women.

Ms. Fernandes said that people cannot find jobs. Could you imagine people cannot find jobs? I do not know what fictional world these people are living in. They are coming here to this House and trying to create as though people do not remember a time when they could not find work. Families who are watching this debate know that we just came out of Christmas, people know that they cannot find a carpenter, they cannot find a plumber, they cannot find an electrician or they cannot find a painter. It is because everyone is working. The construction sector has increased. People are hard at work. That is not a bad thing; that is a good thing. Guyanese fled this country in the 70s and 80s. They fled an undemocratic government. They migrated to the United States of America (USA) and other places. They did hard work where they scrubbed other people's floors and worked in restaurants. Today, they have made a successful life for themselves and they come to this House and disparage those hard-working people.

This Budget was presented a week ago and I struggle to find one sensible – just one – criticism of this Budget from the Opposition. I struggled. Ms. Fernandes will come to this House and tell you that this Budget has nothing for nobody. That is the criticism that they will come to this House with but let me tell the public, let me tell the people what this Budget has for them. This Administration, the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, has policies that will take care of people from the cradle to the grave. Their entire life – cradle to grave care. From the time a person is born, every Guyanese mother will be given \$100,000 compliments of the Government of Guyana. From the time they started, the People's National Congress (PNC), AFC, APNU or whatever they call themselves put VAT on medical supplies. Under their leadership, it became more expensive to access medical care in this country, by putting VAT on the supplies and medication. It made it more expensive. From the time the children start school, they will receive the Because We

Care grant. They will go to school and get textbooks. They will get meals at their schools. All of that are provided by our Government's policies. They talk about old age pension, could you imagine? Could you imagine that they talk about old age pension? We have kept our promises to all of the people in this country.

Going back to health, the Hon. Member mentioned about a few who will benefit for the voucher from the Ministry of Health. Only yesterday, the Hon. Minister of Health had a meeting with 50 healthcare providers – 50 healthcare providers. Every laboratory that is registered in this country will honour that voucher. The vouchers will access healthcare, the eyeglasses for the children and cervical cancer screening; all of the healthcare providers will benefit from that proposal.

Our promise to the farmers is to invest in Drainage and Irrigation (D&I) and our promises to the miners are all kept. We saw what they did to the miners. Ms. Fernandes is from Region 7, which is a mining region. Where was her outrage? Where was her voice then? Where was her representation for the miners and for Guyanese Amerindian people in Region 7? We know that there is no valid criticism of this Budget, so what they have done, the strategy now is to out promise. The strategy now is to out promise what we have done in Office. Overnight, we have posts popping up on *Facebook* about what they will do.

The income tax threshold – they are promising \$400,000 a month tax-free threshold. At one point, they said \$100,000. Then, when we raised it, we surpassed \$100,000. We are at \$130,000 now. They have shifted the goal post again. Now, it is \$400,000 that they are promising people a month. They increased the income tax threshold from 2015–2019 by \$15,000. The People's Progressive Party/Civic have doubled the income tax threshold in our first term. It moved from \$65,000 in 2020 to \$130,000 today.

Coming back to the pension... Let us talk about the pension. They said that they are concerned about the vulnerable people. They promised to double old age pension in their 100-day plan. The five years finished but the 100-day plan is not achieved as yet; but they promise the people to double old age pension. They moved it from \$13,129 to \$20,500 in five years – in five years. They are saying to the people now, we are only giving them \$5000 this year. Mr. Speaker, do you know how much they gave the old age pensioners in 2018? In 2018, they gave the old age pensioners \$500 increase – \$500 increase for the old age pension. What a shame!

Let us talk about the students' stipend. They want to give the University of Guyana students \$50,000 monthly stipend. Who is going to believe this? Who is going to believe this? This is unbelievable, when they raised the tuition of the University of Guyana by 35% and increased all of the administrative fees, which made it harder for young people to access tertiary education. They put VAT on education and now you are promising right offs. It is done. It is delivered. The PPP/C have already delivered it.

Salary increase – the APNU/AFC promised significant salary increases for government workers, nurses, teachers, *et cetera* in their 100-day plan. Over the five years - I do not know where Ms. Fernandes is getting her figures from, because the Hon. Member quoted figures here but did not say where she got it from - they increased public servants' salaries by 38.5%. That is how much they increased public servants' salaries by. It took them five years to increase that but, in four months of their Government, they increased Ministers' salaries by \$50,000.

Cash grants – they were against cash grants. Their Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, said that cash grants are not an effective solution for addressing poverty. Now they are promising regular and guaranteed cash grants over \$100,000 a month in cash and benefits plus \$100,000 hard cash. Who is going to believe this? Who is going to believe this? They took away \$10,000 from the schoolchildren and they are coming to tell the people that they will give them \$100,000 a month. Every single Guyanese knows this is a bluff. This is a bluff. This is all *gyaff*. Your track record tells a different story.

11.32 a.m.

Subsidies – they now want to give subsidies for water and electricity. They took away the subsidies from the pensioners. They took it away. We reinstated it. We restored it. They put VAT on water and electricity and are now coming with subsidies for water and electricity. This is also done. It is completed. We did the work. It is delivered. Mr. Speaker you noticed that I have not come to the electoral fraud. I did not even come to how the whole thing exploded at the end when the people of this country booted them out because of the arrogance and callousness that they witnessed from the Opposition.

Let us talk about the debt. The Hon. Member mentioned the debt. Total external debt has to be measured by the size of the economy. One has to have the capacity to service debt. People know that the more they are earning, the more their capacity to borrow. There is nothing genius in that. Do not

try to come here and overcomplicate something that is very simple for the people at home to understand. The more you earn, the more your capacity is to borrow. What should people do? What should we do? Should we tell the people, let us save the money; save all of the money; do not build the roads; do not build the bridge across the Demerara River, we should wait until we have the cash to do it, while people continue to suffer and spend time in traffic; we should not build the Wismar bridge across the Demerara River, we should leave the Lindenors to punish there; we should let people continue to suffer in blackouts and we should not build the gas and energy project? Is that what they want? Is that their strategy to not do anything? Well, that is the characteristics of them. They did nothing in their five years.

The ratio of public debt to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) decreased from 47.4% in 2020 to 24.3% in 2024. It is the second lowest debt to GDP in the Western Hemisphere. That is a fact. Debt service to Government's revenue was 8.5% in 2020, by the end of 2024, it fell to 5.2%. This is prudent management. They do not want us to compare 2015 to 2020 or 2025, so I will do them a favour. I will compare 1992 to today. In 1992, we were using 100% revenue to service debt. That is the economy that the People's National Congress left for us – a bankrupt economy. The People's Progressive Party/Civic brought us through that difficult period, with prudent management. We brought this country back to a period of surplus. A place where we have a surplus from dire economic straits that the PNC Government left us in, in 1992. Are you telling people they should not go to the bank to access a mortgage to build their homes? Is this what they are telling the people? Why are they scaring people? Why are they trying to frighten people about debt? This is a grave disservice to their supporters and to everyone who is watching.

The external debt in 1992 was \$2.1 billion. You said you do not want us to compare your period, so we are comparing from 1992. The external debt today is almost the same. In an oil economy, it is \$2.2 billion. We were one of the poorest countries then. We had no capacity to service debt. To date we are in a stronger financial position to service debt. It is nothing to be afraid of. It is how we are building the economy and building the infrastructure for the future. They racked up that debt of \$2 billion in 1992 with nothing to show for it – nothing. No roads. No schools. No hospitals. An impoverished country. All of the people were poor. People were fleeing this country migrating from economic hardships. That is a devastated position that we were left in, in 1992. Today, with the spending that we are doing, including borrowing, you can point to every community that

you go into this country, to all the schools, the hospitals, the roads, the bridges, everything built by the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. On the coast; in the hinterland; everything built. What did APNU build? What is one thing that you built that lasted? Nothing! What is one thing that you built that created value for people?

They will come and they will talk about infrastructure. They said people cannot eat roads and bridges. This is the narrow-mindedness of the people who compose the Opposition. We are building infrastructure to open opportunities for connectivity to increase trade for the farm-to-market roads, to reduce travel time, to open new lands for housing and to build water treatment plants. This is what people want. This is how you use the resources to generate wealth and to build sustainable infrastructure that will last long into the future. Their arguments will be inconsistent over the next few days. You will hear the inconsistent arguments. On one hand, we are spending too much. On the other hand, we should be spending more. I want them to tell the people of this country who are listening which project they would like us to cut, which housing scheme we should not build. Should we give out 500 house lots as opposed to 50,000 house lots? Ms. Fernandes, tell the young people whether they will get their house lot under the APNU/AFC Government. I assure you they will not get it because they had a chance and they failed miserably. Even now, you would think that they have learned their lesson. Even now, they are not promising to create house lots; they are promising a rental subsidy. That is their bright idea to improve housing in this country. That is not a new promise; that is a recycled promise from 2015 to give people a rental subsidy. They said this is an initiative to provide modern, safe rental accommodation by offering incentives to the private sector, the diaspora and existing house owners for investing and renting middle and low-income housing.

This is their bright idea. This is their vision in their manifesto to create housing, to keep people renting and to keep people paying rent. We are empowering people by giving them home ownership, by putting a title or a transport in their hands so that they can go to the bank, that they can live in a home that they own, that they can pass on an asset to their children. This is how we are creating wealth among ordinary Guyanese people and this will allow people to lift themselves out of poverty because of the conditions that we are creating through our policies. They benefited from the housing programme, and they do not want the Guyanese people to benefit from it. From the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, 69% of the Opposition Members have benefited from the housing programme. Twenty-two

out of 32 of them on that side of the House have house lots from the Government of Guyana. What I can tell you too is that 100% of their house lots were created in housing schemes built by the People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration. They did not build any. They did not build any new housing areas but they come here to criticise the housing programme that has already benefited 41,000 young people in this country – 18,000 young women, single women, have benefited from house lots in the last four years. Over 20,000 young people between the ages of 21 and 35 now own their own homes or land.

Their big idea when they were in Government was a 50% discount on the remaining 50% that people had to pay for their house lots. That is not a strategy to create affordable housing but that was their big idea. Then, they went and built duplexes. They did not amend the legislation so that they can be able to pass titles for those who have paid for their duplexes. The PPP/C had to come back into government to pass legislation in this National Assembly to allow the creation of titles and the passage of titles to young people. We have continued to invest in support infrastructure in existing and new housing areas. These are former cane fields that we are converting from swamps in certain places that we have to build up and sand fill, sand filling canals and creating land so that people can occupy their house lots. This takes time but it is happening. Ordinary Guyanese every day are going to access their house lots and to build their homes. Today, it costs about \$5 million to create a single house lot and when a low-income family comes to pay for that house lot the family pays \$300,000 – that is only 6% of the cost of that house lot. It is 94% subsidised by the Government. That is the beauty of the housing programme – transferring wealth to people. From the moment they occupy their house lots they are already worth millions of dollars when we put in the support infrastructure, the electricity and the water. They can go to the bank and leverage the value of that house lot.

We have further promoted home ownership through our housing construction drive with 2,000 homes already completed across all income brackets. We have provided over 1,600 steel and cement subsidies to families to start building their homes. We have already built 129 core homes where beneficiaries have only paid \$100,000. Now, they have a core home that they can start to build their lives with. Our target is to build 298 of these. We have already distributed 798 home improvement subsidies for people to improve their existing homes so that they can have a better quality of life. Looking ahead, we plan to address all of the applications in Region 1; Region 2; Region 3; Region 5; Region 6; Region 7; Region 8; Region 9; and Region 10;

and, significantly, reduce the pending applications for Region 4. We are already planning phase two. We are already moving on the planning for 2026 and 2027 of how we will deliver another 30,000 house lots to the pending applicants so the young people can look forward to that.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, for you to plan more you will need an extension of time.

**Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]:** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Hon. Member, I wish to ask that she be given the five-minute extension as agreed to between the Chief Whips.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you. Minister, you may continue for five minutes to complete.

**Ms. Rodrigues:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. What has been the impact? What has been the impact of this? What is the metric? For those who are watching, this is the metric. We have seen the growth in the construction sector – growth of 30.8%. We have seen mortgage and real estate loans grow by 71.9% over the last four years. These are ordinary people. These are Guyanese who are going to the bank, accessing mortgages and building their homes.

*11.47 a.m.*

This is what is driving the increase in the construction sector, not rental subsidies. Rental subsidies do not increase housing or provide affordable housing to people. The housing loans at commercial banks, in 2020, at the New Building Society (NBS) their mortgage portfolio was 3.5%, and for the year 2024 they have already disbursed over \$16 billion, in one year. This is Guyanese, regular Guyanese men and women who are approaching the banks with confidence and accessing a mortgage and building their home, their first property, something that will give them tremendous pride and security as they build a life for themselves and their families. In July, 2020, comparing another bank, Guyana Bank for Trade & Industry Limited. (GBTI), \$6.2 billion; today, \$18.6 billion for mortgages processed in 2024. Additionally, savings deposits held by individuals grew by 67.5% between 2020 and 2024. How much did it grow under the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU)? One per cent. One point four per cent increase in savings for five years. That is the result of your performance in Government; people could only save 1%. This is the truth. Private sector credit increased by 19.8% in 2024, with a cumulative

increase of 73.4%, only possible in a stable country with sound economic policies.

Mr. Speaker, water. In the APNU/AFC Manifesto 2015, not a word about water. Not a word about producing clean water for the people of our country. Instead, we found a water sector in shambles. We saw the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI) was bankrupt. We saw low level of service. We saw procurement breaches. We saw overpayment to contractors for services not yet delivered. That is what they did in the water sector during their five years. What are we to do? We have rejuvenated the Guyana Water Inc., which is now in a stable and sound financial position. Service delivery has been improved nationally, and the implementation of our strategic plan to deliver treated water to 90% of our coastal population will be completed in a few months, long before the end of 2025. All of the people who have been calling on us about the quality of water that they are receiving, will be receiving clean water long before the end of 2025 – water that you can drink. We have already commissioned the first water treatment plant at Caledonia and we have six other new, large water treatment plants that will be commissioned in the next few months that will deliver safe and clean water to the people on our coastland. This is being built... [An

**Hon. Member (Opposition): (Inaudible)]** Imagine, they are saying it is another promise. I just said we commissioned one of the water treatment plants. Are you not listening? We commissioned one; six are in the testing phase, Hon. Duncan. Six are in the testing phase. They are built. You can see it; it is at Cummings Lodge; it is at Bachelors Adventure; they can see it. I think these people live in orbit. I think sometimes they live in orbit.

Looking across at the hinterland, our Amerindian brothers and sisters, we have increased supply in the hinterland from 46%, in 2020, to 91% at the end of 2024, drilling 130 new wells in the hinterland regions with 40,000 Amerindians receiving first-time access to clean water. This is our legacy; we deliver for all the people of Guyana. This, the culmination of all of these programmes, policies, and projects in all of the sectors, is how you reduce poverty and unemployment and inequality and you usher in a period of prosperity for the people of our country.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for your indulgence, and I wholeheartedly commend *Budget 2025* for passage in this House. [Applause]

**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:** Mr. Speaker, today I rise in the august Assembly, with a deep sense of responsibility, knowing that we, the Members of this Assembly, have all,

without exception, sworn allegiance to the Constitution and the people of Guyana. As we embark on the journey of 2025, allow me to extend my heartfelt wishes for a year of purpose, progress and prosperity for all Guyanese. I wish to posit that our primary duty for us here in this National Assembly, is to adopt positions following principles that are consistent with the Constitution. So, today, I call on all concerned to let their honour and Constitution be their guide as we debate *Budget 2025*.

Mr. Speaker, I sit on the Opposition benches and as a Member of the Opposition, it is my solemn duty, I am required, to examine the budget that has been presented to this House and to faithfully and truthfully pass judgments on its projects, policies, and programmes. But while I sit on this side of the House, when it comes to our homeland, Guyana, I believe all of us on both sides of the House should be on the same side, battling for our country and our people. I earnestly believe that all of us on the Opposition, and those on the Government side, want what is best for Guyana. Where we differ, I believe, is in the means by which we should get there. This is why I believe that these proceedings should not descend into a shouting match but should be characterised by civility and a willingness to consider each other's perspectives.

I believe that we all want what is good for Guyana. We all want a country with a growing economy that will provide resources to improve the lives of our people, including through the generation of employment. I believe that, on both sides of the House, we would like to ensure that our people have a decent standard of living and can reside in safe communities. I believe that, on both sides of this House, we want to bequeath a future for our children in which they would enjoy universal access to quality education that adequately equips them with the skills, knowledge, and attitude to be productive, all-rounded citizens. I believe that we would all like to see a healthcare system that is improving constantly and aspires to provide world-class services, and where there is greater equity across all the ten administrative regions. I believe we want a Guyana in which we ensure that meritocracy is recognised and valued. I believe we would like to see a Guyana in which public services are efficient and reliable. I believe that, on both sides, we would like to see policies in housing, water and sanitation, local government, infrastructural development, education, and security, that uplift our communities and provide our people with a better way of life. I believe we would like to see measures aimed to support our pensioners, our youth, and women. At the heart of all these deliberations, debates, and decisions in this National Assembly, lies a

shared aspiration to see Guyana united, free, and prosperous as a nation.

We all dream of a country where our diverse people stand together as one, where freedom and liberties are not just lived rights, but a lived reality for every citizen and where prosperity reaches every corner of our homeland. This vision should transcend party lines and personal ideology because it reflects the hopes and ambitions of every Guyanese. It is a vision of a Guyana where our resources are harnessed responsibly, our communities thrive, and our children inherit a future filled with opportunities and peace. I sincerely believe that, on both sides of the House, there is a willingness to support positive programmes, policies, and measures in the budget. Indeed, at sittings of this House, we have witnessed the unanimous passage of legislation. If we can do this for legislation, why can we not do this? Why can we not do the same for programmes, policies, and platforms that are in the best interest of our people? It is my view that both sides of the House must be committed to fully articulating their concerns but, at the same time, work together to ensure the budget and its implementation is for the benefit of the people of Guyana. I have taken all this time here to outline these fundamentals because they speak to the core of what a budget should address and how we should approach it. This year's budget theme, *Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana for All*, must be more than words. It must embody bold action and transformative reformation as we approach the conclusion of the Government's current term.

Today, I rise not merely as a Member of Parliament, but as a citizen deeply invested in the future of our beloved Guyana. My passion stems from a responsibility to my country, my loved ones, and every Guyanese who dreams of a nation where fairness, opportunity, and justice prevail. Words alone will not achieve this vision. We must act decisively to ensure a brighter, more inclusive future for every citizen. Guyana is at a pivotal moment; our rise as the fastest-growing economy in the world is a remarkable achievement. Very few will deny that we are in a transformative moment in our country's history. The resources provided by and generated by the discovery of oil provide us with an opportunity to finally be able to realise our full potential as a nation, to lift our people out of poverty, mitigate costs of living, promote hinterland development bringing greater relief to the vulnerable; improve our infrastructure, and support the engines of national development while social development, and ensuring food and energy security, safe and secure communities. This is the challenge of *Budget 2025*.

Growth as a nation, growth of an economy, comes with great responsibility, we cannot celebrate economic success if there is inequality and inequity. With the oil boom there are realistic expectations for our people and from our people. One-off cash grants and payments and incremental policy adjustments are creditable, yet we must accept that they are not enough to confront the entrenched issues of poverty, inequality and exclusion. These are common issues that affect every single nation, and they are not unique to Guyana. This reality demands reform action and an unrelenting commitment to addressing these challenges head-on. It demands that we take a stand for those who feel left behind, for those whose voices are drowned in the roar of progress. The question is no longer whether we will act, it is how decisively and how boldly we will act to ensure that Guyana's prosperity is shared by all. It is time to abandon half measures and half efforts. Policies must not merely aim to grow wealth, they must ensure its fair distribution and preservation for Guyana's generations. Former President David Granger spoke of 'A Good Life' as a national aspiration; President Ali envisions a 'One Guyana'. These are not just catchphrases, they must be blueprints for real action. The time now has come, to move from rhetorics to results. It is only fair to acknowledge the achievements of this administration.

Investments in agriculture, infrastructure, strides in education, expanding social programmes, the justice sector, *et cetera*, these initiatives signal progress, but progress alone is insufficient without equity and equality. No budget is perfect, and this one is no exception. It is our duty as legislators not to settle for good enough, but to demand more, more equity, more inclusion, and more action. The Opposition's role here is not to obstruct progress, but it is to push for better outcomes. Criticism is not opposition for its own sake, it is a call to address gaps, correct missteps, and ensure that governance serves all people, regardless of their religion, class, or creed. Governance must not be measured by promises but by the tangible impact of policies on people's lives. This Budget highlights several areas where urgent and decisive action is required.

12.02 p.m.

Education reform: while new schools are being built, which is commendable, they must go beyond infrastructure. We need comprehensive education policies that equip students with life skills that will make them well-rounded, provide teachers with the resources they need, and ensure that every child, regardless of their background, has the tools to succeed across all 10 administrative regions. Moreso,

education has to be current to satisfy the demands of the changing economic and social environment that is unfolding.

Progress in closing the infrastructure gap is commendable, but it must accelerate. Hinterland and rural communities must no longer be left behind. Integration into the national economy is critical to achieving equity. The gap between urban and rural regions must be addressed with targeted intervention to address disparities, creating opportunities for all 10 administrative regions to thrive. As we implement transformative policies, we must ensure transparency and vigilance against waste or mismanagement; every dollar spent must tangibly improve the lives of citizens and contribute to building a sustainable future. Slogans such as 'One Guyana' or 'A Good Life', must be more than aspirations; they must become lived realities. Our people deserve governance that prioritises their needs and delivers results. National unity, security and prosperity, will not emerge on their own. They require, as I have said earlier, bold and unapologetic action.

The Opposition has warned repeatedly of the risk of any mismanagement or mismanaging our newfound wealth. These warnings are not partisan. They are rooted in the desire to see Guyana avoid the pitfalls of inequality and instability. We must act decisively to ensure that our economic growth uplifts every citizen and creates an environment where we can all thrive. The time for reform is now. This Budget offers a foundation, but it is not an endpoint. It is a call to action, a challenge to every Member of the House to do better for our people. Let us work together, not as adversaries, but as stewards of the nation's future, to build a Guyana that is secure, prosperous, and sustainable for generations to come.

I wish to address an issue of national urgency and international significance – the measures needed to elevate Guyana's security sector to global standards. As the fastest-growing economy in the world, Guyana is experiencing rapid changes, bringing immense opportunities and emerging challenges, particularly in the realm of crime and security. Our country's economic transformation has increased our visibility on the global stage. It may attract new and sophisticated threats, including cybercrime, transnational organised crime, trafficking, and financial crime. To ensure that Guyana's growth is sustainable, inclusive, and safe, we have to act decisively to modernise our security architecture. While our security forces have long served this nation with dedication, the rapidly evolving nature of global crime necessitates reform to our system, tools, and strategies. Among the challenges we face are cybersecurity threats,



transnational organised crime, and our geographical location makes us vulnerable to trafficking in persons, narcotics, arms and ammunition, *et cetera*.

Financial crimes: with increased capital inflow, we may see a rise in money laundering, tax evasion, and illicit financial flows, terrorism, extremism, and domestic crime. To address these challenges, and as someone passionate about security governance, I propose the following measures: enhance and fully equip the cybersecurity authority tasked with monitoring, detecting, and responding to cyber threats; partner with international agencies to adopt best practices for protecting critical infrastructure; invest in additional cybersecurity training for law enforcement; strengthen our border security; deploy additional advanced surveillance technology at key border points to detect illegal activities; continue to collaborate with neighbouring countries to enhance intelligence-sharing mechanisms; increase the presence and resources of the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) in border regions; transition to intelligence-led policing; ensure that our security equipment is modernised and is of global standards and quality; strengthen Guyana's participation in international security organisations; enter into more and/or strengthen bilateral and multilateral agreements with countries and agencies to combat crime; seek technical and financial support where needed and where necessary; bolster the resources of the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU); ensure full compliance with standards set by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF); foster stronger police-community relations to build trust; expand programmes that will address youth unemployment and education to reduce crime; have additional public awareness campaigns on emerging threats; craft a comprehensive, forward-looking national security strategy; establish a broad-based National Security Council to coordinate efforts between law enforcement, intelligence agencies, and policymakers.

On this note of training here, Mr. Speaker, I wish to place on the record that the Guyana Police Force has demonstrated some commitment to improving law enforcement capabilities, professionalism and road safety through extensive training programmes and resource acquisition. There has been significant budget allocation for training in this area. Allocation of about \$250 million annually for training should underscore the prioritisation of modern policing and capacity building. Training, however, must encompass specialised areas to address the multi-faceted challenges faced by law enforcement. While several ranks benefit from specialised overseas courses, a greater emphasis on cascading this knowledge to broader police units is

essential to maximise its impact. The consistent allocation of roughly \$250 million annually for training indicates a prioritisation, but underutilisation raises questions about efficient planning and execution. While we modernise our security system, we must also ensure that these measures uphold the values of accountability, transparency, and human rights. Independent oversight mechanisms must be strengthened to monitor the performance of security agencies and prevent abuses of power. As the people's representatives, we in this House must ensure that these initiatives receive the necessary budgetary allocation and legislative support. We must prioritise investments in security as a foundation for sustainable growth and prosperity.

Guyana's economic growth is a beacon of hope, but it also makes us a target for sophisticated crimes. By adopting these measures, we can ensure that Guyana not only meets international security standards, but it also becomes a regional leader in safeguarding its citizens and its interests. I urge all Members of the House to come together in support of these proposals and recognise that security is the cornerstone of peace, progress, and prosperity. Let us ensure that every Guyanese can live and thrive in a safe and secure nation.

I will now touch on the Government's One Guyana Digital School initiative. The Government's proposal to implement a One Guyana Digital School initiative is a bold step towards modernising Guyana's education system. While the vision aligns with global trends, its success, though, depends on its thorough evaluation, on its feasibility, inclusivity, and sustainability. As we deliberate on the 2025 Budget, it is imperative to critically analyse this initiative to ensure that it delivers transformative results. A digital school could transform access to quality education by connecting students in remote and hinterland areas to the same resources as their urban counterparts. Interactive learning can promise to create an equitable learning environment. Modernising education includes equipping teachers with advanced infrastructure tools and access to international expertise. This initiative aligns with Guyana's diversification into a technology-driven economy. By equipping students with skills in information and communication technology (ICT), data analysis, and artificial intelligence (AI), the digital school can position the next generation for leadership in emerging industries. I am very passionate about this, because, as a mother, my children stand to benefit. However, without robust infrastructure, hinterland and rural communities risk exclusion from the benefits of digital education. Limited access to reliable electricity and internet could also deepen

existing inequalities. The affordability of devices and internet access may also pose a problem for low-income families.

Transitioning to digital learning demands significant teacher training. Resistance to change could also pose a problem. Hence, I propose the following: prioritise investment in electricity; invest in high-speed internet – the option is always Starlink, Elon Musk’s internet; infrastructure is the backbone of this initiative; subsidise access to technology; develop a comprehensive teacher manual; start with a hybrid approach; involve parents, teachers, community, and all stakeholders. The Government’s One Guyana Digital School initiative holds transformative potential for Guyana’s education sector. However, realising the vision requires strategic planning, decisive action and unwavering commitment to inclusivity. By addressing these critical challenges – inequality, infrastructure, capacity building and cybersecurity – we can ensure this initiative is not just a vision but a catalyst for meaningful change. As Parliamentarians, it is our responsibility to demand smart investment, rigorous oversight, and stakeholder collaboration. Let us all in this House act decisively to create an education system that equips every child to thrive in the digital age and secure Guyana’s future as a leader in education and innovation.

I will now briefly touch on some of the measures. The Government proposes targeted measures to alleviate expenses for households and businesses. I will touch on a couple for the two sectors that I spoke on. Electricity cost reduction: a projected 50% reduction post-completion of the gas-to-energy project; timely completion is critical for realising this benefit. Reduced electricity and consistent access to electricity can positively impact both areas I have touched on – the security aspect and education. Eliminating tolls for 50,000 daily commuters reduces transportation costs. Reduced transportation costs can provide easier access to schools and provide opportunities for students and teachers to have reliable transportation.

The health voucher: a \$10,000 voucher for basic tests targets 500,000 people. This can positively contribute to students having annual health checks. A healthy student population brings positive outcomes, and attendance will be more consistent.

The part-time job programme: an \$11 million allocation supports supplemental income. Student engagement and participation in the part-time job programme can provide opportunities for training and at the same time offer students

the opportunity to gain meaningful experience to assist in national development. I have listened closely to what the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service said when he read his speech. It was not short on policies, programmes and projects. It highlighted what was achieved in 2024 and what is planned for this year. It is a budget that sought to capture some of the aspirations of our people and translate them into actionable measures. It is a budget that has announced some policies for community development.

*12.17 p.m.*

However, its success must translate to measures that reach down to the ordinary man and woman. It addresses in fair measure some of what we aspire to see. I have taken note of certain actions embarked by President Ali and his Administration. They appear to bear some mark of prudence, practicality and pragmatism. Some of these measures, it would seem, may well signify a serious and considerate effort to advance towards the fulfilment of the objectives I have outlined. We must, therefore, all remain committed to contribute positively to ensure that the aspirations of our people move swiftly to realisation. I will not stand here in this House, in good conscience and say that this Budget is completely vacuous and lack vision. There are some fair measures to alleviate the cost of living. It is my view that consideration should be given for the abolition of value-added tax (VAT), which will serve to further...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I have just given consideration to the time. To continue, you have to get an extension.

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

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

**Ms. Chandan-Edmond:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It is my view that consideration should be given to the abolition of VAT, which will serve to enhance the quality of life of all the citizens of our beloved country. Any effort to unite our people is commendable. The consistent work among communities by this Administration must be extended to all communities within the 10 administrative regions. I am confident in the success of Guyana on the policies that translate to equality. While I sit on the Opposition benches, I must say this: I see no reason why this Budget should be a source of division in this House once our proposals and

recommendations are considered. There are measures in this Budget that can and should be supported by all sides, measures that speak to the heart of what Government is about, improving the lives of our people.

Mr. Speaker, I started off my speech by saying that with growth comes responsibility. In the *Marvel* superhero movie, there is a famous line or phrase that states, 'with great power comes great responsibility'. President Ali must now demonstrate to the nation whether he shall soar to the revered role of the heroic champion, the hero 'Spiderman' of Guyana, and thus carve his name into the archives of history as a figure of great virtue and renown, or whether he shall instead take on the dreadful guise of the 'Green Goblin' of Guyana.

Consistent with my duty to act for the benefit of the people of Guyana, I lend my full support to the positive budgetary measures of this Budget. Let us make this a moment where we rise above the fray, where we put the interests of our people first and where we demonstrate that we are worthy of the trust that they have placed in us. Measures that alleviate poverty, I support. I support progress, I support peace, I support prosperity, I support commitment. I also support ambitions; I support liberty; I support inspirations. Before I take my leave, Mr. Speaker, permit me to thank the hardworking staff of the Ministry of Finance for their continued hard work and dedication. Working on the production of a budget is no easy feat. So, kudos to all of you and thank you. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, this is a good time to take the suspension.

*Sitting suspended at 12.21 p.m.*

*Sitting resumed at 1.51 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, thank you. Please be seated. I now invite the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Hon. Hugh Todd, to make his presentation.

**Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation [Mr. Todd]:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Let me first of all take this opportunity to recognise the visionary leadership of His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, the President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. Let me also take this opportunity to thank my dear colleague and friend, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, for his accurate representation of the President's vision and the will of the Guyanese people in the 2025

Budget theme: *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana.*

Mr. Speaker, if you allow me to reflect for a moment on, over the last four years, the stewardship of His Excellency and his leadership, we have moved in 2020 from a *Plan for Prosperity* to *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience; Steadfast Against All Challenges, Resolute In Building Our One Guyana; Improving Lives Today, Building Prosperity for Tomorrow*; and for 2024, *Staying the Course: Building Prosperity For All*. I wanted to highlight these thematic areas that covered the budgets from 2020 to 2025 and to show the trajectory, the clear vision and leadership of His Excellency the President, and the fact that we have been able to deliver to the people of this dear land of ours. As we approach the implementation of the budget for this year, 2025, and with, of course, the support from this side of the House and the support from the opposite side of the House, I know that we will be making the people of Guyana proud. I think it was very admirable listening to the Hon. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, from the other side of the House this morning, on a very clear and objective understanding of *Budget 2025* and her recognition of the stewardship of His Excellency the President, highlighting our performance indicators. I think that is very commendable, and the people who support the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition should be very proud of the representation that they are receiving from that Hon. Member, and I thank her for her submission.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to also highlight the key aspects of my dear colleague, the Hon. Susan Rodrigues, for her submission in highlighting very important points that have led to Guyana's trajectory, in terms of development. I think it is very important for us to understand that we have been very clear, we have been very articulate, and we have been very responsible as a government. Mr. Speaker, recall that when we took Office in 2020 we did not have a foreign policy. **[Mr. Mahipaul: (Inaudible)]** When we took Office in 2020 we did not inherit a foreign policy from the APNU/AFC; that will bring clarity. So, Mr. Speaker, if you look at what we have achieved thus far, we have been able to use our development here in Guyana and to take that development across the world, under the leadership of His Excellency the President, as a model for development, especially in developing countries.

Importantly, for us in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, we have the responsibility of executing the President's mandate on foreign policy, which would allow me to begin with the protection of Guyana's

sovereignty and territorial integrity. We remain cognisant of the fact that for Guyana's economic prospects to be fully realised, our relations with bordering countries, especially those that harbour ambitions to the very territory we need to develop, must be carefully managed. Guyana's diplomacy would therefore be at the forefront of the efforts aimed at ensuring a positive and stable environment for the development of critical industries, including the hydrocarbon and related sectors during this year and the next few years as we seek to move our country forward. In this regard, in the fulfilment of the mandate to protect and preserve Guyana's territorial integrity on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (Venezuela) front, the Ministry focused on three broad areas, namely: one, lobbying for international support against the claims of Venezuela to Guyana's territory; two, the advancement of our case before the International Court of Justice (ICJ); and three, desensitisation of the local and international community on Guyana's border issues.

In relation to the claims of Venezuela, there are systematic approaches made to individual states, as well as critical international organisations and bodies, including the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Commonwealth of Nations (Commonwealth), the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the Organizations of American States (OAS) to name a few. This is to support Guyana's bid to preserve its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and in its call for the denunciation of the actions of Venezuela that were in contravention of the 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2023, ICJ General International Law and the Joint Declaration of the Argyle for Dialogue and Peace between Guyana and Venezuela on 14<sup>th</sup> December, 2023.

In a statement released on 15<sup>th</sup> April, 2024, the United Nations Security Council urged the parties to exercise maximum restraint, reminding of the obligations to comply with the order of provisional measures issued by the International Court of Justice on 1<sup>st</sup> December, 2023, and underlining the importance of maintaining regional peace and security and ensuring that the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region remains a zone of peace. Both CARICOM and the Commonwealth urged Venezuela to refrain from any further actions that would hinder regional and hemispheric peace and stability, and to adhere to the international law as the only viable path to achieve a just and lasting settlement to the controversy. On 9<sup>th</sup> December, 2024, Guyana submitted to the ICJ its final written brief on the merits in the case against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. Venezuela will have the opportunity to respond to Guyana's reply with its Rejoinder due on the 8<sup>th</sup> August, this year. The Court will in due course set a date for the oral

hearings. Guyana welcomes Venezuela's engagement in the merits of the case.

With respect to the management of our relations with the Republic of Suriname (Suriname), the accumulation and analysis of historical documents relating to the unresolved border issues between the two countries has been and will continue to be given significant attention. Preparations are underway for the convening of a meeting of the Border Commission between Guyana and Suriname this year. We reaffirmed the commitment of our two countries to pursue the agreed initiatives. Within the Strategic Dialogue and Co-operation Platform (SDCP), several issues of mutual benefit to both sides were discussed, including the bridging of the Corentyne River. The Ministry will continue to employ several multimedia avenues to disseminate information on Guyana's borders. In this regard, our diplomats, both at home and abroad, are continually briefed on the strategy of the Government and the role they play in carrying out this strategy.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to reflect on our participation at the multilateral level. Guyana's international engagements are grounded in the provisions of our Constitution, respect for the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter, and the fundamental adherence to international law.

2.02 *p.m.*

This, in turn, guides the pursuit of the key objectives of our foreign policies which include the following: one, the maintenance of Guyana's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and promoting regional and international support to this end; two, to maintain, develop and enhance relationships with strategic countries on the bilateral, regional and multilateral levels, and to ensure that Guyana is actively and meaningfully engaged in the multilateral arena; three, to focus and ensure that Guyana could build the partnerships required to achieve its development objectives, including full implementation of the 2030 agenda on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and that Guyana contributes substantively to the global forum dedicated to advancing their implementation.

Guyana's approach to human rights issues is premised on obligations deriving from the Constitution, the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR), and the several international instruments to which Guyana is party, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), as well as to advance Guyana's leading role in finding solutions to

global challenges, including climate security, food security and energy security. We have had a very active participation at the level of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the year 2024. Please allow me to update the citizens. Since commencing its tenure on the United Nations Security Council on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2024, Guyana has actively worked to enhance partnerships with fellow Council Members within the framework of the Africa Three or the African group, the Elected 10 or the Elected 10 Members and the Permanent Five Members to advance the mandate of the United Nations Security Council, which is the exercise of the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Guyana has served as President of the Council for the month of February, 2024 and has hosted a signatory event under the theme: *The Impact of Climate Change and Food Insecurity on the Maintenance of International Peace and Security*. This event was chaired by His Excellency, President Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali. During 2024 as well, Guyana collaborated with the African Group of the United Nations Security Council – Algeria, Mozambique and Sierra Leone – through the African mechanism which fosters cooperation, consultation and collaboration between the African Union and Caribbean Community (CARICOM) member states with a shared commitment to advancing African common positions and amplifying Africa's voice within the Security Council. Guyana continued to work closely with the African Group partners to build consensus on African issues and speak with a unified voice, contributing to key Council outcomes such as a press conference on Libya, urging de-escalation and a presidential statement on missing persons. Additionally, the African Group jointly engaged on non-African matters, including Haiti, Columbia, Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, children and armed conflict and other topics where member consensus existed.

In February 2024, Guyana co-led a field mission to Columbia with the United Kingdom (UK) and Switzerland. In October 2024, Guyana was a coordinator of the elected 10 Members of the Council. We also partnered with Switzerland as the informal focal point on conflict and hunger within its Security Council for the year 2024. This alliance with Guyana's proactive stance on addressing conflict and hunger, particularly conflict-related food insecurity, is what the Government of Guyana prioritises as both a driver and consequence of conflicts. Guyana is also a member of the incoming Chair of the Informal Expert Group on Climate, Peace and Security, and was also elected to serve on the organisational committee of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC), filling the seat allocated to the Group of

Latin American and Caribbean States (GRULAC) in the security council category.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to briefly highlight our achievements on human rights issues, including Indigenous peoples, African descent rights, and women's issues. Guyana participated in its Third Periodic Review in March, 2024. The United Nations Human Rights Committee (UNHRC), during three of its meetings, considered Guyana's Third Periodic Report under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Guyana reaffirmed its commitment to honouring its obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other applicable conventions. Guyana also updated on actions since the last report, including enactment of new laws and amendments to statutes to strengthen human rights; reform of the health system; modernisation of the judiciary; implementation of anticorruption measures; safeguarding revenue from the oil and gas sector for future generations; and providing digitalise platforms to make businesses' activities more transparent and accountable. As it pertains to non-reformer or not forcing migrants to return to their home countries, Guyana stated that migrants from Venezuela were not returned to the country of their origin but were welcomed humanely. Guyana also told the Committee of the restitution of the Multi-Agency Coordinating Committee created to ensure Guyana honours its commitment to International Humanitarian Law.

On reparations, His Excellency, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, has made several calls for reparations, for the historical injustices relating to the transatlantic slave trade and restitution for the impacts on communities and nations. His Excellency urged that a reparations mechanism be established. Guyana participated in several high-level conferences on human rights issues including the 17<sup>th</sup> Session of the Conference of State Parties to the Convention of Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Guyana also participated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent which was held in April, 2024. During that meeting, Guyana supported calls for a second International Decade for the People of African Descent. Guyana also proclaimed its commitment to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. We have also had the privilege of informing on the progress made by the people of African Descent and its budgeted subventions made towards supporting civil society's organisations geared towards their continued development. Guyana is also informed of the

Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC) and its purpose for fostering harmony among the ethnic groups in Guyana.

In 2024, Guyana participated in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Session of the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII). During the session, Guyana reaffirmed its commitment to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). Guyana also had the privilege of informing the session of the progress made by Guyana's first peoples and its budgeted subventions made towards their continued development. We, as a country, also shared our unique governance model and Indigenous people's interaction during the National Toshias Council (NTC).

At the 113<sup>th</sup> Session, we also participated in a dialogue on the Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD). During the Session, Guyana was able to engage with the Committee and, by doing so, reaffirm our commitment to the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We also undertook to submit our 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Periodic Reports to that Committee.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to speak a little about our Sustainable Development Goals. The Government of Guyana has aligned the country's national development pathway to focus on priority areas such as food security, climate change and agriculture financing, as it works towards achieving the United Nations SDG2: Zero Hunger. The agriculture and food sector in Guyana is being repositioned and transformed into an expanded, diversified, modernised, resilient and competitive sector. Moreover, Guyana has emerged as a leader in CARICOM, being the lead head with responsibility for agriculture, agricultural diversification and food security within the CARICOM Quasi-Cabinet. As the region implements the CARICOM agri-food system agenda, Guyana has committed to play an integral role in fulfilling the goal of reducing CARICOM's food import bill by 25% this year.

Guyana is making significant strides in advancing health sector resilience to achieve universal health coverage in accordance with SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being. The Government of Guyana has prioritised efforts to advance the integration of human, animal and environmental health sectors to improve disease prevention, preparedness and resilience against climate-related health impacts through the implementation of a One Health Approach. By increasing cross-sectoral collaboration, particularly in One Health and

sustaining investments in health, environmental and emergency response systems, Guyana aims to improve health outcomes, advance universal health coverage and support regional health security and resilience. The project will strengthen public health preparedness by continuing efforts to build sustainable capacities in pandemic prevention, preparedness and response following the Guyana Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) emergency response project.

Guyana has continued to be a leader in forest with Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030 Agenda, showing real results in climate finance with carbon credit sales for the period 2016 to 2020, already earning Guyana US\$750 million. This is a result of Guyana's landmark issuance as the first jurisdictional scaled carbon credit programme in the world with 23.4 million tonnes of carbon credits issued to Guyana. Additional milestones for Guyana include the fact that His Excellency the President represented Guyana at the 79<sup>th</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly and also participated in the debates, as well as the Summit of the Future. His Excellency emphasised Guyana's commitment to sustainable development and the combat of climate change. His Excellency also called on countries to fulfil their related pledges to alleviate the challenges faced by Small Island Developing States (SIDS), especially for those affected by the rise in sea levels. He also advocated for action to assure food and energy security while underscoring the collective responsibility to provide \$300 billion to \$500 billion needed to reform the global food system.

In advancing our leadership regionally and at the multilateral level, Guyana was elected to serve on several international bodies such as the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO), which we are chairing this year – congratulations to my dear Colleague, Dr. Frank Anthony; the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR); and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO). Guyana has also won the bid to host the annual exercise of Simulation of Humanitarian Assistance in Case of Disasters within the Ambit of the Organization of American States (OAS) in 2025.

*2.17 p.m.*

Guyana also hosted the Food and Agriculture Organisations' (FAO's) 38<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference of Blacks for Latin America and Caribbean States, with representations from 289 participants from 33 countries, eight United Nations (UN) organisations, 13 inter-governmental organisations, six civil society organisations, six private sector associations

and 10 scientific and academic organisations. Allow me to thank my dear Colleague, Minister of Agriculture, Hon. Mustapha, for leading this very great initiative.

In January, 2025, Guyana will submit its Fourth Cycle National Report under the Universal Periodic Review process to the Human Rights Council. In addition, the country will be reviewed in May at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, based on the national report submitted in January, the Civil Rights Society reports, Special Rapporteurs and other human rights actors in Guyana.

Guyana also assumed the role as Coordinator of the African Group for the first quarter of 2025 and, as part of that role as Coordinator, Guyana will hold the African Group retreat in Georgetown in February, this year. Guyana will also assume the role of Co-Chair of the Informal Expert Group on Climate and Security in 2025, along with the Republic of Korea and Slovenia on the United Nations Security Council. Guyana will also resume the Presidency of the Security Council for the second time in the month of June, 2025. Thematic areas for this signature event are currently under consideration. Wrapping up on the multilateral level, Guyana is campaigning for its candidacy to the Executive Board of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at the elections scheduled to take place during the 43<sup>rd</sup> Session of the General Conference of UNESCO in October-November, 2025 in Uzbekistan. My dear Colleague, Minister Manickchand, is going to lead this charge.

On our Foreign Trade Policy, Guyana remains an open and liberalised trade policy environment that is consistent with our membership of the Caribbean Community Single Market and Economy (CSME). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation has continued to successfully execute its mandate of articulating and coordinating Guyana's trade policy at the bilateral, regional and multilateral levels. At the multilateral level, Guyana remains committed to a fair and development-friendly, rules-based trading system. Since 2020, the Government of Guyana has strengthened the technical capacities of the country's diplomatic representatives to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Geneva and to the European Union (EU) and the Organisation of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (OACPS) in Brussels. At the WTO, the Guyana Mission in Geneva continues to provide group leadership in CARICOM's representation at the fisheries subsidies' negotiations and African, Caribbean and Pacific Group representation in the agriculture negotiations. This is also consistent with Guyana's lead responsibility within

CARICOM for agriculture sector development, including agriculture diversification and food security.

We continue to implement trade measures directed at the expansion of the economy through enhanced import and export profiles, with both traditional and non-traditional sources. In this regard, we have consistently engaged Guyana's trading partners in relation to the removal of market access barriers, with a view to securing and expanding improved market presence for our products in both regional and international markets. Between 2020 and 2023, exports increased by 285%, moving from US\$2.8 billion to US\$10.8 billion, accounting for a 106% improvement in our non-oil exports.

**Mr. Speaker:** To allow you to conclude, Hon. Minister, we will need an extension.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, for reminding us. I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his statement to the House.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you. Minister Teixeira. Minister Todd, you may continue to conclude in five minutes.

**Mr. Todd:** Consequently, trade with our major extra-regional partners increased significantly. Exports to the United States of America and Canada expanded by US\$6.2 billion and US\$385 billion, respectively. The growth of our exports to the United Kingdom and the European Union have also been exponential, increasing by US\$747 million and US\$2.2 billion during the period. This trend is reflected in our extra-regional exports, which have risen by US\$2.8 billion since 2020. Additionally, exports to non-traditional markets have increased substantially. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Singapore and India are now ranked among Guyana's top (10) export destinations. Since 2020, our exports have grown by US\$2.1 billion to those countries. We are also strengthening our public-private trade partnership. During the year 2024, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation continued to strengthen our inter-agency trade policy consultative mechanism, with the private sector and the wider business community as strategic partners in trade facilitation and market access development.

Allow me to move to the diaspora, Mr. Speaker. The Government of Guyana, under the leadership of His Excellency, continues to aggressively pursue the involvement of the diaspora community in national development. During the year 2024, we undertook more than 15 diaspora engagements in approximately eight

jurisdictions. We will continue to engage with Guyanese living abroad to encourage their involvement in the national development process.

On migration, the Ministry has improved the efficiency in the processing to allow for timely deliverables in keeping with the Ministry's mandate. In 2024, the Ministry processed 409 successful applications of Guyanese who re-migrated primarily from the United States, Canada, United Kingdom and the Caribbean States.

Since taking Office, the Government of Guyana has processed approximately 2,000 qualified re-migrant applications. This highlights the trust and confidence of the Diaspora in the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government. The Remigration Unit continues to process applications within seven working days. This represents one-third of the processing time under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government. I set out to highlight Guyana's performance at the level of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in advancing our foreign trade development, our foreign policy agenda, as well as our trade policy agenda. The numbers do not lie. We have positioned ourselves as a leader on climate, on energy and on food. We will continue along that trend, with the leadership of His Excellency and his competent Government. We as a people will work together in advancing the interests of the people.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service again and his team at the Ministry of Finance. Allow me also to thank the Members of staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for their support and for their hard work during the year 2024. Let me also commend this budget to this Assembly for its passage. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Minister. Before I call on the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, we have been going very good and I am still hearing a number of words that are coming from those interrupting speakers. I have not mentioned it yet, but I just want to remind persons who are coming after Minister Todd, of Standing Order 41:07:

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

Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, you have the floor.

**Mr. Duncan:** Thank you very much, gracious Speaker. Later this year, when we are on the other side of the House, I

am going to miss you. I am going to miss these exchanges we have had. I am going to miss you.

Members of the National Assembly, Guyanese everywhere, it is a privilege to join with my Colleagues – *Budget 2025*. I want to thank the Members of the Government too, who have made presentations. When we find the areas to support the Government we will. We have no trouble in doing that. Over the last four years, we have found common ground on some occasions. We have seen the measures for children – school grants go up a little. Then we see some kids come out of nowhere, we were all surprised. I saw what you did there. You raised the money and then you brought kids out from all over the place. I saw what you did there. With that being said, it is difficult to come after the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. It is very difficult. I have a hard task on my hand.

The year before the last, November, there was a motion passed in Venezuela, and we had a lot of fearful people in this country. It was morbid fear. It was palpable. I had the privilege of representing the Parliamentary Opposition with my Colleague from Region 1, Mr. Cox. We went down there. I went down to Mabaruma to see our Guyanese brothers and sisters and to stand in support with them. For those who do not know, Region 1 is a border frontier. We went all the way down to Yarakita, which is the first contact the Venezuelans would have with our country. I did not see Minister Todd there reassuring our Guyanese brothers and sisters. I did not see the verbose goodly Bishop. I did not see the Hon. Member, Ms. Rodrigues. I did not see Dr. Ashni Singh. I did not see the Vice-President. As a matter of fact, to be fair, I did see the Commander-in-Chief, and he spent about nine minutes at the waterfront and then he was gone. The video is there to prove.

Those of us who were less fearful went down to Yarakita, we went down to Imbotero, and we spoke to our Guyanese brothers and sisters and we let them know that ‘We are here for you’. I want to leave most of this retort in response to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation to my eminent Colleague, Ms. Walton-Desir, who I am certain will deal with him. Suffice to say that Maduro and his administration, you understand why they have gotten more emboldened under this Administration when you listen to the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

2.32 p.m.

All right-thinking Guyanese advised against the meeting in Argyle, St Vincent and the Grenadines. Hon. Minister of



Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, for that meeting and what we expended on that, what have we to show for it? Hon. Minister, under your watch the Haitian situation rose a crescendo under this Administration, under our chairmanship of CARICOM and we declared success because we installed an interim management committee of sorts in Haiti. Haiti is worst off today. I will leave most of it to my imminent Colleague as I said.

Guyana only fares well on the international stage and globally because we had in David Authur Granger the foresight in 2018 to take this matter to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and you abuse us for that ever so often. That is why we have done extremely well in this period; do not let us be confused. We have done extremely well globally because, on this side of the House, we historically had strong leaders on the international stage. Guyana's foreign affairs must be judged on the success of the fishing license deal with Suriname. We must be judged on that. We treated His Excellency, Chandrikapersad Santokhi to a State visit and what have we to show for those fishing licenses we were promised – four years after Minister Todd. That is on you and that is on your Government. We like to talk half and leave half, well I come to talk the other half. This situation persists. As I am on fishing, Hon. Minister of Agriculture, it persists because Guyanese know everywhere *when you find a packoo, you buss he back*. How much *backs* Todd got? That is the question – the Hon. Member. That is the question we have to ask ourselves.

I have come to this esteemed House to address this so-called transformative 2025 Budget, presented by the Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service. While grand on paper, the budget invites critical examination when viewed through the lens of past fiscal practices, specifically those... [ **Mr. Todd:** The man failed UG a hundred times.] Yet finished my law degree in three years. [ **Mr. Todd:** How long did you spend doing law?] Three years. While grand on paper, Mr. Speaker... [ *interruption*] Mr. Foreign Affairs Minister, you would serve your time better shouting at Maduro and not at me.

[ *Mr. Speaker hit the gavel*]

While grand on paper...[ *interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, I have stopped your clock. You will get back your time. Please Members, there is a Standing Order with respect to interruption, Hon. Member Todd. Hon. Member Todd, you had a chance to speak. I want to caution Members...

[ *Mr. Speaker the gavel*]

I want to caution members in the gallery, clapping, thumping on the desks is not for you. If I see that again, I will have to ask you to be removed. Go ahead, Hon. Member, please.

**Mr. Duncan:** For the record, I studied Communication at the Undergraduate Level, at the Diploma Level from 2009 for two years. I pursued Law after that. I studied it for three years and passed. I did not fall out. Graduated from the Law Department of the University of Guyana in 2015, and I became Student President in my first year at UG.

While grand on paper, the 2025 Budget invites critical examination when viewed through the lens of past fiscal practices, specifically those of *Budgets 2020 through 2024* and (*inaudible*) the experience of Guyanese. *Budget 2025*, the theme should be what Guyanese see when they look for an update on the infamous cash grant, 'Printed but not yet available'. The theme of this budget should be what Guyanese see when they check the status of the \$100,000 cash grant, 'Distribution venue to be determined'. From instantaneously in November last year – rather 10<sup>th</sup> October – instantaneously, \$200,000 per Guyanese household moved to November month end, before Christmas, before New Year and Guyanese are still waiting. Benefits from the *Budget 2025* will remain elusive like the benefits of past budgets, 'Printed but not yet available', 'Distribution venue to be determined'. Do not let this come into this House and try to kerfuffle us and Guyanese people, as though Independence was gained in this country in 2015. The PPP had 32 years in Government – 32 years. What have we to show for it?

A young teacher took me to a field at the back of, I think it was at Diamond, and said, 'My house lot is somewhere here' – somewhere. And, of course, we did not build anything. While my colleague was showing me that vast expanse, 'somewhere out here the land is', the Hon. Member, Susan Rodrigues, had a cutlass chopping her way to Linden. She was not using the highway. A young nurse said, 'Yes, I got a house lot. I paid for it. I got it titled but I do not know where it is. I was never shown a map, a space where this house is'. That is replicated thousands of times in this country-wide because you want to come and preach in the National Assembly that we gave out 6,000 house lots but people have never seen them and do not have access to them.

Guyana here is something you did not know. We are meeting at a time when the former Technical Director of Operations at the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), Mr. Dwarka Bahadur, said,

“The hiring of seven Cuban experts at a huge cost to help the factory operations has yielded no tangible results...”

He said,

“...similar recruitments from India would likely produce the same result.”

Let us set the economic context from which we will interrogate *Budget 2025*. Mr. Bahadur went on to state that:

“The company through whatever deliberations sought to bring seven Cuban experts for the factories at an enormous cost to the company and who have to date made zero contribution.”

I will repeat what Mr. Bahadur said,

“...zero.”

He went on to say:

“GuySuCo needed field help but had received factory experts.”

Let us set the context for the budget. He goes on to say:

“I am inclined to say that as a trained qualified technologist, I am dismayed at the seemingly casual responses to the challenges of the sugar industry. Tinkering with the structure...”

I mean Hon. Minister,

“...and blaming the directors...”

Mr. Bahadur said,

“...would not solve the problems of the industry.”

Guyana, here is something you did not know. We are meeting at a time when companies are closing. Last budget, the budget before, I heard the Hon. Minister of Finance premise huge job growths based on BPOs they were bringing, this is Business Processing Outsourcing Companies. Intel closed last year – that BPO. They closed last year under the magnificent watch of this Government – nice time in the economy. Let me tell you something you did not know – more nice time. Midas’ BPO transitioned out of their business in Linden. They like to quote that they brought a hundred jobs to Linden through the Midas BPO. They transitioned to a company called Prochant and Prochant downsized from 100 to 35. This is the other half we did not hear in the budget context. Acquity BPO also closed; shut down its operations locally. We did not hear about that. That

glowing part of the budget; that glowing part of the economy. It was not just limited to BPOs. For instance, a company called Only Coconuts, they closed the factory last year – last year. I am happy to bring you up to speed. Demerara Bakery closed its doors last year. Lots of these companies keep mentioning the rising costs.

Guyana here is something you did not know. The single largest project that we are investing in, the Gas to Shore, we have been adamant that this project needs a feasibility study. We were told that the Export-Import (EXIM) Bank and its consultants did a feasibility study. We have learnt recently from the EXIM Bank, and I want to quote the letter from them, the EXIM Bank, based on a request that was made, stated this,

“You have requested any and all feasibility studies conducted by the US EXIM Bank for loan application...”

Moreover, it states the loan application,

“We have conducted a comprehensive search of the files within the Office of the Board Authorized Finance, Engineering Environmental Division for records that would be responsive to your request. This is the component within EXIM...”

This is the bank talking,

“...in which responsive records could reasonably be expected to be found. Please be advised we were unable to locate or identify any responsive records, as EXIM did not conduct a feasibility study.”

*Talk half and leff half.* Guyana, just in case you did not know...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you have completed the first part of your presentation, including the time I gave you back. You have five minutes to conclude, can someone so move?

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member Jones. Hon. Member, you continue for five minutes and conclude.

**Mr. Duncan:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. To get a good snapshot of where we are as a company, for the last year plus every Monday *Stabroek News* is publishing *How the Cost of Living is Affecting People*. How the cost of living is affecting Guyanese – \$80 a pound of sugar has gone up to

\$240, has gone up to \$300. Rice has gone from 2000 for a 10kg bag to 2800, and it has gone beyond that. They mentioned transportation cost has gone up, among other things, housing materials. Hon. Member, cement, zinc sheet, sand have all gone up, just in case you did not know. Pensioners like Venus Wright, struggle with the high cost of living. Farmers like Ramlakhan Bismat lament that \$5000 barely buys necessities. You have Natasha Williams, a single mother, who says, 'I have to work two jobs to keep my children fed and in school. Housing for me is out of reach'. Denis Marshall, a fisherman, highlights that the price of fuel has gone up. Gloria Singh, a small shop owner, laments, 'People just do not have the money to buy'. Rajesh Narine, a mechanic, says, 'Spare parts are so expensive now'. The list goes on and on. [Mr. Mahipaul: And on and on.] And on and on.

Here is something you did not know, Minister Hugh Todd, billions dedicated to housing and water and yet we have no comprehensive spending details. We do not have that. Bureau of Statistics, \$2 billion later, cannot produce the Census. Just in case you did not know, Minister Todd. Fiscal deficit keeps increasing. Sugar has declined 21%. Income tax out of this world. No tax record – Exxon, Hess and their counterparts, China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) as well. The part-time job scheme just keeps going up. Why? It is signalling underemployment.

The fishing sector – 1% growth; gold mining sector – 0.5% growth. The Government's diversification rhetoric is contradicted. Oil and gas is carrying everything else and the non-oil sector keeps failing us, just in case you did not know.

2.47 p.m.

As I conclude, Mr. Speaker, *Budget 2025* is not a vision for progress, it is a missed opportunity. It prioritises the political agenda of the PPP/C over the practical needs of the Guyanese people. It is an election-year budget. Over-reliance on oil revenues, lack of transparency and inadequate measures to address poverty and inequity mar this budget. It mars this budget. We need a budget that genuinely reflects the aspirations of all Guyanese, not just a select few like the Hon. Minister Todd. I urge this House to scrutinise *Budget 2025* thoroughly, demanding accountability and transparency at every step. Finally, let us work together to ensure that Guyana's financial resources are used to build a truly prosperous and equitable society for all. I urge the Government to go back to the drawing board and present a budget that truly reflects the aspirations of all Guyanese and not just the short-term goals of the PPP/C. Thank you, Mr.

Speaker and thank you very much, Minister Todd. [Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan. Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister, the Hon. Member Mr. McCoy, you may proceed with your contribution.

**Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister [Mr. McCoy]:** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish that the Alliance For Change (AFC) had done a feasibility study on the stage they mounted at Parade Ground that collapsed. I wish they had done a feasibility study on the art of governance. [Dr. Singh: What about D'Urban Park?] I even wish they had done a feasibility study on D'Urban Park. It is very clear that what we continue to hear in this House... By the way, I walked with this compilation of major sins of APNU/AFC. It is highlights of incompetence and neglect of people, and this is just part of it.

We are not afraid of people. In the worst of times, we are with people. In the good times, we are still with them so we do not have to be afraid to go to Region 1, Region 9, Region 7, Region 8, Region 10 or wherever exists situations where our people need us. We have an impressive record of engagement with people and outreaches with people across this country day in and day out. No part in the history of this country have we had that before. We do not have cardboard images for people to interface and interact with. We have real Ministers, a real President and a real Prime Minister on the ground meeting people every single day. Not so long ago, in 2020 to be precise, the Guyanese citizens parted ways with APNU/AFC – goodbye, ta-ta – whose globally unmatched incompetence left Guyana teetering on the precipice of economic collapse. Their lacklustre governance manifested in catastrophic job losses across every sector of our country, affecting the livelihood of over 30,000 Guyanese workers and, additionally, with a tragic impact on 70,000 family members.

Somewhere in this House, the *Shaggys* on the other side of this House will barefacedly deny – *it wasn't me*. The APNU/AFC coalition Government's reckless policies shattered the hope, aspirations and dreams of Guyanese, and by extension, communities across our country. The calamitous display of con artistry, profound misunderstanding of rudimentary economics, calculated misrepresentation of factual and realistic occurrences and clumsy denials of their involvement in electoral criminality have already manifested themselves here today in this House. A reckless imposition of over 300 new taxes and fees

as an albatross around the necks of the working class – *it wasn't me*. Presided over the worst unaccountability and mismanagement in our nation's history – *it wasn't me*. Gold bangles decorated on the hand of a former Minister, purchased with misappropriated funds – *it wasn't me*. The larceny of the country's first oil and gas signing bonus of \$18 million – *it wasn't me*.

**Mr. Speaker:** Check the word.

**Mr. McCoy:** I am not sure what word.

**Mr. Speaker:** You check back.

**Mr. McCoy:** The records will show that a former Minister denied... [Dr. Singh: Its existence.] ...the existence and the collection of a signing bonus of US\$18,000,000 and then when they were exposed, he said he thought it was a gift. A gift to whom? That was in Parliament.

Mr. Speaker, in the face of this ruinous legacy, we, the People's Progressive Party/ Civic, remained steadfast as true stewards of the economy, as true defenders and protectors of our sacred democracy, ensuring that never again will the APNU/AFC interlopers be able to attempt the heist of our entire election in broad daylight. Consistent adherence to and the preservation of the rule of law and an abiding commitment to the empowerment of Guyanese people and the betterment of their lives remain at the heart of our policies and programmes of the People's Progressive Party/ Civic Government. Over just four short years, considering two years of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) setbacks, we have honoured the people's mandate through results-oriented delivery of goods and services. Today, the social contract entered into with our citizens, through our resounding and definitive 2020 mandate, Guyana's most ambitious and transformative agenda ever undertaken in the history of our nation prioritises the well-being of Guyanese above everything else. Those with unpatriotic and narrow self-serving, partisan agendas, who always just seek to disrupt, divide, badmouth and trample upon our achievements, will never be allowed to succeed.

*Budget 2025* adds to our transformative vision, and is grounded in sustainable development, which advances education, diversifies the economy and modernises our infrastructure. We are improving the quality of life of Guyanese where every citizen has the opportunity to thrive, to partake in the bounty of the prospering economy and to contribute to a democratic society that embodies the will of the people. I, therefore, commend my colleague, the Hon. Dr. Singh, and his staff at the Ministry of Finance, and

indeed all other public servants, for presenting another transformative plan for the advancement of our great nation, *Budget 2025* – a bold affirmation of the Government's unwavering commitment to a people-centred development agenda that is rooted in the principles of equity, inclusivity and sustainable progress.

Through *Budget 2025*, the PPP/C Government is continuing to charter a course towards an integrated, diversified and robust economy, ensuring that every citizen, respective of where they live, can benefit from the abundant opportunities created by the growth of both the oil and non-oil sectors. This budget places a particular emphasis on enhancing Guyana's infrastructural capacity, with monumental investments in the energy, transportation and water sectors. The construction of new roads, bridges and drainage systems, alongside a focus on renewable energy, reflects the Government's recognition that modern infrastructure is integral to the improvement of living standards across our country. *Budget 2025* is another example of people's empowerment. It does make a huge difference when an ordinary hinterland resident – man, woman and child – now has equitable access to quality healthcare, solid secondary education, potable water, and unfettered access to our menu of social welfare programmes altogether.

Guyanese globally celebrated the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) transfers, direct financial benefits to 253 hinterland and Amerindian communities where, as part of their self-governance feature, the moneys are used to administer community affairs. The former regime's broken record has been sung for the past four years, that they had no access to oil money. It is a sorry excuse to mask the poor performance of the failed APNU/AFC regime. By constantly singing that song, they hoped the people would forget that they were raking in hundreds of billions of new money from the more than 300 new taxes and fees they imposed on us.

Permit me to dismantle one of the most disingenuous arguments advanced by our colleagues on the opposite side during this debate. If money were truly the issue, their actions would have been guided by service to the public rather than self-enrichment. Therein lies the profound contradiction. While they claimed financial constraints, their immediate actions, once they assumed Office in 2015, belied their rhetoric. The ink had not dried on the instruments of appointment when they gave themselves a 50% salary increase under the guise of increased workload. Laughable indeed. They had increased workload.

3.02 p.m.

[**Dr. Singh:** No. They said they had to be paid not to be corrupt.] That too, but it ended up being the opposite anyway. The cry of no oil money for the people never once stopped the APNU/AFC from embarking on frivolous, extravagant ventures that drained resources, such as the colossal waste of over \$1 billion on D'Urban Park. What a monument. Mr. Ramjattan, are you proud of D'Urban Park? I am sure you are. It is money that evaporated. Up to now, they cannot give account for over \$600 million of that \$1 billion. They are looking for projects done by the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. *Tracker* from the US television series is still looking for the missing moneys from the D'Urban Park project.

Their priorities were more about beds, bangles, bracelets and bed sheets than about fulfilling the most basic needs of people who had placed their trust in them. The people were not fooled. They saw the disparity between the promises made and the reality that unfolded and they understood that the APNU/AFC were more interested in securing their future than the future of the Guyanese people. Let us be absolutely clear. This was never a matter of limited resources. It was a matter of intent, and the intent was to enrich themselves and to divert resources away from the masses and funnel them into their own pockets, knowing that their promises were empty. Going green by painting buildings green was mere window dressing. It was about constructing a system that empowered just a few at the expense of the many. When it came to showing any true concern for people, such as the over 7,000 sugar workers, who were unceremoniously sent home without severance or compensation, the APNU/AFC *turned a blind eye*, unwilling to extend the bare minimum of support, leaving the workers with nothing but broken dreams and hearts.

When APNU/AFC leaders found themselves confronted with the discontent of the Guyanese people, they resorted to an absurd, embarrassing gesture. Rather than engage directly with the people, they put forward a cardboard replica of their former leader, Mr. David Granger. Contrast this, Mr. Speaker, with the leadership of our President and Government, whose visits to the diaspora and engagements with people across this country, both at home and abroad, altogether are marked by authenticity and deep care, affection and empathy. Our Government embodies the true essence of leadership. Whether it is Brooklyn or Berbice, this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government is engaged, compassionate, and in touch with the needs of the people. Our Government listens to the citizens and makes adjustments in its policies and programmes where necessary. We listen to the real needs on the ground, and we design

measures and initiatives that meet those needs. Our Government has championed the needs and aspirations of the working class. We have remained true to our ideals. We have kept faith with the people. We have remained grounded and accessible to people, and we continue to work day and night to create betterment for all our citizens.

Let us not be deceived by the empty slogan of extravagant promises or the hollow symbols of the quasi-leadership that we will continue to hear from the other side. The APNU/AFC had the opportunity to serve the people, and they led without empathy and made a mess of the opportunity.

Friends, families and favourites: I stand today fully aware and indeed deeply appreciative of the role my colleagues on the other side are playing, whether they realise it or not, in helping to amplify the vision of our 'One Guyana' – a vision that, in stark contrast to their divisive and exclusionary tactics, seeks to unite all Guyanese, irrespective of their political affiliation, region, or socio-economic standing. This is a vision that is actively dismantling the entrenched legacies of neglect that the APNU/AFC cabal perpetrated on the people of this country. It is the same cabal that deprived the people of our hinterland, stripping over 1,900 Community Service Officers (CSOs) of employment. Yet, they are the same individuals who now stand before us preaching a gospel of exclusion and disillusionment while we, the Government of the people, remain committed to lifting every last corner and citizen of this great nation.

Allow me... [**An Hon. Member:** The people are listening to you.]

I am happy. That is why I am speaking for them. Allow me to thank my colleagues on that side of the House, once again, for, as we speak today, my Guyanese family in Region 1 is benefitting directly from the immense strides made in improving river transport, enhanced medical services and improved educational facilities. This is all because, as a truly caring Government, we refuse to leave even the most remote communities behind – communities that were forgotten under your Government and communities that have now found solace and opportunity in the forward march of progress under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government.

My Indigenous Guyanese family in Region 9 is experiencing the transformative power of a massive housing programme, and as we push forward, *Ms. Waterfront Walton*, take note, we have friends across Linden too. My friends in Linden, who have long enjoyed the benefits of electricity subsidies under this PPP/C Government, are now reaping more

rewards of a revitalised bauxite industry, a new four-lane highway that is connecting them to the broader national landscape, a new toll-free four-lane Wismar bridge, a new Lethem to Mabura Highway, and over 600 new house lots distributed to the people of Region 10. My friends in Linden are secure knowing that this Government remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring that all Guyanese, regardless of their political affiliation or region, have access to the essential services they need to thrive in this modern world.

Mr. Speaker, let us turn our gaze to our favourites, the very individuals who sit across from me today whose political theatrics are nothing more than an attempt to mislead and deceive the people of this country, who had no hesitation in walking, like Hon. Annette Ferguson, on the newly-paved roads in communities considered People's National Congress (PNC) strongholds after failing to organise a protest against the road – those roads constructed by this PPP/C Government, roads built for the people and roads that have transformed lives and communities. Yet, these our favourites, despite walking on those roads, had no qualms in proclaiming to the citizens that this Government has done nothing for them. While they, the very same favourites, grinned for the cameras when the enumerators registered them for the \$100,000 cash grant – a grant that has brought tangible benefits to every adult citizen – the very people they now seek to deceive and mislead, telling them this is not for you, as though they have some divine right to withhold progress from the very citizens who have benefitted most from the initiatives rolled out by this Administration.

Mr. Speaker, it is as brazen as it could get. It is as brazen as it is repugnant. It is a level of duplicity that can only be described as cynical, where those who have benefitted most from the programmes and policies of this PPP/C Administration dare to undermine the very Government that made their benefits possible. It is all in the name of political expediency, all for the hollow gain of a few, all while the people of Guyana – the real people, not the privileged elite on that side of the House – see through the charade.

This morning's first speaker denigrated and insulted the working people of this country. It was total disrespect, Mr. Speaker, when she spoke in such a demeaning way about women, young people, men, and ordinary people of this country who, on a daily basis, get into their workplaces, wherever it is, and set themselves a task to earn a daily living, to make money to feed their families, to be able to lift themselves out of poverty, to take advantage of the opportunity of a job. They were insulted. I, Mr. Speaker, ask that the Hon. Member retract that comment. Workers of all

types, skills, talents, and experiences make up the Guyanese workforce and support our economy and the growth and development of our economy. Workers, whether they work in the hotel industry, the construction industry, any industry, any sector or any workplace are people who are deserving of our admiration and commendation for their verse understanding of wanting to work, to work hard and honestly for a living.

3.17 p.m.

In any industry, in any sector or any workplace are people who are deserving of our admiration and commendation for their verse understanding of wanting to work, to work hard and honestly for a living. They should never be embarrassed. They should never be made to feel as if they are lesser than those who are in the field of medicine, law or any profession. They have a right to a job. That is why you can recognise the difference between us and you on that side. The people of this country have long recognised, Mr. Ramjattan, that their only resolve will be to keep you right there – to keep the *Shaggys* right there. It is this Government, under the visionary leadership of our President, that has sought to break the shackles of neglect that were so painstakingly constructed under your Government, the APNU/AFC Coalition. Today, we can see clearly now progress that is not marred in empty rhetoric but that is grounded in real, impactful action and progress that includes every Guyanese family, friends and favourites alike.

I am pleased that *Budget 2025* will advance our Government's agenda for fair and equitable access to information and public engagement. In analysing the landscape of political and media engagement in Guyana, one cannot help but acknowledge the stark contrast between the APNU/ AFC that came before the People's Progressive Party/Civic. As our commitment to transparent public discourse and media relations stands as a monumental shift in the political ethos, it is a clear departure from the darkness of opacity that once defined the political climate under the previous Regime. This is where engagement with the public, engagement with the media...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, your engagement here needs a five-minute extension.

**Ms. Teixeira:** I would like to ask for an additional five minutes for my Hon. Member to conclude his statement.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Minister Ms. Teixeira. Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy, you may continue. You have five minutes to conclude.

**Mr. McCoy:** ...where engagement with the media and the very idea of accountability seemed to be a mere afterthought, a farce and a performance more for the cameras than for the citizens of this great nation under your watch. You would recall – and I spoke already, perhaps I should not restate – the cardboard images and the silence by our President and Ministers of the former Government, when the air was thick with silence, with an alarming absence of genuine press conferences. This left journalists scrambling for scraps of information in an environment where access to the corridors of power was limited, and public officials were too often hidden behind closed doors. The APNU/AFC Government, instead of embracing scrutiny, operated as though it feared the light of public examination. It is sad, with no small degree of irony, Mr. Speaker, that President Granger, in the early years of his presidency, conducted a series of press conferences so rare that they were almost mythical. Today, unlike you, we have hundreds of....

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, remember that you are speaking to me.

**Mr. McCoy:** Mr. Speaker, unlike those on the opposite side, we have hundreds of engagements by our Cabinet and President every day – keeping in touch with people and ensuring that people are connected to us for the purpose of us continuously working for their development. That is our understanding of how a Government operates. Under our Government, my favourites on the other side, have seen the true potential of what a government truly committed to its people looks like. It is where transparency is not just a buzzword but a fundamental pillar upon which the Administration stands, and where the press is not seen as an adversary to be avoided but as a partner in the pursuit of truth, justice and progress. This is a far cry from the days when the cut-out cardboard images of your leaders stood in for real engagement.

In 2025, you will see us continuously working to ensure that the Government's information services benefit citizens through the provision of information and education to help them make decisions about their lives, understand what their Government is about, what their Government is doing, and be able to measure our actions for purposes inclusive of accountability and transparency. Over the past four years, we have retooled the state media apparatus and rebuilt the human capacities to ensure robust and professional service is

given to our people. While they rabble-rouse over there about equitable access, the people must be reminded that our state media provides and serves the people of Guyana every day.

In conclusion, the 2025 Budget is a bold, visionary blueprint that addresses the immediate and long-term needs of the people of Guyana. It is a budget that balances the imperatives of economic growth with the principles of equity, sustainability and social inclusion. Under the leadership of our President and the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, this budget exemplifies a Government committed not merely to the superficialities of development but to the deep, lasting transformation of our nation, ensuring that all Guyanese can share in the prosperity that we all are building for our future. This is a budget worthy of all our commendations. This budget is worthy of our support as it continues a programme of development, transformation and prosperity for the people of Guyana. I do so commend *Budget 2025* to this House for passage. [Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Minister McCoy, and now for the Opposition Chief Whip, Hon. Christopher Jones. Hon. Member, you may start.

**Mr. Jones:** Cde. Speaker, the Guyanese people are happy that *Budget 2025* has been presented. However, they are not happy because it is the largest budget in our history. They are not happy because of the grand theme, *A Secure, Prosperous and Sustainable Guyana*. The Guyanese people are happy because this is the last budget of the PPP/C Administration in Office. It will be out for a very long time.

The PPP/C's record of withdrawals: Over the past four years, the PPP/C has treated the Parliament of Guyana as an Automated Teller Machine (ATM). It has made 20 withdrawals – six budgets and 14 supplementary allocations totalling over \$4.9 trillion. This enormous spending has left Guyanese asking, what has changed for us? Each year we are told – this is our year and that every budget is the people's budget. Yet, Cde. Speaker, the promises in these budgets are nothing more than a fleeting illusion – visions that will never be attained under the People's Progressive Party/ Civic. For some reason, over the successive years of the People's Progressive Party/Civic in Office, the public servants are always left behind. Cde. Speaker, if you compare the APNU/AFC's four years in office without oil revenues to the PPP/C's five years with oil, the difference is clear. Under the APNU/AFC, public servants received a total wage increase of 77%. Under the PPP/C, which accessed trillions in oil

revenues, public servants received just 35%. This is typical greed from the PPP/C Government – big budgets but small increases for the people who keep this country running.

If we ask the average Guyanese citizen: has your life improved with these large budgets and oil revenue? The answer will be a resounding, no. The cost of living is unbearable. Access to clean water is inconsistent. Roads and bridges are poorly constructed. Health centres lack medication. Blackouts are frequent. In the abundance of water, the people of this country are thirsty. The Hon. Minister of Housing and Water spoke glowingly, just a few minutes ago, of potable water, wells, treatment plants, and the Guyanese people now having access to potable water. This was according to the Hon. Minister. The Hon. Minister could not have been speaking about the 592. The Hon. Minister could not have been speaking about the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. On Friday, 17<sup>th</sup> February, the very day that *Budget 2025* was being read, on Hits and Jams Entertainment (HJ) 94.1's morning programme, *Jump Start*, a woman called in from Westminster, La Parfaite Harmonie, complaining that for weeks La Parfaite Harmonie has been without potable water. The caller's story opened the floodgates. Citizens in communities across the country took to social media and highlighted the fact that water coming through their taps is smelly and *dutty*. It is water they cannot drink; water they cannot use to wash clothes; and water they cannot use to wash their yards. Now, we are about to pass a budget of \$1.3 trillion in the fastest-growing economy in the world, and the average Guyanese citizen cannot get potable water from their taps. The water is so bad that they cannot even wash their yards.

3.32 p.m.

Health – Under the Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger Administration patients across the country were provided with lifesaving dialysis treatment free of cost at several centres, including the New Amsterdam Public Hospital. However, when the People's Progressive Party/Civic took Office in 2020, this programme was scrapped and replaced with a private partnership that imposed a fee of \$24,000 per session. Patients are now required to pay out of their pockets \$12,000 for each session. Three sessions per week needed amount to \$36,000 or \$144,000 monthly. The devastating result is that over 45% of the patients who receive this life saving treatment, which was previously free of cost before 2020 are no longer with us. It is not because they sought treatment elsewhere but because they are dead. One such patient whose name I cannot disclose out of respect for his family's privacy was a water vendor; a man who supplied

water for residents in the New Amsterdam and surrounding communities. He expressed that he simply cannot afford \$36,000 per week for dialysis treatment because he has a family to feed and bills to pay. Forced to prioritise the wellbeing of his wife and children, he was unable to continue the treatment. Tragically, four months ago, this man died.

Youths – The young people of Guyana are our future and, in a country overflowing with oil revenues, they deserve meaningful investment in their potential. Our young people deserve access to funding to start their own businesses, substantial innovation grants, government guaranteed loans, business supported services, land for their ventures, and timely permits and approvals without unnecessary delay. It is time to end the friends and family opportunities programme, and let merit and fairness prevail. The PPP/C Government continues to fail the young people of this country by neglecting the priorities of same.

The Hon. Minister, Ms. Rodrigues, in her presentation made reference by essentially saying or giving the impression that nothing happened in Guyana before 1992. I will take the opportunity now to remind the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, in his Budget presentation at page 100, states under the caption:

“Free University and Technical and Vocational Education.”

He went on to state:

“...it would be recalled that our path to offering free tertiary education began in... with a write-off of outstanding student loans at the University of Guyana (UG)...”

I will stop there. The People's Progressive Party/Civic wants to give the young people of this country the impression that they are about to introduce free education in this country but it was under the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) and Mr. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham that Guyanese received free education from nursery to university. Many of the Ministers of Government sitting in this House, right now, are products of free education under the PNC, but they want to hoodwink the young people of this country. They need to say to the young people of this country when the People's Progressive Party/Civic came into Office, they introduced fees at the University of Guyana.

When we say the PPP/C has lost touch with reality and the people of this country, it is an understatement. They just do



not care. For here is a political party founded on the struggles for workers' rights, better paying jobs and better condition for the working poor. Mr. Speaker, you may know the PPP/C's party battle song, 'Oh fighting men, oh fighting men will now have to be rewarded'. It has to be rewarded, because the PPP/C now find themselves as a party fighting to enrich themselves, their families, friends and favourites. The former President of the United States of America, Mr. Joe Biden, in his farewell speech to the American people stated:

"Today an oligarchy is taking shape in America of extreme wealth, power and influence that ...threatens our... democracy, our basic rights and freedoms..."

An oligarchy which threatens the democracy in Guyana has already been formed and it is rapidly growing. The people refused to be condemned to servitude under the PPP/C oligarchy. I will remind this House that it was the former President, Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger, who warned this nation in July, 2011. He stated:

"The PPP/C has spawned a new culture that is not a meritocracy. It is a kleptocracy..."

It is supported by an oligarchy. It supports the people who places personal greed before the public need. Today, there are allegations – and I cannot use the word 'corruption', so I will replace it with 'dishonest dealings'.

**Mr. Speaker:** You cannot use that either. No.

**Mr. Jones:** Could I use the word 'loot'?

**Mr. Speaker:** [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Jones:** All right. Today, there are allegations of loot. Sorry. There are allegations of loot in almost every Government ministry and agency. What is worse is that these allegations of loot have been levelled at...

**Mr. Speaker:** Your time is still going so if you want to continue it that way, we will [*inaudible*].

**Mr. Jones:** [An Hon. Member (Opposition): Runnings.] Runnings. All right. Cde. Speaker...

**Mr. Speaker:** I will ask them to expunge the...

**Mr. Jones:** That is fine, Cde Speaker. It is understood. What is worse is the allegations of *runnings* have been levelled by Ministers of the Government – allegations of their spouses, children and family members fronting shell companies who are awarded contracts for...

**Mr. Speaker:** You are now imputing. You are now imputing. You are now imputing on Hon. Members. Hon. Member, please. You were going good until you took a set up.

**Mr. Jones:** Cde. Speaker, there are allegations of *runnings* in the Guyana Police Force (GPF) at the most senior level affecting the morale of the entire force but there is a saying, *the snake rots at the head*. In 2011, the international news outfit, *Vice News* reported allegations of *runnings* involving the Vice-President, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Members, there are Standing Orders with respect to imputing and also referencing and I will not allow them. You have two minutes on your original 15 minutes remaining. There is also a Standing Order with respect to repetition and we have heard that over and over again. Go ahead.

**Mr. Jones:** During Guyana's appearance before the United Nations (UN) Human Rights Commission, the UN Human Rights Committee Member, Mr. Laurence Helfer, stated that the Committee is aware of public frustration, for example, the failure to investigate reports of *runnings* by the named individual I mentioned before, The Committee also notes allegations of *runnings* in the Guyana Police Force and the Judiciary. In her response, the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, Ms. Gail Teixeira stated that allegations against the individual I mentioned before were never investigated because no police report was ever filed against him in the matter by anyone. In other words, the Guyanese citizens are expected to report allegations of *runnings* involving ministers and senior government officials to the same Guyana Police Force who faces allegations of *runnings* at the highest level.

**Mr. Speaker:** For you to continue running, you will need five minutes extension.

**Mr. Mahipaul:** Mr. Speaker, I move for the Hon. Member to be given five minutes to complete his presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul. Hon. Member Mr. Jones, I think you could now leave off where you are running to and continue on where we should.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Cde. Speaker. Parliamentary Committees play a crucial role in any functioning democratic system. They enhance the efficiency, accountability and transparency by facilitating in-depth investigation of issues, policies and legislations and take

tasks that cannot be thoroughly addressed during regular parliamentary sessions due to time constraint.

The Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance headed by the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, organised a Human Rights and Anti-*Runnings* Expo on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2024. The Minister stated that she is trying to create resilient institutions that have the capacity and the competency to reduce *runnings* to not only prevent and reduce it, but also to uncover it and prosecute it. One such Committee, that plays a critical role in this regard is the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of the Parliament of Guyana. The Committee examines the accounts detailing the appropriation of funds granted by the National Assembly for public expenditure, as well as accounts referred to it by the Assembly alongside the Report of the Auditor General. The Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, a Member of the Public Accounts Committee, has overseen the decline under her PPP/C Administration. Over the past four years, these are the meetings of the PAC.

In 2021, the Public Accounts Committee of the Parliament met 25 times. In 2022, it met 21 times. In 2023, only 11 times. By 2024, the number dropped to just nine meetings for the entire year. This is as a result of a resolution piloted by the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, and passed by a one seat majority. Nothing better can be said of the other Committees of Parliament. In my Budget speech of 2024, under the caption “Governance”, I highlighted the highly egregious situation with the Committees headed by Members of the Government. Nothing has changed and which flies in the face of article 13 of the Constitution. During the 2020 elections campaign, the PPP/C frequently emphasised the importance of constitution reform. In their manifesto, they promise:

“We will ensure that the Committee on Constitutional Reform that will advance the work will pursue nationwide consultation following the model used in the past...with half of the members from the civil society and equal representation from Government and Opposition.”

This Committee is headed by or chaired by the Hon. Attorney General, Mr. Nandlall. In 2023, this Committee never met and never held a single meeting and in 2024, after I highlighted this fact, the Committee met once.

Foreign Relations – I will close with foreign relations, Cde. Speaker. We saw the continued aggression from Venezuela and its baseless claims to two-thirds of Guyana’s territory, the buildup of Venezuelan troops along the western border,

the building of a bridge from mainland Venezuela to Ankoko Island, the changes made to Venezuela’s map to reflect Guyana’s territory as part of Venezuela and the recently naming of a Venezuelan Army General as Governor of the Essequibo Region. The Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Foreign Relations for the year 2024, held only one meeting.

3.47 p.m.

It should be noted that the chairmanship of which the Hon. Minister, Mr. Hugh Todd, is Chair expired last year and that Committee should be chaired now by the Opposition. We await that meeting. In closing, according to the Standing Orders:

“the Parliamentary Oversight Committee on the Security Sector which shall have responsibility for examining the policies and administration ... entities in the Security Sector namely the Disciplined Forces...”

The influx of migrants, adding more challenges to law enforcement authorities, coupled with the high crime rate are crucial of the importance of the Committee meeting. This Committee is headed by the Hon. Prime Minister, Brigadier (Ret’d) Mark Phillips. Meetings held by this Committee in 2021 – zero; in 2022 – zero; in 2023 – zero; and in 2024 – zero. *Budget 2024* is not a budget for the people. It is a blueprint for the enrichment of a few. It is a betrayal of the trust and hopes of the Guyanese people. A farce, a pretence, a shameful transfer of wealth from the many...

**Mr. Speaker:** I think you have run out of words and ran out of time. Thank you, very much.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you, Cde. Speaker. [Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** Now, for the Hon. Parliamentary Secretary, the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarah Browne.

**Ms. Browne:** It is quite the irony to speak after the Hon. Chief Whip, Mr. Jones, as I have been vindicated. The Hon. Members spoke glowingly of youth and opportunities for youth, yet, at the age of 29, as a young woman, I was denied my right to stand here for the past four years to represent my people. Today, I rise with pride and honour to wholeheartedly support and endorse *Budget 2025* as presented by Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, to the National Assembly under an appropriate theme: *A Secure, Prosperous and Sustainable Guyana. Budget 2025*, like every other PPP/C budget, lives up to expectations and its passage will ensure that every single commitment made in our manifesto

is fulfilled. It proves to all Guyanese that we are a Government and a party to be trusted, unlike the APNU/AFC who failed to live up to their promises in five years, much less 100 days – quite the opposite to us on this side of the House.

Firstly, I must commend His Excellency, the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali and his entire Cabinet for ensuring...  
[*Interruption*]

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I determine how it is used. Hon. Members, you could stay away from that and talk about your Regime or your Government.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I believe I am going to have to write a long memorandum on this issue because the President...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, you are standing on a Point of Order; so, please.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 41, in regard to the President – the President is the head of the Parliament and, therefore, it is impossible in the National Assembly that a Government or anybody else referring to the President as the head of that Government and also the head of the Parliament, so we cannot... What the Standing Order says at 41(8) is if a Member is using the name of the President to influence the Parliament but a statement of fact, that the President said so and so [*inaudible*].

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira. Thank you very much.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr Speaker, I intend to write you a long memorandum on this.

**Mr. Speaker:** Yes, you could. Hon. Members, I am very firm on Standing Order 41(7). I allowed the Hon. Minister to make an intervention, though I do not consider it a Point of Order. Standing Order 41(7) again states:

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

I will determine that on either side. If I am not allowing it...

**Mr. McCoy:** I do not know what this National Assembly is becoming.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy, you could always bring a no confidence motion against the Speaker and put the National Assembly where you want it to be – where you want it to be. Please, I ask that we confirm to two things, Standing Order 41(7) and the list of unparliamentary words.

It has been going great that we have been a bit consistent with not using these words. Hon. Member, Ms. Sarah Browne, you may continue.

**Ms. Browne:** I wish to commend the Government of Guyana for reaching out to every corner of our country, despite geographic constraints and unforeseen circumstances, such as the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, natural disasters and other threats beyond our control. As everything else, when the PPP/C presents a budget, it is not crafted by hearsay or guess. It is crafted after consultation with real people being on the ground, engaging with communities and listening to what is important to the people.

I noticed that on today’s agenda, my Colleague and esteemed in law on the other side of the House, unfortunately, as geographic Member of Parliament for Region 1, born and bred, is scheduled to speak. I am certain that the Hon. Member will seek to cast a shadow and discredit the work done by the Government on the transformation and progress that Region 1 has experienced for the past four years. However, I wish to pre-empt by asking that MP, how many villages he visited, as a Member of Parliament, to meet with his constituency and hear from the ground what are the issues. Along with the Hon. Member, Mr. Christopher Jones, who did not visit any of the communities in Region 1 to hold consultations or to keep meetings, would never know what has changed. When he asked, what has changed, he will never know because he has never visited any of the villages across the region.

Today, when I will speak about the development and transformation across the 87 villages in Region 1 – from Baramita in the Matarkai sub-district to Waramuri in the Moruca sub-district – bearing in mind that Mabaruma town is not Region 1, as was the perception of the Granger-led Administration, so much so that they hired multiple planes to take 30 persons to Mabaruma to plant one tree and then flew to Georgetown as part of a tree planting exercise, all in a day’s work. Georgetown is not the 592; Georgetown is not Guyana. I was privileged to struggle alongside geographic MP, now Minister Collin Croal. As an Opposition MP, he visited every single village in Region 1 – high water or low water. He held consultations and brought to this House verified concerns and recommendations coming from the source – the people on the ground. Now, again, in Government, we are doing the same thing. As a matter of fact, in Opposition, many of our MPs including Minister, Ms. Gail Teixeira, have been to far-flung and remote villages across the hinterland. We are doing it again in Government.

I think that I may probably need to ask for a swab to clear my ear because I cannot be hearing right with what is being said from the other side, as in the benefits going to friends, families and favourites. These cannot be the same persons who said that they needed to hire a doctor who spoke Spanish and wanted one that was PNC. These cannot be the same persons. Are they then saying to us that once we are a part of this party that we cannot access or be a part of the *good life*? No thanks to Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger, former President. As Guyanese Amerindians living in Guyana's hinterland, we traditionally benefit directly from the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs, which has a robust welfare programme that rescues and supports hundreds of Guyanese Amerindians who encounter difficult circumstances and for different reasons are often stranded in Georgetown where we are guaranteed a lodging, meals and a safe passage back home. This is not done on *Facebook* for likes. It is not done for shares. It is done because we have a responsibility which we take very seriously as a government. Many of us have had to seek the intervention of this programme to aid in funeral expenses when our loved ones transition while receiving medical attention in the city, and to quote Minister, Ms. Rodriques:

“...from the cradle to the grave.”

This is costly – often depending on the villages from which we come. In addition, the Amerindian Development Fund (ADF) is an initiative of our Government, under the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. It has always been a lifeline for our villages, whereby we not only rehired the 2,000 Community Support Officers (CSOs) who were dismissed by the APNU/AFC – an act that neither the APNU nor the AFC apologised to us for – but we increased the numbers and we raised the stipend from \$30,000 to \$40,000. This programme, along with the National Pathway Workers Programme, we benefit from in the hinterland as well, empowers thousands of young people in the hinterland.

Speaking of this programme, it really warms my heart and it hits close to home, as I have witnessed first-hand how this Programme uplifted many, including one of my best friends – Annette Ganesh. She is a young single parent who started out as a CSO when it was first launched under our Government, assigned to work with the Santa Rosa Village Council in the area of governance and her story began. When APNU/AFC took Office, along with 2,000 others, she was dismissed but she did not give up. As an empowered youth, she contested in the village elections and was elected as an area counsellor for her area. Today, she is serving as a

Community Development Officer and works with the village councils to transform their communities. There are many untold stories and this is the hope and the light at the end of the tunnel that was taken from us when they disbanded this programme. A starting point and a hope that we restored when we took Office once again. The MPs on the other side will not tell us of the \$1.633 billion in carbon credit transfer to us in Region 1 in 2023 and the \$1.658 billion in 2024 to support villages whether in livelihood, economic projects or other projects as given by the villages. To many, this may just sound like a large sum of money but, for us, it is transforming our lives every single day and uplifting us to new heights.

For the Parakese alone in the Moruca sub-district in 2023, electrical cables were installed in 84 homes and, for the first time, they were able to access electricity generated to complement the solar panels we gave to every single household in the hinterland. Still, they had moneys left over for food security and agriculture projects. In 2024, they invested in livelihood projects to make their lives a bit easier.

Let us turn to Mabaruma, in Imbotero, for example, home to Hon. Member, Mr. Ronald Cox. In the first year, it developed its sports ground, purchased a 60-horsepower outboard engine, invested in the women's poultry farm and invested the housing development project. Last year, it continued the housing development programme.

Barabina, Mabaruma – the first year it bought a bus, a 100 water tanks for residents, wired homes so persons could have access to power, established a food processing plant and established a nature resort.

Baramita, for example, in the Matarkai sub-district invested in a wood-mizer, an all-terrain vehicle (ATV) and a poultry project. It is yet to spend its 2024 carbon credit money. I only spoke on four villages and highlighted 17 projects funded by carbon credits. Just imagine what is happening in all 87 communities in Region 1 alone. I have said before that I am one proud Lokono, sitting on this side of the House, among the best to help right the injustices, bring relief and help rebuild after five years of neglect under the APNU/AFC which took us back to a starting point. It was expected since, even before assuming Office, when they held the parliamentary majority for three years used they used it to slash the Agricultural Development Fund (ADF) from the Budget, knowing full well that we depended on this intervention to enhance our communities.

4.02 p.m.

What to expect from someone who calls us greedy for wanting our own lands and, in the same breath, tell us that if we want more lands, we should not benefit from oil resources. We are still awaiting an apology. There is no surprise that we are not going to get one because better is here on this side of the House. I would like to quote His Excellency - I did not call his name - on the occasion of the Amerindian Heritage Month 2020, when His Excellency said my Government takes this obligation seriously to ensure that the benefits derived from oil and gas resources in the coming years are equitably distributed among all of our people. We got our lands. We were given direct transfers from carbon credits and we are benefiting from oil and gas under this Government.

We are benefiting from new schools, new hospitals, and enhanced and new infrastructures. Yes, we are benefiting from \$55,000 per child in school this year. Ophthalmologists are visiting every community to ensure that children and elderly eyes are tested and they are given prescription lenses. Updated textbooks are arriving. The hot meal programme is thriving and it is expanding. Pensioners have gotten their increase. In 2024, 2,642 pensioners received their pension and 6,679 received their Public Assistance. Adults over 18 are getting their \$100,000 cash grant. COVID-19 grants were issued, flood relief was given and we will be benefitting from the measures in *Budget 2025*, including free university education. What *y'all* could tell us in this "One Guyana"? As the Director of Youth, Mr. Jones, how many play fields and youth groups you supported in your tenure in the Hinterland? I would like to report that our Government supported over 200 villages in the Hinterland and play field upgrade or support to young people.

They claim to love Public Servants but they took away the cash grant to schoolchildren and the bonus to the Disciplined Services. They taxed water, electricity, education and medical supplies purchased by Public Servants. They denied them the right to access house lot and to buy a motor car. In five years, they impoverished Public Servants. We are giving free university education and national service is not a requirement. The APNU/AFC increased administrative fee and tuition fees. Then, they claim that they love and have love for the UG students. I can safely say that every sector is working in overdrive to ensure that we are in a better position. This is as a result of putting the task in the hands of young, fit and proper leaders as compared to a geriatric cabinet.

In Region 1, 17 new schools were constructed or are under construction – including Hosororo, Kwebanna, Waramuri

and Matthew's Ridge. In Region 1 alone, from 2020 to 2024, we trained 328 teachers. In health, the Kumaka District Hospital once had Panadol as secure for every ailment under the APNU. Let us not forget, the AFC were a part of this too. The Hospital is now performing life-saving surgeries and offers many services, which will soon be enhanced with the construction of a new state-of-the art facility and similar developments are ongoing across the Region. We introduced telemedicine capabilities in far-flung communities such as Powaikuru, Tassawini, Imbotero, Warapoka and Black Water Savannah, just to name a few.

The Ministry of Agriculture – the entire Moruca River, as I speak, is currently being dredged, as requested by residents to make our lives easier. Fifty-two shade houses were constructed across the Region and 200 acres of citrus are currently under cultivation, while agro-processing facilities were constructed in Kumaka and White Creek in the Mabaruma sub-district. How could we forget the MV Militia, a manifesto commitment fulfilled? This only scratches the surface.

I am happy to report that most of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) hubs across the region are up and are functioning. We can now access free wireless fidelity (Wi-Fi) and the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) Scholarship which many of us have taken up. A few days ago, I was chatting with a young lady from my village and proceeded to ask her about her employment status. She said to me that she never applied for a job because she does not have the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC). What made me *beam with pride* was when she proceeded to say that despite that she now has a certificate from GOAL and she now wants to send in an application, so she can have a job. This is the vision that our Government have for our young people. Our young people in turn are taking these opportunities and they are *making hay while the sun shines* under this Government.

**Mr. Speaker:** For you to shine more, you will need an extension to continue to conclude.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude her very good statement. Thank you.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Minister Ms. Teixeira. Hon. Member, you may continue. You have five minutes to conclude.

**Ms. Browne:** These projects are in addition to the support from Ministry of Armenian Affairs and the carbon transfers given directly to our village, so that we can acknowledge the transformation to which I refer. What is the legacy of the APNU/AFC? What did they do for the people in Region 1? For five years, we never saw a minister of government and, for the first time, they levied taxes on items that were once tax free, including food and basic supplies. Five thousand dollars on a barrel of fuel, raking in millions of dollars in revenue annually. What did the people of Region 1 get in return – no new school, no new hospital, no employment and no training for our young people. Under this Government, last month we graduated 50 Community Health Workers (CHWs), 18 operating room technicians and 23 nursing assistants, adding 84 young professionals into the system. Guess what. They were trained right in Region 1. This is our legacy.

For those who have not lived the struggle will not appreciate how far we have come and for those who insist otherwise, they are stifling their conscience. Many moons ago, a young Guyanese Amerindian girl was living with her *Ma* when she fell ill with a stroke and was rushed to the hospital. At that time, there were no motor vehicles or hardly motor-powered boats in my village. Upon inquiry, that girl was told that the uncle took her grandmother to the nearest point in a canoe and using a hammock holding both ends, they took her to the hospital approximately on a one mile stretch in the dark of night. When that girl left home on Wednesday morning on a one-mile stretch, she counted 20 cars on that road that was once a trail. I am that girl and this is the legacy of our Party.

Mr. Speaker, I know for a fact that you have visited and worked the ground in those days, so you know of which I speak. Thus, Mr. Speaker, I invite you to visit my village today and you will tell your own story. Our story is not riddled with a history of undemocratic rule, rigged elections and injustices. The APNU/AFC had a chance to change their narrative but, instead, they proved to all Guyanese and the international community, that they are what we said they are, the same old riggers, using a new name. Progress must continue, and we are the only Government who have the proven track-record – tested, approved and trusted. I commend *Budget 2025* to this National Assembly for its passage. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, very much, Hon. Member. The Hon. Member, Mr. McCoy does not know I know you from a toddler. I have seen your development. Thank you, very much. Hon. Member. Mr. Ramsaroop, it is your turn.

**Mr. Ramsaroop:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Hon. Speaker, distinguished Members of National Assembly and citizens of Guyana, good evening. Before I go, I want to make some clarifications on the former speaker. It must be put on record that the CSOs were not fired. We found that many of them were hired by political parties and were doing political work. There were a lot of complaints from the community that the work and project that were given were not done. That is first one. I will leave a couple for my Friend, Mr. Cox, to deal with in Region 1.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Point of Order...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, is standing on a Point of Order.

**Ms. Teixeira:** The House was the recipient from the then Vice-President, Mr. Allicock, of the letters of dismissal and termination of 1,972. It is in the Parliament's record, Sir.

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Ramsaroop, the Hon. Minister has established what the fact is. I think we have been down that road before doing budget debate. You will stand corrected.

**Mr. Ramsaroop:** I am so guided but I will be happy if proof could be provided. I will be happy. Cash grant – under the APNU/AFC Government, the cash grant was replaced by what we call the 5 Bs programme which benefited directly the children directly of this country. That is one other clarification. The other clarification I want to make is, the internet service was done in 72 communities, and all were abandoned by this Government. Those are the clarifications I want to make.

It is my duty today, to address this House and the people of Guyana on *Budget 2025* allocations for some critical sectors that underpin our nation's development and natural resources management, namely: forestry; Guyana Geology and Mines Commission and the Environmental Protection Agency. While these sectors hold immense potential, they are plagued by management issues, inadequate funding, environmental and insufficient oversight. These weaknesses hindered sustainable development and deprived the people of Guyana of full benefit of their natural wealth. Today, we are still awaiting the resumption of the Parliamentary Sectoral Committee on Natural Resources, where we have meaningful discussions with companies such as ExxonMobil and agencies such the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). We have to do this in this National Assembly. It is our obligation to the National Assembly to ensure that companies who are working in our country we examine,

scrutinise and work with them to ensure that all is going well.

As we analyse the Government's Budget proposal, there were several gaps existed, but I will focus my attention on the recommendation I have made over the years right in this House – the implementation as we prepare to take back government. In 2020, I spoke about the programmes where we secured 800,000 hectares and that were given to friends of the PPP/C Government, that was redistributed to the Guyanese people. When the Government want to talk ill advice or wants to make a political statement that the APNU/AFC closed Baishanlin and the Barama company, the facts need to be checked. We tried to make the playing field level. We were not allowing one company to take over the entire forestry sector. The Barama company was not paying the prescribed royalties as the others were doing. We had to change that to make the playing field level.

4.17 p.m.

I spoke about transparency, where disclosure of information was made public on the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) website. Recently, I have checked but cannot access information on the website – about two weeks ago. We have set up the Guyana Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (GYEITI) Secretariat to reemphasise our commitment to transparency and governance; today all these are failing. Despite this, only \$2.1 million was budgeted. Are we serious about transparency? It seems not, Mr. Speaker. We have strengthened interagency collaboration where most of the interior roads were maintained by the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) Fund. This will be a continuation programme and even made better by starting to look at asphaltic materials to pave these roads. It will enhance connectivity between communities and foster faster and greater productivity. So, when the Government wants to mislead the nation that the APNU/AFC Government has done nothing for the interior roads, they need to fact-check the record.

We will bridge those rivers that use pontoons across Kwakwani, Shirima, Kurupukari and Butakari. It is time that we start to think about how we can connect these communities easily. These are the major river crossings that risk the lives of our people and slow productivity. We have witnessed recently that the GDF truck went overboard; luckily, there were no serious injuries. It must be noted that it was under our Government that communities like Lethem, Ituni, and Kwakwani saw paved roads for the first time, without the oil money. In the 2021 Budget speech, paragraph

4.30, it was mentioned that the Guyana Forest Commission would be self-sufficient. In the same year it was contracted by 7.4% and export by 8.6%. We saw in 2024 that it grew 4.5%. That is because of two factors: one, it is the construction sector that is receiving a big chunk of the budget, over \$209 billion in this 2025 Budget; and the new allocation of logging concessions. So these are the issues that are contributing. What we are not looking at is the policy that really can drive the sector, and if you look overall, we are producing about 450,000-plus cubic meter of logs per year. We are entitled to cut over a million cubic meters, and we are struggling to meet 50% of that... [Mr. Bharrat: And you *ent* producing. You *gatta* start producing.] I cannot do the other 50%, to be honest with you.

Mr. Speaker, the GFC and all those involved in the forest need to have an opportunity to improve technology, less cost, access to money, increased training to access foreign markets, the creation of downstream forest products, and other forms of assistance. This is what we will do. As I mentioned and recommended, in 2022, the revolving fund was implemented by the Government but only 11 persons benefitted from that revolving fund. The rest were disqualified because they do not have the criteria; and the purpose of that mechanism was to assist the communities and the small loggers to ensure that they can access finance. So that needs to be revised and remodelled. My honourable friend there is smiling...

[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]

Yes, I know the bank is a part of the criteria but my friend there will have some recommendations to do that. Recommendations were made again as to the design and the materials to use for the interior roads but nothing happened.

We will redesign the National Forest Inventory to benefit the stakeholders that are in need because, originally, the design of that National Forest Inventory was to benefit the large concession holders. The benefit of a National Forest Inventory will not only benefit the stakeholder but will benefit the government, so that the government will have an understanding to know what are the stocks that are in the forest. The Log Export Policy will be revised to benefit those that are exporting. We will make a one-stop shop system to ensure that ease of doing business; the red tapes are too much. In 2018, under the APNU/AFC Government, amendments were made to the Log Export Policy to have a third-party licence to export logs; that saw the volume of the lesser used species increased. Thanks to my friend that continued that programme.

In 2023, I made recommendation that the first tranche of the carbon credits money, that 25%, should be given to the Amerindian community – 25%. My honourable friend who was boasting just now about them receiving so many billions, you have to ask yourselves the question, if that is enough. When I proposed the revolving fund, it was proposed to have US\$10 million to do this and, therefore, the other 450 operators could have benefitted more to this recommendation. I recommended \$3 million for the Guyana Forestry Commission so that it will help in the operations. This would have enhanced operations, monitoring, providing proper living accommodation. I recently went to Ituni Forest Station, and it was quite strange; it was supposed to be a temporary forest station, but it is there over 12 years. The state that these officers work under is really ridiculous. I went to Itaballi Forest Station and only one all-terrain vehicle (ATV) is there. Therefore, that is why I recommended US\$3 million to help to boost that forest station to improve the monitoring.

The Hon. Member Hugh Todd mentioned carbon credit as the milestone for his Government and it earns over US\$750 million, which was bought by Hess. No doubt, Sir; no doubt. However, my question to him, is what happens to the remainder, 70%? Where is he? *Oh*, he is not here. Sorry. My question is, what happened to 70%, and to date... My friend would probably in his speech mention the other remaining 70%. When we were examining the estimates here, I told the Hon. Member, Mr. Vickram Bharat, that we need to remodel this carbon credit scheme. If you are paying for carbon credits, you must have an idea as to where you are buying this credit; I think that was absent. We will ensure that there is an opt-in mechanism for the Amerindian communities and concession holders to benefit directly from the carbon scheme; this is what we will do. [Mr. Mahipaul:

(Inaudible)] And that is what gives me the skills, right? You only *gah* have skills when you can sit at these boards.

In 2024, I focused heavily on the environment. I did not see any major spending for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to build upon what the Coalition handed over with respect to its human capacity and infrastructure development again in 2025. I think the Hon. Member Susan Rodrigues was talking about track records. Let me put this on record, the PPP/C track record. When the Coalition Government took office after 23 years of destruction to the EPA, it was dysfunctional; it had only two vehicles for inspections and monitoring, which meant that no field monitoring nor inspections occurred; no filling systems of records to even know how many permits and operations

existed. Unbelievably, the Coalition found that the agency did not even have records of numerous operations, and there were over 600 expired permits for some over 15 years. That is the track record.

Our track record, let me go to that because, apparently, my honourable friend wants to know. Within less than three years the EPA discovered over 2,000 projects existed, brought all permits and operations into compliance, had eight brand new vehicles without a dime from the treasury, the collection of over \$150 million in fees owed from expired permits, which is called the back fees; built a state-of-the-art registry and filing system to manage these projects; increased staff by 20% with engineers and scientists, which the agency was severely lacking. We have tripled the number of EPA offices from one to three by adding offices to Corentyne and Linden to ease the financial burden of inconvenience of business people having to travel to Georgetown only to conduct their businesses; established 24/7 complaint hotline with a 24-hour response time; and developed a culture of transparency and free access to media and public. This is what we have done.

We will continue capacity building for this institution. The EPA had no one with a petroleum background in the oil and gas sector when we took over. We had to quickly build capacity to perform adequate monitoring and oversight of the oil and gas operation with US\$1 million from the World Bank. We and the World Bank developed a plan to build a 36-member oil and gas unit to highly specialise skills and experience for 24/7 on-site presence on the drill ship and the floating production, storage and offloading vessels (FPSOs) to obtain credible and real-time information. After the 2025 Elections, we will continue in this trajectory; that is what we will do. We will establish a study leave programme to build a capacity where the EPA will sponsor students to go to universities and train, with contractual obligation to the Government; we will do that.

Sir, with flaring, we will continue to work with the oil companies to ensure that they comply with the permits and the contractual obligations. The Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), we will ensure that all projects that will endanger the Guyanese people are done diligently so that we can avoid, a what you call, *a pay to pollute government*.

[Mr. Bharrat: (Inaudible)] The PSA, you said you would renegotiate it, not me; it was you who said that.

Dumping of toxic waste into the ocean: we will work, we will ensure that the public, people's health, and the environment comes first; we will ensure that the companies



comply with the prescribed regulations. Under the full coverage liability insurance, let me put this clear: the full coverage liability is equal to the insurance plus parent company guaranteeing. My friend will probably know the formula; I do not know if he knows it by now. We will ensure what is enshrined in the permits is enforced and work with ExxonMobil to ensure that we are on common grounds.

This had brought me to the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC). The gold mining is a critical sector...

**Mr. Speaker:** Before you go to that critical sector, you need an extension.

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you. [*Inaudible*]

**Mr. Ramsaroop:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you my Hon. Chief Whip. Gold mining is a critical sector for the Guyanese economy, contributing significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employment. However, for the past four years we have seen a steady decline in this gold production. Recommendations as I propose: we will implement stricter monitoring policies on our borders; we will implement modern technologies to access minerals for small- and medium-sized gold miners; we will engage with women miners to ensure that they cement their place in the gold mining sectors; we will explore value-added processing; encourage the development of local facilities to refine and process gold, adding value before export; we will offer tax breaks and incentives for companies investing in the downstream processing.

Formalisation of small-scale mining: we will provide training and technical support to small-scale miners to help them formalise their operations and comply with regulations. We will create cooperatives to pool resources and improve efficiency.

Access to financing: we will establish a low interest programme or microfinance option for miners to access modern equipment and technology; we will facilitate partnership between small-scale miners and large-scale miners' companies to transfer knowledge and resources; we will conduct resource mapping; we will expand geological surveying to identify new mining opportunities and improve planning; we will develop a national database of mineral resources; we will encourage collaboration; we will partner with universities and research institutions to develop

innovation in the mining techniques; we will seek information expertise to improve efficiency and sustainability. [**Mr. Bharrat:** (*Inaudible*)] My honourable friend, Mr. Vickram, is saying, we have done this, but yet I mentioned that there is a steady decline in the gold production in this country. So, therefore, I put all these recommendations that we will do to ensure that we can improve this sector that is critical for our country's development, Sir. I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

4.32 p.m.

**Mr. Datadin:** Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Just a few things to clear up before I actually get to my presentation, please. The speaker before me... Let us start with the Hon. Member, Mr. Christopher Jones. Mr. Christopher Jones told this House that under the APNU/AFC dialysis was free. That was a lie. Am I allowed to say lie? I am sorry. That was economical with the truth. It was not free. Dialysis was not free under the APNU/AFC. What happened under the APNU/AFC, the only thing to happen, was a \$300,000 one-off payment was given to persons who required dialysis.

The present position is, under this Government, \$600,000 per year is given to each person who requires the assistance. Five hundred and fifty people benefit from that. There is a lab that is set up to do the tests and provide associated chemicals and medicine. They have said that what they have done with dialysis, as it was free, you walked in, you went anywhere. That was not true. They were not... Dialysis requires machines. The machines require components. Chemicals and other components need to be done for every patient. That did not exist before. Now that is there. The extended centres are at Linden, Region 3 and Suddie Hospital. Dialysis centres are in Georgetown, on the East Bank, Region 2, Region 3, Region 6, Region 10, and all of the new hospitals are going to have dialysis in them. The thing about this is this was published. The centres, the assistance, the places that people could go, the people who needed assistance, this was published in the newspapers.

We then get to a very bold statement from the Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, as it relates to free education at the university, and about how much they love young people and how much they prefer education. Yet, when it came to fees at the university, the Coalition Government, APNU/AFC, raised university fees by 35%. That is a fact. The university council subsequently met and 10% and more was what the administrative fees were raised by. Now, we all know that at present, the position of this Government is university education is free. Those who have loans and student loans

before, it is going to be written off. Interestingly, under the APNU/AFC Government, you might be aware, or you might not be aware, the Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson, you might not be aware that those who went to the University of Guyana (UG) and took a loan, your Government, and when you were a minister, published their names in the newspapers and said they cannot travel. You would not know that because you got funding and a scholarship, apparently, to study overseas so you would not know about those who had to go to UG. You would not know. You went...

[**Ms. Ferguson:** (*Inaudible*)] Did you not have money to go and study a master's outside of Guyana? So you would not know.

Mr. Speaker, forgive me but allow me to state that I support *Budget 2025* so expertly presented to this House by the Hon. Senior Minister Dr. Ashni Singh. Allow me to thank the Hon. Minister, his staff and, indeed, all of the members of Cabinet and their staff for presenting a budget that is significant. It is worthwhile to not only commend the budget but to reflect on it. The significant progress we, as a nation, have achieved under this Government, the PPP/C Government, over the past four years, we are now witnessing right before our eyes. Mr. Speaker...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member Mr. Datadin, I stopped the clock. I want to refer to Speaker Ramkaran, decades ago, with two words that are popping up quite often in the interruptions. One is 'cry of shame', and I just heard 'nonsensical'; and the particular person who said 'nonsensical' was also shouting 'thief' many times. Please, we only have a few speakers to go and let us see if we can continue with the efficiency that Hon. Members Geeta Chandan-Edmond and Juretha Fernandes concluded their presentations.

**Mr. Datadin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We are now witnessing right before our eyes economic transformation that positions Guyana on an upward economic trajectory that we have never seen. Guyana stands out now as a beacon, not only in the Caribbean and CARICOM but on the world stage. The accomplishments that we have achieved were all promised in the 2020 PPP Manifesto. They are not milestones, but more markers, more symbols of all that has been achieved and what keeping your promises look like – tangible results, visionary leadership, sound governments and a deep commitment to the people of Guyana. Now we have to compare it with what went before. If we look at stable economic growth in this country, Guyana has unprecedented economic growth, and continuous, over the last four years. It is driven, principally, and in large part by our petroleum sector. Revenues are carefully managed and

spent to improve our infrastructure, but it ensures that there is sustainability and development of the nation through the National Development Fund. In this regard, under the leadership of this Government, we have taken control of the petroleum sector to ensure its growth. We have passed new legislation. The most important one, perhaps, if I dare say, is the Local Content Act.

The introduction of the Local Content Act was putting into law measures that protected our citizens. What existed before it? As usual, promises, perhaps feasibility studies, perhaps reports, perhaps reports from the petroleum advisors, such as Ms. Carol Joseph, who would have given grave and weighty advice as to how we should manage this petroleum sector, I imagine. What happened? Nothing. There was a local content policy being shepherd around by the Director of Petroleum at the time. We then heard that this local content policy that was in existence was being amended, and we would have local content policy number two. We never saw number one. We do not know what it stated. We do not know what was amended. Number two came along and was kept as a national secret. Again, it was not put out. It was not introduced to the population. We kept hearing about it while people suffered, while opportunities were lost. For example, since the Local Content Act that was introduced by this Government came into force, more than 1,100 companies have applied for and obtained local content certificates. That means that there are 1,100 companies involved in the petroleum sector that are at least 51% owned by Guyanese people. In 2024 alone, that accounted for revenues in excess of US\$620 million. Now, that is what keeping your promise looks like. That is what caring about the people of Guyana looks like. Do not say you are going to have a policy to benefit them and for which they would be able to develop their companies and earn revenue and you do not actually do it. When it was done, it was done because there had to be a legal underpinning to allow the citizens of this country to benefit, preferentially, from their petroleum reserves; and that was done.

We talk about the Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) and the errors and the unfairness of it all. What has happened since? Now, we know under this Government there is a revised PSA for future companies. There is a Petroleum Activities Act that sets the compass and the direction for the petroleum sector, not only today but for years to come. The Natural Resource Fund (NRF) is another key component of this equation. The Natural Resource Fund that had been passed when the Government had already fallen, and it was passed in a parliament, could not be understood and it was shrouded in secrecy. No one with certainty could have

calculated what amount of money could be taken out of that fund. No one could calculate with any certainty what the fund was supposed to do with investments. [An Hon. Member: Winston Jordan.] Not even 'Jordon' could have done that. But what we now have is a Natural Resource Fund that is simple.

4.47 p.m.

What could be taken is very clear. How much is taken is very clear. There is a number value, \$500 million. Then what happens with the investment, that too is very clear. So, anyone who wishes can find out what is happening. With that legislation came the obligation that the Hon. Minister had to lay in this National Assembly how much money was received in royalties and from profit oil, so that everyone could know; it is gazetted, it is published, it is laid in the House, and if it is not done, there is the penalty of jail and a fine.

The education sector and healthcare in Guyana have grown by leaps and bounds. Remarkable achievements have been made in education insofar as it relates to the physical structures, the schools that have to be built, but also the teachers that need to teach in that school there is more. Again, under the previous administration of the APNU/AFC, we heard promises. I am sure there were feasibility studies. I am certain there were reports. Perhaps all of that took up all of the available funds. Maybe that is what happened and there was no money left to actually build the schools and train the teachers.

It is important that we recognise some of the catchwords and phrases and what is being said by the Hon. Members of the Opposition about the Budget. A favourite seems to be fiscal space. To say now there is fiscal space to do all manner of things. They say it is an oil economy and we are rich, but that is not entirely true. It is an oil economy, but we are not rich, we are getting there; and if we manage our finances prudently, we will get there. Under the budget and under the regime of the APNU/AFC they said there was no fiscal space to do this, but they taxed everything. Four hundred new taxes. They raised taxes – four hundred new taxes. Four hundred taxes were raised. I am sure you did not know that if you had more than one dog, you had to get a licence and pay for it. [Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Speaker.] I am sure you did not know that if you had a horse, you would have to pay a licence per foot. I do not know why it was per foot, but assuming all horses have four feet... But this was it. You sold newspapers on the corner, you needed a licence.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, I have the Hon. Member, Ms. Volda Lawrence, on her feet.

**Ms. Lawrence:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The present Member on the floor has referred to the previous Government raising some four hundred taxes. I am asking that the Hon. Member lay over in this House these four hundred taxes that have been raised by the previous Government.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, you stood on a Point of Order.

**Ms. Lawrence:** Yes, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** I waited for you to say what that Point of Order is or was.

**Ms. Lawrence:** Forty-one, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** You could put that in a question, but as I understand it, he is saying that if you put a tax on a dog, that is one tax. If you put it on a horse...

**Ms. Lawrence:** No, no, no, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Speaker:** But you were explaining your four hundred taxes.

**Ms. Lawrence:** Let him lay it over in the House.

**Mr. Datadin:** Indeed, Mr. Speaker, and if I could explain it more. What happened was, again – Mathematics (Maths) being the very, very, very strong point of the Opposition – they made amendments to the laws that took into account all of the licences that existed. They took into account that even if you had a gate you needed a licence. So, perhaps, the Hon. Member will pay a little less. I heard she took back her gate. You had all of these measures because all licensing was raised. All of them were raised by a percentage. When the PPP/C came back into power, it was all reversed. All of it was reversed. More... [Mr. Mahipaul: All 400 were reversed?]

No, more was reversed. We took away VAT on water. We took away VAT on electricity. We took away VAT on education. All of that was done; that is not included in the four hundred. Again we are facing a startling thing that occurs in this House with regularity, the attempt to rewrite history. The Hon. Member before me said the CSOs were not fired, rewriting history. It is a fact. This is a fact. They were fired. It is rather simple, today they had a job, tomorrow they did not; they were fired. ...and came to this House and said they were not fired or, *oh*, they were somehow connected to a political party. They were fired. That was the truth. The attempt, the continuous attempt to rewrite and gloss over

history is astonishing. We will soon hear about the election...

**Mr. Speaker:** What is astonishing is you have completed your time, including the interruptions. You need an extension.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that my Hon. Member be given five minutes more to conclude his presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Minister Teixeira. Hon. Member, you may continue and conclude in five minutes.

**Mr. Datadin:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We have to also take the other very popular one that the Opposition likes to say 'they *can't* eat roads'; they *can't* eat schools. They need to understand how development works; I understand that they do not have the capacity to do so, perhaps. But it is simple. You see what happens is this. The roads are built by people, human beings who go to work; those people who go to work earn a salary. With that salary they can take care of their family, they can put food on the table. Coming back to the whole issue of fiscal space, among the things that the APNU/AFC Government did, when they were talking about fiscal space, they closed down the sugar industry and fired all the workers. They took all the CSOs, but they still spend about \$150 million a year on food. They still spent that money, and they said they did not have fiscal space.

The comparison of the side that will make promises that they will never deliver: instead they will do reports; they will do commissions of inquiries; they will do feasibility studies; they will do nothing, actually do anything. It is what in the old days we would refer to as a talk shop. That is what it was good for. We have and we see the trajectory that the country is on now. The development, the roads that are built, the bridges under construction, the roads across the country, the schools, the hospitals, all of it is from prudent management. Now we look... [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*]

And it is because of promises. The promise of 50,000 jobs has been delivered already. The promise of 50,000 house lots is at 39,000. More will be more. The promise of grants: again, the APNU/AFC come here and they want to promise that they love the people, but they did away with the cash grants. The cash grants are back; other cash grants are in place. We have promises of all sorts that are being made, but when APNU/AFC was in Government, not one single promise was kept. There is not one infrastructure project that was undertaken in this country during those five years that

they can point to. We then have a very simple equation, there is one side that will have a talk shop and promise everything; there is another side that will deliver.

Arguments are made, and continuous arguments are made about the gas-to-energy project, for example, saying they want a feasibility study for what will be done and how much it will be. They fail to realise how commerce works, how industries are built. With a gas-to-energy project, energy that is much needed in the country will be provided. There will be, along with that, industrial and commercial applications for which energy will be cheaper. It will make us more competitive. It will build sectors. When the questions are being asked, why do this, why do that, and you should do this, we have to remember they were there and they did nothing. Mr. Speaker, permit me, with those few words, to commend *Budget 2025* to this House. [Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, it is now 4.59 p.m. Let us take a break and we will return at 5.45 p.m.

*Assembly suspended at 4.59 p.m.*

*Assembly resumed at 5.53 p.m.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Please be seated. I will invite the Hon. Member Mr. Ronald Cox to make his presentation.

**Mr. Cox:** Thank you very much. Mr. Speaker, our esteemed colleagues of this august Assembly, fellow citizens of Guyana, today I rise to make my contribution to the 2025 National Budget Debates, a budget presented by the Hon. Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr Ashni Singh.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

[Mdm. Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.]

While I acknowledge that some steps have been taken to address the needs of our country, we cannot ignore the glaring discrepancies between the Government's rhetoric and the reality faced by the many working class of Guyana. The Government's budget may seem promising on paper, with bold projections of economic growth, but when we scratch beneath the surface we see a Government out of touch with the everyday struggles of ordinary citizens of this country, the fact, supported of course by empirical evidence of daily life, tells a different story. Earlier, my colleague, the Hon. Sarah Browne, attempted to highlight what she called in my words, in my own interpretation, a paradise in Region 1 by this Government. Mr. Speaker, I will not attempt... Mdm. Deputy Speaker, my apologies. I will not attempt to discredit

her, but I will ask some very pertinent questions that are asked every day by the citizens of this country, if indeed we are in such a glowing... [Mr. Mahipaul: Paradise.] Paradise.

5.56 p.m.

One, how come a healthcare centre is without simple things like Panadol? Number two, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, it seems that one businessman is doing more than an entire Government? He is doing so much that he has to be stopped. How come we cannot afford to buy the basic food that we may need? How come those school buses are not operational – as we speak – in Mabaruma to transport primary school children from their school to home? If these are in the paradise, then it leaves much to be desired. You can sway 1,000 men by appealing to their prejudices quicker than you can convince one man by logic. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, we can both agree that if some of our leaders spend more time or use the voices that they use to heckle, we will have better presentations in this Assembly.

I would like to touch on my personal experiences, as my Colleague did touch on her own. Everybody already know that I am from Imbotero. I recall paddling a canoe from Imbotero to Morawhanna and then walking from Morawhanna for 90 minutes to get to the secondary school. That was not under the APNU/AFC. That was under the PPP/C Government. I know that my Colleague, the Hon. Ms. Sarah Browne, is far younger than I am, so all the descriptions of her struggles she mentioned earlier, happened under the PPP/C Government.

From examining the 2025 Budget, which was presented under the theme, “A Secure, Prosperous and Sustainable Guyana, it is clear that if I were benefiting through large contracts from this Budget and if my life was made luxurious by this Government and this Budget, then, of course, I would come here and say the Budget is an excellent one. I would have no other choice. Despite the ambitious projection, it does not adequately address the most urgent needs of the working class, farmers and vulnerable communities. This budget delivers more of the same promises that have not been able to ease the suffering of many ordinary Guyanese. We cannot morally support a budget that disregards the basic necessities of the Guyanese people and is in favour of large-scale infrastructure projects and foreign investments. It is time to shift our priorities and rethink an economic strategy that is realistic, doable and, above all, liveable for the typical working person.

Although the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service proudly listed growth rates, we must keep in mind that these estimates are based on exaggerated assumptions and heavily depend on the oil and gas sector. Our economic growth cannot be driven exclusively by oil income. We have seen this before. Our entire economy is at risk when output falters or global oil prices decline. It is imperative that we concentrate on diversifying our economy by supporting small businesses, local sectors and agriculture – such as in my region. In addition to attracting international investment we will move forward. We require a more sustainable and well-rounded strategy for growth – one that encourages regional entrepreneurship and generates employment outside of the oil industry. In order to ensure that all areas and industries are developed at the same time, we will advocate for increased investment in industries, including manufacturing, tourism, agriculture and others. The working class cannot remain vulnerable to changes and insecurity. Let me quote Ram and McRae in their offering of comments on *Budget 2025*:

“The proliferation of subsidies, grants and allowances addresses symptoms rather than causes of high living costs.”

We, on the other side of this House, will not seek to address symptoms. We will bring an end to the diseases themselves. The alternative government, that is, will focus on structural economic reforms as may be needed, rather than palliative measures. In Guyana, the cost of living has skyrocketed, and we cannot ignore that. That is factual. Many citizens can no longer afford their basic needs, as I mentioned earlier. The important problem of inflation and how it directly affects the working class is not addressed in the proposed budget. Simply promising tax breaks or subsidies is insufficient. We also need to take concrete action to lower the cost of common products. We need to provide a straightforward solution and a thorough price management plan to stop price gouging, particularly for necessities, in order to keep living expenses under control for all Guyanese. We also need to set up subsidies for important industries like electricity and transportation.

I wish to highlight a few things that were done in Region 1 under the APNU/AFC while it was in Government. We cannot allow ourselves to be led astray and allow the Guyanese people to feel or believe – as was previously mentioned – that nothing was done under the APNU/AFC. The APNU/ AFC had five years of Government, while we were told earlier in this debate that the PPP/C had 32 years.

You cannot, at no time, compare your 32 years to the APNU/AFC's five years in Government. Nevertheless, in Region 1, while we are happy that the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) transfers are benefiting Indigenous communities, we demand that an Indigenous economic development committee be established under the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs – one that will effectively help our Indigenous villages to plan, execute and, of course, benefit from these funds. If that is done, I am sure that the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs will not have all those petitions on her desk by village councillors calling for Toshaos to be recalled and for her to intervene in village councils, especially in Region 1. I could name two such villages – Yarakita is one and Four Miles is another in Port Kaituma.

Under the APNU/AFC, we, in Region 1 witnessed a brand-new hospital built in Port Kaituma with a mortuary and a well for water supply. We also saw the first solar farm in Mabaruma. We also saw the first radio station in Mabaruma. We also saw the first fire station in Mabaruma. We also saw the first stretches of concrete road across Region 1. We saw an increase in the hours of electricity given, from five hours to 17 hours. Of course, they made it 24 now. We are happy about that because we started the project.

The San Jose Bridge in Moruca is another project under the APNU/AFC. The Bemichi Airstrip in Moruca is another one under the APNU/AFC. There was the first green-friendly park in Mabaruma; the establishment of the township of Mabaruma; and the first batch of Community Health Workers (CHW) who were trained in 2018 under the APNU/AFC Government. You come here to boast about how many were trained recently. Well, we are happy about the training, but you need to tell us under whose stewardship the initiative started. We are happy that you will continue with what was started, but you need to tell us. Those are just some of the highlights of what we experienced under the APNU/AFC from 2015 to 2020. If these are, 'nothing was done', then I am not sure what we are saying.

Earlier, we heard the Hon. Susan Rodrigues lambasting the APNU/AFC Members while they were in Government for increasing salaries, while she and her Colleagues are equally enjoying that right now. I call on the Hon. Susan Rodrigues and her Colleague to bring a motion to this National Assembly and rescind the increase with immediate effect. If they cannot do that, then they do not stand by their words. If they do it, I will congratulate them myself. They have been mentioning this since 2020. Four years later, it is still being mentioned, but they have been enjoying it. Rescind it and we

will congratulate you. It is simple. The fact that many of our fellow countrymen are trying to make ends meet on the minimum wage is something we cannot ignore any longer. The majority of our workforce is employed in the private sector. Although the Government has made progress in increasing pay for those in the public sector, this has not resulted in improvements for them. A decent minimum wage that takes into account the growing cost of living is long overdue.

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, you require five minutes to conclude.

**Mr. Jones:** Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Please continue.

**Mr. Cox:** Thank you, Cde. Deputy Speaker. It is clear that the Government's 2025 Budget can do better. Therefore, we offer the following proposed inflation control measures. We must introduce policies to stabilise the cost of living. These should include price controls on essential goods, subsidies for fuel transportation and active management of inflationary measures through fiscal policy and strategic reserve management.

Rather than focusing on limited tax cuts for the wealthy and businesses, we propose implementing targeted social programmes aimed at the working class and vulnerable population. This includes direct cash transfers and much more than the \$100,000 that is being given presently. Under an alternative government, we will see \$1 million being given to every single family in this country, expanding the cash grant system to cover a large proportion of families and introducing a progressive tax system that ensures the wealthy pay their share. We propose a wage increase that is above the rate of inflation, along with an immediate review of salary scales to ensure they reflect the true cost of living in Guyana. In addition, we advocate for better working conditions, training and professional development for all sections of the public sector. Of course these will boost productivity and satisfaction.

*6.11 p.m.*

Strengthening education and healthcare: the budget must prioritise investment in our people. This means substantial increase in funding for education as is evident in this budget, healthcare and vocational training programmes that will equip our young people with skills needed for a modern

diversified economy. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, we in the Opposition do not have any problem with the allocated funds, especially in education, but we need equity. I have always spoken since 2020 for equitable distribution of our resources for the Indigenous communities and I will not cease to again call for equitable distribution. I am in the system; I have been a teacher for over 20 years, and I know the system inside out.

**Diversification and Sustainable Growth:** We must reduce our self-reliance on oil by diversifying the economy, as I mentioned earlier. Investments must be large in agriculture, technology and renewable energy which of course will create long-term sustainable jobs that support every single person in Guyana. The World Economic Forum 2023 emphasised that countries dependent on a single commodity are at significant risk of economic volatility and Guyana must take steps to mitigate this risk.

While I close, I would like to remind the Government that every single Guyanese tuned into this debate is listening. They have their own experiences, they have their own opinions, and they, of course, will make their own judgments at the end of these debates. I call on the Government's side to use their time wisely to defend their budget, rather than come here and tell us what they told us in 2020. We need not a repeat. In a year where we will have general and regional elections, it is very important that we make ourselves the best choice. I trust that I have made my contributions to this budget, and I do hope that each and every one of us listening will ensure that they make a choice at the end of the debates. We cannot and we should not ignore the cries of the working class. So, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I thank you for your time and may God bless each and every one of us. [*Applause*]

**Mr. Williams:** A speaker who just spoke before me talked about the budget needing to ease the suffering, but he failed to remember that under the APNU/AFC the then Government imposed more taxes on the people of Guyana and that created the suffering. Also, there was the ban on used tyres where the ordinary people could not afford the new tyres but only the high-class Ministers, who received the 50% increase in salary, could afford them while the low and ordinary persons suffered. That is the suffering you brought to the people of Guyana by banning the used tyres. There are many more, but because of time, I would not go into details.

The Hon. Member of Parliament (MP) boasted about projects in Region 1, but he failed to realise that even if he did those projects, the people of Region 1 and Guyanese still

voted them out to sit on the Opposition side to date and they will always remain there forever and ever. We know we are a few months away from elections and the APNU/AFC is making wild promises that they will not fulfil. If they could not fulfil their 50% increase to public servants and pensioners, how could they fulfil \$1 million to the ordinary people of Guyana? That is impossible.

As I rise to make my contribution to *Budget 2025*, much has been said by my Colleagues. I want to firstly commend the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service and his staff for presenting one budget for all Guyanese, as One Guyana. It is a budget for the young and old and a budget for every category, regardless of who you are. The leadership of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, since taking Office, has been working tirelessly to achieve prosperity for all Guyanese. Achieving prosperity for all Guyanese has been the ideal pursuit of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government and it is resolute to deliver its promises to every Guyanese. The PPP/C Government, over the last four years, has implemented such a system and such a plan for all Guyanese and for the first people, the Amerindians, so that they can have their disposable income at their disposal. This is so that they can become stronger, year by year. We have seen these transformational changes in every town and in every village across Guyana, and everyone has a share of Guyana's wealth as we move our country to *A Secure, Prosperous and Sustainable Guyana*.

My contribution to *Budget 2025* will be more on contrast. The Hon. Members on the Opposition benches over the last budget debate spoke about the budget not being people-centred, it lacks equity, it lacks equality and so on. Lest we forget that under their Government, from 2015 to 2020 – and they are not happy to hear about this period – their budget was self-centred where they increased their Ministers' salaries by 50% in 100 days in Office after making empty promises, not only to the public servants but to our elderly people and also to the Guyanese population – *A Good Life for All Guyanese*. In contrast, the PPP/C Government since taking Office in the latter part of 2020 to now has delivered, fulfilled and implemented programmes and policies to all Guyanese across the country from the coastland to the hinterland. The time that is allotted to me will not give me a chance to speak on every developmental agenda in the hinterland, but it will allow me to give some of the contrast that the PPP/C Government has delivered. In 2015, the APNU/AFC went to the youths and told them – I have a poster here –

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

“Youths it is time to vote for jobs.”

Coincidentally, there was a poster at the bottom that stated:

“Nothing to laugh about.”

This is shameful for the APNU/AFC.

“Youths it is time to vote for jobs.”

They went to the youths and said that the Government could not provide jobs but emphasised the selling of plantain chips and cook-up rice. The youths can now feel relieved and secure under the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. The People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government, since taking Office, reintroduced the Community Support Officers (CSOs) programme immediately, and to date, over 2,700 youths across the country are benefiting from this initiative. The CSO programme has increased by 50% to support village councils from 10 to 15 CSOs in villages. Further, the Government has increased their stipend by 33.3%. I know that the Opposition has a problem with calculation, but it is from \$30,000 to \$40,000 for the CSOs. Amerindian Development is vital for the PPP/C Government, so the Government of Guyana, through the Low Carbon Development Strategy 2030, has significantly injected in 2013 15% and in 2024, 26.5% of carbon credits in over 220 Amerindian villages which resulted in over \$9.5 billion for the sustainable project in their respective villages. Here are a few pictures of the project under the LCDS carbon credit that have been undertaken by villages. These are the facts that I am showing you so that you will see where and how it is being spent.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

The APNU/AFC, upon assuming Office in 2015 to 2020, gave 0% towards the Amerindian development programme under their Green State Development Strategy, which was fruitless and visionless under the incompetent APNU/AFC

Communication technology in the hinterland was a major challenge in Amerindian villages. Today, as I speak, I would like to commend the Prime Minister and his staff at the Office of the Prime Minister and, by extension, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government for delivering high-speed internet in the villages where the youths, the CSOs and community can enjoy free Wi-Fi to communicate with their families. Not only to communicate but we have the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) trainees and trainee nurses who are pursuing their studies online at home from the Government’s free Wi-Fi initiative. I have here the CSOs

using the free Wi-Fi. There is not only one but 20 laptops being used by 20 youths who are using this free Wi-Fi.

The well-being of our people is paramount to the People’s Progressive Party/Civic Government. To date, Guyana’s Government has trained a number of CHWs in the hinterland and nurses and midwives serving their respective villages. There are more than one CHWs, medics and midwives serving the people through health services. The Government has invested huge budgets to improve health facilities across the country, including Bartica and the Kamarang District Hospital where the People’s Progressive Party/Civic has constructed a surgical theatre. For the first time in Upper Mazaruni, in 2024, there were 37 surgeries successfully performed at the Kamarang District Hospital. That has brought relief to patients who were treated and sent home rather than having to travel to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) away from their families. The communication in the health sector has improved in the hinterland. The health personnels from the health facilities can now communicate with their supervisors and seek advice on patients using telemedicine in Amerindian villages, including villages in the Upper Mazaruni. As of yesterday, a telemedicine was installed in the village of Kako where the Hon. Dawn Hastings-Williams resides. So, we have a telemedicine in Kako that was recently installed by the Ministry of Health.

I now turn to education – apart from all of the infrastructural development in the education sector, where new secondary schools would be built in the hinterland, two secondary schools in Region 7, Upper Mazaruni, will be built in Jawalla and Phillipai to minimise the overcrowding at the Desrey Caesar Fox Secondary School. The PPP/C Government has incrementally increased the Because We Care cash grant programme after the APNU/AFC squashed the programme and took away disposable income from the school children and their parents that affects families who were unfortunate to maintain their school children for some reason. Today, the parents of all school children feel relieved because their disposable income has increased incrementally. For the viewers to understand the track record of the two Governments, let me present to this House a bar graph because apparently the Opposition seem not to understand the budget.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

In 2014, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic started a \$10,000 cash grant and the APNU/AFC squashed the



programme and gave the school children a \$2,000 cash voucher. Do you see the graph?

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

It was an 80% reduction from \$10,000 to \$2,000. A deduction – decrease – from \$10,000 to \$2,000. It was an 80% decrease. When the People's Progressive Party/Civic took Office in 2020, we started with a \$2,000 cash voucher and increased it to \$15,000, a 650% increase.

6.26 p.m.

In 2022, it increased to \$25,000 – 66.6%; in 2023, by 40% to \$35,000; in 2024, 28.5% to \$45, 000; and, in 2025, we have 22.2% – \$55,000. That is the story of the People's Progressive Party/Civic. If you want the proof, you could have the graph and keep it as your record.

As we turn to our national cash grant, the Government has implemented measures to help citizens, not only to have the cash grant, but to increase the disposable income for every Guyanese since assuming Office in 2020. This includes \$25,000 per household, and a \$100,000 cash grant for every household, sorry, for Guyanese citizens 18 years and over. Today, the Hon. Member of Parliament, Ms. Fernandes, came to this House speaking about poverty. Today, I want to inform this House and the entire nation that the cash grant distribution is still underway across the country. Today, in Upper Mazaruni, the first phase of distribution is still in progress where five villages have already received their cash grants.

Kako village – \$33.8 million to the pockets of our friends, families and favourites; Kamarang village – \$54.7 million to the pockets of our Amerindian friends, families and favourites; Waramadong village – \$55 million to our Amerindian families, friends and favourites; Paruima village – \$31.1 million to our Amerindian friends, families and favourites. While some are yet to receive this cash grant, the PPP/C Government has assured that no one will be left out from this initiative. The People's Progressive Party/Civic Government has shown to the Guyanese population its competence in delivering its promises. The AFC has come with a slogan, *Better Must Come*. The Alliance For Change is coming with a *Better Must Come*, but I want to tell you, the Opposition, that you better not come here because Guyana is progressing fast under the leadership of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. I will make use of my time, so I will take my time, Mdm. Deputy Speaker.

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, to conclude you will need five minutes.

**Mr. Williams:** Okay.

**Ms. Teixeira:** Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Thank you. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

**Mr. Williams:** Thank you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I encourage the Opposition to use their conscience, like their former People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) Comrade, who publicly said and I quote from his sum of expert:

“The One Guyana initiative is not...”

...only a mere...

“...promise; it is actively working to build a more cohesive nation.

All groups within our population are benefiting from increased access to the nation's wealth.

There has been a notable effort ... fostering young entrepreneurs, enhancing sporting and cultural facilities, and proving seed capital for small businesses.”

The desire for progress is at the heart of the leadership of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. I urge all Guyanese, regardless of race, political affiliation or any other factor, to support the People's Progressive Party/Civic. Give them the mandate to serve our great country for another term. With all being said, I ask the Members of the Opposition benches to look at our track record, and join me in commending, and supporting the passage of *Budget 2025* – stronger together for a better Guyana. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**Ms. Veerasammy:** Good evening, everyone. I stand this evening in this august House as a proud representative of the People's Progressive Party/Civic, representing the people of our country. At the onset, I want to say that this Budget is about people and country. It has something for everyone, and its gender mainstreaming component ensures that women benefit equitably. In the four years, from 2020 to now, the PPP/Civic Government has fulfilled its manifesto promises and delivered beyond our people's expectations.

Madam, permit me to join my Colleagues to convey my congratulations to my Comrade, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh, for such a well thought-out strategic plan for our country. You, my Comrade, delivered in your eloquent style, *Budget 2025*, offering our people goodwill; increased wages and salaries; improved conditions of living; wealth creation through education; skills training; job creation; entrepreneurship; and so much more. This budget will ensure that our people live longer, and healthier lives because of the top-of-the-line healthcare services to be provided across our country. Gradually, the disparity in the healthcare system will be removed between rural, urban and hinterland areas. I would like to extend gratitude to the staff across Government, and the Ministry of Finance who prepared *Budget 2025*. We are here, promoting and defending your social and sectorial projections so that you could continue to provide the services that our people deserve.

Guyanese voted and returned the PPP/Civic to Office in 2020 because our manifesto plan resonated with their goals. During 2015 to 2020, APNU/AFC forced them to live or relive the pre-1992 era – the era of fear and hardship. The APNU/AFC failed promises and draconian taxes suppressed our people and strangled our economy. Businesses closed their doors and scaled down their operations and thousands of people lost their jobs. They shut down the sugar estates, forced thousands of people on the breadline, and did not spare the people they loved the most. They caused the closure of United Company Russian Aluminium (RUSAL), the call centre that employed mostly women, and a logging company. A large number of Lindenians were thrown out of work and put on the bread line. Mdm. Speaker because Lindenians are friends, families and favourites of the People's Progressive Party/Civic, we recreated the opportunities for thousands of them to be re-employed. Today, the bauxite company has become viable and so will GuySuCo in the near future. With the PPP/Civic at the helm of our Government, our people know that life is easier because they could have celebrated democracy and freedom.

Freedom in this country is like breathing clean air – something, Ms. Annette Ferguson, your party do not know about. I am repeating, with the PPP/Civic at the helm of our Government, our people know that life is easier because they could celebrate democracy and freedom. We do not go about fooling people, and we do not give them promises of a 'good life'. We are actually working night and day to give them a good life. Over the past week, the Opposition has been trying to spew assertions on *Budget 2025*. Yes, I agree, people do not eat roads, according to the Opposition Leader, but, asphalted and concrete roads, and bridges save time and

money for families. Car owners save money when their cars are not damaged, so they go less to the mechanic. Most importantly, it saves people time getting from one place to another, including work. Time means money. Time is very precious for women who are full-time students or employees, especially if they are parents. Time saved from travelling could be spent with children and families.

The history of our country will always associate itself with the PPP, and the PPP/C Government with development. No amount of name changing will change the fact that PNC, PNCr, or PNC and APNU/AFC will always be associated with rigged elections, fear and failure.

As soon as the PPP/C Government assumed Office in 1992, remember this, the means test was abolished and everyone over 65 was granted their old age pension. In 2015, APNU/AFC promised to double the old age pension, and, five years later, this is the result. They increased old age pension by \$7,375 or 36%, which moved the pension from \$13,125 to \$20,500. Their economic policies pushed elders into abject poverty. Let me explain. They imposed 14% Value-Added Tax (VAT) on our food items, drugs and medical supplies.

[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)]

I have to remind you, Comrade, because you seem to have forgotten this. They imposed 14% VAT on all items, drugs and medical supplies, on water and electricity, telephone, data and internet. They further took away the water and electricity subsidies. During the same period, they increased public assistance by only 20%, from \$8000 to \$10,000. This is what the PPP/C did for pensioners since 2020, we increased it from \$20,500 to \$41,000 or by 100%. This is a manifesto promise kept. Further, VAT was removed from water, electricity, telephone, data, internet, drugs, medical supplies and so many other food items. Yet, you come here and say we do nothing for elders, but we have them living in poverty. The Opposition needs to conduct an assessment to understand the real total of old age pension, not like what they did. They added, multiplied, subtracted, and then gave the people the \$13,000. Between 2020 to 2025, the PPP/Civic increased public assistance by 120% or 100% more from \$10,000 to \$22,000 monthly. Vulnerable people clearly understand which government they are better off under.

In 2020, our PPP/Civic Government unveiled its manifesto plans in *Budget 2020*, under the theme: *Our Plan for Prosperity*. In 2025, we continued our country's development trajectory under the theme: *A Secure, Prosperous and Sustainable Guyana*. This proves that the PPP/Civic's Manifesto and our group of hardworking vibrant

leaders, headed by His Excellency the President, Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, and our Vice President and General Secretary of the PPP/C, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo, have what it takes to transform Guyana into a modern country. We will continue to work hard with the people of Guyana for the people of Guyana to improve their lives. In our fifth year in Government, the PPP/Civic not only removed VAT from more than 200 items, but we have not imposed a single tax on our people in all these five years. Our prudent measures, instead, put billions of dollars in disposable income each year into the hands of our people. Over the last four years, people could see development and progress in every sphere, even though the Government had to deal with more than two years of the Coronavirus disease 2019 pandemic, floods, drought and the threat from Venezuela.

Part of my job is to be with our people, to listen to their criticisms and recommendations, to provide answers to their questions, but more than that, to be with our people and involve them in nation building. Recognising that culture and tradition kept women behind in every sphere of society, the PPP/Civic invested heavily in education and training because it knows that education is the key that will bring women and our people out of poverty. We must remember that Guyana achieved universal primary education by the year 2014, and the Government is working to achieve universal secondary education. The Ministry of Education has invested heavily in teachers' training across Guyana over the last four years. Approximately 4,378 teachers were trained, and the Ministry is introducing new teaching methods and smart classrooms for our students.

6.41 p.m.

All courses at the University of Guyana (UG) will be free, commencing this year, and since 2024, all student loans are being written off – another manifesto promise kept. Our manifesto promise of 20,000 scholarship targets has been surpassed with over 29,758 scholarships. Of this, 21,436, or 72% of the beneficiaries are women. This is something for which I cannot find words to thank the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

While the formal school system prepares children for higher education, the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute develops courses, under the Women Innovation and Investment Network (WIIN), for women and girls who drop out of school. The courses aim to empower women and girls with accredited technical and vocational training, entrepreneurial skills, and access to financing opportunities. The very long list of courses offered is accessible to women

across Guyana. From 2021 to 2024, over 12,000 women have been trained.

The Board of Industrial Training (BIT) trained 5,077 males and 7,688 females. Again, we have seen that 60% of women benefitted from these courses, taking women to another level in our country. This is promoting gender inclusivity in a male-dominated profession.

Madam, to include those persons who had to leave school for various reasons and could not find jobs in the formal establishment, the National Pathway Workers Programme was created. Since 2022, 10,751 persons were employed and more than 75% were women. In 2024, this number rose to 15,283 persons; that is, the same 75%. This pathway work is creating wealth for low-income workers in Guyana, especially for women. They work in community enhancement, and they function as clerks and receptionists in offices, especially in an environment where we have short labour.

To have people living longer, healthier lives, the promise of decentralising our healthcare services to every region is a manifesto promise kept. Six of the 12 regional hospitals will be opened later this year. The Opposition is talking about where we are going to get people to staff these hospitals. The answer was out there because the Minister of Health, Dr. Anthony, said that the thousands of medical professionals graduating this year from local and international institutions will be placed in those hospitals. If more is needed, healthcare workers will be hired from other countries. People are taking our workers, so we will now try to get back some of them.

The PPP/C Government has been working since 1992 to help our people become homeowners, and this has intensified in the last four years, with 40,290 house lots and over 2,000 homes built for new homeowners. Of this number, 18,530 house lots, or 46% were allocated to women. There was a time in our country when women owned no property and all property was owned by men. Mdm. Speaker, do not forget that during the 2015 period, the APNU/AFC almost closed down the Ministry of Housing and barely handed out 7,534 house lots. They cut the ceiling for loans so people could not get to build a certain level or a certain size of building because they wanted to keep people in their place. You know, low-income people have a place. They wanted to keep them there.

In the pre-1992 period, under the People's National Congress, women spent hours fetching water. Today, 98.3% of our women are getting water in their homes.

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, you require five minutes to conclude.

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Thank you very much. You have five minutes to conclude.

**Ms. Veerasammy:** Thank you, Mdm. Speaker. Please permit me to share in this august House a subject matter that we do not talk much about. The Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, of which I am a part, works with people who have lost hope and want to give up, who sometimes feel that they have no one and nowhere to turn. The Ministry has several departments that deal with the softer side of society, a side that people believe distributes Old Age Pensions and Public Assistance vouchers only. This Ministry has staff who hold hands, heal hearts and give hope to people who are homeless and who do not have the ability, sometimes, to look to the future with optimism.

After spending time at the Night Shelter, training is sought for them, through the Board of Industrial Training and other institutions. They are linked with jobs, and we try to reintegrate them with families. Many of them reintegrate into society as productive members of society. These departments are at the Palms Geriatric Home, the Hugo Chavez Home for Rehabilitation and Reintegration, and the Night Shelter. Our staff go to the street, with support from the Guyana Police Force (GPF), the Mental Health Clinic and the Chest Clinic and we remove people and bring them to the Night Shelter. We offer them a bed, a warm meal, and a bath. We provide them with medical evaluations, psychiatric care, and Tuberculosis (TB) assessment. We then ensure that they receive treatment. Those hospitalised are treated, stabilised, and transferred back to the Night Shelter. Depending on the casework, elders over 60 are transferred to the geriatric home, which is the Palms Institution, and some of them under 60 are transferred to the Hugo Chavez Home at Onverwagt, where specific care is provided.

Living on the streets causes people to develop certain types of antisocial behaviour and chronic and terminal diseases. Many of them did not see the doctor for decades and received no treatment. Intervention by the staff of the Night Shelter and the Hugo Chavez home must be commended. They work beyond the call of duty to ensure that the homeless are provided with care and empathy. Most of them

who are removed from the streets were abandoned by their families. People tend to find themselves homeless for various reasons, and due to this, they develop anger issues. They go on the streets because of family problems, domestic violence, drug abuse, alcoholism, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) tuberculosis, mental illness and others. I would like to thank the staff of the Ministry of Health, Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC), the Regional Health Services, and staff for every department in the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security for helping heal the bodies of these people while we work to heal their minds.

The Night Shelter is a premier institution of its kind that will become a shining example of what caring for the vulnerable is all about. We are in surgeries for fractures, cataracts, hernias, and urology intervention, and monitor hospitalisation for those admitted with chronic diseases and others. The Night Shelter has many beautiful stories to tell about the people who live there, but I do not have the time to do so here. I would like to thank our President and our Government, for providing the funding and safe haven for this vulnerable group. I look forward to more support in the years ahead. Mdm. Speaker, before I end my presentation, I would like to commend this budget to this House for approval. *[Applause]*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. Let me congratulate the speakers who spoke today. With this, it concludes our business of today. Hon. Prime Minister, proceed.

## ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the National Assembly stands adjourned to Monday, 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2025”.

**Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips:** Thank you, Mdm. Speaker. I ask that we adjourn the sitting of the House of Assembly, to Monday, 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2025, at 10.00 a.m.

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. I now move the adjournment of the National Assembly to Monday, 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2025, at 10.00 a.m. Thank you.

*Adjourned accordingly at 6.51 p.m.*