



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*

94TH Sitting

Tuesday 28TH January, 2025

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

Assembly convened at 10.33a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

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

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Peoples Progressive Party Civic (38)

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

Vice-President (1)

Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P., Vice-President

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

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

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

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

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

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

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Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P. (Region No. 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara)
Minister of Education

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

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Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P., Minister of Labour

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Minister of Human Services and Social Security

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

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

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Ministry of Housing and Water

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

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

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

***Non-Elected Member**

Other Members (15)

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

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

Hon. Sanjeev J. Datadin, M.P.

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Hon. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.

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

Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.

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

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

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

*Hon. Sarah Browne, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs

*Hon. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture

Hon. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.

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

Hon. Suresh Singh, M.P.

MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)

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

Hon. Aubrey Norton M.P., Leader of the Opposition

Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.

Hon. Roysdale A. Forde, S.C., M.P. [Absent on – Leave]

Hon. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P. (Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam)

Hon. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)

Hon. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.

***Non-Elected Member**

Hon. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.

Hon. Volda A. Lawrence, M.P. [Virtual Participation]

Hon. Dawn Hastings-Williams, M.P. (Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni)

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

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

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Hon. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.

Hon. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P.

Hon. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P.

Hon. David A. Patterson, M.P. [Virtual Participation]

Hon. Ronald Cox, M.P. (Region No. 1 – Barima/Waini)

Hon. Jermaine A. Figueira, M.P. (Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice)

Hon. Ganesh A. Mahipaul, M.P. (Region No. 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara)

Hon. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P.

Hon. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)

Hon. Dineshwar N. Jaiprakash, M.P. (Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne)

Hon. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P. (Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)

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

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

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

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

Hon. Dr. Asha Kissoon, M.P., Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly [Virtual Participation]

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Ms. Hermina Gilgeours, Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly

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Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician

Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

The Assembly convened at 10.21 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Time Management

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we are doing a bit better with respect to time. I am appealing to whoever can, to get me a school bell. We have been looking all over the city. Apparently, Minister Ms. Manickchand may have procured all of it, but we are still looking for that bell to get persons to come into the Dome, or sign in, so that we can have a quorum and start in a more prompt fashion.

Presence of Teachers and Students from Secondary Schools in Georgetown

Today, we have students from Richard Ishmael Secondary School and two teachers. Welcome, Richard Ishmael. To my right, we have two teachers and students from the Christ Church Secondary School. I know they are anxiously waiting to move into that spanking new building at Middle and Camp Streets. Welcome to the schools.

Presence of Her Excellency, Ambassador Ms. Smith, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)

We also have Her Excellency, Ambassador Ms. Smith, joining us from the FAO – FAO representative to Guyana. Thank you.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT 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.

*[The 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 continue the debate on the motion for the approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for the Financial Year 2025. Today's first speaker is the Hon. Member Mr. Vinceroy Jordan.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to say good morning to all my colleagues and those visiting today in the National Assembly. I rise to add my voice to the Budget Debates of 2025. While this national Budget is important, I stand today not to speak heavily on its content, but rather on the management and execution of its allocation, for it is that which the Guyanese people will use as measuring sticks to unseat this incompetent, uncaring, heartless and unscrupulous regime

from Office. Yes, Sir, it is not just the numbers but what is allocated for the development and transformation of the lives of every Guyanese. That is exactly what this Budget lacks.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to touch briefly on Region 5. Almost five years in, this Government remains incompetent at the regional level, as it was from the beginning of its term. Sir, the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development will come to this House and boast about the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) and how it achieved 99% and 100% across programmes as of December, 2024, but let me help you understand how ineffectual and laid back this Government is. At mid-year, the PSIP in Region 5 stood just below 30%. By September, 2024, the progress report remained just around 30%. By November, 2024, the report was just under 50%. Millions of dollars were unspent yet, by the end of the year, they boast of completing their work programme – they could not have.

Permit me to highlight the incompetence of the Mahaica-Berbice Regional Administration. We still have several unfinished schools. Schools are in need of repairs and maintenance. The Hon. Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha knows that, Sir. The evidence is clear. Just check the number of schools that remain closed in Guyana at the opening of the school term in September, and as recent as January. As a result of the incompetence of the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, Ms. Sonia Parag, the Bush Lot Secondary School has been under repairs since September of last year and the children go to school on a rotational basis. A parent was severely injured during a parent-teacher conference at the very school when a huge beam fell from the roof, hitting her on the head. That is the incompetence of the Hon. Ms. Sonia Parag. Sir, the Hoptown Nursery School started construction in the middle of the September school term when the budget was passed in February, 2024. So, you would understand, Sir, when we talk about incompetence.

Mr. Speaker, the incompetence is further demonstrated in public health, Region 5. As a result of poor performance under the work programme, our hospitals are having shortages of drugs and little or no cleaning supplies, just like Timehri as many would say. We demand that the Medical Outreach and Public Assistance Programme, started under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government – led by Mr. David Arthur Granger and discontinued by this heartless People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government – be restored to the people of Champagne Creek immediately. They were two months in, and they removed the

programme. Now our pensioners have to go to the hospital, travelling miles and paying thousands of dollars to seek medical healthcare.

While this Government remains incompetent, the residents of Region 5 suffer in many cases with impossible roads, mud-filled streets, and dams filled with large potholes – not the one that the Hon. Mr. Jaffarally lives on. The incompetence is so grave that the road to Champagne Creek, Mahaicony, was placed in three budgets, and never completed. I repeat for emphasis – the road was placed in three budgets, and it was never completed. As we speak, the road is now under construction by the Ministry of Public Works. That is a result of the visit of the Leader of the Opposition who had to highlight the plight of the people. That is how this Government operates. They only run when the Leader of the Opposition visits and speaks. They run after him. Might I remind this Jagdeo-led regime, that changing Regional Executive Officers (REOs) in Region 5 will not solve the problems of nepotism, cronyism and incompetence. By now this Government has changed three REOs in Region 5 in five years, with one resigning just two days after taking the job, and another acting for several months until his incompetent Minister said, time up. All that in administrative management and Region 5 is in no better place.

10.32 a.m.

What is sure, however, is that the people of Region 5 are aware of the number of contracts that are handed out to the friends, families and favourites of this Government. With this new budget, the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development must tell us how much of the allocations for Region 5 will go to the companies associated with the friends and families of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C). The Minister of Local Government and Regional Development must tell this House why the former Chief Accountant of Region 5 was made to resign and how many contracts were awarded to his company that is registered in his name, while he sat as a Chief Accountant. The same must be done for the other senior officials in Region 5 whose companies are registered in the names of friends, families and favourites. The Hon. Jaffarally would know about the company, and he could tell us about the phantom companies.

One must come to the reality that Guyana has a large percentage of its population living in poverty. It was reported that 48% of Guyanese are living in poverty. This budget does not cater to the needs of the 48% of our population living in poverty. While a few measures are reasonable, permit me

to say to the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service what the Guyanese people are saying. Guyanese are saying that the \$100,000 one-off cash grant will not solve the issues of poverty. The \$100,000 for every newborn to a Guyanese mother will definitely not serve the issues of poverty in Guyana. The meagre \$5,000 increase in old age pension will certainly not solve the issues of poverty in Guyana. Further, the meagre, \$3,000 increase in public assistance will definitely not solve the issues of poverty in Guyana. The 10-day part-time job will not solve the 48% of poverty in Guyana at \$40,000 a month. Guyanese want this Government to know that a \$130,000 monthly tax-free threshold will not reduce the 48% rate of poverty in Guyana. What the Guyanese require is a liveable income to begin the reduction of poverty in Guyana. Let it be made abundantly clear that, upon return to Office later in 2025, the Coalition Government will increase the income tax threshold to \$400,000 and all Guyanese could then experience a life of prosperity with a 35% increase in wages and salaries.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to touch on food security and permit me to dissect the Minister's speech on agriculture and food security. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service spoke gloriously about food security and an increase in food production. Sir, every Guyanese, including you, and the Minister would know, this is far from the truth. If food is being produced, why the continued increase prices in the market? If food is being produced, why is there extreme shortages in the market? This incapable and incompetent PPP/C Government must answer those questions. This is the reality. A 10 kilogrammes (kgs) bag of rice in 2020 was \$1,600. In 2024, it was \$2,500. A bottle of oil in 2020 was \$1,500. In 2024, it was \$3,700. One pound of sugar that we produced was \$120. In 2024, it is about \$300. A parcel of bora for a family of five in 2020 was \$300. In 2024, the same parcel was \$1,000 and more. A pound of tomato in 2020 was \$120. In 2024, tomatoes were selling at \$260 per pound. A slice of pumpkin for all of Guyana to see was \$200 in 2020. In 2024, a slice of pumpkin was \$1,300. That is the food security the Hon. Minister spoke about. Butter, that is widely used by all like flour and sugar, in 2020, was \$240 a pound. In 2024, it was \$650 a pound. Potato in 2020 was \$120 a pound. In 2024, potato was \$247. I challenge them to go to the Bounty Supermarket and to the market and check the prices. They will see the reality that prices have indeed increased.

The Minister spoke about the 2.9% estimated inflation rate for 2024. The Minister and his Government should know that all Guyanese feel it is more like 15% to 18% inflation in 2024. There is an old saying that *who feels it, knows*. They do not feel it. They do not go to the markets and the shops, so they do not know what it feels like to stand under the heavy burden of inflation. The Minister himself told us in his budget document that even the malnourished and moderately malnourished have increased significantly among Guyanese. In one case it was stated that the severely malnourished rate increased from 0.1% in 2020 to 0.5% in 2024, moving upwards by 300%. In relation to the moderately malnourished, that category of Guyanese has increased from 0.5% in 2020 to 1.4% in 2024. Our good Friend, the Hon. Jennifer Westford, came to this House yesterday and said that we need to see the people who are malnourished. In that very Government, there are living examples of people who are malnourished right here in Guyana. We do not have to go far. It is evident right across the Government. This alone is a clear indication that the Minister's report on food security is far from the truth. Let the Minister tell us about the healthy foods and why these categories of Guyanese were unable to receive the required foods.

The failures by the Ministry of Agriculture are so evident and ever so present since everywhere we look, we can see the failures. It ranges from the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) to drainage, to irrigation, to crops and livestock and many more. To compound the situation, the failures and mismanagement are widened with wrongdoings. We know when we speak about wrongdoings, it stands in the place of that 'C' word. Here are some failures, mismanagement and wrongdoings that occurred during the last year and which this Minister failed to mention in his budget presentation this year that these are either challenges or missteps by this Government. I want to highlight some of these missteps. In *Kaieteur News* on 12th September, 2024, it was stated:

“Massive fraud was uncovered at GMC after the general manager ordered audit...

- accountant, special projects manager fingered.”

The Hon. Minister of Agriculture knows very well what I am talking about. The wrongdoings continued at the Mahaica, Mahaicony and Abary/Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA). That organisation admitted to misappropriation by staff members which was uncovered and which it claimed to immediately deal with. We are still waiting. At the Guyana Livestock Development Authority (GLDA), the Chairman admitted that there were damages to

thousands of duck eggs and suspected sabotage. To date, there is no disclosure. At GuySuCo's Albion Estate, the powerhouse was destroyed by fire which caused a delay in the start of the crop and was estimated at just over \$50 million in damages as reported by GuySuCo. We saw and heard in this very House requests for money to make payments of over \$600 million for a \$50 million in damage. That is the reality of this Government – wrongdoings.

Over at the Rose Hall Estate, it was reported that over 240 tonnes of sugar were unaccounted for while senior managers were sacked. To date, no probe has been launched. Mr. Speaker, you would recall the Opposition reporting that chicken was being smuggled from Suriname allegedly by senior Government officials. To date, Sir, no audit has been launched. Mr. Speaker, you would know that several pump stations across Guyana remained incomplete while billions of dollars were spent with no work to show. I spoke extensively about the Inclusion Body Hepatitis (IBH) pandemic in the poultry sector. It caused the mortality rate to increase exponentially. I saw hundreds of poultry farmers losing thousands of layers and broilers. To date, nothing was done by the Ministry of Agriculture to curb this crisis as it has since worsened as we speak today. That is the reality on the ground.

I challenge the Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha to visit the local farmers. I challenge him not to be interested only in chickens coming across the borders, but that he go to the local farms and see the plight and struggle of our farmers. The chickens are not being properly vaccinated and that is the reality. We saw hundreds of farmers and households counting their losses – and certainly not being compensated – after being flooded as sluices and kokers gave way across this country due to poor maintenance and lack of servicing, as recently as three months ago, causing severe flooding in Calcutta, Catherine, Good Faith and Dundee Mahaicony. The Minister knows because we were both on the scene at the same time. He knows. They will blame it on the high tide and spring tide. Whether it is high tide or spring tide or no tide, our infrastructure must be able to stand against the tides of the day. So, I call it, Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, your incompetence. Our fisher folks are still awaiting the fishing and trawler license between Guyana and Suriname.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to touch on rice expansion and the cheaper production of our intended Coalition Government. The next Coalition Government will fast-track the production of nitrogen fertiliser in Guyana through direct Government investments. We see the local fertiliser industry as a game changer, in terms of boosting agricultural production, reducing food prices by 25% to 30%,

growing the income of tens of thousands of farmers, bringing marginal lands into commercial viability, boosting rural economies and guaranteeing Guyana's food security. I want to assure all our rice farmers that the Coalition Government when it takes Office, will reduce the cost of rice production with this initiative.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to touch on Drainage and Irrigation (D&I). Our future Coalition Government will place special emphasis on drainage and irrigation in a structured manner. We will create a special sector with a minister responsible for drainage and irrigation and properly decentralise D&I for every region. What is the operative word, Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha? It is 'properly'.

10.47 a.m.

Like Region 9, with a special focus on the hinterland regions, especially the Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo, we will develop new and improved D&I infrastructure which will significantly reduce the chances of flooding during the rainy or wet seasons and develop a proper water management system that will build upon the previous work of the APNU/AFC Government. In that, we will build more secured reservoirs to store water for the entire Rupununi Savannahs during the dry seasons. That is a fact of the Coalition Government. We have started that.

This Government is kleptocratic and unscrupulous. It lacks credibility and the ability to devise strategies, plans, and execute large projects. I want to repeat for emphasis now that my Colleague, the Hon. Kwame McCoy, has come into the House – this Government is kleptocratic and unscrupulous. It lacks credibility and the ability to devise strategies, plans, and executions of large projects. We do not have to go far – look at the Skeldon Sugar Modernisation Project and the Fibre Optic Cable Project. Let me get back to my speech. With that in mind, we see the need for increased and improved infrastructure in D&I across Guyana, considering the challenges of climate change and its consequences. Hence, the reason our next Coalition Government will place much focus on sector management and improvement, not wanting the cases of Tepui, Belle West and Cottage Pump Station to ever repeat themselves, ever again in Guyana. Mr. Speaker, you, like many Guyanese, will know that this PPP/C Government is incompetent, and thrives on hatching deals with its friends, families, and favourites. You will remember that a contract was awarded by the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) almost two years ago to the Tepui

(Construction company) Group Incorporated, owned and managed by the well-known Guyanese Critic. Its completion date was slated for 12 months after, and today, it stands at just over 15% completed. After spending over \$800 million, there is nothing to show for the work. I hear the Hon. Minister shouting from across the other side, but, let me continue.

The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, in the middle of his Budget presentation, wandered off on a tangent to talk about sea and river defence at the Columbia-Mahaicony foreshore. Let me tell the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service that, successive Jagdeo and Ramotar PPP/C Governments are equally responsible for the deterioration and eventual destruction of the sea defence along the Danzig to Colombia foreshore. The Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo spent 12 years as President, while Mr. Ramotar spent just over three years, totalling 15 plus years of the PPP/C Government having knowledge of a deteriorating sea defence. I will prove my case by saying that, on several occasions during both Presidents' tenure in Office, they patched and partially rehabilitated that very sea defence. It is disingenuous of the Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service – or rather, he has only responsibilities, he is not the Minister – to come to this House and cast blame on the APNU/AFC Government for that breach of the sea defence, when, in fact, they had 23 years to fix it, and they never did. That apart, almost five years in, and they budgeted billions of dollars to fix that very sea defence. Today, I recently visited that site, and after spending billions of dollars, they are still driving piles. They are still driving piles while the breaches continue to happen at several points along the seashore.

A time is coming, and let me say it loud and clear, when Guyanese will judge this incompetent Government; when Guyanese will judge this kleptocratic, lacklustre and dysfunctional puppet-like Government led by the Hon. Vice President Jagdeo. The answer of my Guyanese brothers and sisters will certainly be, depart...

Mr. Speaker: I have to stop you there because you are imputing on behalf of a sitting Member of the House. Is that right? You have to withdraw that.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Sir, withdrawn. Our Guyanese brothers and sisters will overwhelmingly say, depart from me, you workers of iniquity. I know you not. Now, I come to GuySuCo. Guyanese

across this country must know that by the poor performance industry, our Government continues to sell sugar at a price far below the cost of production. In essence, this Government continues to subsidise the foreign economy by making Guyanese pay, through taxes, the cost for each pound of sugar produced and sold below the price of production. Let me state emphatically that the 2025 sugar production target set by this incompetent Government is an unrealistic and unclear plan to create a false impression, knowing fully well that it will fail. This is not rocket science. Under the PPP/C Government, from 2020 to 2024, GuySuCo has failed to meet every target set by the sugar corporation, even when they significantly revised and reduced those targets. I will hear shortly the Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha shout from the top of his voice as I go deeper, but the Hon. Minister, like the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, is a product of free education under the successive People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) Governments. However, it is not my fault for his inability to grasp much.

This 115% in the target of 100 metric tonnes announced by the Minister for 2025 must be an election gimmick, but sadly, not many Guyanese are prepared to buy this one. Here are the statistics – in 2021, the sugar production target was 79,000 metric tonnes thereabout and the actual production was 58,000 metric tonnes. They fall short by over 21,000 metric tonnes. In 2022, the target was around 80,000 metric tonnes. The actual production was 47,000 metric tonnes. In 2023, the target was 70,000 metric tonnes. The actual production was just around 60,000 metric tonnes. In 2024, the Minister stood and shouted at the top of his voice that they would produce 100,000 metric tonnes. The actual production was only 47,000 metric tonnes. He woefully fell short of over 50% of that production. Guyanese must take note that all this happened after the PPP/C Government brought teams of experts to revive the sugar industry, spending millions, if not billions, of taxpayers' dollars, and they continue to read the Riot Act. In August, 2008, the then President Bharrat Jagdeo read the Riot Act and I quote from *Kaieteur News*, dated 21st August, 2008:

“President Jagdeo has stressed that the Government does not intend to subsidise...”

This loss-making entity...

“at the expense of education and health...”

In our country.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, at the expense of cutting you off totally, we need to stop here to give you an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may continue to conclude.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This same person then argued against his own words, when we right-size the sugar industry – sad. In 2022, the Riot Act was read again, and I quote from *The Village Voice*, dated 14th June 2022:

“President reads riot act to failing GuySuCo... no place for CEO...”

At the table. Mr. Speaker, fast forward to December, 2024, the Riot Act was read again. This time *Demerara Waves*, dated 21st December 2024, reports, and I quote:

“President reads “riot act” to GuySuCo’s top brass...”

And...

“...warns “heads will roll.”

The article detailed that the President on Friday said, or rather he:

“read the “riot act” to the management of the loss-making and low-producing Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), even as the entity’s new investment...was being considered by...”

The...

“...Government. “I’ve let them understand that we are...dissatisfied with the performance.”

Let me make it clear again, no heads will roll. This is the usual rail and rant, and no action will be taken. The only heads that must roll at this time are those of the incompetent PPP/C Government,

starting with the incompetent Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, who after spending \$40 billion, failed to produce one set target in five years. He failed to turn around the industry. He failed to reopen the Skeldon and East Demerara estates. He failed to return GuySuCo to profitability, according to the PPP/C manifesto on page 13. He also failed to ensure that better management and greater efficiency were returned. This Minister is a complete failure on GuySuCo. The PPP/C campaigned on GuySuCo. They spread their usual racial rhetoric. They persuaded Guyanese, especially our Indo-Guyanese brothers and sisters in the sugar belt community, and they said the Coalition was bad for GuySuCo.

Today, the facts are clear. The PPP/C failed Guyanese in its manifesto promise. Mr. Speaker, I challenge you to read page 13 of the PPP/C's Manifesto, and you will see a slew of measures they failed to complete. Worse yet, here is what the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service will not tell Guyanese in his Budget Presentation. He will not tell Guyanese that GuySuCo is not making returns to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). He will not tell Guyanese that, under the PPP/Cs Government, GuySuCo became the largest debtor to NIS, or that our factory and field workers' NIS contributions are not being paid in. The Minister will not tell us that his Government spent over \$40 billion on GuySuCo since taking office, and they lost equally – over \$22 billion. In 2021, they lost \$7.8 billion. In 2022, GuySuCo lost \$10.2 billion. In 2023, they lost \$4.7 billion.

I want to assure all that the Coalition Government will develop GuySuCo. We have long said that the best decision was to right-size the industry. We remain committed to diversifying the industry. We remain committed to ensuring that GuySuCo, crop by crop, make set production targets. We will ensure that a competent and skilled board of directors is installed to oversee the proper management of GuySuCo. We will not manage GuySuCo in the friends-and-family affairs. I spoke to several factory and field workers and management across Guyana. They all echoed similar sentiments. They said GuySuCo can do well, but the problem is the PPP/C Government – its incompetence coupled with some sections of management and the unfair treatment of many middle-class managers. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) study showed that more jobs were lost in the sugar industry under the PPP/C Government than under the PNC/R Coalition. The study states on page 24 that, there were 28,081 workers employed by GuySuCo. The report further noted that, by May 2015, the Guyana Sugar Corporation was in dire financial straits and the

number of employees reduced to 16,900. That was done by the PPP/C Government. A reduction of 11,154 workers.

11.02 a.m.

This in comparison to the PNC/R and Coalition's years in Office, we saw 325 jobs that were lost under Burnham and Hoyte and 5,160 under the Coalition. They like to talk about 7,000 sugar workers being displaced. In 1976, there were 12 sugar estates in Guyana. By 2015, when the Coalition took Office, there were only six sugar estates. The PPP/C closed six sugar estates between 1992 and 2015. They closed more than us.

In conclusion, Sir, here are some of the policies our next Coalition government will adopt to further develop the agriculture sector. We will establish a national agriculture council to advise the Ministry of Agriculture on policy decisions and sector development. The council will include representatives from farmers organisations, industry experts and relevant stakeholders to provide balance and practical recommendations. We will coordinate the promotion of agricultural development in every region to increase agricultural production, food availability and accessibility in pursuant of a sustainable agriculture sector across Guyana. We will review and develop a national drainage and irrigation framework, while decentralising offices and services in every region, making Drainage and Irrigation a core sector of focus and responsibility in the Ministry of Agriculture. We will establish a department within D&I responsible for the study and development of water storage reservoirs and have allocations in hinterland and highland regions, for example, Central Rupununi.

We will initiate a task force that will review, advise and oversee the structural changes in administration at all regional levels in the delivery of agricultural services by the agencies under the Ministry of Agriculture. For example, all agencies at the regional level should be brought under the coordinated supervision of a regional coordinator or a head of agricultural services. We will develop and implement programmes that promote market-driven agriculture production with focus on enhancing both quality and quantity, adopting international standards such as hazard analysis, critical control points, good agricultural practices and the global gap for safe, high-quality agricultural productions. Our next government will establish business incubators aimed at supporting youth, women and vulnerable groups by providing access to land, grants, soft loans,

training and market access. We will collaborate with financial institutions such as the Institute for Private Enterprise Development (IPED) and the International Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA) to offer favourable loans, or loan conditions and grants tailored to support agricultural startups. We will implement strict zoning regulations to safeguard agricultural lands from residential or industrial encroachment, establish a land allocation and review community that the Ministry of Agriculture, after consultation with the Mahaica/Mahaicony Abary/Agriculture Development Authority (MMA/ADA) and the Guyana Lands and Survey Commission (GLSC) and local authority.

Mr. Speaker, I see that you indicated the time is up, but Sir, we have a slew of other measures that will improve agriculture in Guyana. With the Coalition taking Office, we will enact and ensure that this becomes a reality and that this sector will be turned around under the Coalition government. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, there were two citations in your presentation, and we need you to present the copies immediately to the Clerk – the (International Labour Organization) ILO and the 48% poverty rate. Now for the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, the Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I want to join with you in welcoming our students to this debate here this morning. I think it was a very bad example just now. Our young people must know the fact – what has happened in our country. This story has to be told. We should not come into this House with a prepared speech, bury our heads and read from start to end. Let us debate. A debate is to debate issues and we will debate them.

I want these young people here today to know, first of all, the legacy of the PPP/C and the legacy of the APNU/AFC. The young people must know the facts, or else, when they leave here today, they will leave with the wrong impression. All the misinformation, all the allegations that were made just now were false. Every time there is a PPP/C Government, we always see progress, development and benefit to the people of our country. Every time we have a PPP/C Government, we always have development taking place, benefit to the people, stability and growth. What we have seen over the years and let us categorise the period, let us look at the period 1966 to 1992. From 1966 to 1992, the PNC ruled for 28 years. What was their legacy? Rigged election, banning

of basic food items – the young people must know – things like dhal, potato, split peas, sardine – everything. Flour was banned. The young people must know that they were banned. The PNC banned them from us. We never had them. If you had sardine or split peas, and you were doing a Jhandi, you had to go to jail under the PNC Regime from 1966 to 1992. We had under-development. We had party paramountcy. The PNC flag was flown over the Court of Appeal in this country – the PNC paramountcy. The Hon. Member Jordan was not born as yet. He must read the history of his Party, rather than come here with a prepared speech. Somebody prepared the speech and gave him, and he came and read it here.

We had economic crisis after crisis. People were fleeing Guyana. We had potholes. We had dilapidated infrastructure. That was the legacy of the PNC and the young people must know. That is their history. I want to say something here. All the elections that were held in this country before 1992, were rigged by the PNC. Elections held in 1968, 1973, 1980 and 1985, all those elections were rigged by the PNC, and they put themselves in power. They stole the vote of the people. They stole the democratic rights of the people in this country. We had elections in 1992, and they were forced by the Carter Centre and other international powers to implement electoral reform. We had the counting of the ballots at the place of poll in 1992 and what happened? The PPP/C won a majority and took over this country. The young people must know the history; the story must be told. From 1992 to 2015, we had stability. We have had free and fair elections all the time. The elections of 1997, the elections of 2001, 2006, 2011, 2015, all were free and fair. They were declared by international observers under the People's Progressive Party/Civic. That is the story. That is the legacy.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Jones.

Mr. Jones: On a Point of Order. Could the Hon. Minister produce the evidence of these rigged elections? This is because we only know about the 1997 elections that were vitiated in a Court in Guyana.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will allow the Minister to continue.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Speaker, those are published reports. Those are public knowledge. We had international observers pronounce on the rigged elections under the PNC. Then we had stability in this country from 1992. What did we have in this country, Mr. Speaker? We had democratic renewal. We rebuilt the economy. There was hope and optimism in the people of our country. Many persons came back to live in Guyana. That was the legacy of the PPP/C from 1992 to 2015.

[**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I did not miss anything. From 2015, they had another chance. People thought that by giving them another chance that they would change. What did they do? From 2015 to 2020, leaving out all the burdens they have placed on the backs of the Guyanese people, leaving out all the hardships they have implemented, they caused Guyana to lose its place in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). The most damning thing was, once again, rigged elections in this country. That was their legacy. That is their legacy. If it was a responsible Party or a responsible government, the young people must know these things or else they will go away with wrong facts. This is because just now we were regaled with misinformation. We were regaled with misinformation and allegations. I am just putting the facts.

We had a no-confidence motion. They squatted for one year in Government. Eventually, we had the election in March, 2020. What did we do? Everybody pronounced that the election was held according to all the rules. Even they pronounced on it. When they knew they had lost the elections, they held on to power for five months. They wanted to take away a country in front of the eyes of the world. For five months they squatted in Government, although we had elections in March, 2020. They came out of Government in August, 2020. That is their legacy. In that period, we saw rigged elections once again. We saw heavy taxation. We saw economic burden on the backs of the people. We saw a number of retrogressive steps taken by the APNU/AFC Government. What we are seeing now, we are seeing a new era. A new era is in dawn now from 2020. An era where Guyana's credibility has been restored to the world. An era where Guyana is making its contribution to the world in terms of energy, in terms of food security, and in terms of climate change. We are leading in those areas. We are being recognised around the world, not like the APNU/AFC. We lost our place in CARICOM in 2015. We lost that place because of your ineptitude. Now, we are seeing massive transformations taking place.

11.17 a.m.

We are seeing Guyana be the fastest-growing economy in the world. We are seeing benefits for the people. We are seeing cash transfers to the people. Those are the legacies of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) in this country.

Mr. Speaker, you can see the four periods...the young people must know the four periods that we are talking about. They must see that whenever the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC)/People's National Congress (PNC) are in government, we have economic depression, we have rigged elections, we have banned items and we have lots of crimes. Whenever the People's Progressive Party/Civic is in government, we have economic prosperity, and we have Guyana regaining its glory on the international stage. Those are the legacies of the two parties. So, we must not come and bury our heads in speeches. I could have rebutted every single thing that Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, mentioned. I want to set the record straight. That is the record. The record is when we bring development to this country, every single stratum of society enjoys it. You can be PNC/R, APNU, AFC, or PPP/C. Everybody is getting the \$100,000 cash grant. Everybody is getting the pension increase, the public assistance, and every other thing, healthcare, education expansion, every single sector.

This brings me to the point of one of the most dismal performances of the APNU/AFC – agriculture. They should have been the last people to speak on agriculture. They destroyed the agriculture sector in this country. I want to change the perception they are trying to create in this country. They want the people in this country to believe that sugar had started to decline under the PPP/C Government. I want to give you the records. These are the records: in 2015, the last year we were in Government, sugar production was 231,071 metric tonnes. In 2019, sugar production dropped to 92,256 tonnes – a 60% decrease in sugar during the APNU's time. Under the APNU, sugar declined by 60%. They closed down four sugar factories, and we have heard all the legends. Hon. Suresh Singh said last night how he was affected when his father was sent home, and there are thousands of Suresh Singhs around this country whose fathers were sent home, whose parents were sent home, and who never had a job to take care of their families. That is the legacy of the PNC/APNU.

I want to bring to this record the legacy of the PNC again. I have a lease in my hand. This lease that I have in my hand is from the Mahaica-Mahaicony-Abary/Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA). Listen to what this lease states. The former chairman of MMA's Board

of Directors – and I can call the name – was Mr. Kelvin Saul. He was the chairman under APNU/AFC. What did he do? [An Hon. Member: (inaudible)] Alright. I withdraw the name, but he was the former chairman. [An. Hon. Member: It is a fact.] These are the facts I have here, and I will lay this in the National Assembly. Their chairman took away people's lands and took 10,000 acres of land from the MMA. Not Indo-Guyanese...Who was affected? Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, your countryman, your own Afro-Guyanese who you claimed are supporting you, were discriminated against. They are sitting up there. Look up there. Raise your hands and let them see you. Those are the people.

Mr. Speaker, hear this testimonial. I, Harold H. Booker, of Lot 35 'C' Field, West Coast Berbice (WCB), am a rice farmer who has devoted over 20 years to cultivating rice to sustain my family. I am a husband and father to four children and our very survival depended on the livelihood that rice farming provided. In 2014, MMA/ADA granted land in our village for farming, allowing us to work the soil and provide for our families. I was allocated 10 acres of state land in the where of 'C' Field, West Coast Berbice. However, on 18th March, 2016 – they did not have the respect to send a notice to these people – a notice that was published in the *Stabroek News* revealed that my lease had been revoked by the MMA/ADA under the Granger Administration. That is the legacy of the APNU. The young people must know these things. Poor farmers, who were toiling the land to make a living for their families, had their lands taken away by the callousness of the APNU/AFC. Listen to this one. The decision to cancel my lease came without warning and the pressure placed on us as farmers was immense. We were forcibly removed from the land that has been our source of hope and sustenance. The consequence of this decision was devastating. I was stripped of the ability to provide for my family and forced to search desperately for alternative means of survival. The pain of watching my children face uncertainty and hardship weighed heavily on me to this day. That is the testimonial.

Then, the Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, came here with a prepared speech – someone prepared a speech and gave it to him to come to read to talk about all of the wrong things in agriculture, which are untruths and a misrepresentation of what is happening. When you come into this House, debate like this. Come with your facts and talk. Let us hear what is happening. Do not come and read and bend your head. I would like to assure the farmers there, all those farmers whose lands were taken away, that the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government will once again give you back your

land. We have a history of standing with the workers and farmers in this country. I have another one here. I, Gregon B. Ross – do you know that one, Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan? You are bending your head. Listen – of 41 ‘C’ Field, West Coast Berbice, am a rice farmer who has devoted over 50 years of my life to the land that provided for my family. I am a husband and a father to eight children and our survivals are deeply tied to the livelihood that our farming brought to us. Again, they took away, callously, the land from that comrade.

I have another one here, too, Mr Edmond Gravesande, whose land was taken up. I have the testimonial. The man said that on 18th March, 2016, a notice published in the *Stabroek News* revealed that his lease had been revoked by the MMA under the Granger Administration. The man went on. I have worked tirelessly on this land since leaving the army at the age of 25. My father farmed these lands as a part of the communal corporation before it collapsed, and I have continued his legacy of hard work. My right to this land is rooted in years of dedication and labour, and I am now in a position where I need clarity and resolution to continue my work without interference. That is the legacy of the APNU/AFC. Then, you come here and speak about bora, baigan, and squash. That is the mentality of these people – the bora/squash mentality. Last year, I mentioned it and I thought they would have changed, but they are now again looking at the small things; bora/squash mentality.

Mr. Speaker, I will tell you now that I will be the first Minister of Agriculture...for a competent person who knows about agriculture to replace me, not a man who comes here and talks about bora and baigan. That is a disgrace to my position as Minister of Agriculture.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I just want to caution the persons in the gallery that there should be no recording, clapping, or thumping. That is reserved for our Hon. Members only. You may proceed, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. We can see what they have done to this country, and then they come in here and try to put the blame on the PPP/C, talking about Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), talking about incompetence, talking about Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP), schools needing repairs and dilapidated roads in the structure. Cde. Speaker, if you look at sugar, as I said, the decline started in the APNU/AFC period, and we saw the decline drastically in 2019. Sugar had declined by 60% and they closed four sugar factories. This is not

our work. This is the work of the APNU/AFC. It is a Commission of Inquiry (CoI) that was commissioned by the President at a cost of \$52 million to look into the affairs of the sugar industry when they went into government. Do you know what it stated?

“The CoI does not recommend the closure of any estate at this time.”

Their report. When they saw that the report was not in favour of them, what did they say? They said that it was not gospel and they could not take it. So, they closed the sugar factory. What was the reason that they closed the sugar factory? The reason they had closed the sugar estate was because of political reasons. They have a problem with sugar workers in this country. They think that sugar workers are supporting the PPP/C and they have to punish them, but I want them to know that as long the PPP/C is in Government, every single worker in this country will benefit, including the sugar workers. When we extended benefits to the bauxite workers at Linden, we did not discriminate against them. We are a party and we are a government that look after the welfare of workers and the people of this country, and we will continue to do that. We do not have any explanation to make. That is the reason they are over there. It is because they promised every single thing under the sun. Hon. Susan Rodrigues, when she debated last Friday, spoke about the promises they have been making. Hon. Vickram Bharrat, do you know what has caused them to be over there? It is this.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

This manifesto in which they put everything under the sun. Someone said they needed \$100,000 – we will give you when we get into government. Someone said they need the income tax threshold to increase – we will raise it to \$400,000. We need the cash grant to increase – we will give you \$1 million. Not one single thing that they put in this manifesto was ever achieved. The sugar industry started to collapse under the APNU/AFC. They discriminated against the sugar workers in this country. They took out spite against the sugar workers and they wanted to punish the sugar workers in this country. That is why when we were in Opposition, and we called for an economic impact study, due to the fallout the disclosure would have caused, they never did it. In places like Rose Hall in Berbice, Skeldon, Enmore, and Wales, entire village economies died. They destroyed the economy of Berbice; that is their legacy. They destroyed the economy of Berbice and parts of Demerara. Those areas were ghost towns. Go now and see the life that the PPP/C has brought to

those areas and the economic activities that are available in those areas now. That is the legacy of the PPP/C.

11.32 a.m.

I heard the Hon. Member talk about this year's production. Over the last few years, at least over the last two years, we have seen the impact of climate change on the industry's performance. Although we have seen that, we have worked diligently to ensure that we take care of it. That is why we have seen low production. I want to assure the Hon. Member that what we are doing now, what GuySuCo is doing, already 40% of the cultivation land has been mechanised. They starved the corporation of funds. That is why we have to spend \$40 billion to rehabilitate the factories, to ensure that we have proper factories that can grind and crush the canes. I am very optimistic, like the team from GuySuCo, that we will make the target of 101,000 metric tonnes this year.

We heard the Hon. Member talk about rice. [Mr. Jaffarally: He knows nothing about rice.] Probably he knows how to eat rice. Nothing. You are right. We have seen how we have turned around the rice industry in this country. For the first time in the history of our country since rice cultivation, we have reached over 700,000 tonnes, and we have peaked at 725,000 tonnes – the highest production in the history of our country. That is our legacy. That is the PPP/C's legacy.

We heard the Hon. Member talk just now about how farmers are suffering. What did they do to the farmers? We had a very lucrative market in Panama that was negotiated by the PPP/C when we were in Government in 2011. What did they do? They lost the market, and a number of farmers were not paid. Some \$1.7 billion was owed to the farmers of this country. They were in Government for five years and they left the farmers on their own. Do you all remember the terminology? It was that rice was a private business, so they left the farmers on their own. The farmers were left to fend for themselves. Many farmers had to come out of rice cultivation. Many factories and rice mills had to close. The farmers came and met with us when we were in Opposition and we told them – because we were very confident that we would have gotten back into Government – that when we got back into Government, we would resolve that matter. I am happy to say that with the intervention... I know I cannot call the President here, but we must acknowledge the role His Excellency played to recoup that money from Panama. A couple of months ago, less than six months ago, all the farmers were paid their money. Some \$1.7 billion

was transferred to the farmers. [An Hon. Member (Government): (*Inaudible*) Attorney General (*Inaudible*)] The Attorney General, too, worked with me. Right.

When we came out of Government in 2015, we had another lucrative market, the PetroCaribe market in Venezuela. What did they do? [Mr. Jaffarally: They destroyed it.] They destroyed it. They lost it and almost 20 farmers were owed again. Only last month we found the \$438 million to pay to the farmers. Over the last four years, we saw rice production peak at 725,000 tonnes. I am very optimistic, again this year, that we will increase rice production to over 804,000 metric tonnes. This crop alone we have already cultivated 235,000 acres. For the first time in the history of this country, for the first time in the history of the MMA scheme, it is cultivating 101,000 acres of rice. [Mr. Jaffarally: (*Inaudible*) does not know about that.] Probably he does not know about rice. I want to quote this one. I have to. They had 11 items in their manifesto about how they would improve the rice industry. I want to read it out, Mr. Speaker. Number one, they said they would restructure the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB). Nothing. Hear the joke of the day. Mr. Speaker, the joke of the day is they said they would hold:

“...free and fair elections, supervised by GECOM, for the executives of the RPA;”

They wanted to hold free and fair elections. Watch who is talking about free and fair elections. What a joke, Mr. Speaker. Free and fair election for Rice Producers Association (RPA) when APNU/AFC held this country ransom for five months and squatted in Government for one year? And they are talking about free and fair elections. [Mr. Ramson: For RPA] For the RPA. That is the joke of the year. [An Hon. Member (Government): They wanted the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM).] They wanted the GECOM to supervise free and fair elections. Tell me if these people know what they are doing. Free and fair election. That is the joke. I got a number of other measures that they said they would do.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Minister, this is no joke. You need an extension.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister Teixeira. Hon. Minister, you may continue.

Mr. Mustapha: The agriculture sector is moving rapidly. Today, Guyana has taken its rightful place in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and in the region. Whilst we are now increasing production in the traditional area of rice and other crops, we have now started a new industry in aquaculture. We have increased brackish water shrimp by over 700% - from 10,000 kilogrammes monthly to 120,000 kilogrammes. That industry alone earned about \$1.8 billion in the rural economies. We have started the production of Vannamei prawns. We are now producing our prawns, a very lucrative activity. We will be exporting that overseas. Right here in Guyana, there are a number of demands for these prawns. We already have 10 ponds at Onverwagt on the West Coast of Berbice. We have our hatchery now. We are in the process of building our feed mill. Those are new activities. Mr. Speaker, we have started the marine cage culture. When we talked about the marine cage culture many of them said that those technologies cannot come to this part of the world and that those things can happen in Asia and places like Hong Kong and so on. We brought it here. We did the pilot test at Mashabo, Mainstay, and Capoey. It was very successful, and we are in the process of installing another 50 cages in different interior locations. Those are the new things.

In our manifesto, we said we would diversify the economy. We started the diversification in 2021. In 2023, we increased the cultivation of corn and soya. Last year, we increased it to 12,000 acres – an almost 700% increase. This year, we will increase that to 25,000 acres and that will help us, two times per year, to be self-sufficient in producing all our needs right here in Guyana. Those are the visions that we are talking about. We are not coming here with a prepared speech and read a prepared speech. Those are the policies of the Government. That is the food security that we are talking about.

Mr. Speaker, you heard in the budget speech that over 600 shade houses were built. We will be building another 200 this year. That is not the case. We brought in young people – young people who were seeing agriculture as a menial job, as a job for old people, and the adult people who never went to school. We brought in people from the University of Guyana (UG) and the Guyana School of Agriculture (GSA). Over 70% of the participants in this programme are young people. For all the projects from the Ministry of Agriculture, we have to have 35% young people and women.

The Black Belly Sheep Project is another success story. Raise your hand and let us see you there. Watch the success is here. Over 175 farmers have already benefitted from the Black Belly Sheep Project. We have had a 100% increase in the Black Belly Sheep production, and we are slowly building that brand. We are slowly building that brand to replace the New Zealand lamb and the Australian lamb that come to this part of the world. Those are the visions of the PPP/C Government. We have seen livestock increase by 24%. We have started a new programme. For the first time in the history of this country, we started embryo transplants – 300 embryo transplants, sure pregnancy and a better breed of animal. We brought in 63 breeding bulls, which we gave to farmers around the country. We completed the abattoir in Region 5. In the next two weeks, we will commission those abattoirs. We are looking to build the swine abattoir at Garden of Eden. The swine story has been a success.

Mr. Speaker, I know for a fact that I have been going on and time will catch up with me, but I want to also thank my brother here, my colleague, Hon. Dr. Singh, and his team for bringing a budget that is forward-thinking, one that gives the strategic direction of our country and one that will reshape the future of Guyana. Mr. Speaker, the budget under the theme, *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*, is one for all Guyanese, as I said. All will benefit, regardless of class, ethnicity or political affiliation. We stand at a defining moment in our country's history. Guyana is growing, Guyana is thriving, and Guyana is charting a path toward prosperity that will benefit every citizen, every community, and every region of our country. As I said, in this budget there is something for every single section of society. As I said, this budget is more than just a plan for the upcoming year. It is a vision for the future. We are establishing the groundwork for a better tomorrow for all Guyanese.

I want to just highlight two points that my brother made when he read his budget speech. He talked about this budget addressing all our promises with which we went to the electorate. We have already fulfilled, for the first time in this country, all the promises that we have made to the electorate of this country. Secondly, this budget lays the groundwork for our next term in 2025 and for 2030 and beyond. This is a comprehensive budget and a budget for all Guyanese. I urge that we should not have a division in accepting this budget for the country and propel Guyana forward. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Now for the Hon. Member, Ms. Flue-Bess.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A pleasant good morning. I want to take this opportunity to welcome the students from Christ Church Secondary School and Richard Ishmael Secondary School into the Assembly this morning. It is nice to see you here. I feel as though I am in my class, so it is good for you to be here.

11.47 a.m.

With that being said, the honourable speaker before me made a presentation and spoke about history, and I would like to spend some time, just a few minutes, recapping history. The year 1964 we should not forget. Hon. Minister, my family lost 100 acres of land and did not get it back. When we talk about legacy, from 1992 to the time up to 2015, if we are to talk about the legacy of the PPP/C Government, I would ask the children to research to find out under which Government we lost about 1400 young African men and women who died in this country. I would say to these young people here that it is good for you to read so that you can get the information. Again, we talk about history, and we must be reminded that because of the ban on certain products, Guyana produces salt fish as a result. Also, Guyana was able to grow its food. All of these things we can see and learn from our history.

Today, as we dissect the tapestry of *Budget 2025*, we must cast aside the due platitudes that often punctuate these debates and confront the malcontent reality facing the Guyanese people. This budget, with all its pretensions of prosperity, is bereft of cogent strategies, offering little more than a roof masquerading as governance. The ruling PPP/C Government, in its static detachment, has managed to culminate another year of mendacious promises and dystopian expenditures that confound reason. This is not governance. This is kleptocracy wrapped in a veil of mendacity. I reflect on the words of Aristotle.

“The worst form of inequality is to try to make unequal things equal.”

Mr. Speaker, how do we justify a paltry \$5,000 increase for our pensioners, a mere \$167 per day? It is barely enough for a pack of mints. Is it not an insult to those who have laboured for this nation? The \$3,000 increase in public assistance cannot even cover one therapeutic session. A meagre \$100 a day reeks of abhorrent disregard for the vulnerable. The jejune offering is no salve for the hapless who must navigate an economy rift with inflation and unchecked, deliberate price gouging. For the announcement of the \$130,000, I have a breakdown: If you are earning \$130,000 and you are

renting, you are probably paying \$45,000. My colleague at work said to me that is cheap. Transportation might cost \$15,000, and if you have a child travelling all the way from the East Coast, their transportation to Georgetown would be \$8,000. Guyana Power and Light (GPL) might collect \$10,000, and the water bill could be \$3,000. You might pay \$6,000 for the internet, because, as you know, we are in the age of technology. Your cooking gas will be \$5,000, and you are left with about \$46,000 to feed your family. That is the reality of \$130,000.

Adjustment to taxes and income tax thresholds: The question is, who controls the prices in the market? Distribution of cash grants is marvellous but what system of confusion will be in place? Guyanese people do not know. The promises of free travel on the new Demerara Harbour Bridge and 50% electricity reduction hinge upon completion timelines that remain as malleable as the Government's integrity. Temporising with such aggrandised claims, they pontificate about progress while our people languish in uncertainty with no salient assurances in sight. The part-time job allocation of \$11 billion raises more questions than answers. Will these workers see an increase or is this merely another hoax designed while the friends, family and favourites line their pockets? Meanwhile, the Value Added Tax (VAT) removal on backup generators is another lord-like manoeuvre benefitting only those who can afford such luxuries while the average citizen remains confounded by perpetual blackouts. Can you imagine the learners' loss – and the children are here – and the distress of our youths in this technological age with blackouts? You have to do your assignments and you have to charge your gadgets, and then in the middle of it is a blackout. The children and young people of this nation can speak to that distress.

I turn my attention to the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. The allocation of \$3.6 billion for culture appears impressive at first glance, but a closer look reveals that it is bereft of genuine intent. Some 57.2% of this sum will be put towards infrastructure, leaving our artists, musicians and cultural practitioners scrambling for scraps. What is the rationale used by the Ministry to determine where a project is most needed? We see from last year's budget a recording studio was to be set up in Port Mourant. It has not been completed as yet. The question is, what is the rationale? How can we preserve Guyana's cultural tapestry when the Government's priorities are glaringly skewed? For example, under the Coalition Government, I came into this house in 2020, and the Hon. Members from that side of the House would talk about D'Urban Park. All they are focusing on is the money, but what is the historical significance of D'Urban Park? D'Urban Park is located

in the area where there is the Independence Arch. D'Urban Park is located in the area where there is the Square of the Revolution. D'Urban Park is located in the area where there is the Office of the President. D'Urban Park is located in the area where there is the Botanical Gardens. D'Urban Park is located in the area where there is the National Culture Centre (NCC). It is the historical significance. D'Urban Park was created to celebrate Guyana's 50th Independence Anniversary. Anywhere in this world you go, people celebrate things of significance. What happened to the flagpole? Why do we not see the Golden Arrowhead flying on that flagpole? What is wrong with having our Golden Arrowhead flying high there? The children in this House today can speak to the experiences of D'Urban Park since many of them would have participated in the events there.

Guyana's cultural heritage is a unifying force for development and a representation of our cultural cross-fertilisation. Yet, Mashramani, a cornerstone of our national identity, has been reduced to a mundane spectacle, stripped of its vibrancy by a Government intent on imposing its narrow, censorious vision of 'One Guyana'. The Government's interference in cultural expression is not only imprudent but is also an affront to our nation's heritage. The PPP/C Government sees everything as political. For example, 'Tell me, how we must survive with 6.5,?' contestant disqualified from children's Mash Competition last year February. What were the words of the calypso? I will say them:

"Tell me how I must survive with 6.5? Please tell *meh* how I must survive with 6.5? I have a burning issue on *meh* chest/I can't even rest/ how cost of living everything doubling/ this thing is troubling/ tell me how I must carry on with a seemingly one arm?"

Tell me what is political about this presentation. Social commentary is a part of our Mashramani celebration. Rules should not be there to affect our children. Quite recently, at the heart of Guyana's cultural creativity, this piece was disqualified for political reason. Well, *eh eh* Guyana this is you building new things, carving new roads so brand new, where sugar once flowed, and cane fields grew, now we chase trends shiny and new, but tell me Guyana, what is left of you? *Oh*, the thing we used to do. *Oh*, Guyana the things that make you uniquely you. Tell me what is political about that. I am trying to figure it out. These are the things that are thrown out. Guyanese cannot afford to continue to see one set, one type of dance presentation, one set of dramas, one set of musicians, and one type of presentation, at all the national events we have under this one PPP/C Guyana theme. We need to see diversity in keeping with our national motto of *One People, One Nation*,

One Destiny. That is our national motto, and we must say it and let our children understand that is our national motto.

Our government will allocate resources to preserve and showcase Guyana's rich cultural heritage for all ethnic groups as well as music, dance, and our festivals. We will ensure every ethnic group receives the amount of money budgeted for them and not impose political decisions to cripple ethnic groups. We will ensure the projects done meet specific needs. An APNU-led Government will rectify this by creating the cultural industry secretariat, free from political interference. We will empower our local artists, musicians, filmmakers and practitioners with nonpartisan grants. Not all of them cook-up and cookery that take place. We will establish cultural centres across this country and again integrate cultural education into the school curriculum, which will instil pride in our shared history. Most importantly, the protection by legislation for the creative industry will be done.

Youths: The allocation of \$1.2 billion for youth development is equally jejune. How can a mere \$75 million for the Youth Council address the pressing needs of our young people? There has been an increase in the allocation of the President's Award of \$5 million, and I must commend the Member who spoke last evening and gave an outline of the programme. However, I would like to know, as per region, how the young people benefitted. Why did the over 30 youths displaced from Caneview, Sarah Johanna, Hill Foot, or any of the areas where they have been deprived not benefit from any of the moneys allocated under youth? We had a lot of young people who were in business – 'Shevon'. We had a lot of young people – Santiana with her four daughters – who were involved in business. Marian was involved in business as well. These are young people. The issue of losing everything they owned and destroying the businesses that they had...Why is it that they did not deserve some of the money allocated for youths to help them to develop?

I want the Hon. Member to know that when you speak of *merciless*, think about Caneview. When you speak of *merciless*, think about the 1400 youths that were gunned down and killed in this country. When we speak of *merciless*, think about all the massacres that took place. When we speak about *merciless*, think about the unfairness that is meted out to ordinary people in this land. This is what you call merciless.

12.02 p.m.

When you speak of mercilessness, speak about what happens when the grants are given and the children do not get them; parents fight for them and the children still go to school without the necessary things that they need. That is what we call merciless. Actions such as those are what we consider merciless.

None of the local youth organisations have benefited from any increases in the 2025 budgetary allocation. This Budget tells a whole story. The oil and gas industry, which should be a beacon of opportunity, remains inaccessible to many of our youth due to the lack of adequate training programmes. The Government's penchant to temporise with short-term initiatives set our youths up for failure. Ministerial powers dictate that a twelve-month programme must be completed in four months that speak to the uncaring nature of the learning process, rather the importance of the numbers game. Our Government will empower youth for national prosperity. Under the Coalition Government, we will launch robust – again – long-term, youth development programmes; provide funding for young entrepreneurship; and establish business hubs at strategic locations such as the airport, where only certain people can get stalls and our stadiums, where there is no space for our local people. Create a business hub – you are doing training so create opportunity for the young people to do their business. Create an opportunity for them to showcase.

I am always disappointed when I visit the games that come to this country. Thankfully, I can pay for my tickets and go. When one goes to the games, walk around and look to see what can be found about Guyana, there is nothing. There is nothing. A simple water from Guyana cannot be bought. What has happened? Are we not going to put things in place for that? We will also invest in leadership development programmes, mental health support to nurture future leaders and engage in equal opportunities for all, strengthening our national identity.

Sports – it was a very eventful year – a very eventful year. The secrecy surrounding the tragic death of Joel Adams on 9th July, 2024, in the state-run swimming programme and the subsequent cover-up, exemplifies the Government's lack of accountability. This teen did not even deserve this. The strange thing is Joel had friends; Joel had teachers; and Joel had people who loved him. Not because he lived in a state-run facility... He had people who loved him. I encountered Joel as a teacher. It is very difficult to think for a simple homegoing service that he did not deserve a live stream where people could be there to say... It was all a secret. The questions surrounding him are: why was the International Swimming Federation (FINA) certified coach not in charge of the

Learn to Swim Programme? Why were the ambulance and medical professionals not at the Learn to Swim Programme if they were teaching people to swim? Answers – there need to be answers, but only the ministerial mystical powers have the answers.

While the Government boasts about medals achieved by our athletes, Guyana is super proud of their achievements. I pause to acknowledge – let us acknowledge – our athletes who amidst every challenge, amidst every trial and amidst every testing were able to bring home medals and fly the Golden Arrowhead. It was not the *One Guyana*; it was the Golden Arrowhead of Guyana for this nation. This is unlike when you sent the children to the Inter-Guyana Games in their uniforms which have a big, ‘*One Guyana*’ and you do not even see the flag. If you check the Republic of Suriname’s uniform, it has its flag. If you check French Guiana’s, it has everything. When you check Guyana’s own, there is a big ‘*One Guyana*’. Where is our Coat-of-Arms? Where are our national symbols? These are what we want to see. Those are what we want to see because they represent Guyana.

While the Government boasts of medals achieved by our athletes, all of Guyana is super proud of their achievements. However, these athletes financed their training while the coaches worked for free. Where is the governmental support for our athletes and coaches? There is not even water at the venue or free transportation service to take them to training. It is only when they are ready to go to the international stage the Government show up. That is not how sports operate. It is a process. They need the support so that they can be successful. How many of them are paying for transportation from the East Coast to Leonora? They are paying \$200 from the East Coast to the park. They are paying \$200 from Stabroek to Vreed-en-Hoop. Then they are paying \$200 from Vreed-en-Hoop to go to Leonora. The sum is \$600. Then they must find the same to come back. It is simple – where is the support? Where is the support for these athletes? The announcement of stipends for our athletes was nice. I can say it – nice. However, the athletes cannot say with certainty which time of the month the stipend will be ready. The lack of respect towards our sportsmen and sportswomen is quite blatant.

Participation in international competition – we participate in international competitions; yes; bravo. The Government will boast. Let us talk about the type of accommodation and the meals these athletes would get when they leave Guyana to go and compete. Who went and checked the facilities for the games in French Guiana? Our athletes stayed in a rundown old dormitory. That is

where our athletes stayed – the door could not even close – to represent Guyana. Why are our athletes not accommodated with the other athletes? We are, as you say, the fastest-growing economy, and we cannot adequately invest to ensure Guyanese athletes are accommodated in fine style with other teams and are comfortable. When one goes to sports and championships, one makes friends, form bonds, build relationships with people and communicate – all of those. I see this every day. Why is it that our Guyanese athletes cannot enjoy the same? I recall talking to an athlete about the stadium in Grenada and the young man said to me – ‘Miss, those seats were so comfortable’. Why can they not say the same about the stadium over the river at Leonora? What are we doing? Why are we taking so long? Money comes in; money is allocated; and we are taking so long. I see all these agencies who come out to support. Yes, it is \$8 billion. That is lovely for them. Let them walk to the facilities to see if the athletes are actually comfortable. Let them walk and see how the athletes have to deal with the training. That is what they need to do.

Based on the budgetary allocations for the National Sports Commission, it will be the *same old, same old*. There is not going to be much of a difference because the finances allocated are not much different from last year. We are expected to host the Caribbean Premier League (CPL) finals this year. When I saw it in the newspaper, I smiled and said – good. They boast about it in the National Assembly and we are seeing it. I smiled. Let me remind this House and the PPP/C as they are boasting – hosting an international competition is laughable when juxtaposed with the realities of a leaky roof in July, 2024, at the Karate World Cup championship, the blackout-ridden CPL finals in October, 2024, and missing the Minister at the Winfield Braithwaite Caribbean Schoolboys and Schoolgirls Boxing Championship in October. Mr. Charles Ramson – the person had to call two and three times before the Minister appeared on stage and did not speak well. There were non-functional toilets and dirty stands at the Aliann Pompey Invitational (API) held at the National Track and Field Centre in Leonora. I was so embarrassed because I always go to these sports things. I check out all these events because I love sports.

Hopefully, actions will be taken to ensure no more international embarrassment for Guyana. We have to fix them. If you bring international competition, ensure you give international standards. I was embarrassed when I went to the Guyana National Stadium for the cricket. There were the elite games and that was another thing. Do you know what is amazing? A lot of times, the people do not go to the regular stands but in the Very Important Persons’ (VIP’s) section, there is VIP. The

people who were there to support – the spectators – to encourage and to cheer were not important. The washrooms were nasty and there were no toilet tissues. There was nothing and we were hosting an international competition. We have to fix them.

The grounds in question for which the Minister had the audacity to declare as completed are glaring testaments to the incompetence and misuse of public funds. My two Colleagues mentioned and highlighted two grounds. Despite millions of dollars earmarked for these projects, the reality on the ground tells a different story. In *Budgets 2023* and *2024*, you said you were going to do 251 grounds – these were going to be upgraded. That is fine. In the latter part of the year, the Minister came and said the funds were exhausted. He presented a list of 93 grounds. I have it from the *Hansard*. Interestingly, how were these grounds completed? The fences were poorly constructed; no gates are in place; and animals are running all over the fields. The neglect has rendered the grounds unsafe for use. There are dangerous holes caused by animal activity and stuff like that. These fields remain surrounded and invaded with negligence to the east, faggots on the west, inefficiency in the north and more trouble in the south. This so-called completion is nothing but a sham showcasing the Government's failure to ensure accountability and proper oversight of the use of taxpayers' dollars.

This year, \$8 billion is allocated for sports in 2025. I am happy to see that – very happy. Old projects will take \$2 billion; \$1.3 billion will be used to complete the work at Palmyra; and \$700 million for the multi-purpose sports facilities. For the new projects, \$100 million will go to the Cricket Academy at Good Hope; \$2 billion will go for ground upgrades, and \$1 million will go for the installation of lights, which is a total of \$6.4 billion out of the \$8 billion will be spent on infrastructure. The remains from the \$1.6 billion, some more will be spent on infrastructure such as the tarmac. There are schools we are helping with basketball and I hope the one at my school will be fixed. How much of the allocated sums will be spent on coaches? Again, our athletes will be short-changed since 80% of the sum will be spent on infrastructure. Last year alone, we spent billions of dollars on infrastructure. How are these athletes actually benefiting? They have no access to the facilities. They have not been able to use them as yet – nothing.

In earlier days, we had more athletes in the various sports disciplines because the facilities were well-kept and accessible to our youths. Now, we have an upgrade to facilities that are taking four long years, three long years, two long years and going. The Cliff Anderson Sports Hall is a good

example. It is not completed because work is still going on outside. There are newly completed facilities and they are not certain about the completion of the stadiums in Regions 2, 6 and 10. The question again is – how are projects selected to be done? There is the Timehri Red Ground or the Hyde Park, Timehri Red Ground. This is the ground that I ran on as a child. It provides services for persons at St. Mary’s Primary School. It provides opportunities for people at the Soesdyke Primary School, the Soesdyke Secondary School and the Timehri Primary School. All the other schools in that area can use the Timehri Red Ground. Was the ground done? No. Why was it not done? Only God knows. If we are working with the needs assessment that would be important because it will serve the schools in the area, as well as the children living in the area.

12.17 p.m.

I will go down the line to Land of Canaan. The Minister is not in the House for me to tell him what I want to tell him now. He went to Land of Canaan and had a meeting with the people. The people talked about the ground being done in Land of Canaan and he told the people they are too *covetous* and that they always want something. Why is it that you do not see the need to do the ground in Land of Canaan? Land of Canaan will serve not only the people there, but it will serve Supply Primary School, it will serve Friendship Secondary School and all the other schools within that square, Pearl Nursery School and so forth. They can use the ground to complete their sports. Why was Land of Canaan not done? Only God in heaven knows. It is the *same old, same old*. We need to be real, if you are doing the project, ensure that the people can benefit from; ensure...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I want to ensure you benefit from an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Chief Whip. You may continue, Hon. Member for five more minutes.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I could name several grounds. There are grounds in Perth Village, Mahaicony that are fenced but still cannot be used. The ground at Ogle needs cleaning and fixing; but still cannot be used. There are many other grounds I could name along this length. Our government will ensure continuous sports development by investing and completing modern

sports facilities and strengthening grassroots programmes to identify and to nurture the talent from an early age. Programmes will be provided for our young people and scholarships for the young athletes to compete in regional and international competitions. Partnerships will be created with local and international organisations to enhance sponsorship, coaching, training and sports science. The APNU government will prioritise the dignity and well-being of our athletes. We will continue to ensure proper facilities, timely stipends and comprehensive support for our athletes.

In keeping with our people-centred development strategy, as a coalition government, our Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture – I want the workers to hear – will be one where workers would be respected. There will be no phone call to a minister who will cause disrespect to any worker. No worker will be disrespected since their skills, experience and qualifications would be used for the good and the development of this nation. The athletes, the craftsmen and our youths would get adequate support without ministerial dictatorship. Our ministry would see the empowerment of our youths, sporting excellence, cultural renaissance and preservation, and celebration of Guyana's rich cultural diversity. We will have our cultural industry secretariat strengthening our national identity through social cohesion of our youth's engagement.

This Budget is not a tapestry of prosperity but a dystopian blueprint for continued disenfranchisement. The PPP/C Government have proven themselves to be a mendacious Administration, adept for favouring their cronies, while leaving the ordinary Guyanese bereft of hope. It is time for Guyanese to reject kleptocracy and once again rally under the banner of *One People, One Nation and One Destiny*. It is time for Guyanese to rally as *One People, One Nation and One Destiny*. The Coalition with their people development strategy, vision and our patriotic heart – because you have to love your country to serve it well – stand ready to lead this nation once again to a future of fairness, equity and prosperity. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Member, Ms. Nima Flue-Bess. Now for the Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, the Hon. Member, Mr. Charles Ramson Jr.

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports [Mr. Ramson]: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. It is with great pleasure to use my voice here to support the largest Budget in this country's history and, more importantly, a budget that does not include any new taxes. I have to say with this new measure of \$100,000 for every new child, I was particularly interested in that. I think that particular

measure will make Guyanese, let us say, a lot more productive. I listened to the Hon. Member, and I like Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, but with all of the caterwauling that happened a few minutes ago, one would forget that it was they who disbanded the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.

I want to welcome all of the students who are here. All of the lofty ideals and the glowing words about young people, their first act when they came into power was to get rid of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. I have been listening very carefully over the last few minutes and I want to pause on this particular point too that the Hon. Member mentioned. The Hon. Member might be the only person in Guyana and probably in this world who extols the amazing beauty and location/locality of D'Urban Park. I was driving with someone who came into the country for the first time and while I was showing him around, he had the opportunity to pass by Home Stretch Avenue. When he saw D'Urban Park, do you know what he said to me? He asked me, oh my gosh, was there a fire here? That is an eyesore and an example of the record that the APNU/AFC Government have.

When I heard all of what the Members of the Opposition said over the last few days – I heard the purported paragons of virtue and rectitude – I cannot help but ask myself, are these the people who spent \$1.4 billion on D'Urban Park and \$600 million cannot be accounted for? Are these the people who sold a Government wharf that was valued at \$8 billion? They sold it for \$100 million, only collected \$20 million and transferred the property, which rob Guyana of billions and billions of dollars. Are these the same people who sole sourced a bottom house for drugs for \$12.5 million a month in rent which cost Guyana \$340 million? Are these the same people? Are these the same people who spent \$1 billion on the State Asset Recovery Agency (SARA) and never recovered one asset? [*Heckling*]

[*Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.*]

Are these the same people who spent \$72 million on scales, sole sourced them to their political advisor from Jamaica and the scales were never delivered? Are these the same people who transferred \$90 million into their personal bank accounts in three months? Are these the same people who gave themselves contracts in Videomega Productions? Are these the same people who passed the liberalisation for the Telecommunications Act 2016 but never brought it into force until the People's Progressive Party/Civic came to power in 2021? Are these the same people who gave

themselves a 50% salary increase and who has an affinity for bangles, bracelets, bed sheets, barber chairs and pig farms? Are these the same people who fired 7,000 sugar workers and 2,000 Community Service Officers (CSO) workers? Are these the same people who transferred 200 acres of land to the Chief Elections Officer (CEO) who is charged for rigging the elections in 2020? Are these the same people who gave the Returning Officer of Region 4 his land the very next day after he applied for it? Are these the same people, purported to be paragons of virtue and rectitude, who attempted to rig the 2020 elections and who caused Mr. Mike Pompeo of the United States of America (USA) in Washington to say at his press briefing:

“I am announcing visa restrictions on individuals responsible for or complicit in undermining democracy in Guyana... The Granger Government must respect the result of democratic elections and step aside.”

That was Mike Pompeo, the Secretary of State for the United States of America and the best I have ever seen. It happened in this very House in 2020, on the penultimate day of the recount and the ultimate day of the recount downstairs by the foyer. We had the same people who gathered in a circle, held hands and prayed that the recount would show that the APNU/AFC won the elections. I have the picture here to prove it.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

These are the same people. These people are *delulu*. God would not help you to rig the elections and even the spirits at seven pawns would not help you either.

I want to deal with this friends, families and favourites. They are friends and families. The 215,000 children who would be benefiting from the \$50,000 per child, the PPP/C and their parents are our friends and families. The 300,000 who will be receiving the \$100,000 cash grant and again this year are our friends and families. The 80,000 pensioners whose pension was moved from \$20,500 to \$41,000 are our friends and families. The 60,000 persons who gained jobs in the last four years are our friends and families. The 30,000 Guyanese who are studying free on the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship are our friends and families. The 15,000 pathway workers are our friends and families.

12.32 p.m.

The 12,000 Guyanese who received their vocational training for free under Board of Industrial Training (BIT) are our friends and family. The 41,000 who received subsidised house lots – highly subsidised house lots – are paying \$300,000 for a house lot that is worth \$5 million, Government-invested and they are our friends and family. The hundreds of thousands of people who will be benefiting from the roads, the bridges, the hospitals, the schools, the community grounds – all of them – are our friends and families. The hundreds of thousands of people who are going to be using the Demerara Harbour Bridge are our friends and families. The sugar workers, the farmers, all of the miners are our friends and families. The tens of thousands of people who took out mortgages – \$164 billion in mortgages in the last four years alone – are our friends and families. The hundreds of thousands of people who now have access to cheaper internet because we removed value-added tax (VAT) and liberalised the economy are our friends and families. The 248 Amerindian villages that received the \$10 billion from the world class Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) money from the sale of our carbon credit are our friends and families. The 8,000 members of the discipline services who had their one-month tax free salary restored that the APNU/AFC took away from them are our friends and families. I could keep going. This is the *One Guyana* family who President Irfaan Ali and the PPP/C is building. When we say we will win the next elections, it is based on those numbers. It is simple Mathematics. I know they have difficulty with Mathematics on that side – simple Mathematics.

When we hear about the criticism of this Budget and this Government, without first listing the stellar achievements, it reminds me of the Yiddish saying, *to a worm in horseradish, the world is horseradish*. Do not stifle your conscience. These policies, programmes and projects have benefitted all Guyanese. When I hear the Hon. Member – Mr. black belly sheep – on the other side, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul, said ‘bring back Rohee and bring back Frank,’ it is not by a mistake that he is not saying ‘bring back Ramjattan, bring back Norton and bring back *phagwali*.’

I want to turn to the Opposition. I have been carefully observing this Opposition over the last four years and I could safely say that there are three things that Guyanese could agree on; the first is our 83,000 square mile territory, the second is our love for cricket and the third is that this Opposition is a complete waste of time. The fact is that this Opposition could have done so much. They wasted four years. Many of them do not even attend the National Assembly regularly. They

do not come on time. They do not make presentations. When they attend, they leave early. They do not go through their work and ask questions. They do not even vote.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I have the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, on his feet.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, there is a hybrid system in the National Assembly – a virtual and physical. A majority of our Members when they are not in the House...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, a good try, but if you had presented to me a record of the attendance and used that analysis to say what he said does not reflect with reality.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Ramson: Many of them do not attend the National Assembly. Many of them do not come on time. Many of them, when they do come, have lunch and leave early. They do not do their presentations. They do not prepare and ask questions. These are facts. When you want to come and present budgets here... Anybody could come and read a speech, but it is time because time is the true answer of the truth. Time is where the facts lie. Now, the Opposition will start to go out into communities. They do not even do community work. They are in Opposition and do not even do community work. They will go and do community work now, but I want them to know *what rain can't full, dew can't full*. This Opposition wanted to prevent us from spending oil money. Their brilliant and genius idea was to steal this mace.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I will correct you – attempted to.

Mr. Ramson: Attempted to steal this mace; thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. One of the Members who was inside this House was getting quarterback and choreographed ideas from a Member who was outside – a man who had not taken his seat yet in the National Assembly. Even after we had the attempt to steal the mace, we held a hearing and we suspended them. Do you know what they did? They went to court to overturn their suspension. That is what they did and they lost. How are these people going to tell people not to commit crimes?

The one definition of an abdication of their responsibility was when we had the Local Content Bill presented in this House by the People's Progressive Party/Civic, which we committed to in opposition as part of our manifesto's promise. Do you know what they did when it was presented? They argued against it. They voted against it. This was a Bill and now an Act that would have given and now gives Guyanese people more employment in the oil industry, more opportunities for work and more opportunities to get procurement of goods and services. They voted against it. Just like when they were in Government, they cannot be united now in Opposition. Their big focus now is whether there will be a coalition or not and who will be the presidential candidate. Their focus is not on people. It is on themselves. No one was shocked when it was revealed on Friday that 22 out of the 32 Members of the Opposition hustled to get house lots for themselves. They could be asked how many they have for ordinary people. By their own admission, they said that their Coalition is on life support. Well, let me just tell you – *postmortem don't bring back dead*.

I want to take a few minutes to speak about the oil economy. In December, 2019, we started to produce oil. Yes, we have more oil reserves than any other country in the world, but what matters is production. We are currently producing 650,000 barrels a day. In order to be in the big leagues, we are not even a top 25 producers. The United States of America currently produces 22 million barrels of oil. Russia produces 10 million barrels of oil per day. Saudi Arabia produces 11 million barrels a day. We are at 650,000 barrels a day. We have to rapidly get up our production, otherwise we are not in the big leagues.

I want us to focus on our debt. When we hear Members of the other side speak about our debt – and we have spoken *ad nauseam* about our ratio being the lowest in this hemisphere – the first question that you have to really ask... I do not want to get into too much equations and analysis at that. This is how you should answer it. They would not understand; Minister, Dr. Anthony is right. The first question that you have to ask is, are the schools, the roads, the bridges, the ports, the water wells, the community grounds, the Gas-to-Power Project needed? The answer is yes. The second question is, would this have been built had it not been for Government's expenditure? The answer is no because, otherwise, the market would have done it already. The third question is, if we had to make the decision to build it at some point and we had the money to do it, or we had access to do it, if the answer is yes, why are we waiting to do it? We must do it now. If there is any time to take on debt, now is the time because even when oil prices decline – and they will decline

at some point in the future – the fact is, there are at least four more projects coming on stream by 2030. It means that the increased level of production will offset the risk of the decline in oil prices. I want you to understand – this is what the parochial thinkers on the other side do not understand – that we are competing with other countries such as the United States of America. On their airport alone, they are making a renovation investment of US\$18 billion and that is why it is important for us to double down now and make our infrastructure more improved and modernised, so that we could build for the future. Other countries are getting it, but they are not.

I would like to speak more about the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports and I would also like to take the opportunity to welcome my brother, Mr. Suresh Singh, the Director of Youth. He is another hardworking and young person whom the People's Progressive Party/Civic has promoted. I explained how this APNU/AFC abandoned and betrayed young people by disbanding the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports when they came in. I also want to show the world and Guyana – especially young Guyanese – how the APNU/AFC have not changed. They have had three opportunities to replace a Member of Parliament (MP) in the last four years. They had Lt. Col (Ret'd) Joseph Harmon who vacated; Dr. Nicolette Henry who vacated and Mr. Raphael Trotman who vacated. In all three instances, they replaced those persons with old persons – persons who are in their 60s and 70s. There was not a single young person was chosen in the three. The first time that we had an opportunity to replace another competent MP, Mr. Seeraj, we chose a young person. I also want to say that it is no different from what happened in their internal elections. Both APNU and AFC have had opportunities to elect young leaders and both did not. They elected old leaders. The Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports has been restored to its rightful space at the level of the Cabinet. It has been transformed in the last four years.

12.47 p.m.

I want to start off particularly with culture this time because, in one of the examinations of the Estimates that we had here in 2023, I had the privilege of being interrogated by some of the Hon. Members. I want to share with this honourable House, as I announced then, that the Institute of Creative Arts (ICA), which was started and conceptualised under Minister Frank Anthony, under the People's Progressive Party/Civic, would be registered with the National Accreditation Council. I want to read what the Hon. Member, Ms. Natasha Singh Lewis said when I made the commitment

that it would be registered with the National Accreditation Council. Here is what Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis said in the National Assembly, coming from the *Hansard*. She said:

“The Institute of Creative Arts has to first be registered with the National Accreditation Council That is a prequalification for accreditation. The National Accreditation Council does not do institutional accreditations. It does programmes accreditations at this moment. The ICA could not have been registered all this time because there is no legislation in place that established the ICA.

Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis advised, as she sat in the green office, in the same building at the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports in which I have to say, during that time, there was an unhealthy obsession with the colours green and yellow. Everything was being painted green and yellow. Some people even painted their houses in green and yellow. We were able to get and I told this House and advised that we did not need a legislation to get the Institute registered. I am happy to bring to this House that we are officially registered with the National Accreditation Council – the Institute of Creative Arts. The APNU/AFC came in and had a brilliant concept, which is a tertiary level Creative Arts Academy for persons who are involved in dance, drama, creative writing, and music, *et cetera*, and in those five years they did nothing. They did nothing to advance the registration of the Institute. I am extremely pleased to announce to this National Assembly that we achieved what the Hon. Member said that we could not do. I also would like to say that I have learnt over time that many persons who say that they cannot and many persons who say that they can are often times both correct. Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, who was advising the department back then... [Mr. Mahipaul: Hon. Member.] Hon. Member. This is a situation of where they did not know, and they did not know that they did not know.

The Ministry participated in and held over 60 events last year, and there are only 52 weeks in a year. Twenty-six were held in other countries. We held a Literary Arts Festival, the Dancehall Monarch, which was new, and it is now the most popular entry in the Mashramani entries for song competitions. We held our independence in Region 10. After losing one of our cultural icons, Mr. Dave Martin, we held a fitting tribute for him last year. We invested in training for song writers, stage craft performance, music production, the business of music, audio engineering and music trending. As a result, I want to say that now our artists, our performers, our musicians, their music is now trending in the Caribbean. Our performers are making good money, both in Guyana now

and going overseas. They are being booked overseas and making money. After the APNU/AFC killed the Guyana Prize for Literature, something that was so important for the literary arts, we introduced a Write to Stage programme – WRITE – theatre arts support programme. This has been an immense success, where we have already staged six theatre plays.

We held and conducted workshops with Hollywood actors last year, Mr. Silvio Simac and Mr. Jacob Scipio. This year we will be focusing on our film treaty with the United Kingdom (UK). We completed the cultural and creative industries online platform, which will be launched this year. Castellani House held 15 art exhibitions; our youth culture camp, which was introduced by us, we trained 400 young people last year, and it has been over 1,000 since 2022 when it was introduced. We completed the review and the draft of the legislation for the National Trust, which will be tabled this year. This is the first time it was ever done. We did 37 meetings of hard work to get that accomplished. What did they do? Nothing. I want to turn to sport, Hon. Speaker. The Hon. Speaker,...

Mr. Speaker: Before you turn to sport, I will have to give you an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to continue.

Motion put and agreed to

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister, Ms. Teixeira. Hon. Minister, Mr. Ramson, you may continue.

Mr. Ramson: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In 2023, our athletes secured 167 medals in international and regional levels. That then, in 2023, was the highest that we have ever accomplished in our country's history. I am happy to announce, in 2024, Guyana secured 534 medals in international and regional championships, 300%. In 2023, we participated in 51 international and regional tournaments, spending millions of dollars – 51 international and regional tournaments. That, then, was the highest in 2023. In 2024, it was 102, spending millions and millions of dollars every single time our athletes leave these shores. In 2023, Guyana held 15 international sporting events. In 2024, it was 29, an increase of 93%, bringing millions and millions of United States of America (USA) dollars into our economy. We held the Caribbean Premier

League (CPL); the Cricket World Cup was successfully held and hosted right here in Guyana. We introduced, for the first time, the Global Super League that many of our neighbours are excited about, but are also looking at us with an envious eye.

We also had the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) qualifiers, and the Caribbean Cycling Championships, which has not been held since 2001. Minister Gail Teixeira would have been the Minister during that time. The Caribbean Bodybuilding was held for the first time since 2004, when Dr. Anthony was Minister then. The Caribbean Area Squash Association (CASA), Motor Racing – countries that refused or were unable to host, we worked with those international organisations and local sports associations who have all supported this Budget. We have worked with them to make these tournaments a success and make it beneficial to the country. And it shows the strong relationship and the benefit that we have with the Sports Commission and also the sports associations. I also want to say it also shows the benefit of the National Sports Academy, which we introduced for the first time in 2022.

Last year we had international coaches and athletes come to participate in our elite training programme. Our athletes have now signed with major shoe deal companies for contracts for their promotion and are now being scouted. Some have already secured scholarships in the United States of America and other places in the world because of their athletic performance. Some of them are being scouted right now as we speak, touring many of the universities so that they can make their decision about which university to attend. I also want to announce this year that we will be having a gold medal Olympic and world champion who will be doing one of our elite training programmes with our athletes in this country. In the last four years, the governance of sports associations saw major changes in their leadership. This is something that I am extremely proud about. For years we have been asking for the governance to improve, and the change of leadership has caused that.

I want to say this about our community grounds, because our Members are speaking about community grounds. When the APNU/AFC came to Government, they cut expenditure on community grounds; they cut community expenditure on community grounds by 66%. In the 2011 to 2015 period, we used to spend \$300 million a year on community grounds, and they want to come and profess that they love community grounds. It is for that reason that you have had the decrepitude in community grounds that we have had to make this investment now. We have completed and invested in the last four years 320 community grounds, and if you include the

hinterland, the 248 villages, it is over 550 community grounds that we have invested in. This is something that I put my personal attention in, because I know how important it is to young people. If they do not have a safe space to play in and to pursue their talents, we will lose them forever. They get involved in drugs and gangs and stealing, and then they end up either in jail or six feet below. That is one of the reasons that I have put my personal attention in. I have walked those grounds. I have done over 1,000 consultations with communities, more than the whole of the APNU/AFC combined when they were in Government and in Opposition. I have done over 1,000. I have walked through swamps and vegetations big like forests and ended up with bites and went through snake infested fields. I did all of that just so that I can highlight the importance. Now we are investing over \$2 billion in community grounds and lighting those, and I have seen how those communities have changed. **[Mr. McCoy: (Inaudible)]** He was the snake.

It has been a marked, distinct transformation that has happened in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport. I would like to take the opportunity to thank His Excellency, President Ali and the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, Vice-President, Mr. Jagdeo, and all of my Members of the Cabinet and the members of the Ministry of Finance. Finally, I leave the word of saying thank you for all of the support that we had, that I have personally had, we have had, from the members of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.

1.02 p.m.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic will win the next election. We will have a larger majority here in Parliament and the APNU/AFC will be resigned to Opposition for the next 30 years and you can mark my word on that. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports. Hon. Members, this is a good time to take the suspension. Please listen out for this bell to mark that the Speaker is waiting for a quorum.

[Mr. Speaker rang the bell]

Sitting suspended at 1.03 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 2.34 p.m.

We have some technical issues. For the presenters who are coming now we will have to go on recorded broadcast because the platform is not booting up. So least some say that there is some amount of discrimination with respect to the live broadcast, we have been waiting to rectify that; it is not happening, and we had to also reboot the zoom link for those who are online. We are about to start, and I will call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, to make her contribution.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The theme for the 2025 Budget reads, *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*. With the budget getting bigger and bigger, year after year, mainly due to the production of oil, obviously the expectations of the citizens rise. It therefore means that whoever is the government of the day has to enhance their capacity to deliver the goods to its citizens in an equitable manner. We also have an understanding that no one government is perfect. At times they may appear to be merciful and at times they may become merciless, to repeat the words of our newly elected Parliamentarian, whom I must say presented and defended the Budget quite confidently than some of his colleagues who spoke before him.

The PPP/C had its blunder pre-2015 and the electorates decided then to let them know that enough was enough and they found themselves on the Opposition benches of this House. The APNU/AFC when elected in 2015 to govern also made mistakes during its stint as government, but unlike what happened in 2015, where the citizens practiced their right to vote the government of their choice in a free and fair election, a No Confidence Motion was brought against the Coalition Government robbing them of a full five-year period or term to govern; and the rest is history.

Let me now take you back to the theme for this year's Budget and let us examine the words with a microscope. Secure: I beg to ask the question, are we more financially secure as a country than how we were five years ago? Obviously, the answer is a resounding yes. In a country with the fastest growing economy, are the citizens better off financially now than before? *Oh*, yes, only for a few of the elite, their friends, families and favourites. Unfortunately, and sadly, this is yet to be realised by the majority of the households and individuals who are struggling to put three square meals on the table for their families due to the high cost of living. Do the citizens feel more secure in their homes, on our roadways and highways, and in our border communities? Definitely not, especially when we continue to experience fatal road accidents that cost many lives.

My colleague, the Hon. Member, Ms. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, mentioned that in many of the Indigenous communities the people are now happier than before and that they will greet you with smiling faces. I would like to ask what about the families of the 20-plus children who lost their lives to the fire at Mahdia dormitory. What about the people of Tasserene who lost their Toshao to a gruesome death whilst on official duty in the city. It is all good to determine projects, programmes, or policy relevance, the problem however arises where implementation, efficiency, effectiveness does not impact the lives of citizens and, more so, if it is not sustainable. Hence, permit me to mention a few things about the \$100,000 cash grant and with its promise to all 18 years and over. I must mention that we personally on this side of the House are not against cash grants at all, and I am standing here to advocate for more, especially for those persons in the hinterland. Why I say this? The value of the \$100,000 on the coastland may not be the same value in the hinterland. A typical example is that a bottle of cooking gas costs \$3,500 to \$4,000. However, in Kamarang, a cooking gas bottle costs \$12,000 to \$15,000.

It must be noted that it was first announced by none other than His Excellency that every household will receive a one-off cash grant of \$250,000. A few days after, Mr. Winston Jordan, former Minister of Finance, suggested that \$100,000 to all Guyanese... [Mr. McCoy: *(Inaudible)*] Be careful if you do not have evidence do not talk. ... \$1,000 to all Guyanese of 18 years old and over was a more feasible and practicable – \$100,000 sorry – way to go. The nation was told that they would receive it before the year ends, then we were told about the creation of an application (app), then it announced that the pensioners and the public servants will be the first recipients of the grant. Dates were announced for the registration, and we began to see long lines, and chaos broke out at some of the places identified. Compassion is not just a choice, but it is a responsibility. Where was the mercy and compassion for the elderly from the so-called caring Government? The process was poorly thought of and hence exposed the incompetence of the PPP/C Government. They did not understand the delivery challenge, they did not develop a foundation and plan to drive the delivery of the cash grant. As a consequence, even as I speak now at this hour, many of the Guyanese to this date are still waiting for their cash grant. Get your act together and demonstrate the leadership required to get it done in a transparent and accountable manner.

Let me come to education. My colleague from the Upper Mazaruni, Hon. Member Lee Williams, passionately spoke about the 'Because We Care' cash grant and was boldly displaying a chart

showing the consistent increase from \$5,000 to \$10,000, from \$10,000 to \$15,000 to \$25,000 and now to \$55,000. This is commendable. What he failed to bring to the House was another chart showing us the increased performance or pass rates in Mathematics (Math) and English at the National Grade Six Assessment and Caribbean Secondary Examination Council (CSEC) for the past four years, especially, for the hinterland schools. We all will agree that your outcomes must match your inputs; your outcomes must match your inputs. Permit me to quote from a book entitled, *How to Run a Government: So that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers Don't Go Crazy* by Michael Barber and I quote:

“The knowledge of country people,”

Country people like me, and many of us who are in here, I am sure, came from country sides.

“The knowledge of country people, developed when livelihoods depended on the vagaries of the weather, often turns out to be soundly based in the language of the science of delivery, ‘foggy at seven’ is a lead indicator of ‘fine by eleven’. ...Technically a lead or leading indicator is ‘a metric that helps to predict a future performance...’”

Data makes a job doable. Until then all you can do is *blah blah* and make excuses and hope for the best. So, whether you invest in cash grants, uniform vouchers, school feeding programmes, or time, it must bare results over a period of time. Allow me here to make references from the Report of the Auditor General on an assessment of the Ministry of Education’s Hinterland School Feeding Programme. Let me take us to page 21 of the report, and I read:

“The Food Based Dietary Guidelines which are developed by the Food Policy Division of the Ministry of Health are used as the basis for the development of menus of the Programme. We found...”

These are not my words; they are the words of the office of the Auditor General:

“We found that there was no monitoring as to whether these guidelines were observed and standards were met for the preparation of meals on a regular basis. Through interviews with staff in the division, we were told that the department did not monitor the Programme. Therefore, the lack of comprehensive monitoring of school meals could hamper the ability to access the actual nutritional benefits for school children.

2.48 p.m.

The Audit Office then recommended:

“...that the Head of Budget Agency [closely monitor the programme] to have all weaknesses identified and corrected.”

“The National School Feeding Policy has as one of its major outcomes - the improvement of the nutritional status of children which is aimed at addressing all nutritional matters.”

I also read from the Minister’s budget speech on page 54 of 111 that:

“Over the last four years, \$10 billion was spent under [this heading] ... \$4.9 billion was spent in 2024, and a further \$5.5 billion is allocated... [for] 2025.”

Did we get the value for the money spent? We may very well have malnourished children in our schools. According to Dr. Jennifer Westford, the Hon. Member, they may either be undernourished or overnourished. I trust that the Hon. Minister of Education or the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development can enlighten the people of this House with that information.

Allow me, Mr. Speaker, to share my personal experience when I was appointed the Headmistress of Jawalla Primary School in 2006. The school feeding programme was already in place, but I observed over a period of time that the attendance was very poor on Fridays. It was poor on Fridays because the children left to go and spend the weekends with their families, either in the back dam at the mines or on farmlands. I set out to do a simple survey by asking each student to write down their favourite food or meal. Based on the data collected, chicken fried rice turned out to be the favourite of the majority of the children. I quickly asked the head cook to cook the fried rice for lunch on Fridays. I informed the staff about the intervention using the school feeding programme to improve the attendance. Students were also informed about the change on the menu for Friday. The result, the goal was achieved over a period of time. The attendance showed a vast improvement. Now that the Government has promised to bring back, or reintroduce, free education at the University of Guyana, which is commendable again, I am quite sure that the youth of the hinterland will make the effort to grasp this opportunity to come out into the city to further their education like anybody else. What I do know, however, is that accommodation will be a challenge for them. Hence, I looked to see if there were any moneys allocated to build a new modern

dormitory, or apartments, for those youth who aspire to pursue their tertiary education. I know there is one that we built under our administration at Liliendaal for tertiary, but that is not adequate enough when these young people decide to come out.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, your initial 15 minutes seem not adequate enough too. You will need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Chief Whip. Hon. Member you may continue.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Let me also remind the Hon. Member and the Guyanese people that there was a time in this country when the youths in the hinterland were introduced to high-speed connectivity and robotics prior to them coming back to Government. Over 160 information and communication technology (ICT) hubs were established across the country. Internet and Government electronic(e)-services were made accessible to poor and remote communities in the hinterland. What happened, however, is that when they returned to Government in 2020 they did not maintain those ICT hubs. Mr. Speaker, in case you did not know, there was also a time when blackouts became a thing of the past during 2015 to 2020. No more nationwide blackouts, no more power shutdowns. Do I need to remind the populace who was in the Government then? Lest we forget conveniently, or have shallow memories or myopic visions, let me inform you or remind you of when the regular blackouts returned to the city and, of course, we all know, in 2020.

Hinterland water supply: Mr. Speaker, schools have reopened recently for their Easter term, and do you know or are you aware that to this day there is no running water in some of our schools in the Upper Mazaruni, which is a requirement for all school feeding programmes? If the rain does not pour for several days you can imagine what happens to the school feeding exercise and the sanitary blocks. The entire community of Kamarang has been without water for the past year. Kamarang is where you have the hospital, schools, police station, the Amerindian hostel, business places and other government institutions. Thankfully the residents of Warawata are now having

access to potable water as of recent due to the Basic Needs Trust Fund (BNTF) programme, I think. I also received the good news, Minister of Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI), that they have found water in the well at Kako. Thank you to the Minister of Housing and Water and the workers at GWI. I hope that the water will be adequate enough and sustainable to supply the community.

Let me now come to measures of this Budget. As we become the alternative government let us look: adjustment to taxes paid on second job and adjustment to taxes paid on overtime. Hon. Mr. Lee Williams made mention of Community Support Officers (CSOs) who are employed to assist with their community. How are the 15 or 17 CSOs who work for \$40,000 a month and are paid every two or three months, and in most cases that is the only form of their job, how are they going to benefit from these measures? What about the remainder of the Indigenous youths who are unemployed? According to Melly Mel, make it make sense. Adjust the income tax threshold. Again, CSOs, 10-day workers and Toshaos all work for moneys below the minimum wage.

Mr. Speaker, to my fellow Guyanese in and out of Guyana, you cannot change a person or a government who does not see an issue with their actions. You can only change how you react to them. Elections soon come. Before I take my seat, I wish to commend the staff at the Ministry of Finance for staying the course in crafting the 2025 Budget and, of course, the Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, Dr. Singh. I also wanted to place some recommendations, Mr. Speaker. One, we would restart consultations on the Amerindian Act within our first year in office; establish the Amerindian Heritage Fund to finance the study and preservation of Amerindian culture, inclusive of language, religion, food, ceremonies and traditional medicines or remedies.

In conclusion, I also want to say to this House we will increase the stipends for Toshaos, councillors and CSOs, bringing it on par or above the minimum wage of our public servants. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Charlie: Mr. Speaker, I rise with honour to add my Indigenous voice in contribution to *Budget 2025*, aptly themed, *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*. The PPP/C Government's budget is a roadmap for continued prosperity. It reflects the PPP/C Government's continued commitment to sustainable development with targeted investments in infrastructure, education, health, housing, agriculture, Amerindian development and other sectors. The Budget emphasises

inclusive development while creating opportunities. *Budget 2025* outlines a comprehensive plan to foster economic growth, enhance public services and improve the Guyanese citizens' way of life.

I listened to the Hon. Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams bringing recommendations to this honourable House, but it was in her tenure, the APNU/AFC, the Hon. Member served as a Minister responsible for water and did nothing as that Minister for the Amerindian communities; also served as the Minister of Public Affairs and again did nothing but fail her Indigenous brothers and sisters, and now comes to this House with recommendations. You promised – not you Mr. Speaker – the Coalition promised and they never delivered. How can the people of Guyana believe you now?

Mr. Speaker, permit me to give a synopsis to tell the Guyanese population as to where we were and where we are so they will better understand their position after my presentation and to choose a government that is standing with them. Guyana was under the People's National Congress (PNC) pre-1992, and we must not forget our history. Under the PNC the economy shrank drastically with little to no growth. Guyana was ranked among the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere. Hinterland regions and Amerindian communities were systematically neglected. The country's infrastructure was underdeveloped. It went to a deteriorated stage. Poor governance left Guyana on the brink of bankruptcy. Above all, rigged elections. Guyana suffered 28 years of dictatorship. Let us not forget your track record. At the end of every tunnel there is hope, and people hope for hope. They hoped for betterment when they said to you enough is enough and voted for the PPP/C Government from 1992. That was then the birth of democracy. The PPP/C revived the economy after the collapsed under the PNC, achieving consistent economic growth year after year. The PPP/C reduced national debt significantly maintaining fiscal discipline. The PPP/C Government improved access to water, telecommunication, and energy across rural and hinterland regions. The PPP/C Government improved healthcare delivery by constructing hospitals and health centres across Guyana. The PPP/C Government launched housing programmes that provided thousands of Guyanese with affordable homes.

3.03 p.m.

The PPP/C Government diversified the economy by expanding the agricultural, mining and tourism sectors. Let us not forget that the PPP/C introduced the Low-Carbon Development

Strategy (LCDS) to align environmental protection with economic growth. The PPP/C strengthened democracy through regular free and fair elections. The PPP/C elevated Guyana's reputation globally by promoting regional and international cooperation. However, despite all these gains that have been made from 2015 to 2020, Guyana was on the path of reverse mode under the Coalition. The Coalition Government did little to no land titling. The Hon. Member Hastings-Williams just spoke about the revision of the Amerindian Act, since 2015 that was the Hon. Member's mantra and did nothing. The good news now for you, Hon. Member, is that the PPP/C already started consultation on the Amerindian Act.

The APNU/AFC discontinued the Community Support Officer (CSO) programme, thereby dismissing 2,000 youths. That is your track record. Discontinued the Because We Care cash grants which gave parents, especially in the Amerindian areas, a financial boost. The APNU/AFC parked the solar system electrification project. Lest we forget, the APNU/AFC established a commission to investigate Amerindian lands and that was when one of their Members said that the Amerindians were avaricious, and they should not benefit from the oil wealth because they want more lands. The Hon. Member sat in Government, did not say anything, and did not tell her Government it was wrong to say what that Hon. Member had said about the Amerindian people. The APNU/AFC disposed of the LCDS programme which was aimed at supporting hinterland communities and replaced it with the Green State Development Strategy that brought no benefit to the Amerindian people. That is your track record. Not a secondary school was built in the hinterland communities to further universal access to education – none. The APNU/AFC neglected health infrastructure and imposed hardship taxes on Amerindian communities. The APNU/AFC stalled the hydro project and took away the Discipline Forces' one-month bonus. It comes back to what the Hon. Member Henry said that 'we did not have oil money so we could not have done what you are doing'. You took away all this from the people. What did you do with the money? We saw where the money went. You were the fat cats under your tenure. Fattening yourselves with the taxpayer's dollars and did nothing for them and that is why you are on that side. Let us not forget that the APNU/AFC lost the no-confidence motion on 21st December, 2021 - defeated.

As a geographic Member of Parliament with responsibility for Region 9 in this august House, I turn my attention to telling the Opposition and the people of Guyana what the PPP/C Government did for the people of Region 9 – historic spending and allocation under the PPP/C Government.

From 2025, Region 9 is set to benefit from a total budget of \$7.08 billion, Hon. Henry. The largest allocation yet. Region 9 development – Community Support Officers expanded from just 75 officers in 2020, to 839 by the end of 2024, outnumbering the Hinterland Employment Youth Service (HEYS) programme, creating jobs and empowering villages. The CSO stipends were increased from \$30,000 to \$40,000 in 2024, with over \$1.1 billion paid out since 2020, for your information. Carbon credits are remarkable. From 2023 to 2024, \$1.132 billion was transferred to support village economies, inclusive of your Shulinab village where you reside, Hon. Henry. Villages continue to benefit from the Presidential Grant to boost various economic projects.

Under Education – the Because We Care cash grant and the School Uniform Assistance Programme were reinstated in 2021 and have supported over 10,600 students in Region 9 for 2024, with each receiving \$45,000. These programmes have pumped \$1.394 billion into the region since 2020, and come 2025, each school child will receive a whopping \$55,000.

In the teacher training programme – we have seen 263 teachers equipped between 2020 and 2024. Never like before. Thirty-one new schools are under construction, with 17 already completed in areas such as Crashwater, and Moco-Moco to name a few. The upgrades and maintenance of all schools across the region have ensured a better learning environment for the children of Region 9. We have to thank our indispensable Hon. Minister of Education who is footing all these projects and ensuring that they are delivered.

Under Health – health centres and posts in more than 30 communities have been upgraded, with telemedicine services now available in remote areas to bring health closer to the people for the very first time. A milestone is the US\$331.1 million upgrade of the Lethem Hospital, significantly improving healthcare in Region 9 alone – progress.

Infrastructure development – over 1,200 km of roads in Region 9 have been constructed or rehabilitated, connecting key areas like Lethem to Aishalton, and Karasabi to Yurong Paru. Community roads were built in almost every village, making transportation safer and easier. Lethem Aerodrome has been rehabilitated, and the hydro plants have been constructed and were already commissioned at Moco-Moco, and Kumu, promising sustainable energy for the region.

Lethem's new housing development is underway to provide better living conditions or options for families. Forty-one wells were already drilled across communities like Aishalton, Shulinab, and

Shea, improving access to water for thousands. Farmers have benefited from 36 shade houses and the distribution of planting materials to boost production. Agro-processing facilities have been established at Krowdar, Mururanau and St. Ignatius, allowing farmers to add value to their produce.

Social Services – over 2,100 pensioners received old age pensions in 2024, and nearly 2,000 people have benefitted from public assistance. Cash grants were distributed to support households during Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), and \$100,000 to citizens over the age of 18 years. This is what the PPP/C Government is doing, and the Opposition Members have the audacity to stand bareface in this house to say that the PPP/C is not doing anything for the people of Guyana. I want to remind you, Hon. Members, of your track record, of your white elephant, of your legacy.

[The Hon. Member displayed images.]

This is the state of Durban Park, yet you have not included it in your 90-day plan. What are the people of Region 8 benefiting from your monument? Have a look, Mr. Speaker. I go on with the parking meter, another white elephant in the City of Georgetown – waste of money. This is what you are up to: Idling, eating, and travelling while you were in Government. I go on. This is what the APNU/AFC budget looks like, riddled with taxes on the backs of the Guyanese people. Taxes and more taxes and we did not have the oil money, but you made moneys with the 200 plus taxes...

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Member of Parliament (MP), Hon. Member, I noticed that you had something that confirms what the Hon. Ramjattan said, erection to resurrection. You need five minutes to continue. *[Inaudible]* I am not on the issue of that, I am on the extension of time.

Ms. Teixeria: Apologies, Mr. Speaker, you were too highfalutin for me. I did not get it. You kind of lost me. I thought you... *[inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker: I reminded myself of what the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, said when he was talking about from birth to burial, womb to tomb and...

Ms. Teixeria: Yes. I am afraid that went over my head at that point. However, I wish to ask for five minutes for my Colleague to conclude his very good presentation. Thank you.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister Teixeria. Hon. Member, please continue.

Mr. Charlie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The APNU/AFC broken promises made to Guyana – here there are Mr. Speaker, empirical evidence for the Guyanese people to see. What we promised in 2020 – promises fulfilled. The Hon. Members are now enjoying the \$100,000 cash grant. What they promised in 2015, was lower taxes, jobs for all, housing, free education, to help the traditional and productive sector, transparency in Government high on the agenda, and better healthcare, but what did Guyana get? Over 200 additional taxes and fees, 30,000 jobs lost, no new house lots, redistribution of lands to friends and family, 35% increase in University fees, all on the decline under your tenure – sugar, mining, forestry, rice, and bauxite. Rampant the ‘C’ word. Increase in infant and maternal mortality. This is your track record, this is it. Now you are coming to promise the people. Who will believe you?

This budget is more than a compilation of numbers. It says volumes of what we stand for in Government, what we are in service to the people for, and how we consider our stewardship for Guyana’s future. This budget is a chronicle of perseverance, development, and undying commitment of our country, where every citizen should get a chance to have a better life. Guyana has seen that the PPP/C Government has been able to achieve in the way they committed investments, has transformed communities and has connected the regions by raising lives, jobs for our young people, better schools for our children, and better healthcare for families throughout every corner of Guyana. The budget continues the work of taking hope and opportunity to those who once thought of themselves as forgotten.

3.18 p.m.

Let us not forget the hinterland and Amerindian communities as these investments breathe new life into our communities. These are moments when policies put the bridges, schools, wells and programmes that give our people the life they deserve, right where they live. This is what leadership feels like. No one is left behind. This is a moment for unity, not division. To support this budget is to support the dream of every farmer, every student, every small business owner and every family that relies on us to get the job done. It is to vindicate the faith that the people have entrusted in us to make life better for them. Let us not allow politics or indifferences to cloud the bigger picture. This is about Guyana, our dear loved Guyana and its bright future. I urge every

Member of the Opposition of this House to set aside their differences and come together to pass this budget, not for us, but for the people we serve. Mr. Speaker, with this, I commend the PPP/C's 2025 Budget for its passage. I thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Jaiprashad: Colleagues of this honourable House, a pleasant good afternoon. I stand to make my presentation today on *Budget 2025*. It is an honour to be given the opportunity to present my portion so that adjustments can be made to *Budget 2025* so the Guyanese population can be able to enjoy the benefits of our many resources.

Guyana needs help at the moment. We need to put our ideas and allocate resources where the need exists the most so that we can be able to make the lives of citizens much happier. The needs of our population are growing every day. The needs are growing because of the high inflation and cost of living. The composition of a budget requires consultation with all stakeholders. I want to repeat that – the composition of a budget requires consultation with all stakeholders. This was not done by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service and team. Instead of consultation with everyone – all stakeholders – a selected few were consulted, and this budget came into being. There is a need for revision and addition to this 2025 Budget so we can put systems in place to help the people in Guyana who need help genuinely.

As I look at labour, there are a few points I want to raise today so that consideration can be given and our workers in this country can be represented better than they are currently. Everyday labour laws are flouted in this nation, and representations of workers are not up to *par*. Let us begin with the figures allocated to the Ministry of Labour in this 2025 Budget of \$1.318 trillion – \$1.318 trillion being the total budget, but \$1.235 billion is allocated to the Ministry of Labour, 0.1% of the Budget. The Ministry of Labour is a very important Ministry in this country. It requires proper representation of our workers. We see what is happening in the private and public sectors as it relates to the places of work, salaries and benefits. To allocate 0.1% of the total budget to the Ministry of Labour is far from what is expected. In an oil-rich country, private-sector workers are receiving \$60,000 per month. This translates to about US\$290 to US\$300 in the fastest-growing economy. How can we describe transformation when we expect workers to survive on less than US\$10 per day? This is happening in the fastest-growing nation. The cost of living is going up every day. Housing costs are skyrocketing. Food prices are increasing daily. Transportation costs

for our workers are very burdensome. Yet, the Ministry of Labour received 0.1% of the total budget.

The Ministry of Labour's enforcement of occupational health and safety is horrifying. In 2024, there were 32 deaths at the workplace. The projection set for 2025 is that we will have 20 deaths. It should have been indicated that we will have no deaths. We are playing with the figures so we generate a number to say that 20 persons will die due to a lack of proactive thinking and execution in 2025. Labour inspection will reduce in 2025 from 3131 to 2800. Child labour sensitisation activities will be cut from 52 to 25. Collective labour agreements are expected to drop from 34 to 10. We have many foreigners in Guyana. Is there a system under the Ministry of Labour to assist these vulnerable individuals and guide them to opportunities and services so they can be part of the labour market in this country? I must address the high influx of Venezuelans in Guyana. It is estimated that about 40,000 Venezuelan migrants are in Guyana working in the private sector – mostly on construction sites, chicken farms, as security, and in agriculture. What systems do we have in place to prevent the exploitation of these vulnerable migrants? The Ministry of Labour needs to put a maritime school in place now. We have our seamen who at the moment need to have certification. They have to go to Panama to get the certification. Why can the representation not be made so we can have a maritime school to represent? We talk every day about the shortage of workers. Guyana has a serious problem as it relates to the shortage of workers and the Government of the day is not doing anything positive to rectify the same. We need about 1500 health workers. We need about 1000 police officers, about 1000 soldiers in the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) and another 1500 general public servants.

Annually, we have 3500 to 5000 of our school children who drop out of school. The Hon. Minister of Education will validate that. Annually, we have about 3500 to 5000 youths who drop out of school every day. We are not looking into this resource. We allow our school children to drop out, and then we want to say that we have a shortage in the labour force. If we had shown consideration and care as it relates to the number of children dropping out of school from 2010 to now, we would have enough workers to remedy all the shortages. The Board of Industrial Training (BIT) must be commended for training 13,000 plus youths. Imagine we trained 13,000 youths in this country in more than 600 areas. Yet, we have a shortage in all sectors. The remedy to the labour shortage for us in this country is to review the Education Act, Chapter 39:01. As I speak, the Education Act

states that education is compulsory for children five years, nine months old to 14 years, nine months old. In this country, the fastest-growing oil-producing nation, we allow our children who are 14 years and nine months old to drop out of school. Any child 15 years of age can drop out of school. The suggestion is that we must come to this honourable House and amend the Education Act, Chapter 39:01 so that we can have our children in school until the age of 16. We need to amend the Education Act so that compulsory education moves from 14 years, nine months old to 16 years old.

As it relates to labour, in the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, the age for retirement is 55 years for general public servants or 33 and 1/3 or age 50 – voluntary. What we have observed is that many of our public servants transition or pass away before reaching the age of 55. The proposal here is that we pay gratuity. We should pay the gratuity to all public servants in three instalments – 11 years, 22 years or after 33 and 1/3 years.

3.33 p.m.

We must not hold workers until 33 years then give them a gratuity. After 11 years, we should give them one-third of whatever they are entitled to. For 22 years, we have given them two-thirds, and, if they so desire to serve until 33 and 1/3 years, we give them their pension. What is being observed in the country is that many of our public servants wait to build a house and purchase a vehicle after they retire. We are proposing that when you give them 11 years and 1/3 years, 22 years and 33 years, that is three instalments, we would be able to have more from the workers.

As I turn my attention to Region 6, health is not doing good. The Hon. Member, Dr. Mahadeo, came and did some glorious reporting as to what is really happening in health, but the concentration is on Numbers 77/76 hospitals and the Fort Canje Hospital. They allowed the other health facilities to deteriorate. I visited the New Amsterdam Public Hospital a few days ago and the condition the doctors and the nurses have to operate under is very bad. We acknowledge that the building of a new state-of-the-art hospital will come in a few years' time, but what are they doing with the service that is being provided at the moment? What are they doing now? Are we to wait until the spanking brand-new facility is put up and then we would move?

We are calling on the Ministry of Health to ensure that drugs/medications are available. Why is it that in the fastest-growing nation, we have to give our patients prescriptions to go and buy? Why

is it that doctors have to give prescriptions to our patients to go to private entities and purchase medication? Why is it that we only have B-complex tablets and Panadol to give, and we cannot give the other medications to our population? We have our pensioners standing in long lines at the health facilities to wait and collect 10 B-complex tablets and 10 Panadol. Why is it that is happening to our pensioners? They have given their lives to this country and to treat them the way we are treating them when they come for health services is very, very bad. We need to put better systems in place as it relates to medication being delivered to our pensioners. There is a system partly in place, but we need to enhance it so that more of our pensioners could be able to receive home care and delivery. As it relates to health, the nurses are complaining because of the shortages. *[Heckling]*

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

A few weeks ago, the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) made a big announcement about the shortage of 700 nurses. If we took the same proposal of amending the Education Act to ensure that our children remain in school, we would have had thousands of children over a 10-year period to train so that they could fill the vacancies we have. We have the part-time workers. Port Maurant Hospital has 90 pathway workers. How many systems do we have in place to train these individuals, grade them according to their skills, qualifications, capabilities and interests and put them into the system so they could be able to generate service to our population?

Mr. Speaker: Let us generate some more time for you with 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: Hon. Member, you may continue.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the nurses and the medical health workers are asking about a salary that would keep them and attract others. They are asking about better training and conditions. They are asking for translators. We have a lot of foreign doctors who do not speak English, and they have to communicate with our population. We need to computerise the biodata for our patients so that if they leave Port Maurant and come to New

Amsterdam or to the East Coast or Georgetown, we would be able to track them. We need a heart institute in Berbice. Thanks to the representation by Dr. Mahadeo and Dr. Frank Anthony, we were able to have a cancer centre in Berbice. People are benefiting from that. Now, Hon. Minister of Health...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I misguided you. You have a lot of time remaining. You have 30 minutes plus five.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. You are very gracious. Thank you very much. Thanks for the Cancer Institute in Berbice. It is very, very important. We need better ambulance services and not the one carrying the chicken and the beer. We need an ambulance that could take patients from one point to the next. Four is not enough. We have a big region. Even if APNU/AFC had zero, what are you doing now? The APNU/AFC had zero, you have four and you are justifying it. Is four enough? For the records, I am suggesting that we have better ambulance services in the region so that Port Mourant, Black Bush, Skeldon and New Amsterdam would be able to work and attend to this service.

I turn my attention to education. Education is very, very important. The Hon. Minister is here and she will agree. For us to be able to have growth and development and to compete with other nations, we must be able to have a sound and proper education service. With the amount of money being allocated to education, the results are far from what we expected. The Hon. Minister will agree that the results coming out of education are far from what is expected. We have to calculate the number of days that are being lost for other activities except the actual teaching and learning. I want to implore the Minister of Education, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Minister of Local Government and Regional Development that all contracted works attached to the Ministry of Education should be completed during the vacation. What we have currently happening in many schools is that contracted workers appear in the evening, do a portion of work, leave, come back the next day in the evening and do a portion of work. We cannot settle for that now. I am appealing to the person responsible for the tendering of contracts and the execution of contracts, let all be done during the July/August vacation or on the other holidays. To do that, we must be able to have proper planning. Currently, classrooms are being painted on Saturdays and Sundays and children have to sit in those classrooms on Mondays. Please, we can do better than that.

The water taxi that was put in place from Rosignol to New Amsterdam by the David Granger Administration to transport our school children free was pulled out by the PPP/C. It costs a parent \$600 a day to send his or her child from West Coast to New Amsterdam. The APNU/AFC had free water taxi service. [Ms. Parag: You know we have schools in West Coast Berbice.]

We have school every year, but they still have to pay to go to school. So, we are giving \$55,000 to the children but hear what happens. A child from Rosignol pays \$600 to go to New Amsterdam which is \$3,000 a week. That is \$117,000 a year and you are compensating them with \$55,000. I am saying that we had a system in place to relieve the high cost of living, but it was pulled out by the PPP/C Administration and placed poor people more on this strain. We have children travelling from Corriverton... [Mr. McCoy: You could not be serious.] Very much. We have

children travelling from Corriverton to New Amsterdam costing \$2,000 a day. You who is sitting over there your children do not pay the cost to go to school. You know what happens. It is a special very important person (VIP) taxi, and sports utility vehicle (SUV). For the poor people's children, a child living in Corriverton pays \$2,000 to go to the New Amsterdam Multilateral School. [Dr.

Singh: Why did you not remove the toll from the Berbice Bridge.] We subsidised it from \$300. How much did you subsidise it? Who put it to \$500 and you are talking? We are not providing a service for public transportation for our children from Corriverton to New Amsterdam. A child pays \$2,000 a day, \$10,000 a week and \$390,000 in an academic year. [Ms. Manickchand: (Inaudible)] You cannot put a child where you want to put a child. Wherever the child gets

a score to go, the child has to go where? [Ms. Manickchand: Zone.] Zone? We do not zone.

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

I wish to propose that the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service adjusts this budget and place in it the payment of the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examination for our children in this country. We are giving free education through the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL). We are yet to give free education for the University of Guyana (UG). We are giving free education at the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE). We are sponsoring children to study overseas but our little children at secondary school, in Grade 11 or Form 5, have to pay to write CSEC. This is unfair. We are appealing to you, Mr. Speaker. I am appealing to you as Member of the Opposition (MP)

to adjust the 2025 Budget and ensure that all of the children writing CSEC for 2025 and beyond, the State will pay for them so they will help their parents.

3.48 p.m.

The subsidies are not enough. Pay the full cost for all the children so that they will be able to write. When that happens, there will be increased access to education, promotion of equity, improved national development, social benefits, boosted academic performance, economic benefits, and, most importantly, strengthened national identity and commitment to education. For us to be able to tackle all the social ills, we must first ensure that our children have a sound and proper education.

I wish to commend the school feeding programme for Region 6, and this is an initiative started by David Arthur Granger. I am happy that the... [*Interruption*] I am happy that the Government of the day is continuing and expanding the breakfast initiative. I am proposing a change to what we have in place. It is good that we continue the juice and biscuit for nursery schools, but I am asking the Hon. Minister to ensure that Grades 1 to 6 for primary schools also receive breakfast. I am saying that we should change the biscuits and juice from Grades 1 and 2 at the primary level and give all of the children breakfast. As of now, we are hoping that our children from Grades 1 to 6 will have breakfast at school.

Due to attendance at the secondary level, where we have the most problems, I am suggesting that we have a plan to include our secondary school children having a meal – not a breakfast. This will ensure that our school-aged children remain in school. I am saying this because there is enough money in the national budget to ensure that children receive food, even at the secondary level. It costs the caterer \$280 to prepare one breakfast. If anybody wants to query that, you could go and ask the people in the region – \$280. For us, \$280 is nothing. Yet, we are giving our children in school the equivalent of \$280 to eat. Check it out. I am proposing that the \$280 be moved to \$400. We are asking the Government to ensure that the cost and quality are increased so that the children can have something better than what they are having. We are asking for \$120 more for each meal. As of now, each meal costs \$280. We are asking for \$400 so that we could give them a better bite that would be able to sustain them for the day so that they can absorb the necessary information that teachers have to give.

Due to the frequent blackouts, our children have difficulty studying in the evenings. I would have been very pleased if the Minister had said that they were going to wipe out blackouts and give proper electricity. Instead, the Hon. Member said subsidised generators. [Ms. Flue-Bess: Subsidies are not good enough.] Subsidised generators. [Ms. McDonald: How many people could buy generators?] Well, a lot of individuals sitting in this honourable House have automatic generators. The suggestion is that every child in Grade 6 and every child in Grade 10 be given a computer with the necessary programmes so that when blackout comes, they have a computer to use for three to five hours. If we suggest solar lights for them, then you will say that we want everything, but we are saying give the children in Grade 6 a tablet or a computer that is preloaded with all the programmes. Give the students in Grades 10 or 11 preloaded gadgets so that they will be able to use them and study on their time. A suggestion came from a senior teacher in Region 6. The senior teacher said let the Ministry of Education utilise resources to empower the National Centre for Educational Resource Development (NCERD) to think and act quickly so that we could be able to restore and activate proper education delivery.

Mr. Speaker: Now, Hon. Member, you need that five-minute extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: You may continue, Hon. Member.

Mr. Jaiprashad: Mr. Speaker, the suggestion to NCERD is that the Hon. Minister of Education organises a team that can sit and lesson plan and prepare materials so that we could give a package to our teachers, monthly or termly. Instead of a teacher sitting and using artificial intelligence (AI) and generating something to guide him or her to teach, the teacher would receive a booklet or a gadget with everything inside and would go to the classroom with his or her material, prepared by NCERD, and would say, today, we will do A, B and C. [Ms. Manickchand: We cannot do that.] We can do that. Other countries are doing it. Why can we not do it? Why can we not start with a sample? Let us do it with 10 schools in every region or let us do it with five schools in every region, see the progress and then move forward. Hon. Minister, we cannot say that we cannot do it. [Ms. Manickchand: You cannot do that because they are different.] We can do

it. [Ms. Manickchand: (*Inaudible*) You gotta reach the child where he or she is.] Hon. Minister, wherever we live, whether in (*inaudible*), Orealla or Black Bush Polder, we write the same examination. If we had differentiated and different exams, I would have agreed with that. But we have a one-size-fits-all exam and we are saying that we cannot implement planning of instructional materials and resources and give them to our teachers. That is a suggestion that we could look at. If you need any guidance, there are individuals, subject specialists in all the regions, who could make a team and go and assist at NCERD so that the children could be able to receive what they deserve.

Public Service Ministry – very important. Many workers in Region 6 convey congratulations to the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, for influencing His Excellency in ensuring that people with master's degrees receive the \$22,000. Thank you very much, Sir. I am appealing to the Hon. Minister to please ensure that the people with their bachelor's degrees receive their \$10,000. There is a big issue in the country as it relates to the public service. I want to bring this to the attention, again, of the Hon. Minister. There are education officers who are supervising headteachers – assessing, critiquing, guiding, and evaluating these headteachers. However, what happens is that the education officers receive less than the headteachers. I am working there, so I am saying that all of us will benefit. [Mr. Mahipaul: Is the headteacher getting more?] The headteacher receives more than the education officer, who is their supervisor. To be specific, an education officer receives \$364,582 and a secondary school Grade A headteacher receives \$406,775. Hon. Member, we know that we can fix this. You go to a school to supervise a headteacher and at the end of the day, the headteacher looks at you and says... We can fix this. There are workers in Region 6 with two master's degrees, two bachelor's degrees and two to four postgraduate degrees. Please put systems in place so that they can be able to receive their benefits.

Uniform allowances for public servants. The police receive, the nurses receive, the teachers receive, but the general public servants are yet to receive. This is a call for all the public servants in Region 6. [Ms. Manickchand: Represent people, man. You are representing uniform for yourself.] I am a public servant, so if I say... I am entitled to, Hon. Minister. [Mr. Mahipaul: Come on, Priya.] Come on, Ms. Minister. *Ow, Priya*. I am representing the interests of all the public servants in Region 6 so that they can receive their allowances.

My final point is on local government and regional development. The proposal is that all mayors, chairmen and councillors receive a tangible stipend. For the mayors, we are proposing \$150,000 to \$200,000 per month; for the National Democratic Council (NDC) Chairman – \$50,000 per month, and for the councillors’ pathway workers’ pay of \$40,000 per month. In Region 6, the PPP/C manages most of the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs). I am not here to represent the PPP/C cause or APNU/AFC cause. I am here to represent the cause of the councillors. I am asking that all the councillors in Region 6 receive a \$40,000 stipend so that they can be able to be more effective. They are doing a lot of work in the region. I am asking that the Chairman of the NDC receive \$50,000; and that the mayor receive \$150,000 to \$200,000.

I wish to appeal to the Minister of Home Affairs to ensure that there is a fire service unit at all NDCs that can respond to what is happening. Most importantly, Hon. Member, Minister Vindhya Persaud, there is a need for a social worker to visit the NDCs periodically. In every NDC we have social issues. I am proposing that you schedule a social worker to be present at every NDC – weekly, fortnightly, or monthly – so that they can listen to the people. Thank you very much.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Mr. Jaiprakash. Now for the Hon. Member, Mr. Seepaul Narine.

Mr. Narine: Mr. Speaker, I grew up with my grandmother and she told me you must exercise some tolerance towards religious leaders. So, my friend, the Hon. Member, who is a pandit, I will have some mercy on him.

4.03 p.m.

To answer him in a few words, I will have to be merciful with him. I just want to say something. He said that we need help to make a better life for our people. He is from Berbice. I was in Corentyne on Sunday. The Number 71 Village mandir invited the public to have ‘seven curry’ for free. Have you ever seen that before under the APNU/AFC? Why are you seeing it now? It is because the quality of life of people is better, and they are able to improve and give back to society, and sometimes to the vulnerable.

You talked about the labour laws being flouted. I will give the Hon. Member an excuse because he has no idea about how the Ministry of Labour operates. He never had the opportunity, not even to go to the Ministry and represent an employee at conciliation, much less at a policy level. I wish to remind him that it was the APNU/AFC that made the Ministry of Labour a department for the first time in history. I have no doubt, with the Hon. Member being the shadow Minister, it will remain in the shadow, and the workers of this country will never see the day of light in terms of justice. I sympathise with him because he was not listening when Minister Hamilton pointed out what the Ministry of Labour is doing – how many people we have trained, and the labour offices we have all across this country with staff, and not only desks and furniture. I will not belabour my time too much on him.

I wish to begin my presentation by congratulating my colleague, the Hon. Dr. Singh, and his team and, I dare say, the wider PPP/C Government as well, for an exemplary job of developing a historic, all-encompassing budget that uplifts our people's lives. *Budget 2025* comes as the PPP/C observes its 75th anniversary as a political party. Over that time, the party always placed people, ordinary people, at the forefront. Indeed, *Budget 2025* remains faithful to the party's ideals set out at its foundation. At the same time, it consolidates progress and builds a prosperous nation and a sustainable future for all Guyanese. The budget exemplifies the party's and Government's unwavering determination to ensure a brighter future for all, irrespective of their political shade or stripe. His Excellency the President, on 1st January this year, put it well when he said that the party's vision is for a Guyana where every citizen has a stake in its future. Sadly, despite the olive branch extended to the Opposition, excluding the Deputy Speaker, they have refused to participate meaningfully in our nation's development. Rather, they choose to engage in petty and divisive politics. As much as they are associated with the word "oppose", they oppose without offering justifications or alternatives. I have had to ask myself whether the Hon. Opposition Members are really serious about representing their constituents. This does not seem to be the case, but the winds of change are blowing, and some of the Hon. comrades have come to their senses and have supported the people-centred plan of this PPP/C Government.

The Hon. Leader of the Opposition – and I want to watch him in his face and say this – in 18th January, 2025 *Kaieteur News* newspaper described the budget as lacking. I wondered whether he and I were reading the same document. The Hon. Member, Mr. Norton, reportedly said that the

whopping 30% increase in the income tax threshold would not benefit the ordinary man, although, in the same article, he said the threshold should be significantly increased. He must have missed that the 2025 adjustment released 22,000 workers from paying taxes, placing an additional \$8.5 billion in their pockets. That is almost \$400,000 more for these workers annually per worker. Additionally, reducing the income tax rates puts another \$3.6 billion in workers' pockets, and a further \$1 billion will accrue to families with children. Furthermore, \$1.1 billion will be kept by our hard-working workers who work overtime or do a second job. Aggregately, those interventions alone will enrich the working class by a further \$14.6 billion. Evidently, the Hon. Member could not have been reading from the document presented to this august body. In the same *Kaieteur News* report, the Hon. Member described the old age pension as a joke. The fact is, this PPP/C Government doubled old age pension between 2020 and 2025, a far cry from what the APNU/AFC Government promised in its first 100 days but could not deliver in five years.

I also observed the shadow Minister of Finance, Hon. Fernandes, describe *Budget 2025* as cut and paste. She, like her leader, had to be reading some other document. The PPP/C's programme is eloquently captured by the budget theme, "*A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*". This theme encapsulates the budget's programmes and policies and speaks to the PPP/C thrust since its formation in 1950. This budget builds on the advances of past and present PPP/C Administrations and provides a practical plan for our nation. This is in stark contrast to the Coalition's budget, which lacks coherence and vision. The Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, brushed aside the Coalition's poor performance, contending that their aggregate spending was less than the 2025 budget. We should not forget that the Coalition spent some \$1.2 trillion during its term. What can they show for that money? Where are the benefits to our people? The Hon. Members on the other side of the House get aggravated when it is said that they did nothing. I will not say that because they did a lot. Yes, Mr. Speaker, they did a lot of evil things. In their five years, only 7,000 Guyanese benefitted from house lots, a number this PPP/C Government surpassed in less than one year. In their time, too, not one secondary school was completed, with several being built under this Government. Not one well in the hinterland was drilled, and the list of tragedies can continue.

Unlike the sordid past of the People's National Congress (PNC)/APNU/AFC misrule, this budget, like previous PPP/C budgets, was excitingly anticipated, as Guyanese looked forward to what new benefits would be rolled out. Indeed, this budget has not failed to deliver. This is a working people's

budget. This is a budget with no new taxes, unlike when APNU/AFC imposed massive increases in taxes and fees on the backs of ordinary people. What did they do with the wealth? They rented a bond, yes, a condom bond, from one of their friends, and lavishly spent on food and refreshment. There is the infamous D'Urban Park, the scales reportedly purchased from Abacha, those unsuitable drainage pumps and not forgetting the 7,000-odd sugar workers they put on the streets. They used every opportunity to pinch from the Treasury. I use the word “pinch”, Sir, because I cannot use the unparliamentary word to properly describe their actions.

It is not about how much you spent or did not spend, but it is how it was spent. Without hesitation, I say that the PPP/C Administrations – past, present and no doubt future – have and will remain allied with the people, putting their interests above all. The PPP/C is spending to ensure that greater development reaches all Guyanese. In drawing a contrast, I wish to point out the following: in 2019, the education sector was allocated \$53.2 billion. In 2025, it is \$175 billion, a 229% increase. The health sector's 2019 allocation was \$35.9 billion. In 2025, it is \$142.3 billion, a 297% increase. For housing in 2019, \$1.7 billion was allocated. In 2025, \$112.6 billion, a 6,523% increase. For water, in 2019, \$2.9 billion was allocated. The allocation in 2025 is \$23.1 billion, representing a 696% increase. These numbers tell a story. They are a clear demonstration of bettering our people's lives and ensuring that the nation's wealth is used judiciously.

New hospitals and schools are being built, and roads and bridges are being repaired and rehabilitated. Government services are expanding. Life is becoming easier, and the Guyana we dreamt of is quickly becoming a reality. Workers in particular have not been excluded from the whirlwind of activities. This year alone, in addition to previous initiatives, workers and their families will benefit from an increase in the school child grant, the introduction of a universal health voucher, support for newborn babies, the abolishment of bridge tolls, the highly-anticipated reduction in electricity tariffs, increased income tax threshold and lower tax rates, and exemption of income tax on overtime and a second job, up to \$50,000 per month, among other things. Alongside these improvements, workers' pay levels are ascending. Through collective bargaining, the Government and several unions have concluded multi-year agreements, which advanced substantial improvements in workers' earnings. This is apart from improvements in several other benefits accruing to the workers. Between 2020 and 2024, public servants have seen their aggregate earnings increase by \$100 billion, a substantial jump.

4.18 p.m.

Of course, the Members on the other side, again excluding the Deputy Speaker, will lament these improvements. A few weeks ago, Hon. Member, Ms. Corretta McDonald, speaking at an Opposition Leader press conference on 13th December, 2024, claimed that the Government does not understand collective bargaining. I am unsure what she meant. She must have lost her way because there are several images and videos of the Hon. Member wearing another cap and engaging in collective bargaining with the Ministry of Education. Those engagements led to a multi-year agreement which she alluded to at the same press conference. Permit me to ask the Hon. Minister of Education if I should let the Members on the other side of the House know that their Member of Parliament (MP) was offering herself to be the PPP/C's Prime Ministerial candidate. I have to ask my colleague and friend which cap she will choose to wear – MP or General Secretary – as clearly, her union rules prevent her from wearing both. With pride, I wish to say to this House that our Prime Minister is a man of integrity with no baggage but, unfortunately, I cannot say the same thing about my colleague on the other side of the House. The Opposition has sought to discredit *Budget 2025* without any rationale. I ask, are these elected leaders not seized with any responsibility? Are they not concerned with the well-being of our nation?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, for you to continue, you will need five minutes to conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for my colleague to have five minutes to conclude. Thank you.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Teixeira. You may proceed, Hon. Member.

Mr. Narine: These questions are important as, in a few months, the people of this country will be called upon to elect leaders committed to the people. I am confident that the Guyanese people have seen through the façade and will democratically elect the PPP/C for another term in office to ensure that the programme of development, exuberantly implemented by the Government, is sustained.

I cannot discuss *Budget 2025* without addressing the sugar industry. The industry's performance in 2024 did not live up to expectations. Under the new leadership of the new Chief Executive Officer (CEO), several interventions are being made to improve production and productivity. This

demonstrates that a new level of thinking and innovation was being pursued. Additionally, the skill set is being augmented by technical support from Cuba and India. I am aware that several efforts are underway to enhance revenues. I am advised that the industry's focus on value-added will be strengthened this year, and new product lines will be launched. There are also efforts to increase market availability and expand into new markets within the region and beyond, particularly amongst the diaspora in North America. These are tangible efforts to reorient the industry towards greater direct consumption of sugar which attracts premium prices. Additionally, efforts to cultivate new high-yielding varieties, new planting techniques and greater use of drone and aircraft in herbicide and cane ripening will expectedly reduce cost and improve productivity. A significant development is mechanisation which holds great promise. Several thousands of hectares of land have already been converted, and *Budget 2025* anticipates continuing this process. This initiative is important for the industry to remain competitive and to enhance the productivity of its workers.

Consistent with its commitment to its manifesto this year, the PPP/C Government will advance efforts to resume cane cultivation at Skeldon Estate. Sir, you will recall that the Coalition Government closed the Skeldon Estate, Rose Hall Estate, East Demerara Estate and Wales Estate between 2016-2017. Some 7000 sugar workers were put on the breadline in the largest retrenchment exercise in post-independence Guyana. Already, the PPP/C Government has reopened Rose Hall Estate and, in a phased manner, operations at Skeldon Estate will restart. This is what commitment is about. Cde. Minister of Agriculture, you have returned the smiles to the faces of thousands of Guyanese in the sugar belt. Thank you and thank you, PPP/C Government. Against that background, I fully support the allocation of \$13.3 billion to the sugar industry.

The legacy of resource starvation and spitefulness under the Coalition still haunts the industry. Essential components were left to fail, investments in the field and factories were restricted, and the workers were treated as outcasts. Had the Coalition sustained the momentum of 2014 and 2015, which it inherited, today we would have been talking about the sugar industry in a different light. Rather than continue to nurture the industry, APNU/AFC turned its back and waited for its collapse. The importance of sugar to the country, particularly to the communities in the sugar belt, cannot be underestimated. The scars of closure and joblessness still haunt many who were affected. I am heartened that the vestiges of the estates, with teeming activities, have returned to Rose Hall and soon in a greater way at Skeldon. Indeed, for me, the closure period of 2016 -2017 was one of

the most depressing periods of my life. I participated in the redundancy meeting with the workers and saw men reduced to tears when told they were being sent home. I bonded with the workers and their families on the picket lines, marches and meetings across the sugar belt. It was a period of heartlessness, a dark time in the history of our nation.

Mr. Speaker: I do not want to be heartless, but I will give you 30 seconds to conclude.

Mr. Narine: Indeed, the budget has set the bar high, and much will be done in the coming weeks and months. At the end of it all, there will be a bright future for all Guyanese, both present and future. Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Mr. Seepaul Narine. Now for the Hon. Member, Ms. Coretta McDonald.

Ms. McDonald: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My colleague who just spoke reminded us that he lived with his grandmother. Maybe his grandmother did not teach him to speak the truth and to speak it always. We rubbed shoulders together in the labour movement and the brother should have said to us how many times between 2020 and 2024 the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU) was on strike.

Having said that, I have risen to add my voice to warnings and cautions over this dangerous fiscal forecasting, which is another step in saddling this country with debt that will last our generation and many generations for a long time with nothing significant to show. Sir, I am deeply honoured to stand before you today to do this, my sixth presentation. In doing so, I recognise the strength I continue to gain, not only from God but from my family and all the citizens across this country, even those who are supporters of the PPP/C. Allow me to salute the people of Guyana who continue to perform miracles in trying to survive the last five years of a clueless, uncaring, and incompetent government. At this point, it is safe to say that we are, unfortunately, in the midst of the worst administration in the history of governance in this country. Mr. Edmund Barton was keen to point out:

“Creating a nation requires the will of the people.”

Based on the damning evidence that emerged from the account of the 2020 elections, we know that this installed regime cannot boast of having the will of the people. The PPP/C is like a well-

dressed mannequin, but when you take off the clothing, you see their real nakedness. I do not take lightly the responsibility that is invested in us. We are of the view that our responsibility is to build quality education, build a quality educated nation, have proper healthcare, have proper infrastructure and have an economy to strengthen the social fabric and protect our environment, and deliver public services effectively, efficiently and in a manner that reflects good governance. That is the responsibility of any sitting government. Bearing this in mind, Mr. Minister, we were shocked on 17th January, 2025, when the purported Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service stood at the lectern and delivered a long vacuous presentation that put even his colleagues to sleep. As they slept and the Minister sipped glasses of water, he swallowed the misinformation being digested and a frightening reality was thrust upon this nation. The Hon. Member presented a budget titled, *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*. The Hon. Member spent hours *busing* and *cussing* imaginary enemies and devoted maybe one hour to budgetary matters. We were reminded why the position of Minister of Finance should be for a technocrat and not someone who dabbles in the husking of campaigning at every turn. Almost after five years of the PPP/C rule, Guyana's public debt increased...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, just give me a minute. We are just asking that cameraman... We just asked him to move and he just went one step. Take the chair at the back or we will put you out. You may continue, Hon. Member.

Ms. McDonald: Sir, after almost five years of the PPP/C rule, Guyana's public debt increased to \$5.993 billion, a 167% increase from 2023. Nothing has been secured; there is no prosperity; and this madness and clear lack of planning cannot be sustained.

4.33 p.m.

The intellectual authors of this titled Budget were sitting in their air-conditioned (AC) seats and I suspect they had the finest of security guarding them, while the masses of the Guyanese people sat there still waiting to have a meal. They must have been thinking of prosperity being experienced by family, friends and favourites. Ultimately, they must have thought of sustaining the wanton transfer of State resources to their friends, their families and their favourites. The title of this Budget reflects how out of touch these wealthy controllers of State wealth are. The Budget, I would presume, should be named: *A Secure, Prosperous and Sustainable Guyana for Friends, Families*

and Favourites. After this pie-in-the-sky presentation, the nation asks a collective question: what is the Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh, talking about? After this Government spent \$4.609 trillion to date, the rate of severely malnourished children under five years has increased. Imagine – in this oil economy, children are now hungrier than they were before 2020. The oil money is here and the masquerade is wanton with the fiscal wastage. The poverty rate requires at 48%. Hence, the question is being begged again: what is he talking about?

Victimisation is everywhere, and if a person does not like their *Facebook* pages or does not comment, then that person is dead in his/her booths. That is real. When we look across at some of the ministries – the Ministry of Education, for example – staff and others are warned. They are told, in no uncertain terms, when they like other pages and when they comment on other pages. That is a fact. If someone is remotely associated with the Opposition, there are no contracts for that person. The victimisation has moved to the private sector. Those who are deemed to be anti-government because they speak up about the abuses are denied jobs even there in the private sector. The talk around the town that once a person is in the famous black book, which is lodged at Freedom House, that person shall have no part. Yet, the Hon. Member told us all is swell and well in the Republic of Guyana. We still wonder; what are they talking about?

The transference of State resources from public to private pockets is on the rise and never has been seen in the history of this nation. This practise is part of the dreaded word that is being banned from this House. The word begins with the letter C and ends with the letter S. That word – corruption – forgive me, more than one... I can understand why the Member over there is behaving the way. Sir, it refers to an evil act by an individual or a group who is most unworthy. The act prevents others from engaging in their rights. Furthermore, the word that begins with the letter C includes activities such as bribery or embezzlement. However, the word that begins with letter C and ends with the letter N or S in many ways, most of them are in positions of authority who create this confusion. It is estimated that for every \$1,000,000 committed to a project about \$600,000 ends up in the pockets of officials and selected members of the private sector. The intelligence which has reached our desks has stated that 15% is being demanded upfront before the project is even given or before the building project goes out.

The word that begins with letter C and ends with letter N and sometimes S is on the rise, especially with the people who enter Government as mere paupers but, today, they are millionaires and

billionaires. On the backs of hard-working Guyanese, the ruling elites and their Government officials can now toast with champagne and attend diamond balls that cost millions and millions of dollars, upon the ordinary worker who could not dare to show up at these diamond balls with their slippers or they could have been chased by the ruling party, which once stood there claiming that they are working for the poor but has now been transferred in the party of the get-rich-quick or die-trying. We, in the Opposition, have been informed of the grand tricks of the contracts. We see glorious headlines about small contractors being awarded contracts in their communities but on a practical everyday level if the project is worth \$10 million, the small contractor gets a mere \$1 million to just place their names on the document and the work is being executed by large contractors who collect the great bulk of the money. With no infrastructure plan, the Government seem to be driven by two considerations for infrastructure: one, political mileage and two, money for the boys. When the Hon. Member comes here and regales us about the grand happenings in this Republic, we are forced to ask again: what is he talking about?

After \$4.609 trillion spent in the carnival of fiscal wastage, blackouts seem to be at their highest level. Our lives are being disrupted by constant blackouts, while the ruling elites of Government and their private sector have purchased large generators to insulate themselves from the blackouts caused by their wanton incompetence. It is not a matter of ‘if’ anymore in this country; it is a matter of ‘when’ there will be a blackout. During the time of the Coalition, family members could have been told, ‘if we get a blackout, plug out the fridge.’ Today, there is no ‘if’; it is ‘when’ we get a blackout. This Government does not understand business is essential so is power. Power outages – short-term or long-term – can be detrimental. Power failures disrupt communications, water services, transportation, healthcare services, other offices, the schools and teachers’ delivery in front of their classrooms. They may also cause businesses to shut down, foods can spoil, certain electrical devices will stop working and appliances are often damaged. This uncaring Regime prefers to politicise the issue because they have their own big generators, which their contractor friends gifted them. When the Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service who purports to be the Minister stood here and presented the great misinformation, we cannot keep asking the question: what is he talking about?

On a normal day in Guyana, the Government and their propaganda machine made a journey to Timehri to spread misinformation. It was all going good until they opened up the microphones and

all the skeletons came rolling out. There was an honest, hard-working Doctor who spoke the truth. She detailed the horrors of the health sector: the lack of drugs, the lack of basic equipment and the empty medicine cupboards. What she detailed was the result after \$4.609 trillion was spent by the PPP/C. Her honest submission ran in stark contrast to the nice sound bites that they were accustomed to hearing every day. The health sector is in a mess. There are maternal deaths everywhere. The shortage of drugs continues to plague this society. There are brand new hospitals with state-of-the-art equipment but no basic drugs for simple headaches in the cupboards. Then, the number of nurses per 10,000 remains at an alarming rate of 2.8 in 2024. Sir, do you know what this means at a practical level? It means that at the public hospitals, there will be one nurse doing a job that should be done by 10 nurses. This is why the nurses are *beating out* to find greener pastures. What is the Hon. Minister speaking about?

The grand cash grants, which the PPP/C believes will end poverty in this country, are now proving to be a grand national trick. Poverty will not move from its 48% rate unless the structure of the economy changes. The economy is structured for those who have moneys to get more moneys and those who do not have to stay without. We, in the Opposition, continue to tell our people to take the moneys because they belong to you. However, they cannot take the moneys that are not forthcoming. The \$100,000 cash grant has now succumbed to the C-word, which has been banned in this House. People have been complaining about being registered since the programme started and, to date, no cheque has been made available. When these citizens heard the presentation of the Budget, there was a national question: what is the minister talking about?

I come to the most exciting part of it – the education sector. I believe it is one of the fundamental mistakes that this Government made upon being installed, and that is to put the weakest link at the helm of such a critical sector. Education outcomes are directly related to leadership. If the leadership is bad, there will be bad outcomes – as simple as that. We have seen nothing in the past five years to discredit this theory – garbage in, garbage out (GIGO). There is no good going around about this. A budget speech is a formal presentation and here we are saying that this Budget, which the Minister took all this time to present did not tell us about the objectives that they achieved over the year. The Budget presentation, especially as it relates to the education sector, is expected to report whether the billions spent have achieved significant outcomes. The education sector is not like any other sector. It is technical and ought to be driven by data.

I know, coming out of my presentation, it will evoke the loud noise and the *buse* about the schools we have built and the *buse* about how many students and learners we have fed. Let me remind this House that all that is happening they are continuing from where we left off. Mr. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham introduced, for those of you who are too young to know, Cerex, hot milk and biscuits in schools. They have introduced exercise books and textbooks. Schools were built under the People's National Congress (PNC). Schools were rehabilitated under the APNU and effective learning took place during those times.

4.48 p.m.

Any country that is on a trajectory of brand education achievements should have a budget presentation that talks about monitoring and evaluation. It should talk about value for money and technocratic information that are tracked. When one looks at pages 52.b to page 57, the problem is seen and that is why the sector is in such a mess. In this Budget, the cash is being splashed but there is no indication of whether the investments over the past years have delivered the expected outcomes. A billion here and a billion there; a school here and a school there, but there is no holistic evaluation of what occurs after the school is opened and the cameras are gone.

This Budget has once again confirmed to teachers that their work is not valued by this merciless Regime, but the only hope lies to ensure that they get registered and prepare to return the Coalition to government. A quality basic education is fundamental and a non-negotiable factor if we are to create the future for the country, we wish for ourselves and for future generations. The stark reality is that one cannot be free if one is uneducated in any country, let alone Guyana. Yet, this Government continue upon a trajectory that consigns this essential portfolio to one of some but of no real importance. It would be by no stretch of the truth or imagination that one could state that Guyana has one of the world's most unequal systems in education, despite having a large portion of money being spent on this sector. Teachers, in many, many instances are teaching in classrooms with students who ought to be handled by several teachers. General Literacy and Mathematics are at a palling level. Science and Mathematics are being neglected, and the country is falling further and further behind in competitiveness in most of these important fields. Guyana's secondary schools matriculation rate is less than 50%, meaning that fewer than half of the students who start high school do not graduate. It is against this backdrop, in this Budget, the Government can see where the problem is outlined.

Training of teachers at 4.130 on page 55, the Minister boasted about online training for teachers. Is the Minister really aware of what he talked about? Is the Minister on the ground to experience what our teachers are experiencing? I do not think so. The Hon. Member sees quantity, but quality is very far from his mind. Let me offer some explanation to the Minister. This country has 10 Administrative Regions with 11 Education Districts and some are more remote than others. It is very difficult on most occasions for teachers in the Hinterland to have access to technology to facilitate effective and mandatory training. Teachers from the Hinterland regions face numerous challenges. What do we have? We have ‘pass them all’, because we need the numbers. The lack of access to technology remains the most significant problem. This problem became intense, with the onset of Coronavirus disease (COVID-19). With all the trials and all the assistance that were put in place by the Coalition, when this evil Regime got into Office, they levelled all of them and they removed some of them. Every time they go around blaming the Coalition that we did not do this, we did not do that and we did not do the other, but the facts are there. Tell us about the hubs that we put up there. All training went online and teachers in the hinterland could not access lots and lots of training due to the lack of basic technology. Some of the areas lack the required technological infrastructure to participate in training online. Some teachers have to sign in on their phones and use their own data. That is proving to be effective but, yet, with all the billions that we are receiving in education, there is no sort of help or any help possible to assist these teachers. These are the things this Budget should have been addressing.

Conditions of work – when one reads pages 52 to 57, it is clear that this Government is convinced that throwing a few billion to construct schools is the end of the problem. As I speak, teachers are working in horrible conditions all across this country and we have seen them. We have heard of them. The pigeons are at several schools. The conditions at Bush Lot Secondary School where a beam fell on a parent and the pit latrines. To this day, we still have our children in crowded classrooms. To this day, we still have teachers who do not have access to learning materials in order to perform their tasks but we will hear about all the talks. We will hear about what we did, what we will do and what we will not do. Are these measures effectively paying off for the teachers and the learners who are supposed to benefit from them? There are teachers who report to their classrooms with no resources sometimes. Where are we putting the moneys that are allotted in the Budget? Many times, teachers are subjected to increasingly challenging behaviours, including verbal abuse and physical abuse from students, their parents, and even education officers. In this

day and age, we cannot put proper systems in place to ensure that professionalism amongst our educators, their supervising officers and even those who are supposed to man them are in place. It is all about a friend, a family and somebody else who is close to us. Teachers are in disorderly classrooms and are experiencing escalating behaviours. There are significant disruptions to their lessons; students' disengagement is on the decline; leading to stress, anxiety and even physical injuries. Teachers have to perform in classrooms with mosquitoes buzzing around their ears. Teachers have to spend extra moneys to purchase insect repellents. Teachers are in classrooms risking their lives every day, opening the doors of a drawer with a snake inside. Mr. Speaker, if you were to visit some of these schools, you would be appalled at what is happening and it is a fact because we see them on social media every day. In some schools, as long as the sun is shining, it is all well and good but, when it rains, we have another problem.

I want to use this platform to address a misguided narrative which is developing in this society or continues to be misguided in this society. There is talk being encouraged by the Government that teachers are enjoying brand pay, with free paid vacations, which is a fact. However, what they just do not know is that even while there is a vacation period, teachers are still at work. Teachers have to attend a workshop here, a workshop there and these are not planned workshops. These are workshops that happen when somebody just wakes up in the morning and decides that he/she is going to have this. We are saying that this Budget should cater for planned programmes. Programmes that are orchestrated in such a way that there are time frames in between all of them, and that teachers would be able to effectively benefit from the workshops that they have to attend.

It is important for us to understand the concept of work that is being measured and the pay by which it should be given. Work commensurate with pay, which means that the level of responsibility and difficulty of a job should be proportional to the salaries offered. Essentially, a person should be paid fairly for the amount of work he/she is expected to do. The teachers are the surrogate parents; they are the psychologist, the coach, the adviser, the uncle, the aunt, the doctor, the nurse, the policeman, the motivator, the friend and so many more. Yet, there is no comparison and this is of no comparison to other jobs. Teachers are stressed every day. Every day they are stressed and there is little or no means to assist our teachers. Many of our teachers are suffering from so many illnesses, yet, when the Guyana's Teachers Union (GTU) asked the Ministry to put a system in place, it was blatantly denied. Good teachers rise early in the morning to arrive at their

schools to ensure that they are ready to receive their learners. When they stay out late to plan for the next day's work and are early at school, their work performance and the conditions at work do not measure up to what they are expected to do. Those good teachers who care about education are working the hours of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO), but many of them are not receiving the pay of a CEO. The teachers of this land have raised all of us sitting here and, yet, sometimes, we show no recognition for the contributions that they have made when we pay them the sort of salaries that we are paying them.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, a good, planned programme says you will need five minutes extension to conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thanks, Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you may continue and conclude.

Ms. McDonald: Sir, we have heard of the fundamentals of good education being reading, writing, and arithmetic. I believe we need to look at the real fundamentals, which are good for teachers to work.

At the heart of a strong education, there will be passionate teachers who are respected by their communities for the work they do. When we look at what is happening in the education sector, we cannot help but cry. Regrading teachers with improved qualifications remains stalled. The issue of debauchment continues to be ignored. The promised duty-free concessions for teachers who are qualified have not been properly implemented. Teachers in the hinterlands still await their remote-area incentive. The special needs teachers' allowance remains inadequate. Mr. Speaker, I want to say to you and to the people of this country, to do part-time teaching in our technical institutes and even at the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) the fee is a meagre \$700 in one instance; a meagre \$1,000 in another instance; a meagre \$1,200 in another instance; and, alarming of all is \$300 for transportation. Where are we? What is happening with the moneys that has been allocated? Education, I must say again, is in serious trouble. I cannot support this Budget allocation as it stands.

5.03 p.m.

In an economy, as it stands, in an economy undergoing unprecedented transformation, this Budget represents a failure to protect workers; a failure to ensure safe workplaces; a failure to account accurately to the people of Guyana; a failure to our children; and a failure to secure and sustain. The people of Guyana have a window of opportunity that is opening for them – that is they should send this spending squandermania group packing. I want to say to us that for the millions spent on education, we have a whole lot of waste – wrong mathematical tables and wrong information in our books. We stand here and do not even know whether, she, is a preposition or pronoun. I want to say that we still have these two books available so the Hon. Member could use them.

In closing, I must say education is in a mess. For 75 days our teachers stood out there with nothing tangible to hold on to. Victimisation is at every level. I must say to all of us that we cannot forget the stress that the PPP/C Government put us through. Let us talk about what happened in the 2000s – the number of deaths. We must remember the Henry boys and Ronald Waddle. We must remember Mr. Boston from Essequibo. Do you know what this Government is all about? This is the Government of the appeals. They appealed the cutting of the salaries for the nurses in Linden. They appealed the amount given to Quindon Bacchus's family. They appealed the teachers' case and they have lost.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say to you and to all of us here – for this Budget, the people of Guyana have had almost five years to see what happens when the People's Progressive Party/Civic are in power. They have come to recognise that the crumbs do not taste the same way as the loaf. The leadership of the People's Progressive Party/Civic have been characterised as a group with a lack of vision; a lack of planning; and, above all, a lack of care for the people of this country. This Budget does not present anything that the people of Guyana can hold on to. This Budget is a mere cut and paste fiscal operation. The people in this country have recognised what the PPP/C are. They have recognised that buildings will not ease our problem. They have recognised that prudent management is needed to run this country. I, thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Member Ms. McDonald. Now it is time for the Hon. Minister of Education, Ms. Manickchand.

Minister of Education [Ms. Manickchand]: Thank you, kindly, Mr. Speaker. That was 35 minutes of nothingness. We just celebrated International Day of Education. The theme was based on how to incorporate Artificial Intelligence (AI) sensibly in education. The Hon. Member clearly meant to pay homage to that theme. The Hon. Member missed the part with sensibly. Here is my AI piece for the Hon. Member, and I quote from *ChatGPT*. It reads: ‘As the Minister of Education, it is my duty and privilege to uphold the principles of integrity, fairness and respect for the rule of law, especially within organisations tasked with representing the interests of our nation’s teachers. Today, I am compelled to address a matter that threatens the credibility of the Guyana Teachers’ Union and undermines the trust placed in those chosen to serve its members. Coretta McDonald, the current...’

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, this is to remind visitors in the gallery that they should not be recording or transmitting from the Chamber. We have our media to do so. You may continue

Ms. Manickchand: I do not see staff at a Ministry recording, Sir, but...

Mr. Speaker: Minister, we can exchange words again. I am cautioning members in the gallery, and you are now telling me you are not seeing them. Come on.

Ms. Manickchand: Mr. Speaker, it is your job to caution them. I cannot tell them anything. I do not...

Mr. Speaker: I made a ruling and an observation. It was not at you.

Ms. Manickchand: Your ruling is respected, Sir. It is not being challenged. Your ruling is respected. I would expect everyone to respect it.

Mr. Speaker: Well, you said you did not see anybody.

Ms. Manickchand: I did not.

Mr. Speaker: I did not ask you if you saw anybody.

Ms. Manickchand: Lord. Coretta McDonald...

Mr. Speaker: In this House, I have to keep a certain order. If I notice things are out of order, it is my duty, right and privilege to make the statement. I will start you back from now.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, if you would allow me, she ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister Ms. Teixeira, I would not allow you. I would not allow you. I would not allow you. I do not know about Mr. Mahipaul. I glanced around here using the 12-second rule and if I see five phones out there recording, I do not have to call names, I make a general statement. Minister, you can start now.

Ms. Manickchand: ‘...the current General Secretary of the Guyana Teachers’ Union, has blatantly violated the Union’s Constitution by continuing to hold this office despite her election as a Member of Parliament in 2020. The GTU’s Constitution is explicit in its provisions, clearly stipulating under Rule 3 that no Member of Parliament (MP) may hold an elected office in the Union except the position of immediate past President. This rule exists to prevent conflicts of interest, safeguard the Union’s independence, ensure there is no corruption...’ I am quoting, Sir. ‘...and ensure its focus remains on the needs of its members, our teachers. By continuing to serve as General Secretary, Ms. McDonald has not only ignored these constitutional provisions but has also compromised the integrity of the Union. Her dual role as a political figure and a Union leader creates a glaring conflict of interest that cannot be ignored. How can the GTU effectively negotiate with the state on behalf of teachers when one of its senior representatives holds a partisan political position? Such a scenario breeds distrust and undermines the Union’s ability to advocate impartially for its members.’ I end my *ChatGPT* quote.

This is from the person who came just now and righteously told us what is good for the education sector. I want to pause here to recognise the work of Dr. Singh; recognise the work of his staff; and recognise the work of the Office of the Budget, particularly the Director, who is a female in this country. Dr. Singh is a celebrated Economist, who is coveted in the world over. He sits with his staff to craft a budget. When people coming here, vacuously saying that the Budget makes no sense, they are not addressing Dr. Singh and Ms. Manickchand, it is the hard-working staff they claim they represent – those who sit in offices as technicians and craft the needs of this country. Let us go to what the people said. What do the people say about the Budget? This is 23rd January, 2025, and it states:

“The Guyana Manufacturing and Services Associations (GMSA) is pleased to acknowledge the new measures introduced in the 2025 National Budget, which promise to

bring substantial benefits to employees and businesses alike. These initiatives reflect the government's commitment to addressing key concerns within the manufacturing and services sector.”

Let us turn the page, Sir. It states:

“‘Impressive’- Rugby Union enthused by budgetary allocation for sport”

“Budget 2025, ‘a vehicle for continued growth and development’ – the Georgetown Chamber of Commerce”

“Private Sector Commission (PSC) – ‘heartened’...”

Google that one.

“...by targeted measures in Budget 2025”

This is a monumental step forward. It reads:

“‘A monumental step forward’- Badminton Association hails \$8B investment in sport”

“BUDGET 2025: ‘A game-changer for sport’ – NSC lauds \$8 billion allocation to further advance sport”

“Powerlifting Federation commends Government...”

It goes on and on and on. We have to go back. It is important that we do not let the recreators of history speak to us. This is 2nd December, 2016, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change's Budget *Stabroek News* reports:

“PSC urges gov't to rethink ‘harmful’ VAT proposals”

Harmful starts with the letter H and ends with the letter L. On 4th December, 2017:

“Budget 2018 offers “nothing” for ordinary Guyanese – economist”

He is now deceased – Ramon Gaskin.

This is 7th December, 2016:

“Budget adds further burdens on Guyanese – FITUG”

This is 2nd December, 2016:

“Budget has no good news for miners – GGDMA, GMWO”

This is 1st December, 2016, in *Stabroek News*:

“Budget Measures could have negative impact on economy and growth - Ram & McRae”

This is 29th November, 2017. Notice Sir, these are from several years across the budgets of the APNU/AFC.

“Lots of concern over budget –private sector head”

It was a good discussion that we had but we saw none of the recommendations in the budget. This is 29th November, 2017 in *Stabroek News*:

“Budget lacks clarity on incentive regime for private sector, job creation – City Chamber”

Let us do the better thing. Let us go to what the people said. This is the *Stabroek News* again on 5th December, 2016. This is Natasha Cato:

“As citizens we are already taxed with so many things even our basic necessities. Food, clothing etc. Now think about low-income families living in the rural areas, these families are often times very large families for a father or mother to provide, giving them the best they can is hard work.

Salary is already taxed big time. Light bill and electricity bills are already enough and to put added tax on these bills means added pressure for the breadwinner of the home. Think about those persons who don’t have a stable job.”

She went to state:

“I’m saying to implement tax on water and light is just not a smart idea especially not when Guyana is known as the land of many waters.”

What did Christopher Martain France state?

“I have to say I’m against it. I’m hard pressed to see how exactly the proposal is supposed to help citizens. Water and electricity are basic utilities. Why tax them further? Especially when we consider the fact that the service by GPL already leaves so much to be desired as far as reliability.”

This is Alexis Deodat:

“I think this proposal for VAT on water and light is ridiculous. They took it away from some food items and persons thought it was all smooth sailing because the cost of living was made a little lighter for them but now it’s going to put pressure on the poor man’s pocket.”

5.18 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the PPP/C’s budgets bring hope, bring creativity, bring innovation and bring a spark to businesses, people and humans alike. The APNU/AFC, the People’s National Congress (PNC), or whatever they call themselves, their budgets brought dread and fear and hopelessness. It was oppressive, and that is what the people said. The danger to the Mahipauls, the Figueiras, and the other young ones – the Hon. Members of course – of defending that kind of senselessness, is why they are over there. They should have stood up at the time and told their party that it was being ridiculous and hurting the poor man’s pocket, but of course they did not care because they were not poor men at the time.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the APNU/AFC Manifesto of 2015-2020. This is just for education, and I am going to do it very quickly. These are the people who have all the answers for education, and they know how very important it is. [Mr. Mahipaul: *(Inaudible)*] We will come to fiscal space in a minute. This is what they promised: they will develop appropriate non-monetary benefits, free land and duty-free concessions for teachers and university professors – failed – none was given; increase emoluments and improve working conditions for teachers – failed; provide an improved quality of education – failed; ensure equal access to education – failed; link education and curriculum design to Guyana’s national development needs – failed; engage teachers and other stakeholders as active participants in the development of education in Guyana – failed; distinguish between male and female learning and device learning strategies accordingly with a view to reducing the male dropout rate – failed; establish a computer lab in every primary school and

secondary school – failed and failed; ensure that the nutritional and transportation needs of primary and secondary students are met – failed; natural and agricultural sciences, Mathematics (Math), engineering and IT will become a major focus – failed; boost training and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) so as to create businesses and jobs – failed; make the University of Guyana a major regional research university – failed; the University of Guyana will actively seek foreign students – failed; seek assistance from donor countries for more educational professionals to work in Guyana for several years – they saw the speaker before me and said no thanks – failed; utilise the talents of the diaspora in education, training and other areas in special needs – failed. That was the APNU/AFC’s Manifesto. Then they came back in 2020. I will go to their 2020 Manifesto just now.

We live in a place where information is far freer now. The Hon. Member said just now – the whole Ministry knows that is not true – that we monitor whose pages people like, and we tell people who they could like. The Hon. Member’s problem is, when she makes any post she gets five likes and she thinks it is because we tell people not to like it; but her posts make no sense and that is why she gets five likes. She fights with a Personal Assistant (PA) in the Ministry daily and the PA’s post gets 200 likes and she gets seven; that is the complaint.

Mr. Speaker, let us come to where we were at education because we have to understand that. I will read for you here the 1992 World Bank Report on Guyana. I want to talk about this because we are hearing about fiscal space:

“Since Independence, the Guyanese Government has repeatedly stressed its commitment to ensuring broad access by the population to social services. In the 1960s, Guyana’s achievements in the education and health sectors were considerable; the illiteracy rate was among the lowest in the Caribbean and Latin American region and favourable health indicators reflected a well-designed health care system emphasizing preventative and primary healthcare. In the late 1960s, the Government...”

The APNU/AFC or PNC or whatever their name is:

“...seeking to ensure equal access by all the population... undertook to fully subsidize education and health care. Private facilities in both sectors were absorbed into the public system...”

I will speak to you, Sir. Now I will skip some.

“The country’s economic difficulties and the declining budget shares allocated to the sectors in the 1980s, however, meant that the Government was unable to maintain quality levels while fully subsidizing use of these services. The reluctance to institute cost-recovery, even as resource constraints became increasingly severe in the late 1980s, has thus led to sharp declines in the quality of services provided. Infrastructure has deteriorated...”

That means school buildings, health centres and all of that:

“...to the point where it is severely dilapidated and books and equipment are either not available, broken or obsolete. These poor working conditions, coupled with low salaries, have encouraged skilled and qualified personnel to move out of the sectors or seek work abroad.”

Here is the killer. This is what we are recovering from:

“By 1990, Guyana’s education and health indicators were among the lowest in the Caribbean.”

What a shame! They took us to... I withdraw the word ‘shame’. They took us from the highest in the Caribbean and Latin America and anything they touch turns to... You know what, Sir. [Ms. **Teixeira:** Midas touch.] The Midas touch, I think it was once said. The recommendation was made in 1993.

“As the Treasury cannot support these increases, the introduction of fees and other cost-recovery measures will have to be considered.”

So, it is only sensible people that will do this. When we came into Government in 1992, when we were voted into Government in 1992, 94¢ on every dollar was being spent in debt. So, imagine that. You get a dollar and 94¢ *gat* to be gouged out to go and pay debt. When we left Office in 2015, 23¢... [Mr. **Mahipaul:** When you were voted out.] When we were voted out of Office in 2015, 23¢ of every dollar was being paid on value-added tax (VAT). They had a lot of fiscal space that we did not have, but from 1992, if we look at the *Hansard*... For those Members

who are wondering what that is, that is the record of Parliament. The speaker before me would not know what that is.

When you look at the *Hansard*, you would see that from 1993 Ms. Indranie Chandarpal stood in this House and announced that old age pensions would be universal, that we would give every Guyanese once they are 65 and living here. That was when we were paying 94¢ on the dollar. We did not have a drop of oil; we were a heavily indebted poor country; we were suffering from malnutrition and white mouth and the fleeing of the professional staff in the country; had beriberi; and we made sure old age pension was universal. We built the Aishalton Secondary School and we built the New Amsterdam Public Hospital. When we came in, in 1992, there were three secondary schools in the hinterland communities. By the time we left in 2014, without a drop of oil, we had built 14 secondary schools. It is not what you have; it is what you do with what you have. We did a lot with a little. We left them with the best economic standing in the post-independent Guyana and they were unable to build not one secondary school, they were unable to build not one hospital. They come here now and try to lecture us about good governance from a chat generative pre-trained transformer (ChatGPT) speech.

It was not fiscal space that they lacked; it was the competence that they lacked. The APNU/AFC, PNC, and anything else they want to call themselves, were incompetent, are incompetent and are unable to lift themselves from that incompetence to serve the people of this country. They also collected \$90 billion a year more in taxes than we did. We did not put VAT on water, we did not put VAT on Crayola, we did not put VAT on crayons, we did not put VAT on health services. They had the best economic condition plus \$90 billion a year more than the PPP/C and they introduced 200 taxes on people – the donkey cart man and the snow cone cart man. Then they sit down in here wonderingly and say, why are we here? Every now and then they would venture over here to see how it feels but they first have to develop a heart for service. They have to want to see people do better.

When we came in 2020, we were in the height of the Coronavirus disease (COVID- 19) pandemic. Schools had been closed for five months from March, 2020 to August, 2020. While the rest of the Caribbean were engaged in procuring laptops and getting their students online, the APNU/AFC was engaged in the healthy enterprise of trying to rig an election and steal peoples' votes. They made no preparations for the children of this country. The children were at home and the teachers

were at home. Then, when the President was trying to get vaccines, the Ministry of Education was trying to get programmes on the Guyana Learning Channel and write worksheets and send it out, this is the fear mongering that was started by the APNU/AFC: ‘Ms. Coretta McDonald strongly against reopening of schools.’ ‘Coretta McDonald 11th November confirmation of students testing positive for COVID 19 at various schools is cause for concern and highlights the fact that a reopening of schools was premature, callous and reckless, especially schools that are fitted with dorms’. Then she continued; but I would not read it because it is really not worth... It should be in a bin. It should not be in the *Hansard*. But we were steadfast. We are in Government; we are leaders. The children of this country need us and we carefully, with much consideration – by putting all the facilities in place that the health people had recommended – opened schools. We were the first country in the Caribbean to start reopening schools. And what happened? Guyana has topped the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) and the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE) repeatedly, every year from then. That is what they were trying to take away. That is what happened when we reopened schools. [Hon. Members: (Inaudible)] I will go to the Maths and English story.

Let us go to the Mathematics and English story. I want to be very careful here because I know that sensible people are watching me, and we should never do what you did and what we did. The PPP/C will not rest until 100% of our children pass Mathematics and pass English. We will not rest. Listen to this, Mr. Speaker. On 30th November, 2016, in the *Stabroek News*, only 14% of Grade Six students passed Maths. Do you know who said this? It was Mr. Winston Jordan, the then Hon. Member.

“...less than 50% achieved passes in English.”

Then it went on to state:

“In October a release from the Ministry of Presidency while not referencing the pass rate...”

They were hiding that.

““...said that Cabinet examined the “unsatisfactory” results as a matter of “extreme urgency and grave national importance...””

That was on 30th November, 2016. Hear what they said on 28th November, 2017. Again, this is from *Stabroek News*, ‘having recognised that 14% of the population passed and having recognised that this is a matter of urgency, hear what they did one year later. This is the Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, who stated, ‘it was recognising the need for a reform of the education system that Government established a Commission of Inquiry (COI)’.

5.33 p.m.

The children are failing; people do not know how to count and read and they established a Commission of Inquiry. Just to be clear, for completion of this picture, that was never submitted to the Parliament, and never officially published by the Ministry. We do not know where it went. We do know someone was paid for it. So, when we want to talk about friends and family, let us talk about that. Mr. Jordan told the House that improving the quality of education will not be fixed by building more schools. They had the same position then – throw up your hand and send someone to do an inquiry. That was 2016/2017.

On the 21st August 2024, in the *Antigua Observer*, it was stated:

“‘A sore point’: CXC dismayed as regional CSEC math rate pass declines further.”

In other words, it is a Caribbean-wide problem. Today, Dr. Jerry Jailall, a man that we have hired to help us – we do not always agree; in fact we often disagree – sent me an article from the *Texas Monthly*:

“Is there a Better Solution to Our Public Schools’ Math Problem?”

This is not a Guyana problem; and if you think it is, then you are really not in tune and you do not have sense. This is not a Guyana problem. What have we done? That is the issue. We know we have a problem. The CXC has said to us that they are putting a solution in place, and it will begin in September, 2026. So, what are we doing? We immediately put and kicked into gear our own Mathematics intervention. What is that Math intervention? We are giving to every fourth and fifth former scientific calculators, geometry sets, graph books, all the textbooks they need, and past papers organised by topic. We are sending in monitors to make sure teachers are teaching and finishing the syllabus, and we are going from school to school and talking to the parents about their role. We are doing something about it. We are doing something to take us to the place of

100%. They recognised 14% passed in 2016, and by 2017 all they had to tell the nation was they were going to set up a COI. Look, but this is the reality, and I am laying all of this over. In 1990, the year that I believe the Hon. speaker before me wrote CXC, 16.89% of the population passed mathematics. In 1990, 16% of the population wrote Mathematics and 13% wrote English.

Let us move on a little bit. I believe the Hon. Mahipaul may have written in 2006. We are trying to calculate their ages. Twenty-five per cent of the population passed Mathematics, and 39% passed English. [Mr. Mahipaul: I was in those percentages.] I noticed Mr. Mahipaul is regaling to us that he was in that percentage, but the speaker before him, before me, seems unable to say that. The best Mathematics grade that this country ever got, save 2020, was in 2015, under my leadership in the Ministry, at 45%; and the best English grade was in 2024, under my leadership in the Ministry, at 70.84%. We do not hide from problems and we do not set up COIs nonsensically. This is the problem; we will deal with the problem. Let us talk about access, and access is one of the promises we made. On 30th November, 2016, in an article in the *Stabroek News* that was titled:

“Only 14% of Grade Six students passed math...”

Mr. Winston Jordan had this to say, ‘in the area of capital improvements to the education infrastructure,’... Mr. Jordan said that Government has budgeted ‘over \$4.7 billion on the construction, rehabilitation and maintenance of educational facilities throughout the region. He went on to say, ‘new secondary schools...’ I hope the public is hearing me, new secondary schools he informed, will be constructed and rehabilitated at Christianburg Secondary School – Have you seen it yet, Hon. Mr. Figueira? – and at St. Rose’s High School, which was demolished at the time, and it took five years till we came into Government to build it back; and at Good Hope and at La Parfaite Harmonie. This prevailing view that the Hon. Member just had, that it does not matter if you build schools, is a view that is held philosophically by the APNU/AFC, and if they were to get back in power, people would not get schools to put their children in. Currently we have spent, in the last four years, \$39 billion on infrastructure, 28 new secondary schools. I listened to my learned friend, Mister Hon. ‘Kazack’... [Mr. Ramson: Vincent.] Hon. Mr. Vincent Henry. This is what ‘Vincent’ said yesterday, my dearest friend, and he said this at the podium, he told this country yesterday, ‘we knew we needed schools at Karasabai and Maruranau, and we *startup* some classes. We *seh* we *gunn* build the school later.’ Ask him if he did not say that.

We are in Government, and within two years we began to build a school at Karasabai; one of seven that is going up in Region 9. Now, Mr. Speaker, I want you to hear that. For all of its existence, Region 9 has had four schools. They had St. Ignatius, which was built under the PNC, and then they had Annai Secondary School, Sand Creek Secondary School, and Aishalton Secondary School, which was built under the PPP/C without a drop of oil, and while we were struggling as a Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) country. That is four schools in the entire existence of secondary schools in Region 9. We are currently building seven schools in one five-year term of this ‘Irfaan Ali Government’. Mr. Speaker, I want you to understand what that means... [An

Hon. Member: (*Inaudible*)] She does not understand what it means – the honourable squatter at the Guyana Teachers’ Union (GTU), Ms. Coretta McDonald. She does not understand what it is. What it means is that children who did not have secondary spaces to sit in, they did not have a secondary school to go to, they did not have a laboratory (lab) to go and do their science work, they did not have a computer lab to learn their work, they are now getting schools. That is what it means; and we are no longer settling for teachers like yourself who are untrained and non-graduates. We are trying to make sure we train all the teachers, and we give them the chance to become graduates at the University of Guyana (UG).

We have built 60 nursery schools from scratch, eight dormitories, and 27 primaries. We are extending – major extensions: 22 secondary schools, 15 dormitories, 28 primaries, 10 nurseries, and we are going on. I want to say this: we will not stop until every single child in this country can sit in a discreet secondary school. You cannot come here and say you love the people of Region 7 but fail to tell the people through these speakers and microphones (mics) that we are currently putting up four schools in Region 7 – Jawalla, Phillipai, Issano, and Karrau. You cannot come here and fail to tell the people of this country that we are putting up three new secondary schools with dormitories (dorms) and teachers’ quarters in all the hinterland communities. In Region 8: one at Micobie, one at Monkey Mountain, and one at Kopinang. You cannot say you love the people of Region 1 and fail to tell them that we rebuilt the school that was burnt by arson – the Northwest Secondary School – and that we are currently building one at Matthew’s Ridge, one at Waramuri, one at Hosororo, and one at Kwebanna. Five new secondary schools in Region 1 when, for their entire existence, they have only had three.

Do we have challenges? We have challenges. We were just forced to terminate a contractor at Hosororo because... All these schools, by the way, were publicly tendered, in the newspapers and on the World Wide Web (www), and people were given a chance and evaluated as per law by the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB), and these contracts were awarded. We have challenges; we are dealing with human beings. We have contractors who are not doing what they are supposed to do. We are about to terminate one now. We terminated someone at Kwebanna, but we do not take five years to do it. They broke down St. Rose's High School – it is not in the hinterland – and were passing it whole day, every day. They broke it down in 2017; it went up last year. You left a whole generation of children in St. Rose's High School to be in a dilapidated place for five years, right in the centre of Georgetown. It was just without a conscience. Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Minister, with my conscience, I will need to give you five minutes to conclude.

Mr. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that my colleague be given much more time, obviously, but I am restrained to ask for her to have five minutes more.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Continue, Minister.

Ms. Manickchand: I think I have six minutes. Is that right, Mr. Speaker? We have the Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE). The Hon. Member spoke of trained teachers. When I came into Government in August, 2020, we had one CPCE and 16 satellites, and all were closed. Right now, we have a hundred and twenty-three learning sites, as a result of which... So this is the impact. That's the number of places. We *gah* tell *yuh* now *wah* is the impact. We were able to graduate 4,378 teachers over the last four years alone. There is the Hon. Member representing teachers saying that they are of low quality. All of them could beat her at any test we put them to write. These are the new sites in Region 1. Yesterday, my learned friend... and I like him because he is earnest. He seems to be interested in education – Mr. Ronald Cox. In Region 1, we have 33 centres; in Region 7, 20 centres; in Region 8, 20; in Region 9, 30 – the places they are most needed.

I want to turn to the University of Guyana because I believe people want to know about this. We spoke earlier because the Hon. Christopher Jones had raised very passionately and loudly about

how they had free education, and it was the PPP/C that took it away. However, I remember, that I read earlier from the World Bank Report... [An Hon. Member: *(Inaudible)*] The University of Guyana was conceived by Dr. Cheddi Jagan'; and it was conceived by Dr. Cheddi Jagan' when he could not imagine that there was oil in the country. It was held at the bottom house somewhere, so much so that Hon. Bheri Ramsarran reminds me frequently that it was called the Jagan Night School. So the PPP/C conceived of university education in this country, and were forced, when we were bankrupt as a country, to institute fees, when the World Bank, as one of the major financial institutions in the world that was helping us, had recommended that. I looked at the APNU/AFC Manifesto for 2015 and 2020 and in neither of those Manifestos did you promise free university education. So, do not come here now like a copycat and say you want to do it. You did not even promise it. We promised it. As a result of which, when the APNU/AFC had the best economic position, when they had \$90 billion more than we had in income, they hiked UG fees by 35%. Look, these are the articles and I will lay them over.

What is the PPP/C Government doing? We have declared that the University of Guyana is going to be tuition free for all. We have declared that there are going to be no facilities fees at the University of Guyana for any student. We have declared that those who have already paid for this academic year will get a refund for their second and third semesters. Those who have outstanding fees will be forgiven of that debt. That is what the PPP/C has done to advance tertiary education. Look at Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL): 29,758 scholars, Guyanese scholars, 21,000 of which are women, are studying in foreign universities at no cost to themselves because the PPP/C Government is standing it. Look at Get Ready for Opportunities to Work (GROW): GROW is for people who did not get a chance to finish CXC for whatever reason – because they did not have a school in their village; they did not get a chance to finish CXC. We have 28,825 people studying on GROW.

5.48 p.m.

I want to tell you the story, Mr. Speaker. There is a young girl that I met a few years ago. She is from the Essequibo Coast. She went to Aurora Secondary School. She came to town in 2014 by herself. She left her family and she worked at *Footsteps Store* for two years. Then she started working at the Ministry of Education in 2017. She has three siblings. She has to keep working; she had to keep working. She could not stop and go to the university. Who would pay her rent? Who

would feed her? So she continued working. She is going to graduate this year with a Bachelor of Business Administration in Tourism and Hospitality Management. I could not be prouder. We are going to lose her at the Ministry of Education. I will give her the wings to go because this is good for her. She works closely with me.

When we heard about discrimination, I will say this, and I will challenge you to prove me wrong: when I went into the Ministry of Education, I met a secretariat with 28 people and all I said was we cannot keep 28 people in my secretariat; the General Secretary is going to think I am a diva. Everyone could go to different parts of the Ministry. You decide who leaves. I did not let go of a single person who was hired by the APNU/AFC. They continue to be in my personal secretariat up to today. Let us compare what you did, what the APNU/AFC did, with the staff in my secretariat when I left in 2015. You fired people, you sent them into dusty corners, you changed their salary scale, and I could give you names if you want. That is your record. This is ours. This year we are going to be spending more than \$11 billion on the cash grant. The APNU/AFC's view – supported by the Chief Whip, my learned friend over there and the Hon. Member who spoke before me – of the 'Because We Care' cash grant is that it is a foolish waste of taxpayers' money. We do not hold that view. Every child in this country – red, black, blue, yellow, Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Georgetown or hinterland – will get the 'Because We Care' cash grant, which is \$55,000, which will inject \$11 billion into the pockets of parents. My friend spoke earlier about how the APNU/AFC introduced school feeding. In Region 6, two schools had school feeding. Now, 100% of the schools have school feeding.

I will wrap up now, Sir, and tell you that we have just shared out in the whole National Assembly a textbook list that we have given to each child. When Members come here and say they cannot support this Budget, they are essentially saying to all the young people of this country, we do not want you to have free university education. When you say you cannot support this Budget, you are saying to parents we will snatch again from you the 'Because We Care' cash grant. When you say you cannot support this Budget, you are taking away the children's breakfast. When you say you cannot support this Budget, you are taking away their textbooks. When you say you cannot support this Budget, you are taking away the transportation we are providing for them. When you say you cannot support the Budget, you are taking away all the Special Education Needs (SEN) classrooms and schools that we are currently building. When you say you cannot support the Budget, you are

taking away the libraries from children in schools. So go ahead and tell this nation, again, who you really are. They are listening. I thank you, Sir. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Now for the Hon. Member, Mr. Hemraj Rajkumar, former Minister of Tourism.

Mr. Rajkumar: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *Budget 2025* under the theme *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana* was presented to this honourable House on 17th January, 2025, by the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service.

It is no surprise that this year's budget is the largest in our country's history. The trend has always been that the current budget always exceeds that of the previous year. This 2025 Budget, totalling \$1.382 trillion, is 20.6% larger than *Budget 2024* and will be funded by revenues collected from taxes, sale of carbon credit, withdrawal from the Natural Resource Fund and borrowing. *Budget 2025*, like previous budgets under this Government, again places much more emphasis on public infrastructure development, while the elderly, poor and vulnerable are given next to nothing. We all expect that *Budget 2025* would be larger than *Budget 2024*. The ordinary Guyanese expected that after four years in the fastest growing economy in the world, and in a country receiving billions of US dollars in oil revenue, Government would have provided much more for them.

The 2025 Budget has been described as disappointing, confusing and misleading. There is no doubt that, since 2020, the average Guyanese person has been struggling with the high cost of living. The ordinary man is finding it difficult to make ends meet. The high cost of food, transportation and other necessities have been taking a heavy toll on the ordinary citizens. The Government is well aware of this. It is an embarrassment in a country with the fastest growing economy, with the billions received from oil sector, our poor and vulnerable is again handed pittance by this PPC/C Government. The Hon. Minister informed this House that, in 2022 and 2023, the Government had allocated \$5 billion to address the cost of living concerns, which was increased to \$7 billion in 2024, and now in 2025, \$9 billion. He explained that the money would be used to ease cost of living pressure in 2025, based on consultation with stakeholders. The question is, how would the money be used to ease cost of living pressure? We do not know how many persons benefitted in 2022, 2023 and 2024. It seems that there is no accountability of this money. It seems that the

Government must have foreseen that the increase in cost of living would be much higher in 2025 than in 2024 and the reason for the increase in the \$9 billion.

The PPP/C Government has \$9 billion to spend as they please, an avenue for funding support for the Government in this year's election. The Hon. Minister in his budget presentation boasted that this Government was able to double Old Age Pension in five years to \$41,000, and increased Public Assistance to \$22,000 per month. He compared this with the APNU/AFC Coalition's provision of \$20,500 for Old Age Pension and \$9,000 for Public Assistance when we left Office. We will recall that things were not as expensive as they are now and, of course, we did not have the abundance of oil revenue, as this Government now has. The 2019 Budget was \$3.7 billion. Today, the 2025 Budget surpassed \$1.3 trillion, backed by billions of dollars from oil revenue. Yet, this Government could only increase Old Age Pension by \$5,000 and Public Assistance by \$3,000 per month. This marginal increase cannot and will not make a significant impact on the lives of the elderly and the less fortunate in these times of continued high cost of living. Our dollar had greater purchasing power in 2020, when we left Office, than it has today.

The elderly and the unfortunate are disappointed with these measures announced by the Hon. Minister. The Hon. Minister announced that the Income Tax threshold increased to \$130,000 per month. This is a welcomed measure. He also informed that one parent will be allowed a non-taxable \$10,000 for each child per month. These measures are aimed to further increase disposable income for our citizens. How many persons will benefit from these measures? In order to benefit from the increase in the tax threshold, one has to be receiving in excess of \$130,000 per month. There are thousands of workers who will not benefit from this, since their salaries are \$100,000 and below *[inaudible]*. A parent of two children must receive a salary of at least \$150,000 per month before his or her disposal income can be increased by \$20,000. The thousands of persons in the lower end of the salary scale will not benefit from these measures. In order to combat increase of cost of living foreseen in 2025, Government is telling our citizens at the lower end of this salary scale that they have to work overtime and have a second job so that they can make ends meet. The first \$50,000 from overtime and the first \$50,000 from the second job will not be taxed. The ordinary Guyanese is told that they have to work longer and harder, so that they can make ends meet, not to get richer, but to make ends meet in this fast-growing oil economy.

Reading the Minister's presentation on *Budget 2025*, my mind went back to a novel I read some years ago, *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, the ordinary animals working all day, even Sundays, so that the pigs can have an enjoyable time. It has been argued that *Budget 2025*, like previous PPP/C budgets, focuses on people, and has equitable distribution of wealth to all Guyanese. This is far from reality of *Budget 2025*. This year, \$209.3 billion will be allocated to further develop roads and bridges infrastructure. Billions of dollars will be placed in the hands of the contractor class, the friends, the family and favourites of this Government. The 2025 Budget focuses on providing opportunities for and is designed to make the friends, the family and favourites of this Government much more richer than they are, while, on the other hand, our ordinary Guyanese are told that they have to work extra hours and have a second job to earn a living wage. This is the disparity of *Budget 2025*. It lacks balance and equality.

The Hon. Minister in his presentation, stated that the Government, with the aim of providing the best possible care for our citizens, a \$10,000 university healthcare voucher will be available to each person to help finance basic menus of health tests. The Minister also told us that in 2020, immediately after taking Office, set about to rebuild the health sector, aimed at leapfrogging what was otherwise incremental approach to increase the sector's capacity. After four years, and billions of dollars spent to increase the sector's capacity, the Government cannot provide basic health tests for our people. It was pointed out to us that there were improvements in the health sector, which include the establishment of diagnostic laboratory, dialysis centres in Regions 2, 3, 6 and 10, as well as Georgetown and along the east coast of Demerara. With the establishment of diagnosis laboratory, why is it that basic tests are not done at the government institutions? Is it that we no longer have the qualified personnel to perform these functions, or is it that we do not have the equipment and the basic materials for these tests?

Government acquired two power generation ships which, along with the Guyana Power and Light, Inc. (GPL) will meet the growing demands, until completion of the gas-to-energy project. The Guyanese public are treated to a removal of VAT on the purchase of electric generators. Is this a message that the Government is telling us, that we will experience extensive power outages in 2025, despite acquiring the service of two power generation ships? If we have the capacity to supply demand for electricity, then why are we encouraging our citizens to purchase generators by removing VAT? Is it that the power ships are incapable to supply the current demand of electricity?

We are promised that when the gas-to-energy project is completed, electricity costs will be reduced by 50%. This promise will not be fulfilled in 2025. So the people want to know when to expect this 50% reduction in their electricity cost. People in Region 2 want to know when their electricity bills will be reduced by half.

6.03 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, as we listen to the Hon. Minister delivering his *Budget 2025* presentation, one gets the impression that the shortcomings of this Government after four years of Office were caused by the APNU/AFC's term in Office from 2015 to 2020, and that the APNU/AFC did nothing useful at that time. The Hon. Minister seems to have a short and selective memory.

The Hon. Minister, describing the tourism sector in 2020, stated that, domestically, they have exacerbated five years of policy neglect and plunged the sector into unprecedented hardship. By April, 2020, the visitors' arrival plummeted, revenue declined to 46% and 30% of tourism work was jobless. However, just for the records, and for the reminding of the Hon. Minister and the Guyanese public, I have worked in the Ministry responsible for tourism for a few months. When the APNU/AFC Government took Office a comprehensive plan was crafted to develop tourism in Guyana. By 2019, we had won six international awards. It was the APNU/AFC that established Guyana as a tourism destination. In 2018, we received 183,000 visitors injecting approximately \$62.6 billion in our economy, being the second largest export earner at that time. More than the \$13 billion earned in 2024, tourism contributed 22,000 jobs in 2018. The Hon. Minister, Ms. Waldron, told us that in 2024, 2,000 jobs were created in the hospitality sector. Four years after and the capacity to increase employment has not increased. There was indeed a drop in the arrivals in 2020, but before the lockdown 86,000 visitors came to Guyana. The Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) was the cause of the decline in the tourism sector in 2020. No one can doubt that tourism under the APNU/AFC was on an upward trajectory. We had developed a comprehensive plan for the tourism sector, which included the establishment and development of sports and agri-tourism along with the hospitality institute. We must not forget that.

We have been accused of neglecting GuySuCo. We must not forget that the APNU/AFC, during its term in Office, would have injected over \$32 billion to GuySuCo in an attempt to make it viable. We in Region 2 will not forget the construction and the commission of the 5.4 megawatts power

plant at Anna Regina by the APNU/AFC Government. We still enjoy the Supenaam Waterfront which was built by the Coalition Government at the cost of approximately \$144 million. We cannot forget the Golden Beach Boulevard in the town of Bartica, built by the APNU/AFC Government in promoting tourism and local leisure.

The modern Moruca Bridge in the Moruca subregion was built by the APNU/AFC at the request of the residents there. We must not forget that too. The Hon. Vincent Henry reminded us that, in the town of Lethem, there is an asphalted road built by the APNU/AFC. This too we should not forget. The Guyanese citizens will recall that the APNU/AFC Government had promised and delivered on the promise of the reduction of value added tax (VAT) and the removal of VAT on food and other essential items. The APNU/AFC reduced the 16% VAT that this PPP/C Government placed on the people of Guyana, and we removed it, we reduced it, sorry, to 14%, bringing relief to all of our citizens. We also removed VAT on food and other essential items, the reduction of VAT was as a result of the request of the Guyanese people. We must not forget that as well. The Hon. Minister, Dr. Singh, should have considered reducing VAT to at least 12% in an effort to ease the cost of living pressure faced by our people today. This as a measure would have benefitted all of our citizens. We had promised to establish passport, birth certificate and licence offices in Berbice, Essequibo and Linden. I am proud to say that those promises were fulfilled under the APNU/AFC Government. We must not forget that as well.

Despite not having a large budget and excessive revenue at our disposal, the APNU/AFC Government spent on infrastructure whilst balancing it with human development. Over the past year, I have been calling for tertiary education to be made free again. This year, the right to free education will be restored and our students will be relieved of the burden placed on their shoulders by this PPP/C Government. My hope is that more students take the opportunity to educate themselves.

Since 2022, I have been making a call for treated water for all the residents living along the Essequibo Coast. We were told that the station at Onderneeming would have been completed, and residents would have received treated water at the end of December, 2024. We are still waiting for the service. We are now told that the water treatment plant will be constructed at Charity to Walton Hall. To this date, we are still waiting for the commencement of this project.

I have been asked by some citizens to report to this House that, for almost two years, we have completed payment for house lots at Charity. Since payment was made, no communication to these persons as to when they would receive their house lots. These persons are waiting.

I was also asked to enquire from the Hon. Minister, to explain what he meant when he stated that eligible persons with National Insurance Scheme (NIS) contributions ranging from 500 to 740 contributions will get a grant depending on the year their last contribution was made. The person would like to know what the cut-off year is to be eligible for the grant. We know that our hardworking public servants are to receive an 8% increase in salary this year, what we do not know is when they will receive their increase in salary. What is preventing this Government from paying the increase from 1st January? The people need money to survive in these times of high cost of living. Money has been budgeted so pay them now.

There are at least two things that this Government should have done to mitigate the anticipated and continued rise in the cost of living. One was to reduce VAT to 12% and to do whatever it takes to increase the spending power of our dollar. These are my observations and comments on *Budget 2025*. I cannot support this budget in its current form. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

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

Sitting suspended at 6.11 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 7.07 p.m.

Please be seated. Yes, Members, the bell worked. Even the Minister of Education showed up. So, we ended at 6.11 p.m. and at 7.07 p.m., I invite the Hon. Minister of Amerindian Affairs, the Hon. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai, to make her presentation.

Minister of Amerindian Affairs [Ms. Campbell-Sukhai]: Good afternoon. Thank you for allowing me to contribute to the *Budget 2025* debate. As I stand before this honourable House today, I extend my unwavering support to *Budget 2025*. Let me immediately underscore the leadership role of the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, Dr. Ashni Singh, and his dedicated and disciplined team whose efforts and

contributions ensured an early presentation of *Budget 2025*, under the theme: *A Secure, Prosperous and Sustainable Guyana*.

A budget which further enhances and expands on the PPP/C Government's achievements since its return in August, 2020. Recalling the battle of the People's Progressive Party/Civic to save our country from the clutches of a group of politicians bent on illegally squatting in Government, which threatened democracy, creating instability and later, after the elections, before the results were out, Guyanese remember the drama, the fiasco that ensued at the Ashmin's Building, the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) Headquarters and right here in the Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC), where the recount took place, also, in Guyana's court and, of course, in the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ). The CCJ ruled and vindicated the People's Progressive Party/Civic as the winner, the legitimate leader of government, while APNU/AFC was relegated to the opposition benches. Yesterday, the Hon. Member, Mr. Vincent Henry, claimed that APNU/AFC brought back democracy. Whatever his motive for such claims, the record must be set straight and was set straight by my Colleague, the Hon. Charlie. The restoration of democracy was only possible by the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic continues to advance a consultative and inclusive democracy, giving and sustaining hope to people – to Guyanese people to ordinary people. The budget is fundamentally strong on transitioning and modernising Guyana. It presents policies for stimulating investment opportunities and allocating financial resources for expansion in every sector, and, yes, to further address and improve the lives of every category of our population. To do so the path to a better Guyana is manifested in significant investment to benefit the private sector industry, *et cetera*. Infrastructure and other transformative projects take precedence in this period, such as the new four-lane highways being constructed, the new Harbour Bridge, the Gas-to-Shore Project, the opening up of new housing schemes which allows for the boom in the construction industry and, of course, in the advancement of Silica City.

Advancing food security as a nation is critical and a priority. The investment in agriculture and food security is for the long term. Agro-business and becoming a major supplier of food for the future and, of course, Guyana is looking to also become the supplier of food worldwide. The establishment of agro-processing facilities, newer investments which will lead to supporting food security and modernising the way we do agriculture.

7.14 p.m.

I also want to allude and support the budget for its continued support to ensure that the sugar industry is not destroyed and that the families that are engaged in this critical industry their livelihoods too are secured, and that their children will also have a secure family environment and a secure future that will allow them to enjoy the benefits of our country.

On the measures to address individual benefits, *Budget 2025* has returned the Because We Care cash grant. Today, this budget will ensure that children in both private and public schools will receive \$50,000, in addition to the school uniform assistance, which will then take this to \$55,000. The PPP reinstated this cash grant much to the delight of families and, of course, the children. There are stories of children feeling very joyous when their parents receive, on their behalf, this cash grant, wanting to even feel the dollars. This is because, for them, it means that any limitation the family would have had with respect to sending them to school, the assistance was very critical. The budget also allows for an increase in social assistance, an increase in pension, the disability grant and, of course, the more recent grant for any Guyanese 18 years and over. Only under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, the love for people will be this profound. Guyana's children will face a sustainable and bright future as the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government continues to invest in their future, from the cradle into their future.

Many stories and many opinions on how this will happen have already been told in this House and I want to add to them. We have to see the investment in our children starting from the unborn child. Pregnant mothers, today, have support in the health system. They have support in the construction of maternity waiting rooms. They will have support for the child when the child is birthed. A grant will then be provided annually, a school grant to children who are registered in the schools. They will receive free textbooks and free tuition at the school, both primary and secondary, and, of course, the most recent measure announced by our Government to eradicate fees at university, and so too, fees at the skill and technical training institutions. This demonstrates the priority the People's Progressive Party/Civic places on the human capital of our country. The APNU/AFC wasted the opportunity to develop Guyana's human resources in the term when they spent 30 years in Office and the most recent opportunity they received when they served between 2015 and 2020.

Youth development – in every budget there arises the issue of who dismissed the CSOs. The CSO Programme is a novel programme that allows young Amerindians between the ages of 18 to 35 to have a second chance in their community, contributing to community development in a responsible manner. I want also to say that, over the years of 2015 to 2020, we were accused of engaging young people because we wanted a political red brigade. This is a sorry state of thinking by the Opposition because the young persons, or the young individuals who are part and parcel of the CSO programme are nominated and selected by the village – by the village council. The Ministry of Amerindian Affairs has no role in selecting the young people who are participating in this programme. The budget supports job creation, training, empowerment and building capacities for young people. In a nutshell it means Government investment in human capital this time focusing on youth. We have focused on children, on students and now we are focusing on youth.

The APNU/AFC, while in Office, destroyed the options for young Amerindians. When they were in Office during that period, it was in June, 2015, that the programme was abandoned. I want to clear the air on this allegation that we dismissed them. It was election time; it was campaigning time. Our Government, through a Cabinet decision, ensured that the young CSOs or the Amerindian youths were paid up to April. The incoming Government, whether it be the PPP/Civic or the APNU/AFC, would have had the responsibility to take the programme forward. The PPP/Civic was not in Office in May, neither were we in Office in June. Maybe the first part of May because the elections were held just shortly after the first week. That programme was destroyed. The APNU/AFC took away, for the entire five years and a few months, a maximum of \$3.6 billion from Amerindian young people's pockets. This \$3.6 billion was the investment that spanned the five years of any term.

When we came back into Office in August, 2020, our manifesto made a promise that we would reinstate this programme, and we did reinstate it. We put back into the pockets of young Amerindians more than \$3.5 billion in stipend. We were also able, because we came back, to begin to execute and implement the other component of the programme, which was the training component. We spent more than \$114 million to train young CSOs. The majority of the CSOs that supported village development and community development did not remain in that position because many went on to various other levels of activities. I am very proud of all of those who have moved on from the CSO programme into better job environments. I want to point out here,

for example, in Mahdia, the Mayor, an Amerindian, a young Amerindian woman and the Deputy Mayor of Mahdia, both females, were once former CSOs. This is at the leadership level. They are taking hold of leadership in their own region. The majority of young Amerindian leaders who were elected at the village level, in a democratic way, also emerged from the CSO Programme. We have, for example, Ms. Collette Jonny, the current Toshao of Tiperu, who was a CSO. Ms. Cinta Samuels from Kariako in Region 1, moved on to be a Community Health Worker (CHW) and today she is now a trained nurse. Ms. Colleen Agard from Kimbia has moved into the education sector as a teacher. These are just a sample of the many more such success stories. Time will not permit me to read a long list of which CSO went where and in which sector they are now serving.

Yesterday, the Hon. Member, Mr. Henry, inferred that the People's Progressive Party/Civic dismissed 2,500 young participants in the HEYS project, which was established by the APNU/AFC. I want to inform this House that the HEYS Programme came to an end in July, 2019, and a letter was sent to the Ministry of Finance. I hope one day the Ministry of Finance can share that letter. I was looking for it but, of course, we were not there to manage the correspondence when they were in there. A letter was sent to the Ministry of Finance, saying to the Minister, then Minister Jordan, that the funding for CSO was depleted and that they would retain only three staff up to July, 2019, to prepare the final report. My experience when I entered that Ministry in 2020, the three... [Ms. Teixeira: *(Inaudible)*]

August, 2020. The three retained HEYS technical support staff were still there and they stayed on until December, 2020, when they then... The programme was totally not in operation. The People's Progressive Party/Civic Government could not have dismissed the HEYS. In fact, when you peruse the Auditor General's Report of 2017, the Auditor General, in that report, noted that \$865 million under the HEYS Project was unaccounted for or could not... There was no evidence that showed this money was spent for the purpose it was allocated.

I am saying this because I have lived this experience in my Ministry. When I hear the Members of the other side try to dab dirty mud onto the PPP/Civic, I need to clear the air. During the APNU/AFC period, I also want to address the issue of land tenure security and land rights for Amerindians. There is no doubt that the precondition for independence was that Amerindians would not be left landless. It is a fact that in the 29:01 Act, 74 villages were listed with full

description. This is because sometime in the 1967-1968 period, a land commission was established to examine land rights and land occupation by the then-first people.

7.29 p.m.

That report recommended the area and the location for occupation of residential, fishing, farming, gathering, agriculture, *et cetera*. Yes, land titling began way before we were in Office. However, what I must disclose to this House is that the then People's National Congress (PNC) did not make any or did not put any effort or priority on surveying those lands. It was a mere description by aerial survey, bounded by natural boundaries. When we came into the Office, we were told that only one village, Orealla-Siparuta, was demarcated. We have looked high and low – the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission (GLSC) has looked high and low for the demarcation or the cadastral survey for that village. It has never been found. It was the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, under Dr. Cheddi Jagan, Mrs. Janet Jagan, and the Hon. Vice President, now Vice President, when he was President, that an annual sum was placed in the budget for land titling to be addressed. Even though there was no oil money, even though we inherited a bankrupt economy and country, we in the PPP/Civic ensured that, each year, money was allocated for titling and demarcation.

Today, in 2013, the Kingdom of Norway, the Government of Guyana, the Hon. Finance Minister, and I sat together in this building and signed on to the project, the Amerindian Land Titling Project, which then accelerated land titling. As I am on the topic, I want to share what occurred. I am pleased to announce that, from 2013 to 2015, a number of villages were titled and demarcation started. During 2015 to 2020, the APNU spent \$2.289 billion to address land titling and everyone knows the media reporting on the then Vice President who concluded that he was unable to title any lands for Amerindian for three years. From 2020 to 2024, we spent \$4.6 billion, and I will read our record. We titled Tasserene and Kangaruma, Mashabo, Capoey, St. Monica, Mainstay, Yupukari, Four Miles, Paramakatoi, Arau, Hobodeia extension, Hotoquai extension, Red Hill extension, Akawini extension, and Moco Moco extension. We concluded Sawariwau, Karasabai, and every year since we have gone back into the Office, from 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024, at the National Tshaos Council (NTC), this Government, the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, hands out land titles. That is what a working Government is all about. We work for the people. We work tirelessly for the people, and, of course, we have made significant strides. It

is a work in progress, and we still have villages who are anxious with us. Who are anxious to get their titling out. I want to also say that we could have done much more, but our Government was faced with two years of COVID-19, and huge floods that surveys could not be completed on time. I assure you that this year again when we have the National Toshaos Council, we will be handing out more than zero.

I want to turn to some investment made in the Amerindian community, and how it played out with us and the APNU/AFC. From the period 2015 to 2019, the budget, our capital budget addressed 523 projects for a total of \$9,370,843 billion. Mr. Speaker, 523 projects funded by the capital budget in four years. Let us look at what happened in the APNU/AFC period, from 2015 to 2019, not counting 2020, which was the election year. There were 218 projects, and they spent \$3.4 billion. Presidential grants – projects under presidential grants, our Government from 2020 to 2024 did 1,140 projects. The APNU, in a similar period, did 857 projects, which was accumulated over five years. For CSO Training – under the APNU we spent \$3.2 billion, as I said before. For training, we spent \$411 million and trained 1,565 young people under the CSO programme. For those two categories that I have just listed, under the APNU/AFC, nil-nil, nil-nil. Investment in other projects – we did 681. This is the investment fund. We spent \$1.7 billion on 681 projects across the hinterland. Under APNU, nil-nil. We also had \$3 billion addressing commitments that came out of the National Toshaos Council. We did 492 projects and spent \$2.5 billion. At the National Toshaos Council, APNU spent nil to address concerns and commitments and so they had no cost.

In land transportation – under the budget for the period that we are speaking about, 2020 to 2024, the PPP/Civic provided 226 vehicles: All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), pickups, trucks, and different modes of transportation. We spent \$1 billion. Under APNU, from 2015 to 2019, they used a mere 33, 33 modes of transportation. Water transport – in four years we delivered 269 boats and outboard engines to Amerindian and hinterland riverine communities. Under the five years with APNU, only 62. Tractors and implements – over the period, we delivered 204 tractors. Under APNU, five tractors. This is a working Government, a Government that is investing in Indigenous people's development. We are not speaking here about lip service. We are not making promises in the manifestos that we fail to address. The People's Progressive Party/Civic Government has

completed its Manifesto promises to the Indigenous people, all that was in the Manifesto, and we have rolled out additional support...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, for you to give us more, you need an extension.

Ms. Teixeria: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five more minutes to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister Teixeira. Go ahead.

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Speaker, I had the intention of sharing with this House by reading and delivering what else we have done, naming the projects and naming the villages that benefited, but let me take the time to speak a little bit about *Budget 2025*. Under *Budget 2025*, the CSO programme will benefit from \$1.5 billion; presidential grant \$530 million; hinterland scholarships \$127 million; the National Toshaos Council (NTC) conference \$150 million; the hosting of heritage \$102 million; investment in land and water transport \$307 million; and Amerindian Land Titling \$650 million.

I will now turn to what are some of the projects these allocations will address. I will go through them very quickly because I understand, and I know the time is limited. Communities have asked us to fund shade houses. Those communities in Region 1 are and I will read just a few: Eclipse Falls, Warapoka, Hobodeia, Red Hill, Arukamai Manawarin, Kariako, Santa Cruz, and others have asked for shade houses. We do not determine what we want to give, they do a village consultation, come up with their priorities and we address their priorities. We have a long list for Region 1.

For Region 2 shade houses – Mainstay, Mashabo, Akawini, Wakapoa, Capoey, Kabakaburi, Tapakuma, and Bethany are villages that have asked for shade houses, fish farms, pepper cultivation, fruit farm, *et cetera*. I can go on and on with how much support we are providing to Indigenous villages. This is so that they too can develop. They too can have economic activities that create employment and increase income.

I want to also tell you that for food security we ensure that we work within certain parameters, parameters of food security, infrastructure, tourism, economic projects, women projects, youth

projects, and social and productive projects. I also want to mention before the time is up, the issue of the Low-Carbon Development Strategy and, of course, the carbon credit revenue that we have been given the authority through resolutions signed by all the leaders at the last NTC accepting this mechanism. Thus far, this Government has transferred to 248 Amerindian villages a total of \$9.6 billion which will address additional investments in their villages. Today, we speak about investment and I want to draw your attention that it is not only about farming now, but it is also about investment in mining, investment in forestry, and investment in quarrying. Over the last two years, Amerindian villages have invested in medium-scale mining, not necessarily only in gold mining but in other precious stones and, of course, quarry aggregate, contributing to the investment our country is making in the infrastructure sector in roads.

7.44 p.m.

Many villages today are also investing in upgrading roads to concrete in Region 1, Region 9 and Region 8. I know my time is limited but I have to speak about Region 8. The Ministry of Public Works is doing many road works, and it has given the roadworks to communities. We have community participation. There is over \$2 billion for roadworks in Region 8, Sub-District Two. In Sub-District One, which is the North Pakaraimas, the Ministry of Public Works is enhancing and upgrading the roads from Karasabai to Paramakatoi. In Kato, we are revamping and upgrading the airstrip. We have moved from giving Amerindian villages \$100 million in 2020 for community participation projects for road maintenance to giving \$315 or \$316 million in the hands of the people. This is so that they can benefit, not only through the carbon credits, Presidential Grant Funds or any other supplemental from this honourable House during the budget period and the year, but also from actively participating in ensuring that their villages, wherever they are, are benefiting and improving. I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Ms. Campbell-Sukhai: Mr. Speaker, I commend this budget to the House for a smooth passage.
[Applause]

Mr. Speaker: It is now time for the Hon. Member, Mr. Sears.

Mr. Sears: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I first want to say this: the previous presenter, the Hon. Member, Ms. Campbell-Sukhai, did a terrible job at representing our Indigenous peoples. She utilised the majority of her time comparing what the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), the People's National Congress (PNC) and the People's Progressive Party/Civic have done and all sorts of things. We wanted to hear in this House what benefits are to come in 2025 for the Indigenous peoples.

The Hon. Member failed to say how we are going to preserve our Indigenous heritage – our first people. The Hon. Member failed to say how we are going to ensure that the languages survive the next generation. The Hon. Member failed to say to our Indigenous people what guaranteed future they have under this Administration. I can assure you that they do not have a good future. The only future they will have for the benefit of the generations to come is under the Coalition. First of all, throughout today, all we have been hearing about is the legacy of the PPP/C. We heard about the PNC way back down to 1964. I say to the Guyanese people here this evening, as I stand on this floor, that the young people of this country are not necessarily concerned about history. We are concerned about our future, and the future does not look bright under the People's Progressive Party/Civic. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It is an honour to deliver my contribution to this debate on Guyana's national budget for 2025. This moment is particularly significant as it marks my final contribution on this side of the House, because we will be going into Government come the next elections. As we look ahead, we are steadfast in our resolve to reclaim our country and prepare to assume our rightful place in government. Before I begin, allow me to commend the staff of the Ministry of Finance and various Ministries who contributed to the compilation of this budget. Sadly, despite their efforts, under the guidance of the PPP/C, *Budget 2025*, like every other budget, fails to deliver a quality life for all Guyanese. It falls short of fostering pride among our citizens and thoroughly addressing their needs. Instead, this budget is riddled with scepticism and criticisms. These shortcomings are consistent with the PPP/C's lack of effective consultation and inclusion.

It reflects a heavy-handed approach to governance that continues to plague local authorities, particularly our Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs), Municipalities and Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs). Democracy is becoming a growing farce in this country. Now is the time to rise against tyranny, nepotism and favouritism. We, as Guyanese, cannot afford to allow

our history to rewrite itself – a history marked with failed projects, gross marginalisation and venality. As one of the youngest Members of Parliament (MPs) in this House, I refuse to stand on the sideline and do nothing about it and I am sure our Guyanese brothers and sisters will not. As a son of the soil, unlike the Hon. Prime Minister Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips, Mr. Todd, Mr. Hamilton and Mr. McCoy, I am a proud Lindener. I hail from the heart of Guyana, Region 10. Linden, by now, should have been that of a city status. I know that all five names I have called are sitting Ministers who hail from Linden. Linden should be in a better position than it is currently. Yet, I must say this here: they care about Linden so much, they have been in Government for over 27 years, and we have not seen a major, successful, transformative project in Region 10. Yet, they parade themselves weekend after weekend. The Hon. Prime Minister comes into Linden making a set of noises with sirens and flashing lights, but you all are not delivering what the people are asking for.

Mr. Speaker, contrary to what the PPP/C reports, youth unemployment in the Upper Demerara/Berbice is very high. The greatest resource, as we are fully aware, is that of human capital. We need to invest more in our young people. Yet, the Government is embracing...

[**Mr. McCoy:** *(Inaudible)*] Hon. Mr. McCoy, you are hurting my ears. Fix your lace front. Mr. Speaker, this current Administration embraces hustle rather than employment. They embrace a ten-day job rather than a full-time job. The Guyanese youths are tired of this, Mr. Speaker. In 2024, Guyana's unemployment rate stood at an average of 14.62%. This figure is likely inaccurate because we have an influx of migrants in our country. I dare the Hon. Minister, Mr. Hamilton, to tell us what his real plan is for our young people in Guyana. Let us hear from the Hon. Mr. Ramson Jr. Tell us what more you are doing for the young people in Guyana. The young people need proper representation, and that representation comes from this side of the House. We heard fantastic plans from Mdm. Flue-Bess earlier and we will ensure that those plans come into place when we get into Government later this year.

The labour force is in dire need of revamping. The demand for skilled workers is on the rise owing to the construction boom. Case in point, when we look at the Wismar-Mackenzie Bridge, how many Guyanese or Lindeners are employed on that landmark project? This is the project that the PPP/C continues to claim even though the feasibility study was done under the APNU/AFC. We were well on our way to getting that project completed. How many Chinese are working there?

How many Latinos are working there? We see the same thing happening along the Linden to Lethem Road, which is currently in its first phase. Greater representation is needed and the PPP/C is not doing it. The Opposition continues to welcome development because we love our people. We welcome infrastructure improvements. We welcome bridges and roads, but not at the expense of Guyanese. Guyanese must be put first – not placed on a cheap labour line or hidden behind the pretext that they are unskilled. That means more training and retooling needs to be done.

I was hoping to hear from the Hon. Ms. Manickchand about how she intends to retool the Government Technical Institute (GTI), the Linden Technical Institute (LTI) and the other technical institutes across the country. We did not hear about how much money is going to be pumped into those institutes. It is evident that this Government does not believe in vocational education. They do not believe in technical education, which is driving the development of this country. I want to say this here ... **[Ms. Manickchand: Little boy, if you do not have anything to do, sit.]**

Of course, that is reflective of yourself. Look at the Guyana Technical Education Examination (GTTEE), which hundreds of students from across this country write every year. Do you know what? It is not even accredited; that says a lot. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on accreditation. One does not want to go to school for two years just to collect a piece of paper; one wants to be employed.

I will go further to share with our Guyanese brothers, and I hope they are listening. Remittances have historically played a significant role in Guyana's economy – MoneyGram and Western Union, of course. In 2020, remittance inflow accounted for approximately 8% of the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). **[Mr. McCoy: You said the same thing last year.]** I am happy that you are paying attention. In 2022, Guyana received over \$510 million in personal transfers. It is alarming to know that in this fastest-growing economy, with a \$1.3 trillion budget right now, remittances stand at 17% or contribute to 17% of this country's GDP. Now, as my good friend, Ms. Fernandes, would say, trickle-down economics does not exist in this country. Now, while the Government is splurging a lot of money all over the place, the small man is not feeling it. That is why they are lined up, day after day, trying to collect their little remittance from these services. You cannot go to the market with US\$50; you cannot pay rent with that and you cannot send your children to school with just that. There is more that needs to be done and this budget does not reflect the needs of the people.

There is hope. A changing tide is coming. They will come to this honourable House and say that they are cushioning the economy by distributing cash grants. Might I say, Sir, it is the same PPP/C Regime that disagreed with the Opposition's position of direct cash transfers. The citizens have racked up so much debt with Courts Guyana and bank loans. Some of them will even die before they receive this cash grant. Guess what? When the cash grant was announced, many of them went into debt because they were expecting to get a little something before Christmas. Do you know what? They still owe Courts; they still owe rent; they still owe Singers Guyana Incorporated and other bills. Just the other day, the learned Attorney General said that should the recipients pass away before collecting the cash grants, the beneficiaries will be able to collect it. I must say that the Attorney General is a see-far man because he is anticipating that this cash grant is not coming anytime soon. As the PPP/C continues to shift goals, Guyanese are weary of the fluffs and buffs.

Let us turn our attention to public works. Just last year, billions of dollars in contracts were signed by small contractors across Guyana. In Upper Demerara/Berbice, of course, many PPP/C loyalists got contracts, and even some first-time contractors got contracts. We welcome this. I must report to this honourable House that the residents of Region 10 are disgusted with the lethargic approach being taken when it comes to the completion of these projects. We were expecting it before Christmas, and then we heard that it would have been by the new year. The roads are in a mess. May I ask the Hon. Bishop Edghill who is going to construct the driveway entrance from those roads, and where are the drains? Mr. Speaker, let me tell you something. Let me tell the House something, as a matter of fact. Contract awards undoubtedly are being used as a political tool, just as how cybercrime is being used to silence naysayers who criticise the Government and its affairs. First-time contractors are happy and disappointed at the same time for two things: they continue to ask questions such as – why was I not considered over the last four years for a contract? Why now, heading into elections, are they giving us contracts?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I need to stop you there for the Hon. Minister Teixeira, to move the motion for us to go beyond 8.00 p.m. to complete our business for today.

Suspension of Standing Order No.11

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Order No.11 be suspended to enable this sitting of the National Assembly to continue with its business beyond 8.00 p.m.”

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

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you for the reminder, Mr. Speaker. I wish to ask the House to support our continuing our debate past the hour of 8:00 p.m. Thank you.

7.59 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. MP, you may continue.

Mr. Sears: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. In Generation Z’s term, let me share some tea. Some 90% of the budgetary allocation for capital projects is awarded to 10% of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic’s (PPP/C) families, friends and favourites and 10...

Mr. Speaker: Do you have a study to show that? Be careful.

Mr. Sears: Yes. I will lay it over.

Mr. Speaker: You will have to lay it over.

Mr. Sears: Yes. I have no problem with that, Sir. Some 10% of the budgetary allocation...

Mr. Speaker: Before I allow you to continue, at least quote the source of that survey.

Mr. Sears: [Mr. Datadin: What is your source?] I would say it is artificial intelligence (AI) but... I am just joking about that. This is based on what I had calculated over the last couple of years, in terms of budgetary allocation. It is right in the budgetary allocation.

Mr. Speaker: I have stopped the clock. As an MP who is looking to come back and go on the Opposite side, I want to let you know that there was a particular person who quoted some figures and was sent to the Committee of Privileges. Bishop Edghill?

Minister of Public Infrastructure [Bishop Edghill]: Sir, (*inaudible.*)

Mr. Speaker: Okay. If you cannot...you know. I will suggest you move on.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Speaker... [Mr. Walton-Desir: It is based on our calculation.] Based on our calculation, the majority of the contracts are being awarded, an average of a large number, to the PPP/C's families, friends and favourites, while a smaller number is awarded to a larger group of people. This basically says to us here in this honourable House that the PPP/C continues to look after themselves, rather than these first-time contractors they so care about. Everything that the PPP/C touches falls apart. When we look at Region 10, the call centre, Midas Business Processing Outsourcing, through which they announced 1,000 jobs for Lindeners and young people. What happened? It never surpassed 150. Right now, it has been transferred to Prochant which basically has just about 35 persons. What has happened to the thousands of jobs that were promised?

The Bamia Primary School continues to be a burning issue. Imagine after five years, this school has still not been handed over to the Regional Democratic Council. In relation to the Wiruni Secondary School, I believe the Hon. Minister, Ms. Manickchand, catfished the residents there because the building being constructed looks in no way close to the architect's sketch.

We have been hearing all day from the Hon. Charles Ramson. Mr. Ramson, what is going on with the Kwakwani swimming pool and the money that was allocated towards it? In terms of Kwakwani, let us talk a little bit about that. The Hon. Mark Phillips, back in 2020, commissioned a 900-kilowatt (kw) generator for Kwakwani Utilities Incorporated (KUI) and guess what? Today, we are having constant blackouts. This is not Georgetown. This is Kwakwani. Electricity is free.

When we look at the Waterfront Road, Hon. Bishop Edghill, why is it not completed? Even though the mobilisation money was granted to the contractor, no work has begun.

I now turn my attention to the Hon. Oneidge Walrond. What is the status of our industrial estate that you have boasted about and we are willing to accept? What is the update on that?

In terms of food security, the Hon. Mustapha boasted about the Government and what it has been doing in terms of agro-processing. We have an agro-processing plant in Linden and guess what? Two blenders and a cake mixer. That is not good enough.

When she talks about the promises of potable water, the Hon. Susan Rodrigues, my good friend, would normally say we have been delivering 100% potable water to the entire Linden. Where is it?

The sum of \$150 million was allocated – and this is in reference to the 2023 Budget – to the Tacama wharf to aid in, of course, the agriculture sector. I visited that site just a couple of days ago and that does not look like \$150 million. It looks like \$15 million. I am asking the Government to be accountable for the taxpayer's money.

In terms of house lots, the Government came here and said that they had given out 30,000 house lots or how many thousands of house lots. Mr. Speaker, guess what? A lot of those allottees or those persons who were given lots are still looking for their lots. I ask the Hon. Minister Croal to look into this. There is no allocation for the completion of Millie's Hideout to Sandhills Road. This Government is not serious about food security since a lot of the lands at Millie's Hideout focus extremely on agriculture. Let me go further. There is no incentive to attract meaningful investment in Linden and the subregion right now. I turn my attention to the Hon. Vickram Bharrat.

Mr. Speaker: Before you turn your attention to him, I turn the time's attention to the Chief Whip.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Chief Whip. Hon. Member, you may continue.

Mr. Sears: Of course, it was reported in this House that, through the efforts of Bosai Minerals and also First Bauxite, we are exporting millions of tonnes of bauxite. We continue to be bashed on this side of the House about the failings of Russian Aluminium (RUSAL), but I want to make it clear to the Guyanese people and those who live in the area of Aroaima, Hururu and Kwakwani that our government stood with the people, with the workers at RUSAL because they raised an issue of being underpaid. If this Government is so good, why is it taking so long, Hon. Vickram Bharrat, to find a new investor in Aroaima? There is much more to be desired when it comes to this budget.

Let us turn our attention, really quickly, to tourism. The Hon. Minister spoke about the country's contribution, in terms of tourism, amounting to over \$13 billion, primarily owing to the hospitality sector. Despite that fact, the PPP/C continues to miss the mark in effectively training and preparing workers in this sector to effectively deliver. We need to continue to focus heavily on training, and might I add, we are still awaiting that hospitality school. I believe a different approach might have to be taken and I am hoping that the Hon. Minister would consider...or, in fact, we will implement when we get into Government. We have to decentralise training so that it reaches the people who need it the most. The people are saying that the hotel industry in Georgetown, along the East Bank, and possibly the East Coast, needs to benefit from that first.

The APNU/AFC, when we get into government, would be focusing on developing a *niche* tourism offering, which focuses on ecotourism and cultural heritage, *et cetera*. We must strengthen our infrastructure, not only accommodation and digital creativity but also focus on our transportation network. Guyana must be marketed better to the world. We must not be known as a transshipment point and whatever. We must push our tourism product to the max. It must go all across the world. More investment needs to be made. We need to strengthen our policy and regulation. More tax incentives must be given to attract investors in the tourism and hospitality sector. We must also diversify revenue streams with a focus on domestic tourism. We need to have more engagements at various tour and trade expos across the world as well. Mr. Speaker, greater support from this Government is needed. Sadly, we are not getting that, but we will definitely correct it.

Mr. Speaker, as I prepare to close, I must share this here very quickly. When it comes to good governance, it is disheartening to know that our Hon. Minister, Ms. Parag, fiddles in the business of local authorities. The subject Minister must respect democracy and it is a bottom-up approach. Why are we fiddling in the affairs of the Linden Mayor and Town Council? It is unacceptable. The PPP/C embraces bad governance. That is why at the Regional Democratic Council, there are still two vacancies for Assistant Regional Executive Officers (AREOs) and a lone Deputy Regional Executive Officer (DREO) was sent away. Now, it is just the REO remaining. We ask that these vacancies be filled to allow for better and greater accountability. The Regional Tender Board is expired. We need a new Regional Tender Board now. There is no board at the Linden Hospital Complex. The REO serves as the Regional Health Officer (RHO) and the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the hospital. Could that be right? *Mek it mek* sense, Mr. Speaker. With regard to the

Linen Enterprise Network Incorporated (LEN), the sum of \$300 million is locked away in a coffer. The people need the money so that they can expand their businesses.

In conclusion, it is time Guyanese open up their eyes. It is time to wake up, Hon. Ms. Manickchand. It is time for Guyanese to unite and take back our country, take charge of our destiny and take charge of our future. The PPP/C's governance is marked by poor planning and exclusionary practices. While the country has seen significant economic opportunities through our oil sector and oil resources, Guyanese argue that these benefits have not been equitably distributed. Addressing these governance challenges will require greater transparency, stronger institutions and a commitment to inclusive and sustainable development. Mr. Speaker, at this time, I cannot support *Budget 2025* in its current form. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member, Mr. Sears. Now for the Hon. Member, Dr. Tandika Smith.

Dr. Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we took office in 2020, in a Coronavirus disease (COVID- 19) pandemic, we immediately honoured our manifesto's commitment and embarked on a path of restoration and development. The past four years have been nothing short of progress, nation-building, recovery of our economic status, improvement of livelihoods for all Guyanese, and most of all, placing Guyana on the world map as one of the fastest growing economies in the world.

Budget 2025 was drafted under the theme, *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana* because this is where we stand as a country today. We are heading in a direction that will ensure every Guyanese live a life of dignity and a life where we can build a solid foundation for many generations to come. For the past few days, we have heard many recurring statements about this budget and I quote: This is for friends, families and favourites. This budget has nothing for poor people. The list goes on. I wish to remind this august House that those lines define the former APNU/AFC's Government since it was under their tenure that Guyana was thrown into dismal days. Our sugar workers and Amerindian brothers and sisters were placed on the bread line when they lost their only means of income after being fired by the very persons who claim to love people. It was under the APNU/AFC that every Guyanese struggled to put food on their tables, clothes on their backs, and send their kids to school as they buckled under heavy tax burdens and reversal of

programmes such as the ‘Because We Care’ cash grant among others. They were their own favourites. So, as soon as they took office, they increased their salaries for ministers by more than 50%, while the public servants looked on helplessly on the sidelines and continued to take home their meagre wages and salaries.

It was the poor and ordinary man who got nothing under the APNU/AFC. I did my research and I am still to find one measure that was implemented to place money in the pockets of the small man. Instead, do you know what I found out? I found out that even the man operating a donkey cart had to pay heavy taxes and the persons with a kitchen garden with more than three plants and multiple poultry animals had to pay taxes. These were the inhumane and callous measures meted out to the vulnerable people of this country. The PPP/C Government understands that it is the people of Guyana who place their confidence and trust in us, and that is why we will continue to deliver and stand by our commitment by delivering workable policies, plans and programmes and taking strategic, tangible measures that will help sustain and develop our country.

8.14 p.m.

We continue to boost all sectors by ensuring equitable budgetary allocations that will further support our growing economy. Multiple measures were created to help cushion the pockets of Guyanese. A lot of people are saying there is nothing in this budget for anyone. However, let me give you this scenario and this is for everyone who is watching. We have the Richards family, comprised of eight persons living in a four-bedroom house, including two 2 old-age pensioners; a teenager who wrote the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) examination and passed all his exams and is now desirous of pursuing a career in civil engineering at the University of Guyana (UG). However, funds are a bit low on the side because mom and dad are expecting to welcome their fifth child, all while caring for a differently-abled child who tragically lost both limbs in an accident some time ago. The other kids are all attending primary school and are currently preparing for the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA). This budget will afford and bring relief to this family by increasing the old age pension for the two elderly persons, along with providing their \$100,000 cash grant each. It will provide free university education for that teenager. Mom and dad are public servants and have received their salary increases along with their cash grants. Mom will be signing up for an additional \$100,000 cash grant for her newborn. The primary school kids will each receive \$55,000, and the differently-abled child will also receive his one-off

cash grant along with his increase in PD to \$22,000. Not forgetting the \$10,000 universal healthcare voucher for every member of the family. Like this household, every other household in Guyana will receive the same, whether you support the PPP/C Government or the APNU/AFC Coalition. This is the vision of our Government. We create comprehensive measures to cater for every man, woman and child.

As I turn my attention to health, it is important to note that, contrary to all of the negative comments that we have listened to for the past few days against our healthcare system, it was under our Government in 2020, when we took Office, that various discrepancies were discovered. There was no workable plan to protect citizens from the COVID-19 virus. Billions in expired drugs and medical supplies were discovered. No new hospitals or health centres were built. There were no new health policies in place. Today, we could boast of six new hospitals that are currently being constructed – in Anna Regina, Diamond, Enmore, Bath Settlement, Skeldon, and very soon, right in Region 3, the De Kinderen Regional Hospital will be completed and commissioned. Patients who need dialysis are able to access \$600,000 yearly to help with treatment. Old-age pensioners and school-aged children benefitted from spectacle vouchers. Our women, from ages 21 to 65, benefitted from the Cervical Cancer Screening Programme by accessing screening vouchers. *Budget 2025* will see a continuation of massive development in this sector.

As I turn my attention to Region 3, a contract was awarded to construct a new West Demerara Regional Hospital (WDRH) at the cost of US\$54.2 million. This very hospital, in 2024, had 1,316 deliveries, of which 921 were normal, and 395 were caesarean sections (C-Sections). A total of 1,278 surgeries were also done in this year. We also saw the training of Patient Care Assistants (PCAs) and Community Health Workers (CHWs), which will definitely be an addition to the medical fraternity. We have seen more speciality clinics added to our regional and district hospitals, such as Wakenaam, Leonora and Leguan. We now can see clinics such as internal medicine, surgical, psychiatry, psychology, ear, nose and throat (ENT), maxillofacial and angiology amongst others. All of this helps to decentralise care and, as such, we have seen a decrease in referrals to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC) and the West Demerara Regional Hospital.

As we focus a bit on education, our Government remains committed to the delivery of quality education to every citizen interested in learning a skill or improving their academic life. That is

why the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship has seen at least 20,000 persons benefitting from the same, with 4,431 awardees from Region 3. To date, we have had 1,318 persons complete their studies. This includes certificate, degree and master programmes. This tells us that our young people are *making hay while the sun shines* and are endorsing this initiative provided by our Government – something that never existed before under the previous Administration. Our children continue to benefit from the ‘Because We Care’ cash grant, and this year, every school-aged child, from both public and private schools, will receive a \$50,000 cash grant and \$5,000 school uniform grant. That is a total of \$55,000 per child. This is a manifesto commitment kept and delivered. More of our teachers are being trained. This will afford them personal academic advancement which will also see our children benefitting from the delivery of quality education. This is progress.

There are other numerous infrastructural developments happening in Region 3 at this moment. We understand that our people are our most prized possession, and we will continue to build and nourish the growth and wellbeing of the people of this country. We can see the new Demerara Harbour Bridge which will bring relief and solve the heavy traffic woes faced by daily commuters. Our farmers can now benefit from farm-to-market roads at the Parika Backdam and Parika to Bendolph. Already, we have commenced the gas-to-energy project at Wales and the 0.6 megawatt (MW) solar farm in Leguan. Vendors could now ply their trade in a new Leonora market and very soon will also be able to further expand their trade in the new Hydronie market. In agriculture, we have constructed 62 shade houses so far and distributed planting materials to farmers. Our fishermen have also benefitted from the upgrading of their landing sites all across Region 3.

Time will not permit me to go further into *Budget 2025*, but I wish to encourage every Guyanese to, at a time convenient to you, pause and reflect on what life was like from 2015 to 2020. Take a look around you. You will see that the PPP/C Government promised, and we have delivered. You can trust us to continue on this pathway of development and progress. To my fellow young people, it is important to know that you are living in one of the best times in Guyana’s history. Make the best of every opportunity available and grow in every aspect of your life. The PPP/C Government will return to government and continue to work assiduously towards the development of all of Guyana.

Last but not least, I wish to thank the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, Dr. Ashni Singh, and his dedicated staff for crafting yet another people's budget which will continue to deliver equitable benefits for every Guyanese, irrespective of their race, religious background or political affiliation. I therefore recommend this budget for passage in this honourable House. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, Dr. Smith. Now, for the Hon. Member, Ms. Alert.

Ms. Alert: A very pleasant night, Mr. Speaker and colleagues on both sides of the House. I will start by calling some names – Tucber Park, Burmine Scheme, Festival City, and Clay Brick Scheme. These are housing schemes and what they have in common is that they were established pre-1992.

In *Budget 2025* with the theme, *A Secured, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*, the PPP/C Administration is asking for approval to spend just under \$1.3 trillion. I put it in this context because it is important to understand that this money belongs to the people of Guyana – not the PPP/C Administration, but the people of Guyana. Whether it is a grant, loan, or revenues earned through taxes, duties, or the sale of goods, the money belongs to the people of Guyana – all of the people. When the Administration comes with a budget, it is really the Administration requesting a sum of money from the people of Guyana, and in return for that money, specific goods and services will be provided by the Administration. Now, we all know that the Administration, when it comes with the Appropriation Bill, will use its one-seat majority to pass it. But as we heard in this very House, it is not about how much you spend, but how you spend. We heard that from the Government side of the House.

Like budgets presented by the PPP/C before, we have concerns that many of the returns that the people expect will not be met. For example, in the past, we saw billions being given to GuySuCo – and I know this is a sore point – but production continues to dwindle. My colleague, the Hon. Jermaine Figueira, spoke of this and I endorse what he said. I urge that his recommendations be examined because it is the natural expectation of the people that they will get sugar in return for their money – their money given to GuySuCo. We can argue for the rest of this debate on who destroyed the sugar industry, and go back to the days when the army and police had to cut cane

because of strike action called by the PPP/C-led Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU), or reports of factories being sabotaged, or the \$6.4 billion loan that was taken to build the white elephant – Skeldon Sugar Factory – and continued spending to fix the unfixable...that folly.

Money should have been used instead to retool the Rose Hall Sugar Estate, Enmore Sugar Estate, and Wales Sugar Estate. Knowing fully well that the loss of the European Union (EU) preferential market would result in US\$37 million annually, the PPP/C Administration – many of them still here today – went ahead and borrowed heavily, banking on sugar. The Skeldon Sugar Factory was touted to produce 110,000 tonnes of sugar – money borrowed, more spent, a loan with interest placed on the backs of Guyanese. Or we can debate how the EU was forced to hold back on funding for the ailing sugar industry when Parliament was prorogued. The Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, in his 2011 budget presentation, said that 2010 was a disappointing year for sugar. The signs were there. Sugar was failing. There is a whole long history of what caused the decline of the sugar industry. The time does not permit me to expand on it, but the PPP/C would want the nation to believe that it was the APNU/AFC Coalition Government that crippled sugar. Ask the Vice-President who is it that said if Skeldon fails, sugar is dead.

When money is taken for education, people rightfully expect their children to pass their exams as proof of their education. So, it is hard to understand how millions can be given to an entertainer to construct a school. We have seen the results of such folly. Similarly, millions were given to a social commentator to construct a pump station, and all the people have to see for their money is commentary.

8.29 p.m.

We have the Hon. Vickram Bharrat here in this House and I think the Vice-President may be online. They can tell you about the multilateral schools, how they were constructed and the programmes they offered, such as: fully functioning gyms, as what you would find in more developed nations and music rooms like you would find in more developed nations. Today, we have schools that do not even have an area for children to play but, somehow or the other, we want to talk about holistic development of the children.

When money is taken for healthcare, then the people have a legitimate expectation to go to a health centre or a hospital and receive care and treatment. They do not expect and should not have to appeal on *Facebook* for assistance. Almost every day you go to *Facebook* there is someone begging for assistance to get medical care. In oil-producing Guyana, the fastest growing economy in the world where GDP is skyrocketing, people have to take to social media to beg for assistance to cover medical bills. Only yesterday, there was a news report of a young mother accusing the health sector of negligence that resulted in the death of her baby at birth. Today, a teacher at Wakapau Hinterland village, Amerindian community, is seeking assistance to cover her medical bills. The Village Council has joined in asking for help for her. The Administration and their supporters would want to say that *Rome was not built in a day*. It was not a day, it was 23 plus four and a half years of the PPP/C Administration and trillions of dollars later.

Just the last four year, from 2021 to 2024, the PPP/C spent over \$2.863 trillion. While their focus is continued on spending, the other side of the equation, the peoples' expectations remain unmet. Colleagues, on this side of the House who have spoken before me, bemoaned the failures in the education sector. I am sure that many who will come after me will also highlight where education is failing. Let me say this, we do not view education as a political football. We do not view health as a political football. This is because of our recognition that a sustainable Guyana, to quote from the Budget theme, cannot be achieved if we continue to fail to educate our children. If I am to focus just a bit on what is happening in education at the primary level, I am using data as provided in Volume II of the Budget indicators, the percentage of children scoring 50% or more in all subjects at the National Grade Six Assessment (NGSA), in 2024, was 34%. This year, the Administration is hoping to bring that up to 40%, which means that even if that target is reached, more than half of our children will still not be having a sound primary education.

I spoke of this during the 2024 Budget debate and, a year later, we are still in the same sad position. We can never hope to develop as a nation, when we are failing to provide basic primary education. Twenty-seven years of the PPP/C and primary education, the basic building block of the education system, is failing miserably. It is no wonder, therefore, that we have such high drop-out rates at the secondary level. When the system fails a child at the primary level that child finds it difficult to cope at the secondary level. The child feels overwhelmed. The child is more inclined to drop out of school. This in return, leads to criminal behaviour later in life. I guess the policy of the

PPP/C is to ignore the reality, continue to do what they are doing; which clearly does not work; have our children continue to fail; and wait until they turn to criminal activities, then try to teach them in penal school. I cannot understand it. Providing classrooms, passing teachers through training college, providing textbooks and hot meals were the practice even prior to the PPP/C in Office. All of these are important and we support them. However, when an environment is created where teachers are demotivated, then you have defeated the positive impacts that all those prior things can achieve.

Over the years, the PPP/C Administration has stripped the teaching profession of dignity; treating teachers like beggars; and forcing them to stand in the broiling sun for \$100,000 cash grant, which could have been given to them at the inception, using the same system through which they receive their salaries. No. They made them stand in the sun and showed them who is the boss. Teachers have to stand on the picket line on strike for a scanty top-up to their salaries. Then, in an attempt to destroy their solidarity and their unity, the Administration is fighting against the process of deducting Union dues. This is to stifle the teaching profession of its collective bargaining power. If there is another reason, I would love to hear it. The PPP/C Administration could stand here to scream and shout until dooms day of what they have done. The bottom line, from the statistics they have provided, after all the spending, the chest-beating, the clashing of symbols and all the noise, our children are not coming out of school with an education – most of them.

School is no longer a safe space. Instead, we have gangs operating in schools, unheard of, a few short years ago. Teachers are forced to operate under a cloud of fear. Children are being assaulted right in the school. Where is the secure Guyana? Again, taken from the theme of *Budget 2025*, a secure Guyana, where is that secured Guyana for our teachers? There were a lot of table-thumping and applause. This House was regaled with how many Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) clubs were created – S-T-E-M, where the letter “M” stands for Mathematics. The reality is that, the data is about seven out of every 10 children are failing Mathematics. Where would the next generation of engineers, technicians, welders, architects come from? We do not provide an education system where children are passing in Mathematics.

If I am to turn to post-secondary education and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) rates, the story is not much different. It is the same dismal performance. Enrolment – even those who are enrolled, how are they absorbed into professions into the labour

force? The data, as provided by the PPP/C Administration, tells a very dark and dismal picture when we look into the future of this country. As I am on the topic of data, please let me remind that we are still waiting on the 2022 census. This is 2025 and we cannot have the 2022 census. Again, money is spent and there is nothing to show for it. How can proper planning for sustainable development be done, when you do not even know the present status of households? Is it that the data of oil-rich Guyana is too shocking? Would it reveal too much? Are they looking to re-engineer the data and that is why the census has not yet been released? Moving on, I know my Colleagues will speak more about the sector. I cannot sing to save my life but there is a very popular gospel:

“we are a chosen generation,

all I require for life,

God has given me”.

Every Guyanese ought to be rejoicing, rich fertile land, gold, diamond, other minerals, fresh water; ours is a land of abundant resources. Then, of course, there is the bounty that is being harvested in our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) off of our coastline. Every Guyanese should be enjoying nice time. The sad reality is, too many of our people are forced to exist – I cannot say live, somehow survive in poverty – while they watch on as the bounty of their land is exploited to enrich a few. In the Prayer at the commencement of our Sitting, we implore divine guidance from words that come from the depth of truth. If I could, I would have done probably a Robert DeNiro impersonation and say to my Colleagues over that side of the House, you cannot handle the truth because the truth is, only the friends of the *One Guyana* are enjoying the bounty of this land. The truth of the masses is that 48% cannot even afford proper nutrition and 20% of our children are living in severe food poverty.

The PPP/C Administration may want to split hairs and argue over food poverty, malnutrition, undernutrition but the bottom line is, for 20% of our children their parents can barely afford to provide two food groups per day, when eight are needed for adequate child nutrition. This is the data from the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) – *Child Food Poverty: Nutrition Deprivation in Early Childhood 2024 Child Nutrition Report*. The same Report stated that 40% of our children in Guyana are experiencing moderate child food poverty because they are fed three or four food groups per day, barely half of what is needed. That is the truth of the masses. This is

happening in our country, an agriculture-based economy, now with the added bonus of oil – the fastest growing economy in the world. Parents cannot afford sanitary napkins for their teenaged daughters. That is the truth of parents. It is recognised by the PPP/C. Instead of helping the parents by enabling them to provide for the young ladies, the PPP/C step in with cameras and full media exposures, showing the world that they are proving sanitary napkins for our young women – the menstrual hygiene initiative to end poverty.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will need an extension to complete.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Ms. Alert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and thank you, Chief Whip. That programme exposes our young women to taunts, derogatory remarks and even to the prime prince of paedophile. In a country earning from its oil resources alone, \$64 million each hour, fathers and mothers cannot afford to provide sanitary napkins for their daughters. That is the truth of poverty in oil-rich Guyana. In our country where the GDP is almost doubled by the first half of 2024 poverty abounds. In this fastest growing economy, with \$1.3 trillion to be spent this year, families will still have to depend on remittances from abroad. Now, with the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) man making his rounds, many families may find that source of fund no longer available. Instead, they might have an additional mouth to feed.

There are groups across Guyana, mainly women who call themselves prayer warriors. I believe, that, as a nation, we owe them a debt of gratitude that we cannot repay. Each morning, they pray for our nation. It has to be these prayers that keep us going. How else can our single mothers keep food on the table, send their children to school and pay the bills when earning \$100,000 or less a month? How else, other than by a prayer, can those young women working in restaurants, supermarkets, our sweeper/cleaners, our security guards in the private sector and labourers survive?

8.44 p.m.

When the Opposition brings attention to the spiralling cost of living the response is, well cost of living is going up all over the world. That is true, but we are the chosen generation who are blessed to be living in the land of plenty, more natural resources than most countries yet, in this land of plenty, the masses are forced to survive.

I wanted to spend some time talking about media relations and the money that is going to be given to increase trust of information provided by the Government Information Agency (GIA). The history of media relations of the PPP/C when they are in Office is one of victimisation and intimidation. We have not forgotten when Channel 6 was closed down when a reporter was debarred entry to a press briefing at the Office of the President. When the advertising dollar was weaponised and used against Stabroek News. The Fourth Estate is an integral part of any democracy or as any other part of the three arms of government – the Judiciary, the Legislature and the Administrative. The Fourth Estate is that link between all of government and the people. It is disrespectful to anyone in Government's office to refuse to answer questions on matters of the State, even if they are answering those questions from the party office. We will be paying attention and questioning the allocations there.

In closing, let me take this opportunity to thank all those public servants who went through the frustration of trying to put a budget together that would benefit the people of Guyana. To the masses, the 48%, living in poverty, I say to those people, *long time done, short time lef*. As I said, health is not a political football; education is not a political football. They are too important to the development of our country. The Alliance For Change (AFC) in government will adopt a policy that will see an inclusive approach to fix our education sector, civil society, the business sector, the government and the opposition. I hope that the Hon. Minister, the present Minister of Education, the Hon. Member, Ms. Priya Manickchand and the Hon. Member, Ms. Sonia Parag... [Ms. Manickchand: It is Ma-nick-chand.] Priya Manickchand [Ms. Manickchand: That is correct.] Okay great. I hope that those two Ministers will at least lend their effort because we do need to know what not to do. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Member of Parliament Ms. Alert. Now for the Hon. Member, Ms. Nandranie Coonjah.

Ms. Coonjah: *Budget 2025*, \$1.82 trillion, under the theme: ... [Mr. McCoy: \$1.382 trillion.] Two; yes. ... *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*. I arise to make my presentation on *Budget 2025* but, first of all, I would proudly honour our dynamic Minister, the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, and his dedicated staff in crafting a budget of this nature to cater for a better life for all Guyanese, which truly reflects a *One Guyana*.

Listening to the presentations and remarks for the past two days plus from the other side of the House leads one to wonder whether they truly understand progress and development. I think that is the reason Guyana was underdeveloped during their 33 years of tenure in Government. I never want to recall, I have been hearing all the time about food insecurity and the bad days under this Government. I never want to recall the days of starvation, no soap to bathe or wash our dirty clothes, the long lines my parents lined up to buy basic food items and at the end of the line was told ‘*all done*’. It pains my heart to remember the many helpless parents who watched their hungry children.

The songs for the past two days is the Budget has no provision to cater for survival. I was born and bred in Essequibo; the county was so depressed and forgotten. We could not even get jobs. There was a little girl who I know was in need of a job and was qualified. She applied for a job and was called to the Public Service Ministry (PSM) for an interview. What was surprising is that she was asked for her qualifications; when she presented her certificates, she was asked for her blue card. This child did not know anything about party card in those days. She replied, I do not have any card and was told how do you expect to qualify yourself for the job. In order, under the People’s National Congress (PNC) government if one does not have a PNC card, *cat eat yuh dinner*. Those were the qualifications in those days.

On the other side, they are saying that this Budget has nothing. They are so bias and blatant. Essequibo Region 2 is known for rice cultivation. In 2015, the A Partnership for National Unity came to the rice farmers in their campaign mode under the theme, Decency, Honesty and Integrity, and promised the rice farmers \$8,000 per bag of paddy. After they assumed Office, our farmers all over this world experienced the real bluff, fluff and broken promises, when the then President with high integrity honestly told the distraught farmers that rice is a private business. Since our PPP/C Government took Office in 2020, to date it is with great commitment and dedication our farmers are receiving constant intervention and support. Our Minister of Agriculture and his team, both

regionally and centrally, are often seen on the ground, in the fields walking alongside our farmers and fulfilling their delimitate requests and needs. These actions resulted in increased sold hectares.

I want to give the figure over the period of 2020-2023. There were 106,859 hectares sold on the Essequibo coast. Support by the year 2021-2024, construction of drying floor at Riverstown benefitting, 200 farmers; five cannon jacto sprayers were purchased for the rice industry; and flood assistance programme, 80 framers benefitted. In 2022, construction of drying floor at Summerset benefitted 120 farmers; seed paddy assistance, 598 bags of seed paddy were distributed; and fertiliser assistance, 1,555 farmers benefitted from 26,865 bags of fertiliser. In 2023, seed paddy assistance, 2571 bags of seed paddy were distributed among the framers of Region 2.

The support continues in 2024. Fertiliser assistance, 17,590 bags were distributed to 1543 farmers; seed paddy assistance and 95 bags benefitted 21,000 farmers. These are interventions by our Government and our hardworking and dedicated Minister. Unlike the then Minister of Agriculture who only recognises rice when seen on a plate, our Minister of Agriculture is so experienced and knows how to provide to feed a nation. Here are some works executed in drainage and irrigation, which enhanced sewing and reaping – construction of regulators at Annandale, Hampton Court and Mardeli; construction of irrigation checks at Aberdeen Water Coast; construction of box culvert at Lima Sands and Hampton Court; construction of tail wall at Little Alliance, Bounty Hall and Evergreen; rehabilitation of flap gate at Good Intent; rehabilitation of culvert at Hibernia; rehabilitation of sea sluice at Onderneeming; rehabilitation of drainage structure from Anna Regina to Westbury, Coffee Grove, Adventure and Fairfield; construction of new pump station at Capoey, Andrews and Cozier; construction of 89 shade houses and distribution of planting materials; rehabilitation of the Charity Agro-processing facilities, impoldering farmlands in areas such as Bethany, Supenaam Creek, Upper and Lower Pomeroon; construction of farm-to-market roads in areas such as Golden Fleece, Onderneeming and Sparta; upgrading fishermen landing sites across the region; and several revetments were constructed in various areas securing our land from sliding and also curtail flooding. Our PPP/C Government support every agency under agriculture securing food.

It is not only the rice production area but aquaculture. In aquaculture, the tambaqui species is successfully being framed in the communities of Mashabo, Lake Capoey and Mainstay Lake which benefit 2,000 of our Amerindian brothers and sisters. There are six outgrown cages and three

fingerling cages in these communities. In 2024, the production yield accounted for 1,106 heads of tambaqui which weighed 3,371 pounds. These fish range in sizes from three to six pounds each and are sold at a cost of \$500. These tambaqui, if one eats the tambaqui, one does not know if it is snapper or tambaqui he/she is eating. This is development. This is support for our very hardworking farmers who need to survive and who need to bring food on our tables. We must acknowledge those farmers. This project is a personal initiative of our President and is well accepted by our Indigenous brothers and sisters who are eagerly awaiting on the passage of this 2025 Budget for their expansion plans of additional grow-out cages and two other species.

8.59 p.m.

The Anna Regina Fish Culture Station is being upgraded to support aquaculture development in my region. Works completed in 2024 include the installation of an improved water supply to support increased production – we are planning far ahead with the support of our Government – the construction of a concrete base to support aquaculture tanks and the procurement of 10 3,000 litres plastic tanks for fingerling production. Work planned for 2025 includes the installation of blowers, airlines and diffusers to provide aeration for tanks, as well as the provision of a generator for emergency power supply. Activities planned for 2025 – with the ongoing upgrades of the Anna Regina Fish Culture Station, it is expected to conduct the following activities to support aquaculture development in the region: rearing of tambaqui fingerlings commencing in March, production of all-male red tilapia fingerlings in April and provision of these tilapia fingerlings to existing and new farmers. This sector is expanding. You heard of my region's plan and we are eagerly awaiting the passage of this 2025 Budget. Yet, my Colleagues on the other side of this honourable House are saying this Budget reflects nothing – absolutely nothing. I wish to draw the attention of my Colleague, Hon. Member Dr. Anthony, as more eye surgeries and hearing aids are needed in our country.

Livestock – our Government supports our livestock farmers with chickens, pigs and the black belly sheep. At a rural women's conference hosted in Region 2 on 11th September, 2024, it was reported that 40% of our farmers are women. Our Government caters for all – men, women and children.

We heard in this honourable House that the Pathway Workers Programme is a slush fund. I have news for those on the other side – because of ignorance, they will continue remaining on the other

side. The 2,000 pathway workers, who are mostly young women and girls, were introduced to the world of work by our PPP/C Government. They are attached to the education and health sectors and are doing fine jobs. Many of these young women and girls have recently graduated in the nursing profession, Hon. Member Dr. Anthony. Some are employed permanently, Minister Parag, and some were trained in cosmetology by the Board of Industrial Training (BIT). The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, must apologise to Minister Parag, – they are her workers – Minister Ramson and to these young people in our region for insulting them by calling them a slush fund. Apologise, Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you used one word which I would not allow and now you need an extension to continue to conclude.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for the Hon. Member to have five minutes, please, to continue.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister Teixeira. Hon. Member, you may continue.

Ms. Coonjah: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to touch a little on housing and water. Housing schemes are seen everywhere but these schemes do not come on a platter. They were done with feasibility studies, the clearing of jungles and swamps – the homes of tigers and crocodiles – into budding housing schemes. The Plantation St. Joseph, Charity and Onderneeming Phase 4 were no different. Our caring Government and our two ministers developed them into housing schemes that are liveable.

Education – eight new schools were constructed and another seven were extended. All school and educational facilities were upgraded, rehabilitated and maintained. For the first time in history, a special needs school was constructed in Region 2 and is in operation. Thanks to our Government and Hon. Minister Ms. Manickchand. Indeed, we are taking care from the cradle to the grave.

Water – for the first time, we, the residents, will see clean and treated water that will be flowing into our homes within the Laluni and Good Hope areas. The new treated water plant and the drilling of the well at Onderneeming at a cost of approximately \$2 billion will be commissioned in the first quarter of this year. That is development. Water is life.

There are 12,087 students who benefitted from the Because We Care cash grant and the successful distribution of teachers' cash grants to all schools on a timely basis to enhance a creative and conducive learning environment. The 2024 Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) results – seven top students are from Anna Regina Secondary, Region 2. The 2024 National Grade Six Assessment – one top student is from the village, the Huist Dieren Primary School and we are hearing the cry that education is on the decline but, our Cinderella County, as we were once nicknamed, is shining in this sector over the years. Biscuits and juices were successfully distributed to nursery and primary schools. There are 38 primary schools and Kabakaburi Secondary School who are benefiting from the breakfast and hot meal programme. There are 584 teachers who were treated from 2020 to 2024. I can go on and on. I have much more information from my beautiful county of Region 2.

I also want to thank the Hon. Minister Indar and Minister Bishop Edghill for the six and sometimes eight ferry crossings... [Bishop Edghill: Per day.] ...per day from Supenaam to Parika. We, as Essequibians, also enjoy the timely travel from Parika to Georgetown with the new highway and we are awaiting the crossing of the new Demerara Harbour Bridge. Never mind we were nicknamed 'Cinderella'. We are the Cinderella who has our golden slippers. We have not lost it. We are travelling also to Cheddi Jagan International Airport and comfort and style. Thank you, Ministers. Thank you, our Government of Guyana. This is progress. This is development. This is prosperity. I want to thank you, Sir. I will now commit this Budget for the smooth passage. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Member Ms. Coonjah. Now for the Hon. Member, Mr. Jaffarally.

Mr. Jaffarally: I rise to support *Budget 2025* under the theme: *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana*. Allow me, Mr. Speaker, to congratulate our Hon. and distinguished Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, Dr. Singh and the staff of the Ministry of Finance for a well-crafted budget.

This Budget will see every village, every creek, every community and every town enhanced development in every sector. It is a people-centred budget which will benefit every socio-economic group within our country. Before I continue my Budget speech, the Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan,

mentioned this morning that they... [Mr. Mustapha: He gone?] He is gone. This is the attitude of our Colleagues on the other side. They come to this House with lots of half-truths, ... [McCoy: Misinformation.] ...misinformation and then they leave. They do not wait for a response. [Dr. Singh: They run.] They run. Yes. I agree they reduced the Berbice Bridge toll by \$300 but I want to inform the nation that we, the PPP/C, will have a toll-free bridge later in this year. We will have a toll-free bridge.

The Hon. Member talked about contractors and who are getting contracts. In 2015, when the APNU/AFC took Office, the first thing the then Regional Executive Officer (REO) and the petroleum advisor did was to invite all the contractors in Region 5 for a meeting. They blatantly pointed to each of them and said, "You will not have work," for the simple reason that some of these contractors had on red shirts at the meeting. Just imagine a colour and these people could not. [McCoy: Is that how they conduct business?] That is how they conduct business.

The Hon. Member talked about how he wants a medical outreach in Region 5. Gone are the days when, if a person had a little fever, he/she had to run to Fort Wellington Hospital or Mahaicony Hospital. Today, in Region 5, I am proud to say we have 20 health centres across the region and these health centres are manned by professionals. Some have doctors visiting, midwives, senior nurses and provides all the services that can be provided at a health centre. I have a document in my hand with the names of all the health centres, the number of staff and the services that each health centre are providing.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

In keeping with the Government's commitment to reduce imports by 25% in 2025, agriculture in Region 5 will contribute significantly to achieve this important goal. Agriculture is the lifeblood of Region 5, where more than 50% of our residents are gainfully occupied in agriculture whether they be rice farmers, cattle farmers, cash crop farmers, poultry farmers or involved in the fishing industry. On any given day, you can go to the markets in Georgetown and you will see trucks and canters with farmers' produce from Region 5 coming to Georgetown.

9.14 p.m.

The Ministry of Agriculture, through its various programmes, has made significant strides in empowering and promoting sustainable agricultural practices. We have implemented measures to enhance the irrigation and drainage system, provide farmers with improved varieties, and offer training programmes to help them adopt modern techniques and increase crop yields while conserving natural resources. In this regard, we have seen massive infrastructure development work.

Before I explain, let me give you briefly what transpired between 2015-2020, the records of the APNU/AFC in Region 5. They destroyed every piece of drainage and irrigation system in Region 5 – every single piece. Rice farmers, cash-crop farmers, and cattle farmers had to leave the field because the APNU/AFC destroyed the drainage and irrigation infrastructure in Region 5. In the most blatant manner, they removed streetlights. They removed streetlights from communities such as Bath, Bush-Lot, Woodley Park, Blairmont, and Shieldstown. The Hon. Minister, Ms. Priya Manickchand, was instrumental at that time to have those streetlights placed. I wish to inform this House that we have replaced those lights. I also wish to say that the APNU/AFC will never get a chance to remove those lights because you will never, you will never enter the seat of Government.

Early this morning we had a group of young Afro-Guyanese farmers from C-Field. One-day ‘Teacher Joy’ from Number 41, Pastor Williams and Mr. Miller came to Bath Freedom House and with tears in her eyes she said, ‘Mr. Jaffarally, we voted for APNU/AFC, we voted for them and this is what they are doing to us.’ I said to her ‘Teacher Joy’, whether you vote for APNU/AFC that is not my concern; I am concerned about the injustice that is being done to you, the injustice being done to them. They made an attempt to see the then President, and when they turned up at the gate of the Office of the President, the then Minister of State, who had wanted the land, told the people they cannot pass the gate. I made contact with my colleague, Hon. Anil Nandlall – we were in the Opposition – and he took the case, *pro bono*, to court, and he won the case. Today those farmers have their land, and they are planting their land gainfully.

The other one, ‘Mr. Rubber Stamp’, was across the length and breadth of Region 5 telling people he would give them \$9,000 a bag for paddy as he did in Essequibo. He promised \$9,000 a bag for paddy and, after the election, they had this big conference – I think, right here at the Conference Centre – when they were told rice is a private business. If we allow the rice industry to collapse at any time more than 100,000 people will be out of jobs – more than 100,000 people in this country

will be out of a job. These are the kinds of things that these people did to the people of Region 5. How can we ever forget them? These people, all their focus during their period in office was mismanagement, incompetence, no credibility, and not being trustworthy. How on earth would the people of Region 5, or the people of Guyana, have any confidence in allowing you to have the seat of government? No way, Comrades; no way; not ever again, never again. They built what they call a model farm. They built a model farm at Fort Wellington where they spent over \$200 million, and every Saturday they picked a bag of *baigan* and go *til* up to Linden *fu*h sell it. The People's Progressive Party/C has established what is known as a proper model farm. This is what APNU/AFC had.

[The Hon. Member displayed photographs.]

This is what they had as their model farm.

[The Hon. Member displayed photographs.]

This is what the People's Progressive Party/Civic has as our model farm. Last year alone, nearly 30 schools went and visited the model farm; farmers' groups across the region are going there, and individual farmers are going there. Mr. Speaker... **[Mr. Jones:** Thank God, the model farm is still there that the APNU/AFC put down.] Thank God, that we are now building a state-of-the-art hospital on that spot. The APNU/AFC Government has really destroyed Region 5 in our country as a whole. Then we hear the talk by Mr. Nigel Hughes, who seems to be the Leader of the AFC...

Mr. Speaker: You would not be able to quote Mr. Hughes; he is not here.

Mr. Jaffarally: The Leader of the AFC said people do not eat roads. The Leader of the Opposition said we are building infrastructure. I am proud to say, I want them to come to this National Assembly and tell the people of Ithaca, where we built 17 roads, which one of the roads we must not build for them. You go and tell them, the APNU/AFC go and tell the people in Ithaca, go to Rosignol and tell the people of Rosignol, where we built 22 roads, go to Belladrum or Paradise, where we built another 15 roads, go to Perth, go to Bath Settlement, and go to Bush-lot. Comrades, this Government of the People's Progressive Party/Civic led by Dr. Irfaan Ali is a people-centred Government. They do not want us to build infrastructure. Go and tell the people at Bath Settlement,

or Region 5, that we must not build a new hospital. Go and tell the people of Region 5 that we must not build a new state-of-the-art hospital, or go and tell the people at Esau and Jacob, where the Hon. Minister went recently and we opened a brand-new health centre – a brand-new health centre at Esau and Jacob. So, Comrades, we have to be careful of what we are saying. I am proud to say, in collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Housing and Water, and the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, we have built over 700 community roads in Region 5 from 2020 to 2024. Region 5 has 173 villages from Mahaica Bridge right on to Ithaca; and in every single village across Region 5, the PPP/C Government has built roads; in every one of those villages we have built roads in those areas. So, do not come and tell us do not build infrastructure. Go and tell the rice farmers that we should not build a bridge for Baiabu, or we should not clean the canal at Ithaca, or we should not clean the canal at Perth, or Bath.

As I said, agriculture is of great importance to us. Rice production in Region 5: a total of 175,444.1 acres was sown last year. That is an increase of 11,910 acres or 6.8% of 2023. This was due to the Government's continued investment in the rice industry. Assistance was provided to our farmers on various farms. We have seen an increase of acreage also during 2024. Livestock development: the black belly sheep is a success story; the breeding bull is a success story. I think the Hon. Minister needs to give the Hon. Mahipaul a bull, though. In the fishing sector, we have now gone into prawn production in Region 5, and this year we expect to get \$48 million from prawn production. Mr. Speaker, these are the prawns.

[The Hon. Member displayed photographs.]

These are the ponds and this is the package of prawns for sale.

[The Hon. Member displays photographs.]

Only last year the Hon. Minister spoke about this. There is a difference in the way the PPP/C manages its affairs and how the APNU/AFC operates in Government. All these honourable gentlemen here, the Hon. Ministers, when we go to a community, we interact with our people, we have conversations with them and we are able to solve their problems, sometimes on the spot. Look, when Hon. Minister Deodat Indar went to Baiabu and the issue of electricity was raised, in a matter of weeks we were able to get electricity in Baiabu. When the Hon. Minister Priya

Manickchand... [Ms. Manickchand: He wan know wha Baiabu deh.] He wan...

When the Hon. Minister Manickchand went to the Burma Housing Scheme the people asked about the Augsburg Primary School. That school is under construction. Or when the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, went to Rosignol, and the fish farmers said they needed a shed, \$110 million was spent. Or when Hon. Juan Edghill goes to a community and the people talk about the road, he responds in a positive way. When Hon. Collin Croal goes down to New Providence – I guess he does not know that area either – and the people talked about water distribution, they got water today. That is how we operate as a government – Ministers of Government, His Excellency, the Vice-President, and the Members of Parliament. Why are we doing this? Because we believe we are accountable to the people of this country. We are servants of the people of this country, and we must provide goods and services to the people of this country. Unlike the other side, they sit in a back room and planning how to rig an election. They sit in some back room and plan how to rig an election. The people...

Mr. Speaker: Mr. MP, you will need an extension if you want to complete it.

Ms. Teixeria: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his speech.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Jaffarally: We do not believe in rigging elections. We believe, work with people... [Dr.

Ramsaran: Win the election.] ...win the election squarely. [Dr. Ramsaran: We gunn

win them again.] A we will win again. In 1992, after 28 years of dictatorship under the People's National Congress (PNC), led by Dr. Cheddi Jagan we went to that election with the slogan 'time to change, time to rebuild'. Since then, every single PPP/C Government had to rebuild this country.

9.29 p.m.

Every PPP/C Government had to rebuild this country. You had the Government from 2015 to 2020, and you destroyed everything that we built. Everything that we built, you destroyed. We had to start all over again. We are committed. We are hardworking people who believe that we must provide goods and services to the people of this country. That is why we will always be on the side

of the people. Over the last three days, every speaker in the Opposition when they come to speak has a list of things to do. They say they will do this and they will do that. They had four years. What did they do? [Mr. McCoy: Five.] Five years. What did they do in their five years? Five years they had, and they are coming with things to do now. They have the things to do now. What were they doing there all the time?

In conclusion, as we continue this Budget debate, let us not lose sight of the positive impact this Government has in Region 5 and across our country. This Budget reflects our commitment to the well-being of our citizens, as well as responsible management. As a Government we recognise the importance of financial stability and equitable distribution of the resources of our country. Through prudent decision-making, we aim to foster economic growth, support essential services, and build a foundation for a prosperous future. Together, Opposition Chief Whip, let us move forward. Let us move forward with confidence knowing that *Budget 2025*, under the theme, *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana* will set the stage for a resilient and inclusive society where every citizen can strive. Let us work together with a common goal for our people, they deserve nothing less. Let us continue to build 'One Guyana'. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Mr. Faizal Jaffarally. It is time for the former Minister of Health, the Hon. Dr. Ramsaran.

Dr. Ramsaran: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think you meant the former Minister of Health.

Mr. Chairman: I think that is what I said.

Dr. Ramsarran: Thank you for that. *Budget 2025* is radically transforming Guyana. It is also modernising Guyana. Before I go into that, I would like to remind you that a budget is a costed plan, whether it be a budget by a housewife or a shopkeeper, but more so the Budget by our glorious Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. What I would like to point out is that it is not a single man's job, it is teamwork. Thanks to the team.

Before I get there, Mr. Speaker, I would ask you to allow me to make some observations and a little diversion before we get into, before I delve into the theme of the matter. [Ms. Texeira: You have 20 minutes.] Thank you for reminding me of the 20 minutes. Before delving into

my brief analysis of *Budget 2025*, allow me to make these few observations. I think it was yesterday and earlier today it was reinforced that there was an observation of malnutrition, in childhood malnutrition, to such an extent that I thought I should as a former Minister of Health, two times, supporting the new Minister of Health, the incumbent Minister of Health, that we should tackle it because it is misleading. We think its misleading nature is very deliberate. Before getting into the Budget itself, let me make these observations. The malnutrition scare, the childhood malnutrition that was pumped by certain members on the Opposition, is based on misrepresentation of facts. This misrepresentation maybe due to ignorance of the real situation or to a deliberate effort to misinform the nation. I think you all remember what I am...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please do not impute. Imputing – deliberate attempt to mislead. I can get the quote from the *Hansard*.

Dr. Ramsaran: My apologies to anyone offended. I think we should look at that and put the facts straight just in case there might be some misunderstanding as to the real intention., It can, nevertheless, bring forward a misinformed position, which we need to counter. I believe that this, indeed, could be misunderstood as being calculated. As you pointed out – I would not like to use the word disingenuous – it might be miscalculated by the media and the uninformed audiences that was what was meant. The infinitesimal increase in childhood malnutrition by a factor of 0.000 something is inconsequential. While we must note it as humanitarians, as medical practitioners and generally as public health leaders, truth be told, infant malnutrition ceased to be a problem in mid-1993 – if my memory serves me well – when the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation's (GPHC's) malnutrition ward, which was inherited by the new era PPP/C Administration from the PNC dictatorship, was permanently closed, as was the so-called malnutrition clinic at the said hospital. In other words, we actually had a malnutrition ward in the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation – overpacked – and we had a clinic. Not only was the ward banished, dismantled, and gotten rid of and closed but the clinics themselves. What is more, we must observe that this was also the case, that is the presence of these clinics and the so-called malnutrition wards was also widespread at all the hospitals across the nation, nationwide. These wards and clinics existed under the PNC. Where are they? They gone, vanished; do not like to hear the truth. Mr. Speaker, please allow me to spend some time not repeating but reinforcing the point. **[An Hon. Member:**

(Inaudible) These clinics and wards vanished under the PPP/C.

The condition of malnutrition was referred to locally as *wapia*, or white mouth, and in the literature as kwashiorkor. The late Dr. Anwar Hussain worked in that clinic and so did Dr. Jennifer Westford and I. Childhood malnutrition is not currently a public health problem. I want to use this Budget debate and this simple example to call on the Opposition MPs to stick to the facts. I also want to caution unsuspecting Guyanese, especially the supporters of the PNC – now rebranded the APNU – to beware of the subterfuge. In this regard and through you, Mr. Speaker and in direct reference to the Hon. Member of Parliament, Ms. Fernandes, who made a somewhat amateurish attempt at analysis, I would like to caution Guyanese – beware of pretty faces and melodious voices peddling confusion. Most of the ladies sitting on the Opposition’s benches are hopelessly confused and so too are most of the gentlemen. Beware of the APNU confusionists. Look how they were trying to slip in this little misinformation. This misinformation would have driven a wedge. It would have misinformed not only the public but our developmental partners. They could very well have thought we were fooling them when this misinformation came out, as if it was [*inaudible*].

No budget is perfect. I am paraphrasing another speaker who went before me a few hours ago. No budget is perfect, and this one is no exception. It is admittedly, though, only near perfect. I [*inaudible*] admit, it is not perfect, but let me with all modesty say, it is near perfect. It is our duty as legislators not to settle for good enough but to demand more – more equity, more inclusion, and more action. Our collective duty as legislators is to promote progress and prosperity while pushing for better outcomes. This *Budget 2025* is that costed plan crafted to achieve these lofty goals within the constraints of our current resource-deficient circumstances. In other words, the Minister and his team have put forward a good budget, a good document, while at the same time not hiding from us the difficulties and the constraints they had. Congratulations, Mr. Minister, and congratulations to your team. The truth, transparency. I commend that it generates hope. It opens opportunities for personal and collective security and rewards arising out of hard work. Work hard within the constraints and your government will support you, your government will try in every way to leverage ways and means of giving your effort even more power, more resources and more rewards. In other words, this Budget generates hope. I commend this Budget as presented and endorse it in this august House. Onward, upward, may we ever glow. Repeat it with me, friends. Do you remember that famous song – onward, upward, may we ever glow? [Dr. Singh: Onward, upward, may we ever go.] May we ever glow.

As I said, a budget is a costed plan. The costed plan presented today and the past few days for your scrutiny, supports our Manifesto. Our Manifesto was a promise to the people when we went for their vote. It is a social contract between them, the voters, and us, the people looking for their votes. The Manifesto is clearly supported by this Budget. In other words, it is planned. It is a planned policy. We are not just plucking things out of the air. Dr. Singh and his team, his hard-working team of public servants, skilled, and some of them are not very old. There is a bunch of young people there too; we must note that. They are giving solid support to the Manifesto promises. It shows the continuity from where we came from – we are building on what we have already achieved.

A next note coming from one of our contributors is the Budget covers everyone from cradle to grave. Mr. Ramjattan jokingly... Since we are putting that, I want to put another issue on the front burner – men's health. Mr. Ramjattan could very well be putting us into a little bit of problems. I saw he leaned over and got permission, apparently, from Mr. Norton, his boss, when he tried to make that joke. I think he said something to the effect that in the Budget there must be concerns from erection to resurrection, or something like that. Let me tell you, this Budget does that already in a real healthy sense. Mr. Ramjattan should visit his health centre. He lives in Campbellville, I think. The Campbellville Health Centre is one of the most organised – praise them – public health workers, public health nurses. It is one of the best in the country, if not in the region, for its vaccination programme. There we will be introducing men's health.

I hope I can make the Speaker allow me to make a demonstration. For the first time ever, we are going to be pushing... Formerly, it was women's health and children's health. We love that; we will not give it up. Guyana has one of the best rates of vaccination in the world, if not the best. About 96% to 98% of our kids who need vaccinations in that stage of their lives against vaccine-preventable diseases are vaccinated. In some bigger countries – some neighbouring, some very bellicose, some very warlike – they have only 39% and 40%, sometimes barely 50%. Guyana leads; we are among the best. We are among the best in the world. We are going to be adding... That was women's health. I think Ms. Teixeira did a lot in the past. I am not trying to butter her up because she is my Chief Whip. She did a lot with severe circumstances, resource constraints. She put that on the agenda too when she was Minister of Health several years ago. As a matter of fact, it was decades ago. *Time does fly*. She was able to put on the agenda expanding the

vaccination programme because vaccines save lives, vaccines prevent the spread of diseases. Guyana is in the top ranking among those countries with vaccination programmes.

There was a kind of bias for maternal and child health. Now, we are not saying we are going to get rid of it. We are going to continue that strong and forward momentum, leading the Caribbean. Guyana is 'Big Brother' in that regard. What we are going to be doing, we are going to be begging pardon of men whom we seemed to have neglected over the decades. We are going to be putting men's health on the agenda.

9.44 p.m.

That is one of the titbits, one of the seemingly small things I want to mention. Mr. Ramjattan's poor effort at a little off-colour joke prompted me to put some sense into the nonsense he was trying to evoke. Did you see it? You must run back the footage. He actually had to lean over to his boss, Mr. Norton, to see if he could say that big-man joke. Indeed, it is a problem. Erectile dysfunction can be the first indication of several other diseases, definitely; so do not laugh at it, especially those ladies who have husbands and might know some of their secrets. It might be the first indication of cardiac issues, other issues, and so on, definitely because it is all interconnected. If you cannot perform in one degree, definitely you might be compromised in other degrees.

I would like to take this opportunity to put men's health on the agenda. What we are doing is making it not as an alternative to women's health, but saying when you take your wives, when you take your children to the clinic to have themselves looked at in the maternity section, stay there too. Men's health must be on the front burner now. Get your pressure checked, get your sugar checked, get your blood count done. Those are the things we want to do. For example, are you 45 years and over? Those are already things you have to be looking at. Too many men have prostate cancer and prostate disease, but because it is slow acting, slow in its development and it is so-called shameful, we do not talk about it. I see the people over on the Opposition benches shaking their heads at me. Let us come together. These are the things that unite us. Erectile dysfunction can definitely unite us; so let us unite in those things and in other aspects. What about this? I said vaccine save lives but, Mdm. Teixeira, blood too saves lives. We can come together – and this Parliament has done it before – and have joint blood drives to show that we are definitely with the people. This is not diverting from the budget. The Budget provides for these 30 expanded services.

Let me shift on more to the Budget: six new hospitals. I do not want to intrude on my Minister's purview because he is going to be piling it on. I want to tell you that this is building on a foundation. Remember, it is under the PPP/C that hospitals were made left, right, and centre – Diamond, Leonora, Suddie, Mahaicony and Port Mourant. For the first time ever on the East Bank there is a hospital at Diamond. [Mr. Bharrat: Leonora.] Yes, Leonora, but let me speak a little bit on the East Bank. For the first time ever, there is a hospital there. Previous to that, you had to go to the Guyana Sugar Corporation's (GuySuCo) dispensary, where, more often than not, you were given a green sludge as a cure-for-all with some Panadol; and not only that, only workers and their close relatives could make benefit of that service. So when we did – that was under Dr. Jagdeo's presidency – make a hospital there, it was a boon. As I used to say, Diamond was a gem, and I meant Diamond the location, Diamond the hospital. Now we will be making not only Diamond, we will be putting pearls there now. We are going to be putting a massive new hospital in the vicinity, and Diamond...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, to continue this gem of a presentation, you will need an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could I ask that the Hon. Member be given another five minutes to conclude his presentation?

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister Teixeira. Hon. MP, you may continue.

Dr. Ramsaran: There are many things that are happening in the health sector. I diverted a little bit. I got a little flustered with that, but we are building on what we constructed and what we did. Then, remember, the Diamond facility will not disappear. It will be retrofitted and still pressed into service for the expanded services of the health sector. It might become a rehabilitation (rehab) centre. So, whereas we had just a small hospital on the East Bank corridor, we will have a massive hospital, one of the six hospitals. As Dr. Anthony will tell you later, one of them will specialise in maternal and child health so that infant mortality will go. We know it will never meet zero, but it will approximate to zero. That, again, is the next thing we must boast about.

I remember the first five years when I became the Minister of Health; we had 25 maternal deaths in the first year. Then the next year it went to 21, then 19, then down to 11, then down to 6. What

is more, that again is when we speak about some of the infant deaths and the different things, like malnutrition. Some of those maternal deaths were what you call direct and indirect. In one January, unfortunately, there were two women who died; the only two maternal deaths for that January. One had severe malaria, blackwater fever, what we call cerebral malaria, and one had advanced stages of Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS). What did they die from? Was it the AIDS or the malaria? Under the medical conventions – and Mdm. Teixeira could tell me if this is so or reprimand me if I am making a mistake – it means it will go down as maternal deaths. In that January, we had two maternal deaths, which, in my opinion or in the opinion of someone, had nothing to do with the maternity state. As a matter of fact, if a woman is pregnant – and of course only women can be pregnant until now – and crossing the road and gets run over and die, it is a maternal death. So, those are some of the things you have to look at.

When you are talking about malnutrition, too, Guyana does not have a problem with malnutrition. In other words, *maaga pickney* or *white mouth pickney*, those days are gone since we got rid of the PNC in 1992/1993. They are gone. The clinics had to close down. I was part of that process and Dr. Westford was part of that process. What we have now is a pandemic of childhood obesity, juvenile obesity. We need to look at that, and the Ministry of Education has to take note of what I am saying. The canteen policy – too many sugary beverages are being sold in the school canteens. We have been making some efforts for some time to have cooperation. I am happy to announce that Mdm. Minister of Education is very cooperative and helping us – the canteen policy.

We have been able to ban smoke and tobacco from the schools and the school environment, even advertising it. We have been able to ban alcohol and the advertisement of alcohol from the schools in the canteens, and even nearby. Why can we not do something about sugar? White death means salt, and now the sugary death could mean a next form of death – the canteen policy. I want to point out again that the Minister of Education is very gung-ho about this, a very progressive lady indeed – the canteen policy. She of course, being a mom, knows what I am speaking about, and being enlightened, she has already cooperated in the past with two powerful ministries coming together. For what? For the future of the country, because we have too much juvenile diabetes emerging. As I said, we do not have an epidemic, but a pandemic of juvenile obesity, which is one of the cornerstones for the development of other diseases, for example, cardiac diseases and even

diabetes itself. Those are some of the things I wanted to speak about, and at the same time I wanted to fade out with putting men's health on the agenda. We have done well in maternal and child health. We have done health. [Ms. Teixeira: *Inaudible*] I think they realise they are beyond health. Some of them are beyond health. I think they recognise that, Mdm. Minister.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for giving me the extra time. I would like to close by saying that Guyana has done well, but this Budget will put us in a position to do even better. Let us thank, again, the Minister and his team. Let us repeat: there are six new hospitals, including one specialised for maternal and child health – specialised. As a matter of fact, we need more staff. We might in the initial stage have to import them – not that we are being anti-Guyanese; we are being realistic. Do you remember when under Dr. Jagdeo we made Diamond, Suddie, Mahaicony and Port Mourant? We had to bring in the Cuban specialists but we used them in a double capacity, not only as technicians and clinicians in these facilities, but as teachers, as professors. We were able to bring back 1,000 students we sent to Cuba one year early and had them inducted. They continued their training here at Diamond, Suddie, Mahaicony and Port Mourant under the tutelage of their professors.

Similarly, we are going to have two additional training centres for nurses, one in Suddie and one in New Amsterdam – well advanced. Unfortunately, due to a certain shortage of building materials, again due to the fact that there is so much building going on – I see Dr. Anthony is shaking his head – construction sites are competing against construction sites for sand, brick, stone, steel parts and metal. So we are having those two. As a matter of fact, I can put you in the little know. The one in New Amsterdam is being constructed on an empty plot that was left after the dismantling of the old New Amsterdam Hospital, which was then relocated a few years back to the new location near the mental hospital near the Canje Bridge. So, things are happening. Not only are we building facilities to house, manage and treat the patients, but we are creating modern facilities where nurses can be trained – not a nurse teaching a nurse, not an old nurse teaching a nurse – but with technically equipped classrooms where you can have sessions showing them how to do the actual, mock up sessions. Simulation I think it is called. What is the word? [Dr. Anthony: Simulation centre.] Simulation centre. It is late in the evening, and I am getting a bit tired.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to be able to explain to you. I recommend this Budget wholeheartedly. This Budget will keep us staying the course for better development and propelling Guyana into the future, modernising Guyana. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member Dr. Bheri Ramsaran. Hon. Members, I think this is a good time to call on the Prime Minister to move the adjournment of today's proceedings.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That this National Assembly stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m. on Wednesday, 29th January, 2025.”

[Prime Minister]

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I ask that we adjourn the sitting of the House of Assembly to Wednesday, the 29th January, 2025 at 10:00 a.m., that is, tomorrow.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we adjourn until tomorrow at 10:00 a.m.

Adjourned accordingly at 9.54 p.m.