



NATIONAL ASSEMBLY  
OF THE PARLIAMENT OF  
THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC  
OF GUYANA

# OFFICIAL REPORT

*PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE FIRST SESSION (2020-2025) OF THE TWELFTH PARLIAMENT OF GUYANA UNDER THE CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE REPUBLIC OF GUYANA HELD IN THE DOME OF THE ARTHUR CHUNG CONFERENCE CENTRE, LILIENDAAL, GREATER GEORGETOWN*

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96<sup>TH</sup> Sitting

Thursday, 30<sup>TH</sup> January, 2025

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**PARLIAMENT OFFICE  
HANSARD DIVISION**

*The Assembly convened at 10.11 a.m.*

*Prayers*

*[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]*

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

**Speaker (1)**

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

**MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)**

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

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+ Hon. Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Anthony Phillips, M.S.S., M.P.,  
*Prime Minister,*  
*Prime Minister's Office,*  
*Colgrain House,*  
*205 Camp Street,*  
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+ Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P.,  
*Vice-President,*  
*Office of the President,*  
*New Garden Street,*  
*Georgetown.*

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

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Speaker**

## **Senior Ministers (16)**

+ Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni),  
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,  
Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.  
Government Chief Whip,  
Office of the Presidency,  
New Garden Street,  
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*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),  
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation,  
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Lot 254 South Road,  
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+\*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,  
*Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance  
and the Public Service,  
Ministry of Finance,  
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Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Bishop Juan A. Edghill, M.S., J.P., M.P.,  
*Minister of Public Works,  
Ministry of Public Works,  
Wight's Lane,  
Kingston,  
Georgetown.*

+ Hon. Dr. Frank C. S. Anthony, M.P.,  
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Ministry of Health,  
Brickdam,  
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+ Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P.,  
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+ \*Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P.,  
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Ministry of Home Affairs,  
Brickdam,  
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+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P.,  
*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),*  
*Minister of Agriculture,*  
*Ministry of Agriculture,*  
*Regent and Vlissengen Road,*  
*Bourda, Georgetown.*

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*Minister of Amerindian Affairs,*  
*Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,*  
*Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,*  
*South Cummingsburg,*  
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*Minister of Labour,*  
*Ministry of Labour,*  
*Brickdam,*  
*Georgetown.*

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*Minister of Natural Resources,*  
*Ministry of Natural Resources,*  
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*Minister of Human Services and Social Security,*  
*Ministry of Human Services and Social Security,*  
*Lot 357 East and Lamaha Streets*  
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+ **Cabinet Member**

\* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Charles S. Ramson, M.P.,  
*Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports,*  
*Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports,*  
*Main Street,*  
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+ Hon. Sonia Savitri Parag, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 2 – Pomeroon/Supenaam),*  
*Minister of Local Government and Regional Development,*  
*Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,*  
*DeWinkle Building,*  
*Fort Street,*  
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#### **Junior Ministers (4)**

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*Minister within the Ministry of Housing and Water,*  
*Ministry of Housing and Water,*  
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*Minister within the Ministry of Public Works,*  
*Ministry of Public Works,*  
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*Georgetown.*

Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P.,  
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*Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,*  
*Fort Street,*  
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*Office of the Prime Minister,*  
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+ **Cabinet Member**

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No. 66 Village,  
Corentyne,  
Berbice.

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Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,  
Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,  
c/o Freedom House,  
41 Robb Street,  
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Hon. Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.,  
Lot 340 East Street,  
South Cummingsburg,  
c/o Freedom House,  
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Georgetown.

Hon. Dr. Jennifer R.A. Westford, M.P.,  
55 AA Victoria Avenue,  
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East Bank Demerara.

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Paruima Upper Mazaruni,  
c/o Freedom House,  
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\* Hon. Ms. Sarah Browne, M.P.,  
Parliamentary Secretary,  
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,  
Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,  
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\* Hon. Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,  
Parliamentary Secretary,  
Ministry of Agriculture,  
Regent and Vlissengen Road,  
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Industry,  
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Lot 69 Suddie New Housing Scheme,  
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Lot 72 Jagan Street,  
Enterprise,  
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**MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)**

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Hon. Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, S.C., M.P.,

*[Absent – on leave]*

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*Lot 18 Public Road,  
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*Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),  
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*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),  
Lot 17 Block 1, Section F,  
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Hon. Ms. Beverley Alert, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)  
Lot 169-170 Stanleytown,  
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c/o Lot 13 A, New Providence,  
East Bank Demerara.*

Hon. Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 8 –Potaro/Siparuni)  
Church Street Mahdia.  
Lot 4 Public Road,  
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Hon. Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P.,  
*(Region No. 10 – Upper Demerara/Upper Berbice),  
Lot 90, Section C, Wismar, Linden.*

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

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

## **Officers (2)**

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

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

Mr. Saeed Umrao,  
*Audio Technician*

Mr. Daison Horsham,  
*Audio Technician*

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

### Welcome to the Teachers and Students of the Cummings Lodge Secondary School and Apex Academy

**Mr. Speaker:** Good morning once again, Hon. Members. Today, we have students and teachers from the Cummings Lodge Secondary School and to my far left the Apex Academy. Let us join in welcoming them.

### National Assembly's School Bell Debuts on *TikTok*

I want to make a special recognition to our school bell. Today is the first day we are starting earlier than usual, the earliest so far for the debate; and more particularly to recognise that the school bell has actually made *TikTok*.

## INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The following Bill was introduced and read the first time:

### Income Tax (Amendment) Bill 2025 – Bill No. 2/2025

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Income Tax Act.”

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

## PUBLIC BUSINESS

### GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

#### MOTION

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

WHEREAS the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana requires that Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for any financial year should be laid before the National Assembly and that, when the Estimates of Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly, an Appropriation Bill shall be introduced in the Assembly providing for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure;

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2025 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on January 17, 2025, as summarised in the attached Schedule 1;

AND WHEREAS the Constitution requires that the expenditure of each of the Constitutional Agencies listed in

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

AND WHEREAS the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, Cap. 73:02, requires that the annual lump sum subvention recommended by the Minister with Responsibility for Finance for each Constitutional Agency be included in the annual budget proposal for approval by the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Minister with Responsibility for Finance recommends lump sum subventions for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2025 as summarised in the attached Schedule 2;

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2025 of a total sum of one trillion, two hundred and ninety-eight billion, three hundred and forty-six million, nine hundred and eighty thousand, and one hundred and eighty-one dollars (\$1,298,346,980,181), excluding eighty three billion, eight hundred and three million, five hundred and fifteen thousand, six hundred and seventy-six dollars (\$83,803,515,676) which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in Schedule 1, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and make further provision in respect of finance:

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the National Assembly approves the recommended lumpsum subvention for each Constitutional Agency for the financial year 2025 as stated in Schedule 2, amounting to a total sum of eighteen billion, nine hundred and forty six million, five hundred and sixty-two thousand, and one hundred and seventy-three dollars (\$18,946,562,173) which is charged upon the Consolidated Fund by the Constitution and for the sums voted for the Constitutional Agencies to

form part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures of Guyana for the financial year 2025.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the sum of \$512,436,702,092 equivalent to US\$2,463,889,710 to be withdrawn from the Natural Resource Fund for the financial year 2025 in accordance with the Natural Resource Fund Act 2021.

*[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, the Assembly will continue debate on the motion for the approval of the estimates of expenditure for the financial year 2025. The first speaker today is the Deputy leader, the Hon. Member, Dr. Asha Kissoon. Hon. Member Dr. Kissoon, just give me one minute. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, displays are not allowed. I had to end last night with cautioning you and the first thing this morning is another caution.

**Ms. Ferguson:** *[Inaudible]*

**Mr. Speaker:** We will know when to call on the House to take action. Hon. Member Dr. Kissoon, you may commence.

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker [Dr. Kissoon]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for this opportunity this morning. I must say that the Opposition has really made me feel welcome because this House is witnessing a case of *pot telling kettle that its bottom is black*. These are the same colleagues who squatted in Government for five months after the no-confidence motion was passed. So, they are free to do whatever they want to do.

Mr. Speaker, the culture of vindictive politics must come to an end in Guyana. A national budget is meant to unite us, not divide us. Is it so unheard of that a Member of the Opposition could agree with the Government on something in the budget? Are there no longer free thinkers who exist in the Opposition with the exception of my colleague, Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond? Is it so unheard of that a government could present a budget to us and we agree with what is in it? We need to do better.

Over the last few days, we have heard the words friends, families and favourites. When will we stop victimising the hard-working people of Guyana? There have been hundreds, if not thousands, of contracts given in different, varying ministries in government, and these are persons who have

worked hard putting their bids irregardless of which party they voted for. Now they are being victimised by our Opposition, by accusing them of being favourites of the Government, and that is the only reason they are doing work in our country – to build their own nation with their own hard earned taxpayers' dollars. I would like to recognise that this is unfair to them, and we should not victimise our Guyanese people by accusing them of being friends, favourites, and families for the hard work that they are doing.

I now humbly offer my input to the 2025 national Budget. Hon. Minister, Dr. Ashni Singh and your team, the hard work and dedication put into this Budget has been recognised. A budget of this magnitude had to take hours and days and nights of hard work, and I thank you very much. To begin, I would like to commend the Government of Guyana for the strides taken in the right direction. I am particularly impressed by the housing programmes, agricultural projects, expansion in healthcare, and all of the development that I see happening. As a medical doctor, I must comment here. I commend the steps taken to bring specialisation hospitals in Guyana with the advances in gynaecology, paediatrics, medical imaging, and particularly something dear to me, the new oncology centre that is being developed.

*10.21 a.m.*

Cancer statistics have risen drastically globally, and Guyana should not be left behind when it comes to comprehensive care, including palliative care for our citizens. The cervical cancer screening vouchers have helped thousands of women in Guyana, myself included. This initiative must be recognised. To the Minister of Health, I thank you for doing this for us. There are now ultrasound care services being offered at primary healthcare centres, and there are advances in laboratory services. The healthcare vouchers have played a pivotal part in many lives. They have helped many people. The new \$10,000 voucher is also there now, and it will help persons. However, I must say I have a vision that, one day, with the advances in healthcare in our public system, we will come to a state where we do not even need vouchers, where our public health system will be so self-sufficient that we could cater to all the needs of the citizens of Guyana. In the meantime, this initiative is welcomed and accepted.

I need to bring light to an issue that has come to my attention. I am sure everyone here has noticed that, at some point or the other, there are persons on *Facebook* – not many of them – who seek medical funding and assistance for

certain surgeries, neurological surgeries in particular, that are not offered in the public health system. I make a request that we have budgetary funds allocated for them to assist them, meanwhile systems are put in place in Guyana so that we can do these surgeries in the public health system. It should not be due to the consideration of a minister or someone who is willing to help them with funding, but have them catered for in the budget.

As a young woman, I am pleased to see progress being made by the Ministry of Housing and Water. I look back to the period of 2015-2020, when I saw 7,000 house lots being distributed. I compare it to now, in 2025, after listening to Hon. Minister Croal's presentation yesterday, where we saw 41,000 house lots being distributed to this day, right now, with 50% going to young people between the ages of 21 and 25. These are tremendous strides that are being made for the young people of Guyana. I am going to take this unique opportunity to recognise the hardworking staff at the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI), who have been working tirelessly for new treatment plants. If I am only to name a few, they are in Onderneeming, Parika, La Parfaite Harmonie, Cummings Lodge, Bachelor's Adventure, Caledonia, Wakenaam – and these are only a few. These are treatment plants that will benefit thousands of people in Guyana, and it must be commended.

Land is one of our most valuable resources. Yet, young people are sometimes locked out of opportunities due to bureaucratic hurdles and financial constraints. I urge this House to consider reducing the minimum age for applying for government land from 21 to 18. I am aware that this is an issue that has been debated many times, but young people should have the right to invest into their future early and contribute to national development. To make this a reality, the Government could consider introducing interest-free loans for first time, young landowners, backed by state guarantees, and further subsidise land prices for youth applicants. We are building a great nation for them, and they must be given the means to participate in that process. We must raise independent thinkers, motivated young people, hardworking people. We do not want to raise our children to remain in our homes until they are 21. It is not fair to make them wait five years after finishing school to start the process of owning land and building.

Everywhere I look, there is development – buildings are being constructed, new housing schemes, drainage and, most importantly, beautiful roads and highways. However, with the beautiful vision of a developed Guyana being headed by the Ministers of Public Works, I would like to see more

attention given to contractors, for tarnishing the name of our beautiful country. A very wise man said to me that if there is one drop of faecal matter in a tank of water, nobody wants to drink it. This being said, to the Ministers of Public Works, the Hon. Indar and Edghill, I urge you to be the disinfectant in your sector. We cannot have contractors doing work that is not up to par for the Guyanese people. Attention must be paid to the quality of work being carried out. Continue to do the amazing work that you do but disinfect your tanks. Ensure that we get what we pay for; ensure that contractors are held accountable and complete quality work for the people of Guyana.

We have seen an increase for the cost of living and, without doubt, the Government has taken several steps to curb the effects on our population. One of the most direct ways we can ease the burden on our citizens is through further subsidisation of fuel. Reducing fuel cost will only create a ripple effect – lower transportation cost, the price of goods, and making life more affordable for Guyanese households. While the current Budget has made steps in reducing the cost of electricity, we must go further to ensure that fuel remains accessible and more affordable for all citizens. I do look forward to the promising measures that are being implemented in the gas-to-shore project.

Another way to ease the burden of the cost of living for us is in the education sector. This point was actually raised by my honourable colleague, Mr. Dineshwar Jaiprakash. Few people know this, but I had the privilege of going to school in Africa. I lived there for eight years and I benefitted from a school feeding programme. There, from nursery to secondary, all children are catered for, are feed three meals a day and their snacks. I believe that, here in Guyana, we can afford this for all grades, for all classes, for all schools. The ripple effect created by this is tremendous – school kitchens, creation of employment, nutritionists, cooks, staff, and collaboration with the agricultural sector where there are school gardens and you kindle the love for gardening with the children. This is something that can be considered. Yes, we are the food basket of the Caribbean, and we can also afford to do this for our children also.

In our blooming oil economy, the focus I have seen in the non-oil economy has stood out to me. With more than 10% economic increase, the agricultural sector has been a paramount part of this growth, reducing duty and agricultural equipment, expansion of the agricultural sector, aquaponics, prawns, and countless initiatives. As the economy grows, parents stand up, and everyone wants their children to be lawyers, doctors and engineers to work in the oil sector, but

we have a unique opportunity here to bring back the love of agriculture for the youth of Guyana. This is where the hemp industry comes in. With the historic passing of the legislation – and I must thank the Hon. Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha for this; he has made history here in Guyana with the passing of the hemp legislation – we must now support Guyana's hemp industry which is projected to bring billions of non-oil funding into the economy. So much interest has been shown by the youth in Guyana in hemp, and it is an ideal opportunity to bring young people back into the agricultural sector, not only to focus on the planting of hemp but also into the processing and producing of end products. With its hundreds of uses and medicinal benefits, Guyana can only benefit from this.

A nation's greatness is measured not only by its economic prosperity but also by its compassion. If we are truly building a modern and just society, then the humane treatment of animals must be a priority. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been tirelessly working to care for mistreated animals, yet they receive little financial backing from the State. The Ministry of Agriculture could play a part in this. I must acknowledge that I have seen the initiative taken by the First Son to raise funds for NGOs helping animals and welfare for animals. I have seen NGOs doing work. However, in our Guyana, our oil-rich nation, we should move towards having a state-owned veterinary clinic or hospital where care can be given to our animals, where we can take care of our animals also.

Moving on, I recently learned that we have approximately 95 endangered species of flora and fauna right here in Guyana. Guyana's blessed rain forest has tremendous opportunities for tourism and contribution to our economic growth. We play an important part in the world in bringing awareness to this, and we must lead by example on a global scale. There are commissions formed to protect our wildlife, yet many lack adequate financial assistance to carry out their mandates. I humbly request that more attention be paid to this. I want my children, my grandchildren, and my great-grandchildren, to be able to experience these endangered species as I have growing up.

Bringing attention to these few issues, I now have my conclusion. My conclusion is a special message. As we come to elections, I need to remind the Government and Opposition that our only mandate is to work for the people of Guyana. We must unite, we must come together, and this Budget helps us to do that. Let us support the good measures put forward by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public

Service. Let us support the good initiatives, and where there is disagreement, let us come to an agreement of improvement and not divisive politics. Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker and Honourable Members. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Deputy Speaker, Dr. Kissoon. Now, for our dear Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip, the Hon. Madam, Gail Teixeira.

**Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]:** Good morning, everyone, and thank you, Mr. Speaker, my colleagues in Cabinet, and particularly Minister Ashni Singh for this wonderful Budget. Before I start, I must recognise, acknowledge, and congratulate Dr. Asha Kissoon for the comment she made today, particularly her last comment. There was time in this country when the People's Progressive Party (PPP) offered critical support to the People's National Congress (PNC) – highly controversial – where we said we would support the good things and we would criticise the bad things. Of course, we were told by Mr. Burnham, the then Prime Minister, that they were the *Bolsheviks*, meaning the majority and we were the *Mensheviks*, meaning the minority. So, yes, Dr. Kissoon, it is a time for a form of critical support again. It will help to move this country even faster forward.

*Budget 2025* is an example and a product of inclusion and participation. Why do I say that? I have heard people talking about inclusion, participation, *da da da*, on the other side, but the private sector – the critical component of any economy moving forward, any country moving forward – have all come forward in public statements supporting this Budget. Further, saying they contributed to it; they made proposals and recommendations which are included in the Budget. So we hear, we listen. The community meetings: there is not one day in this country that they are Ministers not out in the field. Thousands and thousands of community meetings have been held – meeting people on the road in terms of looking at what has to be done for the development of the communities – and we listen. People say they have problems with the road, they have problems with drainage, they have problems with the health centres, they have problems with this, and we listen, and we incorporate their views and suggestions into the budget. The point is, that we are there physically, we are accessible, we are visible, and we are listening, and not just listening, responding to that. This is what you call a responsive government, a critical component in democracy as well. We have much to talk about. There is so much and not enough time. As you know,



Mr. Speaker, 35 minutes is not a long time. However, everywhere we go – I am probably one of the oldest Members of Parliament (MPs). I hate to say it as a woman, but what can you do?

10.36 a.m.

Everywhere we go in Guyana, there is progress. I go down roads, sometimes I know landmarks, I do not always know the street names in some areas and, suddenly, I do not recognise where I am. Can you imagine we are having 11-storeyed buildings? We were told for decades that we could not build more than three stories in Guyana. It would sink. There is progress. Obviously, when you have progress, you have to deal with some inconveniences. When the roads are being built, there is dust, traffic congestion and so on. You cannot progress unless there is some discomfort along the way. Everywhere you go, there is progress. Schools, health centres, roads, buildings and houses are going up. Airbnbs are going up. It is unbelievable. I want to say something which, for the younger generation, they might not appreciate.

What I remember in 1992 was, our beautiful Guyana was looking dismal and *bruk up*. Everywhere one went in communities, houses were not painted. They were falling down. There were 20 people in a house – cousin, aunty, granny, in-laws – with one yard tap and one latrine (one toilet) – outside toilet. When you look now at the housing programmes, the conditions under which people are living, the dignity – one of the most important things for human beings to have is dignity. When a woman, a man or a couple gets a house lot, it gives them collateral, it gives them security of tenure and, it allows them to own something in their own right. It is liberating and you cannot put a price on that, now that you are living in better conditions than you were before.

How have people reacted to this budget? I want to tell a little amusing story. As you know, we all have *WhatsApp* and we receive messages from all parts of the country. From one far interior area I got a message the other night from persons saying they had a discussion on the budget and they were all excited about it and were looking forward to it. They said they would vote for the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), of course. One of the jokes of the whole thing is that they were delighted about the \$100,000 for each newborn baby produced by Guyanese woman and man. That very night, they were going to start working on that project. A \$100,000 for every newborn baby; it will cost \$1.3 billion. The fact is that people are also looking forward to the \$10,000 per child, which is non-taxable, in terms of Income

Tax. Those who have five children will have \$50,000 a month times 12 months – you calculate it – of being able to deduct from your Income Tax. These are things people are welcoming. The \$100,000 moved to \$130,000 for the threshold, costing about \$8.5 billion in the budget. It adds another 22,000 people to not be part of the tax net. That is in addition to the ones last year that came off the tax net. The changes in Income Tax from 28 to 25 and so on, are important. I will leave that to the specialist to deal with those issues. All these measures are to make life easier for our people and less stressful for our people. Due to my time, I will try to keep moving as quickly as possible, because I want to get all my bits and pieces in.

I have heard some very sanctimonious arguments in this House. Some people, holier than thou, suddenly can hold up integrity to the world that they are so virtuous. Maybe, sometimes, we have to remind people who may have amnesia or suffer from some kind of dementia, in terms of losing their brain cells. My Colleague spoke about elections. Mr. Jones, who asked for evidence, I produced for him the Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the General and Regional Elections on 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2020. [An Hon.

**Member:** This is the most recent one.] This is the most recent one, where they said this was one of the most brazen efforts to steal an election. It was 2020. I do not have to go back to 1968, 1973, 1978, 1980 and 1985. I just have to go four years ago. Mr. Speaker, they want evidence, here is the evidence.

Let us remind the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), and I want to separate the Opposition from Dr. Kissoon, who is not part of the APNU/AFC... They were rude and disrespectful to walk out on the Deputy Speaker of this House. You have no respect for women. You all come to this House over and over and talk about women, but you disrespect a woman being a Deputy Speaker in this House. Disrespect for what? The Opposition continues to suffer from myopia - short-sightedness. I keep telling Dr. Anthony to do something; help them get their sight back. It seems he cannot work on it. It is congenital.

Let me remind my Friends on the other side of the House in the APNU/AFC of the Amaila Falls Hydro Project. Some of you talked about electricity and cost of living, let me go back to Amaila Falls Hydro Project 2013, where in the Parliament, despite meetings with the former Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Granger and his team at the Office of the President, with President Ramotar, including inter-party discussions between the PPP/C and the APNU, including

agreements that in the second round they will support the laws that would allow for the Amaila Falls Hydro Project, to go through with the funding, they defeated it twice. That was 11 years ago, if that project had gone through, we would have had more electricity, less blackouts and the cost would have been reduced. If we go back to 2013 *Reuters* ... We lost the funding. The company pulled out because and I will quote one part of the *Reuters* article of 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2013: [An. Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] You did not know that 11 years ago. Do you have *farsee*? Are you *farsee*? I know you have short-sightedness.

“A planned \$100 million IADB financing deal required unanimous parliamentary backing for legislation creating environmental protections for the area around the site and raising government loan guarantees to state-owned companies”.

You defeated it twice. It went around and you defeated it. The second time you defeated it. Again, this is short-sightedness. We had the issue of the Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism Bill. It was defeated once and defeated twice in the National Assembly when we were in the minority between 2012 and 2015. What did that lead to? We were grey-listed by the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force CFATF and we were grey-listed by FATF for two years. When they got into Government in 2015, they brought the same Bill to the Special Select Committee they had been opposing, which they defeated twice in the House and they passed it. Vindictiveness and small-mindedness do not move a country forward and do not help to develop a country. You in the APNU/AFC have held back the forward moving of this country. You have taken anti-national positions against the people of this country.

One of my Colleagues asked in the debate that, how is it that every time the PPP/C is in Government, this country moves forward, even in the most difficult times? [An Hon.

Member: (Inaudible)]. I do not know if our *juju* is good. Maybe our aura is good, or we got good *juju*, but somehow, when APNU/AFC gets in there, the country starts removing. They talk of inclusion, participation and transparency, yet they signed the Agreement with ExxonMobil on 16<sup>th</sup> October, 2016. It was a secret. When the media asked and when the Opposition, which was us, asked about what we heard – whether there was an agreement, they denied up to the Budget Debate of 2017, that there was no such agreement. Until they were exposed in the media, they then had to admit that there was an agreement with ExxonMobil in 2016, one that had been

criticised in the press all along, but you cannot, at this time, reverse it. This is hypocrisy at the highest level. You come here to this House in this debate and cry *crocodile tears*. I should not say crocodile, it was caiman. You cried caiman tears in this country.

My Colleagues have referred to many of the scandals with procurement - Durban Park, Sussex Street Bond, COVID-19 – the way in which the drugs and medical supplies were – while the Minister of Health was ensconced at Ashmin's building and right at this building, dealing with elections. We know what her priority was. They say they did not have oil money when they were in Government, so they could not do the things we are doing. Let me remind my Hon. Friends on the other side, there was money left – a lot of money was left. This was in 1992, when we were the third poorest nation in the entire Western Hemisphere. We were with Haiti and Bolivia - the poorest. We were the most indebted. We started to breathe and unravel what they had done from 1964 to 1992. It took us years.

We had to go through hurdles with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and everybody to make us credible again, to make us able to have money. Before I get into what I want to say, I remember when we sat down one day and talked about a national housing programme, and we started with estate land and plantation land from the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) not being used. We sat there and looked at which area we could try with. We realised we had no money to do the infrastructure. We had no money, so how do we help people? We went to the World Bank and the IDB and they told us that they could lend us money for housing programmes, but we had to ask the people who would be buying it to pay the market value of the land. In 1992, 61% of our people were living below the poverty line. We had malnutrition in this country. I know about it. Right in Georgetown, I saw for myself children with kwashiorkor, red hair but not like mine, and big bellies but not like mine. Children in Lodge and Albouystown with malnutrition and severe malnutrition too, were living in abject poverty. You come here and play sanctimonious with us. Do you think we have no memory? Do you think the Guyanese people have no memory?

Let us talk about whether they had money or not? Were they starved for funds or not? Let us do some reminding. Gold – we are a gold-producing country. In fact, there are documents to show the Bank of Guyana's assets of the amount of gold we left in the gold reserves. Gold reserves are like your savings. In case of a bad day, a rainy day, if

there is a flood, or the country is in crisis, you kind of dip into your gold reserves. Your gold reserves are what you really protect. You never sell your gold on the world market at low prices, unless you are in a really bad situation. There was \$15 billion left in the gold reserves of Guyana in 2015.

10.51 a.m.

It went down, according to the Bank of Guyana in December, 2019, to \$635 million. I am calling United States (US) dollars, sorry \$635 Guyana dollars. From \$14.2 billion in 2015, that is what it was. Where has the money gone? Where did the money go? Never accounted for and I am not exaggerating. If my Colleagues on the other side want to do their own checking, they could go to the Bank of Guyana's Statement on Assets and Liabilities, published in the *Official Gazette* on 30<sup>th</sup> May, 2015. The same source will show you, on 29<sup>th</sup> February, 2020, three days before the elections, that the gold reserves held less than a billion dollars, that is \$635 million. However, more than that and what is wicked, what is seriously wicked is that...

[An Hon. Member: (inaudible)] Wicked, yes. In fact, they did not tell the people they had undervalued these accounts to let people think there was more money there than there was in the Bank of Guyana assets. They sold our patrimony. The gold reserve of our country is our patrimony – Guyanese, every single Guyanese's patrimony. It is there to help us as a people. So, they said that they did not have money. Where did the \$15 billion go?

We also have, between 2015 and 2019, the budget, when added up, was \$1.2 trillion. So, they are all excited about the trillion dollars we have right now, but they had in 2015-2019 \$1.25 billion. What did they do with it? Where is it? What is there to show for it? At least Mr. Burnham could say that he built the Soesdyke Highway, and he built the Demerara floating bridge. They cannot say one project. Not one project is a legacy for them in government – not one. Mr. Speaker, [interruption] ... there are the foreign reserves, the foreign currency reserves. In 2015 it was over US\$700 million. In 2020, it was about US\$200 million. Where *de* money gone? What did you do with almost US\$500 million? It is not in the budget but reflected. Do not tell us that you did not have money.

When we came into Government in 1992, we were so in debt that, as a Minister of Health, my budget was about \$200-\$300 million. Ask Dr. Frank Anthony, it is now in the billions – \$30 billion. That was hard guava season in 1992-997. It was very hard guava season to run a government that had a collapsed health sector, a collapsed education sector,

and collapsed infrastructure. No money had been spent on drainage and irrigation for 10 years. Do you know, they held up their 10 years in Government. However, when I was Minister of Home Affairs if there were two riots in Camp Street that led to the havoc that took place, I would have been booted out by all of you.

What is the legacy of APNU/AFC? Your legacy is two riots in Camp Street that led to pandemonium, to people dying and being moved to Lusignan under the most inhuman conditions and embarrassing us as a people. The United Nations Working Group on People of African Descent came and went to Lusignan in 2017 and 2018, and they condemned Lusignan, as inhabitable, and inhuman. That is your legacy. It was we who came in and Mr. Robeson Benn gave a report on what we have been doing with Lusignan Prison and the prisons of this country. You tell me about integrity, oh please, do not think... This is the modern world. It is the modern world, you can *Google* anything that you want. Mr. Speaker, you tell me about integrity, but from the time the Integrity Commission Act came in and you had to make your declarations, the Opposition, whether you or your previous Oppositions, has not been declaring to the Integrity Commission for decades. Why? Take shame off your face and come clean.

We came in 2017 to this House, 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2017. A motion was signed by the now President, who was a young Member of Parliament (MP), and me. The motion proposed to stimulate the economy and reduce poverty and hardships in the 2018 Budget, this was just before. This motion we tried to have it debated, it was debated, and of course it was defeated. This is because everything, every motion, we brought to this House was defeated. I asked the Opposition because it was a long motion which exposed the level of decline of this economy in a few years... Mr. Speaker, you know, we are not an old democracy we are a young democracy. We have gone through hell and high water to reach where we are today. Democracy is fragile at its best, even in advanced democratic nations. We are a young democratic nation and so it is fragile. When the economy is treated in a certain way as they did, then how is there to be progress? Let us go. I advise you, go back to the 2017 motion, moved by a young MP called Mr. Irfaan Ali, and signed by an older MP called Ms. Gail Teixeira in October, 2017. By the way, if you read this you will see that we kept our promises. We made recommendations and those are in the budgets from 2020 to now, as we evolve and rectify, fix what you unfixed and damaged.

The Opposition, I was quite delighted to see People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) putting out 'People First and at the Centre of Our Development Agenda 2020'. This is your Manifesto for 2025. Now, you know, it is very interesting what they came up with in 2015-2020 as their strategy and what this is. Basically, there has been no movement at all – no movement. They throw out, we are going to give this and we are going to give that. One of them says, 'We are going to give Guyanese people, every household \$2 million'. I think that is what it said. I was at the National Park for May Day in 2016. I was the Opposition representative speaking at the National Park with the trade unions there, Mr. Patrick Yarde and all of them. Ms. Amna Ally, as a Minister, a high-ranking Minister of the Government, a high-ranking executive of the APNU/AFC promised the people, the crowd there, 'Every household gets a million dollars out of the oil money'. Where the million-dollar gone? Never produced. Now they come back and talk about \$2 million.

What is most disturbing is that they have not learnt. In order to spend money, you have to make money. In order to have money, you have to spend money, you have to invest money, money has to circulate. Giving subsidies without agriculture, housing, and infrastructure, you are building on quicksand. This goes back to exactly the same formula of 2015/29, we are going to give you and give you and give you. Read – is there an economic thing in here? No, it just openly says, 'Yes, we are going to develop, you know, different places and stuff', but nothing for the farmers. You say you are for the working people, nothing for the farmers, nothing. They are talking about the economy now, agriculture, information-based technology, and tourism. I am not just talking about handing out things. This last time you were in Government, your formula for development was tax, tax and more tax. You depended on tax to bring in revenue so that you could so-called move to develop the country. Well, you taxed and as I refer to the motion there of 2017, it shows the amount of tax you were making. However, where did it go? Again, I ask, where did it go? It cannot be explained. Not one legacy project – not one. Are you telling me the Independence Arches, which were donated by the private sector, is your legacy – that *deh* all *ova* the place?

This is the 2025 Manifesto. It is devoid of any economic strategy. [Dr. Singh: Totally devoid.] Totally devoid. When you read it, you feel so sad. I feel sad because I can say as a politician, they do not have anything to offer and they do not, really. I also feel sad as a Guyanese that a party that says they got 217,000 votes in 2020 have come with such a hackneyed, myopic approach to the economic and

social development of our country. It is sad; it is really sad. I would like to have seen my Friends on the other side rise to the occasion. This country is moving forward like never before, and if they do not see it as a problem, the rest of the Guyanese people see it every single day. They see opportunities. You had the money from Norway, the agreement from Norway to do the carbon credits, US\$ 200 million over five years to build Amaila. You threw it away. You never used it for the Indigenous communities. Where has it gone? You rejected it. You said you wanted consultants; you always like consultants. The consultant said to you that Amaila was the most ready and viable project to move forward, and you dismissed it. You know, development is an interesting thing and maybe we should as a people have more discussions on development.

However, when we build the Harbour Bridge, the Demerara Harbour Bridge, that spanking new bridge that is going up, we can all see it, not like how it was being done under my former Colleague over on the other side which has led to procurement, a commission of inquiry, *et cetera* and court cases *et cetera*. When that bridge goes up, you see we look at a bridge and think, 'Oh infrastructure. How the people *gon* benefit? The people *nah gon* benefit, they *can't* eat concrete'. That is what you say. That is what you say on your websites and stuff. When that bridge opens, it will do many things. Many things for the people of this country. All the massive projects, while they are being dealt with, create jobs, it creates manufacturing, transportation, and whole sector of activities around it. Secondly, materials, men and machines, that is phenomenal. This is a legacy project.

Including that for the people, what does it mean? If you live on the West Coast and you want to come to Georgetown every morning to reach work at 8 o'clock, or to school at 8.30, you have to leave home at 5 and 6 o'clock. It means people will benefit from time. They have less time and less stress. It will lead to greater economic activity between not only Georgetown and Region 4 with Region 3, but also Bartica and Essequibo. This is because that is the route – how you get there. Transportation links are critical for development. Moving goods and services quickly, moving people quickly, that is what is important. We have talked about the Bartica connection with what was called El Condor in the old days between what is Parika and going towards Bartica. When that road opens up, the interior will be a different place and moving goods and services between the interior and the capital. This is the future of our country. Why are you so blind, why can you not understand? Why must you be so tainted that everything you dissect?

11.06 a.m.

It is okay to criticise and say do it better, but you give off such negative vibes. There is nothing good happening in this country, according to you – nothing good. If we take that project as an example of development and all the things, the World Bank said, very clearly, in 2024, in its development report, that a country to adopt... What is the fastest way to develop a country? Is to adopt new technologies and digital industries, ensuring continuous economic expansion with rapid infrastructure to drive rapid growth. If we go along *kanta kanta*, little bit by little bit, like how you all think you have been doing it, we will never reach where we need to reach.

Infrastructure, as I said, is a major catalyst to developing our country. It also encourages investment. It encourages young people. They are at school, and they are going to do the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC). ‘What do I want to be?’ Well, if you do not have any big thing going on, they will never be charmed by it. They will never be excited about it. Now, people in fifth and sixth form can say, ‘What do I want to be? I want to be a doctor. I want to be an engineer. I want to be a scientist. What do I want to be?’ We are providing the means through these programmes in the budget – education, health, Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) and all these things to help our young people reach their dreams. There are no rapid bullets for dreams, you have to go through it, but there is hope.

One of the fundamental issues of oil-producing countries that they have to encounter is economic diversification. All those countries that have had first oil in the developing world, many of them have fallen into the trap that you suddenly become dependent on oil. We were heading in that direction in 2018 and 2019. It was all about oil. Agriculture was left, flown as it may. Rice, sugar, mining – everything was in decline and the stats are there to show it. Mr. Speaker...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Minister, what is in decline is your time. You need an extension to complete. You have five minutes, Hon. Minister.

**Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Ms. Parag]:** Mr... Okay.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Ms. Teixeira:** If you look at the gas to energy (GTE) project, they killed Amaila. We are starting back Amaila but the GTE project – the largest project in this country, the largest and most expensive... We have said in our budget

that, when this project is commissioned, 50% of the consumer costs will be reduced. Do you have any idea what the impact is on every family in Guyana on a monthly basis – their purchasing power being increased?

One of the things with economic development and also targeted infrastructure – we have been very clear and strategic in what infrastructure we are doing. This is because targeted infrastructure not only increases economic activity but enhances economic growth, reduces inequalities and improves public service delivery. We can give examples, roads, electricity and water, for example, and the diversification of our economy. We are no longer an oil country dependent on oil. Oil is not there all the time you know. Oil, it comes to an end. It is not there forever. It may last till X period of time. Look at Trinidad. It was on a good wicket from the 1960s – oil gone; oil dried up. They are still the producers of the natural gas. Our friends need to go into a room somewhere and try to figure out really what they stand for. Are they for Guyana? Are they going to support the Local Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS), which is a comprehensive national strategy in terms of our environment, our climate, Indigenous rights, women's rights, *et cetera*?

When we look at social capital, how can we tell a country is moving forward? Cell phones – do you know cell phones are mostly in Georgetown? Go into any interior village and community and see how many cell phones are there, and what the connectivity is, that we are doing with Starlink, the information and communication technology (ICT) hubs and so on, so that the country is connected. We are being connected for the first time. For people in the interior, we are removing the digital divide and inequalities. Cell phones are a good indicator of what is called social capital and improvement in people's quality of life.

Televisions (TVs) – in 1992 hardly anybody had a television. Cars – in the 1980s cars were tied up with rubber bands and all sorts of things because you could not get any foreign currency to bring in parts for cars. Now cars, all-terrain vehicles (ATVs), motorbikes, electric bikes, and electric cars, these are indicators that there is progress. That people's purchasing power has increased – not a small group. When drivers come to work in the public sector in cars that is an indicator that things change. That is an indicator. I can point to many ministries where the drivers of ministers, the drivers working in the ministries, come to work in the ministry in a car. A car they own. That is the filter-down effect on ordinary people who do not make what you say are big salaries.

The APNU/AFC needs to wake up and smell the roses. Whether you are there or whether you support or not, this country is moving. Nobody is going to stop it now. Our beautiful Guyana, our blessed nation, has got a taste of progress and movement forward. People have a taste for the future – hope, and optimism. They are not going to want it reversed at all, so you better wake up and smell the roses. This is because if you are on the wrong side of history, you are going to be on the wrong side of our nation once again. Our country is on the move. Let me just say one thing, if there is one group of people on the move, it is the women of Guyana. Forty-odd per cent have house lots. Forty-odd per cent have ownership in shade houses. Women are becoming contractors in the construction industry – 365 got contracts out of 1,000 contracts or more. We are not *tekking* left, Comrade. We are not *tekking* left, and we do not care who says what. We have houses. We are putting our children in school and as one woman told me, ‘I got my house and if any man behaves bad, I could put he out. I do not have to depend on no man anymore’. It is a liberation of our women, empowerment of our women. The empowerment of our Amerindian villages has never taken place like this. Four billion dollars of the carbon markets went into Indigenous communities, 30,000 solar panels went to 30,000 families in the interior of Guyana, mining landings and so on, to give people light. And you think, so what? If you do not have light, how do children study? How do teachers study? How do people learn what is going on? Light is illuminating and for the interior areas, it allows children to have a future.

As I said, APNU/AFC has to decide – which side are you on? Progress and development or are you going to continue? We all know the answer to that, unless you have a revolution or coup inside your group, which I know will not happen. Do you want to continually be in this position of holding back the progress of our country, of being the spoiler? You are a bunch of spoilers. This is because when Jagan took up critical support, we supported the foreign policy, we supported things, and we criticised you for rigging elections. You are incapable of bringing up critical support like what we did. Holding back progress and trying to hold back people's progress. The Guyanese people have seen it, smelt it and have seen change. They want more and they will get more under the People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C).

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. For all our people, as an older member of my Government and party and an older Member of Parliament, I am so proud of where Guyana is going. I knew the hard days. I am so proud and so honoured to be able to stand in this House and talk about how we are moving forward, and we are not going to allow any reversal.

No more 2020 experience. That is not going to happen in Guyana. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Minister Teixeira. I will hand over to the Deputy Speaker.

*[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]*

*[Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.]*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Members, I now invite Hon. Catherine Hughes to make her contribution.

**Ms. Hughes:** Thank you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I want to start with a very special welcome to the bright and beautiful faces of these young I see here, the future generation of Guyana. We are happy to have you students here with us today and I know we have got them on both sides. I also want to start with a moment of serious reflection. I want to extend sympathies to the family of Ms. Faliza (Ganesh) Ally. I was driving to this Parliament this morning and heard a horrific news story about Ms. Faliza (Ganesh) Ally – the mother of seven children, the smallest is eight months old – being hacked to death by her partner. I am sure later this evening more of us will hear that. I offer sympathies to the family, and I say to the former Speaker in this House just now that we, as a people, can always do better and that is the message I want to give today. We, when we are in Government, must always do better. This is because although she spoke about women being able to walk out and throw the man out, the reality is we have to provide more systems to ensure Ms. Faliza (Ganesh) Ally does not end up where she is today.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker and distinguished members of this honourable House, I rise today to address the 2025 National Budget with a commitment to constructive dialogue, recognising the commendable efforts of the staff at the Ministry of Finance and even the gentleman with responsibility for finance – not the minister but with responsibility. I am saying that I want to highlight some of the areas that we must strive for improvement.

First, I want to start with an examination of how certain Parliamentarians approach the business of discrediting each other through falsehoods that leave the lingering impression that malfeasance has been committed when, in fact, it has not. This may be attributed in no small measure to the opening statements in the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh's presentation. Hon. Member, there comes a time in the life of any nation when the distortions of truth must be met with clarity or facts, lest our history be rewritten by the most strident voices – those empty vessels – and not by steadfast

truths. Today, I rise to address yours and that of the People's Progressive Party/ Civic's (PPP/C's) oft-repeated preference for twisting narratives for political mileage, a practice that threatens the very fabric of our democracy and the intelligence of our citizenry.

11.21 a.m.

It was most unfortunate that getting all excited about the possibility of a truly transformational budget that would bring "*A Secure, Prosperous, and a Sustainable Guyana*," Guyanese, and worse yet, a few potential international investors who were listening earnestly, got a strong dose of *cuss-down* politics for the first hour. This has come to define this Hon. Minister. Mdm. Speaker, there is a beautiful word called mendacious. Defined – let me quote the Oxford Dictionary – as not telling the truth, lying. Mendacious propaganda. On page 2, a mere few minutes into the speech, referring to 2020 when they came to power, we find some mendacious propaganda. I quote the Minister:

"Guyana found itself in the unrepentant throes of a resurgent governance and economic calamity of the pre-1992 vintage."

I lament having to do this over and over again, but I have to do it to clear the air so that my Guyanese brothers and sisters know truth from fiction. This year, I refer to another of the International Monetary Fund's (IMF's) press releases, number 19 of 332. This is what the IMF said about our economy in 2019 that the Minister claims was a calamity:

"Guyana's economic growth strengthened from 2018 with broad-based expansion across all major sectors. Real GDP grew by 4.1 percent, led by construction and services sectors, up from 2.1 percent in 2017. Inflation remained low at 1.6 percent at end-2018."

What is the inflation rating this budget says? Is it over 2%? Okay.

"Public finances improved in 2018 as the central government deficit came in at 3.5 percent of GDP, lower than the budgeted 5.4 percent of GDP.

Public debt and the external current account deficit are projected to decline steadily following the onset of oil production."

Check your facts, Guyana. Check your facts. Another piece of mendacious propaganda is found on page 24 of the budget speech, paragraph 482.

"History would record that AFHP was derailed by the APNU/AFC."

You heard the majority of most of the Hon. Member of the House who spoke before me, who have been in our Parliament for decades, regale us with the Opposition's strike against the Amaila Falls project. I want to remind Guyana and the public that every time you hear them say the Opposition killed the Amaila Falls project, and that is why you do not have electricity today, I want you to go to the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) report. Let me read what it states:

"Amaila Falls (GY-L1035)

Technical Briefing

March 20, 2014

Management is seeking guidance from the Board on proceeding with the Amaila Falls project, given that..."

and we accept:

"...the Project offers Guyana a long-term climate friendly, renewable solution for its energy sector by introducing the first significant diversification to its energy matrix, with potential fiscal and balance of payments benefits."

We never had any attempt to change the energy mix in the previous 23 years. However, this is what IDB stated:

"IDB's NSG loan would entail a credit rating of RC7, which exceeds the risk tolerance as defined for all NSG projects and the Bank has never approved the loan with this rating.

Guyana Power and Light (GPL), the sole off-taker, has a weak credit profile (poor operational, financial and technical performance, high energy losses, fuel volatility, tariff uncertainty and uncertain hydrology)."

The IDB did not want to approve the loan. It is right here. Mendacious propaganda. Then, there is additional mendacious propaganda when they refer to the \$18 million signing bonus, a subject that has been tossed around with reckless abandon by those on the other side of this dome. They have sought to sow confusion and mistrust, insinuating impropriety where none exists. The record will show, and history will bear witness that under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government, this signing bonus was responsibly placed in a

designated account within the Bank of Guyana (BoG). Its purpose was as clear as daylight – to safeguard our nation’s interest in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) case concerning the border dispute with Venezuela. People of Guyana and Mdm. Speaker, it was calculated then that the patriotic decision was rooted in the understanding that our sovereignty and territorial integrity required not only words but financial preparedness. Where, then, is the impropriety? This narrative of missing funds is nothing more than a straw man built to distract us all from the current Administration’s shortcomings. I want to refer to this Parliament – I am not going to read it – but I want to refer the people of Guyana to the parliamentary sitting in December, 2017 when former Minister Carl Greenidge stood here and laid out the facts. In addition to that, we know that there exists a receipt for the money that went into the bank account and also into...

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

See? It is big there – received. Do you see it? The documents are there, Guyana. So, when the majority of the Members on the other side come with the same old mendacious propaganda, you know who is telling the truth. We are a mature nation and I applaud several of the measures and principles in *Budget 2025*. Any programme that attempts to share more of the people’s wealth with the citizenry, Mdm. Speaker, I support. We are now making \$65 million an hour from our oil and gas industry, and many of these measures to ease the cost of living are absent from this budget. The high cost of living makes our citizens drown, and we all know this is undisputed. Everyone in this House knows that hundreds of thousands of families feel it every day. It is against this background that I say \$1.38 trillion, yes, is the largest budget ever, but this budget highlights that the largest is not always the best. With national discussions estimating that the minimum wage should be between \$100,000 and \$150,000, a pension of \$41,000 just does not cut it. It is too late, and it cannot help. The cries from people in our communities who have been struck off the public assistance list are of concern. Worst yet is that in this Dubai-rich economy, we have only allocated a \$3,000 increase. What does \$3,000 do? I am aware of a very good friend who has a 16-year-old paraplegic daughter, and to take her to the Diamond Special Needs School costs \$4,000 a day.

Mdm. Speaker, what I am highlighting is that *Budget 2025* may be building all the fancy bridges and roads, but it is not putting more money in the pockets where it is needed more. Where is the people-centred approach? Where is the balance between infrastructure and the ever-increasing high cost of living? We have a responsibility to carry as many of our

people as it is possible to a better life. It is clear that prosperity in *Budget 2025* will be delayed as we know it is once again heavy on infrastructure projects and short on investment in people. The increases in the income tax threshold, adjustments on personal income tax and the modest reduction in the Value Added Tax (VAT) rate are great, but all have little impact on the lowest-income earners in Guyana but reinforce the expansion of those that have. We are aware that oil discovery and the advent of an oil economy raise expectations. Naturally, citizens expect more spending and increases in their wages. The rapid redistribution of wealth and income takes place which, in turn, widens the wealth gaps. This we see happening in Guyana today. Unfortunately, this can easily result in the collapse of the foreign exchange rate, leading to foreign exchange rationing and shortages, which we have already heard complaints about from the private sector.

High inflation, high food costs, and emptying of the Sovereign Wealth Fund are now our realities. Property costs have increased, largely driven by the demand for housing by foreigners; this drives the prices, making home ownership and rentals almost impossible for a large section of our population. Already, this budget identifies a drop in our overall growth to 10.6%, a result of the expected decline in oil prices. The one-man-show oil czar has already stated just a couple of days ago – I think it was the headline in our newspapers on Sunday – that oil money is not guaranteed next year. Imagine that, especially in light of planned increased oil production in the United States of America (USA) under the new Trump Administration. These are, therefore, economically unpredictable times and highlight the challenges of an economy overly dependent on oil. This is even more disturbing when one considers that although nine industries did better in 2024, 19 did worse. So, we are not truly developing our productive capacity. It is against these indicators, now very visible in Guyanese society, that we expect *Budget 2025* to distribute more to Guyanese citizens to meet the challenges of everyday cost of living.

Even the two most interesting easing of cost-of-living measures – electricity and the cash grant programme – are fraught with challenges and clearly highlight the PPP/C’s *Jaganomics* development. This is defined in the litany of failed economic projects, a favourite of the most Hon. Vice President. These, of course, include the failed Skeldon plant and the infamous use of National Insurance Scheme (NIS) funds for the Berbice River Bridge project – now he wants another bridge – the failed fibre optic project, the consistent failure of Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), and the Amaila Falls project, to name a few. On the power



generation front, the Government is hanging the transformation of the economy, through cheaper electricity costs, on the finalisation of the gas-to-shore project, now costing the taxpayers of Guyana US\$2.4 billion, a cost increase of more than 200% and counting.

11.36 a.m.

Today, no one knows for sure when the project will be completed, what the total cost will be, and if indeed the cost of electricity for the consumer will be reduced by 50%. At the same time, we are considering a second project.

Mdm. Speaker, what is most worrying about *Budget 2025* is that there appears to be no overarching development policy within which sits all these economic measures. The current state of the cash grant programme is testimony to this. In July, 2024, when the AFC again proposed the transfer of oil money to citizens – I must say our partner, the APNU, also had the same philosophy – the Vice President, Dr. Jagdeo, stated that this was impractical. Vice President, Dr Jagdeo, stated on the 26<sup>th</sup> July, 2024 that it is impractical to give Guyanese money. The article is right there.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

I told you about his *Jaganomics theory*.

“Vice President, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo stated on Thursday that the recent proposal made by Alliance for Change (AFC) Leader...for the transfer of Guyana’s oil revenues to citizens is not only impractical but wholly unwise.”

Guess what? From July, 2024, they moved to deciding in November that they were going to give \$200,000 to each household. They did not know how many households there were. They then changed it to \$100,000 per person and we still have thousands of people who have not gotten anything.

One of the gravest omissions of this budget is the high cost of unorthodox practices of dubious legalities –the big *C* – or what Guyanese know as *runnings*. This is demonstrated in the \$600 million plus above the Engineer’s Estimate for the construction of one of the blocks for the Schoonord Highway. Then, there was the awarding of the contract for nearly \$900 million for a pump house to a company with no prior or relevant experience. In these two examples alone, we are talking about \$1.5 billion of the people’s money squandered. How could we have a project that is \$600 million above the Engineer’s Estimate? Guyana, imagine you are building your house, and the Engineer tells you that your house is going to cost \$30 million and then he increases

it to \$100 million. You will want to know where the extra money is going. The whole of Guyana wants to know where the extra money is going. Do you see how we could find fiscal space to pay the teachers, nurses and other public servants who need a liveable wage? We will do that when we return. To the Hon. Minister of Health, please note the massive *runnings* to which I am referring. Let me remind the Minister of Health of these contracts. We heard your presentation yesterday and *you should not throw stones if you live in a glass house*.

Guyana is now an oil-producing nation. This industry is driving our economy. It is all education and is driving employment. How can we hope to fill these jobs when some 69% of our young people are failing the Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC) Mathematics? Look at the indicators right there in the budget. Look at the indicators for Post-Secondary Education. Mdm. Speaker, the gross enrolment rate at Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions was 1% and at tertiary institutions, it was 11% in 2024. The Government is hoping to bring it up to 15%. In an economy driven by industrialisation, our young people cannot pursue technical and vocational education because they are not passing Mathematics. What we want to do is ensure all students have a sound education in all the core subjects so that they can be in a position to choose what they want to do with their future. We hear a lot of talk about textbooks – *oh boy* we are giving textbooks. Guess what? In the hard times of the 1970s when I went to school, I used to get every textbook. We were instructed to wrap them well in brown paper and look after them. We made sure that the students coming after had nice, good-quality textbooks to use.

Unfortunately, we have been regaled in this House that the APNU/AFC Government never built one school. I must correct that piece of mendacious propaganda; it keeps coming up. In her hysteria to promote this untruth, the Minister of Education conveniently omits the monumental disaster that defines her. Let me remind you guys of the Kato Primary School. It started in 2012; the contractor’s work began in 2013; it was supposed to have been completed in 2015; and in 2018 the school was declared unfit for use – \$850 million later. Guess what? It was finally completed by our APNU/AFC Administration. I had the pleasure of going to that opening. In the final analysis, that school, which defines the Hon. Minister of Education, cost this country \$781 million plus a further \$140 million to fix. Do not forget that.

They talk about nothing happening in the *Burnham days*; there is all the negative information. Guess what? According to the Ministry of Education's document, there have been revolutionary departures in socio-economic development. I want to tell you about the number of schools built, extended, and renovated between 1970 to 1979 – the lean years. There were 17 nursery schools, 25 primary schools – guess what – 26 nursery schools. I know the Minister might forget because maybe she was not born prior to 1992. We built bridges; we built gas ware; we built stoves; and we built fridges. We assembled our own cars and radios. We planted rice, sugar, and potatoes. We planted cotton and made our own fabric. I say this for the young Guyanese, so they know the strong history you come from. Let the record of this House show that in Region 7 alone, primary schools were built in Kamarang, Kato, Imbaimadai, Paruima and Eteringbang by this same Coalition.

I want to go to roads and infrastructure. The budget allocates \$209.3 billion to this. We know the challenges with cost overruns, knocking off project managers, and stopping contracts. While the emphasis on infrastructure development in this budget is undeniable, on the ground the reality paints a far less optimistic picture. A staggering 43% of the national budget is allocated to capital expenditure, which appears impressive at first glance, with projects like the replacement of the Demerara Harbour Bridge. What is the reality of some of the work that is actually being done on the ground?

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, in order to tell me what the reality is we need an extension, please.

**Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]:** Thank you. Cde. Deputy Speaker, the students are wondering where the caterwauling is coming from. It is a Government Minister who is making that sound. I do ask that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude.

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** That is granted. Please continue, Hon. Member.

**Ms. Hughes:** Thank you, Mdm. Speaker. I want to say to the House that in several places...and we saw it on *Facebook* being shared by a young lady with regard to the road at the Mahaica Market. This is the reality of many areas of Georgetown where asphalt roads, like the one that existed in Thorne Drive, are being changed from a sixteen-foot-wide road to a twelve-foot pathway that does not allow two cars to

pass. The people of Tucville are worse off for the road they have gotten.

I want to mention a few things. The Minister of Home Affairs, two days ago, spoke about all the new police stations and the cars that they are importing. Guess what? We had during our time a higher level of police officers who had integrity. When he is looking at the cars that are being imported, guess what? Some police officers are the bandits. These are the renegade police officers who they are doing nothing about are the bandits, the petty drug dealers and then they are the cocaine smugglers. That is the reality.

I want to say that we all know that this budget does not provide a liveable wage for pensioners or for a single-parent mother. I will not go through the numbers, as I am short on time and we have clearly shown how the budget for a family with three children can come close to \$320,000. If we assume that both parents are making that \$130,000, we see that they start with a deficit. That is the reality that this budget does not deal with

I want to address some of the work that has been done in the telecommunications industry. Hon. Prime Minister, I am so glad you are here. I compliment you because you are continuing the policies of our Industry and Innovation Unit, which we started under the Ministry of Public Telecommunications. I do want to say, though, that with liberalisation there was an expectation that the cost would have fallen. A lot of companies in the sector are saying that the 45% increase in the cost of spectrum has not gone down so they are not benefitting. Prime Minister, if you look at your same indicators, only two Information and Communication Technology (ICT) companies were opened. This is according to the indicators in the same budget. Feel free to check it. There were only two in 2024. You have to question how this liberalisation is working.

*11.51 a.m.*

Mdm. Speaker, we have had a challenge. Some more mendacious propaganda has surrounded the concept of rigging, and we hear it all the time here. We hear us talking about the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) and the APNU/AFC, but we do not hear us talking about Guyana enough. When it comes to rigging, there are a few things I want to say, in closing. Let it be clear, Mdm. Speaker, only the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) is responsible for the holding of elections in this country. It is interesting – and we had a meeting with them last week – that GECOM has not yet done an internal review of the last election. They have not attempted to sanction their staff who were involved

with those 47 boxes on the East Coast. We talk about the international observers, but GECOM has, up to now, not reviewed as a commission one of their recommendations. They have not reviewed any, and they started talking about biometrics last year when the country was talking about biometrics.

Mdm. Speaker, I hope that the next time around, we can have a little more maturity and we might sit as a people on both sides to talk about this budget – not just for the first time, but as a meeting. The Hon. Gail Teixeira talked about the former Presidents meeting together...

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member...

**Ms. Hughes:** ...that is the spirit within which...

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member...

**Ms. Hughes:** ...this budget discussion should take place before we get in the House...

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member...

**Ms. Hughes:** ...so our recommendations might be included. Thank you very much, Mdm. Speaker. Thank you very much to the people of Guyana. Better will come. *[Applause]*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on our Hon. Attorney General, Mr. Anil Nandlall.

**Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]:** Mdm. Speaker, it is my privilege to make my contribution to this year's budget debate. I want to begin by welcoming all of these students who are here because I will make many references to them in the course of my presentation.

You heard the presentation by the Hon. Member who spoke before me and you would have heard the Hon. Member use the term 'mendacious' throughout her speech. Mendacious means lying and it is an unparliamentary word. Because she could not say 'lying', she said 'mendacious'. Let me just for one moment make one point. The Hon. Member stood there and told us that we must do better since we are in Government, and she stood there and said that the Hon. Prime Minister and our Government continued where she left off in the telecommunications sector. They went to the elections in 2015 with a manifesto that included a 100-day plan. They told the people and your parents to vote for them and within 100 days, which was just a few months, they were going to do these things. Let us deal with one issue to demonstrate the mendacity. The issue is at number 19 where they promised, within 100 days:

"19. Liberalisation of the telecommunications... sector."

Five years after, there was no liberalisation done. The Hon. Prime Minister and our Government, in 2021, liberalised the sector. That is why you have so many internet providers and cell phone providers. You are young people. You use these facilities, and you know that you were only able to do it a few years ago when we came into Government. That is the mendaciousness that we are speaking about. I can stand here and go on for a long, long time, but I do not have the time.

Mdm. Speaker, I want to come to the budget itself. I want to begin by recognising and acknowledging the work of the Ministry of Finance, headed by the distinguished, Dr. Ashni Singh, and all of the public officers across State sectors who worked assiduously in compiling yet another comprehensive, transformational, and sustainable national budget. I will come back to the term 'sustainable' later.

We heard day in and day out that the budget has nothing for the people of Guyana, but the simple truth is that this budget will inject into the economy of Guyana, a small economy of less than a million people, \$1.6 trillion. That is what the budget alone will inject into the economy. When you add that to foreign direct investments and local private sector investments, the impact is going to be staggering on every single Guyanese, except the losers on the other side. You heard the Hon. Member. We are building highways; we are building roadways; and we are building a Demerara Harbour Bridge that will be about 100 feet in the air. She brings one street and shows the children the mendaciousness. She produced one street, but we are building thousands of roads. You come from various villages across this country, and I say to you that wherever you are living, my children, the streets in your communities are being built but you heard her for yourself – one street. That, my people and my children, is the mendacity we are speaking about.

Speaking at the lower end of the batting order gives me certain benefits. A lot of information has been put out there already about the budget. The parliamentary record is inundated with data on policies and projects in the budget, and I do not wish to retravel those grounds. Later this year, all of us in this House will be coming to your villages – you are too young – and we will be asking your parents to vote for us. Later this year, all of us will be asking them to do that. I want to speak to the electorate from the platform of *Budget 2025*. There is a direct correlation between these budgetary estimates and national elections. These budgetary estimates are not sterile; they bear a relationship. When we

go to your parents, and when we go to the people of this country later this year, we have to demonstrate to them that the promises we made in 2020 have been delivered. We have to show them that it has been delivered, and once we show them that it has been delivered, we will ask them to return us to office and that is what they certainly will do.

Therefore, electoral politics is based upon two important pillars – trust and track record. When you go to the electorate, you are asking them to vote for you, and once they vote for you, you will deliver these promises. So, they are trusting you because you are not yet in government for that term, but you are telling them to, ‘give me your vote and this is what I will give you back’. You are asking them to trust you, and one of the main ways by which they can determine whether or not to trust you is by examining your track record. A human being is not a robot. A human being is informed and guided by his or her experience, and therefore, a track record is important in that trust relationship. We have two main parties in the country – the People’s National Congress (PNC), whether they are the AFC or APNU, but they are one and the same thing... [Dr. Singh: They are all PNC.] ... They are all PNC. You heard from the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes, an AFC Member. She could not point to the developments and accomplishments during their last term in government, so she had to go back to Mr. Burnham... [Dr. Singh: Gone back to Burnham.] ...Gone back to Burnham. You will read, and your parents will tell you what Mr. Burnham did to this country. I do not want to detain you on that issue, but they are the same thing. They governed for 30 years or a little over, since Independence, and the PPP/C has governed for just under 30 years. You have enough to examine the track record. You have three decades of track records from both political parties.

We heard a lot about good governance, we heard a lot about transparent governance, and we heard a lot about constitutionality and the rule of law. None of these attributes, as important as they are, can exist without a simple thing – free and fair elections. [Mr. Ramson: Without a democracy.] They cannot exist without a democracy. Democracy is the *sine qua non* of all those important attributes. The right to vote is perhaps the most important right of the citizens of any country because if you take away that right to vote, you deny those citizens every other right. A governor who takes power without the vote of the electorate will remain in power because he or she does not need the vote of the electorate and therefore will do as he or she pleases. So, all of the other rights will never be realised – like your right to speak, your right to move, your right to

access justice – all of that will be interfered with, including your right to education, if you do not have free and fair elections. Let us examine the track record of the two parties on the question of free and fair elections. This is where I wanted to go. I had to travel a little circuitous route before I reached here. As you know, you are bright children, in 1966, we got Independence, and we went to our first election. In 1968, the PNC was in government and they passed a law that allowed for overseas voting and one-fifth of the persons who voted at those elections were overseas.

12.06 p.m.

They voted overseas. A British television firm did a documentary and decided to follow the trail of the voters. They went to London, all the places these people allegedly voted and they videoed cemeteries. There were dead people there because nobody lived there. They went to their houses, their addresses and they asked the people who were living there if they knew Thom Samuels. The people said, Thom Samuels never lived here, but we have been living here for 50 years. Do you know what they did? They sat in Georgetown, compiled a list and voted for 36,000 people in the United Kingdom (UK). [Mr. Ramson: Who do not exist.] Yes, 36,000 people who do not exist. Do you know the results? Today, there are 65 elected Members of this House. In those days, in 1968, there were only 42 Members of the House – only 42. Listen to the results, the results were the People’s National Congress (PNC) out of 42 seats got 30 seats, which is more than a two-thirds majority. [Mr. Mustapha: They took 30 seats.] They took 30 seats. The People’s Progressive Party (PPP) got 19 seats and the United Force (UF) got the remainder. Thirty seats they took at those elections. At that time, the PPP base was in the majority of voters in this country. Do you understand the magnitude of the fraud? We were a young nation. That is the first scar they inflicted on the democratic tapestry of this country. We were only two years old as a country and they destroyed the democratic credentials of this country. They laid the foundation of what was to come.

The 1973 elections followed. It was worse rigged than that one – worse. They used the army this time. They had to find another mechanism to rig because of the exposure to the overseas voting. The army officers went to all of the polling stations, picked up the ballot boxes and took them to three central locations – one in Berbice, one in Demerara and one in Essequibo. We were not counting at the place of polls. We were counting at the central place. When the army picked it up, they threw away all the ballots in the box and the army officers marked the X next to the palm trees – the PNC’s

symbol – whole night. [Dr. Singh: What do you call that? Mendacious?] Mendacious? That is fraud, trickery and artifice of their highest level. At that time, we had 53 seats in the House. They took 37 of the 53 seats which is another two-thirds majority. Do you know what they gave to the PPP? They gave the PPP 14 seats. The mighty PPP got 14 seats in 1973 when the PPP base was 50% of the population... [Dr. Singh: ...led by Dr. Cheddi Jagan.] ...led by Dr. Cheddi Jagan.

Let us go to the 1980 elections – again, 53 seats. [Dr. Anthony: (Inaudible)] Oh yes, Dr. Anthony is reminding me that at a village on the Corentyne coast, when the army went to pick up the boxes, two young comrades among others blocked the soldiers from taking away with the ballot boxes. They said you are going to steal our ballots. Do you know what the soldiers did? [Mr. Ramson: Shoot them.] They shot those two men, one was 18 years old and one was 24 years old. They did not take them to the hospital but threw them at the back of a pickup truck. They went to all of the other polling stations to pick up more ballot boxes, while those men bled like animals at the back of a pickup until they died. I am so happy that you are here to understand your history. Let us go to the 1980 elections. In the 1980 elections, there were 53 seats in the National Assembly at that time. The PNC took 41 of the 53 seats and gave the PPP 10 seats. The mighty party of Cheddi Jagan got 10 seats. The United Force (TUF), the Speaker's party, got two seats. He was lucky he got two. [Mr. Ramson: Is that TUF?] The TUF got two.

Then we come to the 1985 elections. Do you know that they say? They had two presidents – one is President Burnham and the other is President Hoyte. President Burnham presided over those elections. Let us hear what Mr. Hoyte did. Do you know he is regarded as a democrat? Let us see what Mr. Hoyte did in 1985. In 1985, out of 53 seats in Parliament, they had 42 seats. They got more than in the 1980 elections. Do you know what the PPP got? Do you know what we got? We got eight seats. The Working People's Alliance (WPA) got one seat. That was the massive nature of the rigging and the fraud. Today, they want to lecture us – we must do better when we are in Government. That is what they did when they were in Government. [Mr. Ramson: Fast forward to 2020.] I am coming to 2020. Then, we had free and fair elections in 1992 and it was not an easy task. The international community had to get involved. The Carter Center had to get involved. The President, Mr. Hugh Desmond Hoyte, had to be dragged by the scuff of his neck like a bull to the slaughterhouse before he agreed to the reforms. For the first time that is when we

got observers. None of those elections had observers. They banned observers. Then is when we got counting at the place of polls for the first time. It became hard for them to thief and for them to [inaudible]. It was hard for them to rig.

Then we went to the 1992 elections where we got 31 seats and they got 30 seats. Do you see how the result changed completely? The WPA got one seat and the TUF got one seat – I think. That is what free and fair elections did. Do you see how we moved from eight seats? We moved from a measly eight to in the 30s with one election. That is what democracy brought to this country. Then we had the 1997 elections. We brought back foreign observers. People from all over the world came and observed. We had the 2001 elections, 2006 elections and 2011 elections – those are the elections we presided over. All were certified to be free and fair by the international community and the world. Do you know what the margin was? It was just a few seats' margin of difference between... The PPP/C did not win by 20 and 30 seats, we won by two or three seats because that is what reflected the reality of the vote on the ground. That is what we did.

All of you would know about the 2020 elections. All of you have read about the 2020 elections and the multiple attempts to rig those elections. I am so happy that 2020 came to refresh your memories. What was different about the 2020 elections is that it was recorded on social media. Everything that they did was streamed live across the globe. A person could have been in his/her home and could have seen them in their multiple attempts to rig. Do you know what the beauty of social media is? Every year, it brings back the images as a memory. Every time one plans to forget how they try to rig the elections – *ba-dam* – on Facebook they come back as a memory and the madness is seen all over again.

Forget about the 100 governments who condemned them for their conduct; forget about the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Organization of American States (OAS), the Commonwealth, the private sector and all the international organisations who condemned them; and forget that the Government of the United States of America (USA) threatened to sanction them; forget what the PPP/C said – Forget all of that. Let me share with you what a man by the name of Gaskin said. What was his first name? [Mr. Ramson: His first name is Dominic.] Dominic Gaskin. Now, who is Dominic Gaskin? Dominic Gaskin was a Minister under their Government and a leader of the Alliance For Change (AFC). [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Minister of Business.] He was Minister of Business and he is also the son-in-law of the then President. He is not an ordinary man. He had familial connections to the highest

office and was part and parcel of the collective called the Government of the day. This is what he said in a public statement, I will share it with you – convenient clips. He stated:

“Having said what I had to say back in March, and having then stayed silent for three months while the recount was agreed, challenged and finally executed, I can no longer wait quietly and politely while our country gets hijacked, ridiculed and torn apart.”

Do you know who was doing the hijacking, ridiculing and tearing apart? His Colleagues on the other side.

“In a nutshell, there are six things I would like to elaborate on concerning the 2020 elections adventure: (1) A win by either major contestants ought not to come as a shock to anyone;”

Fair comment.

“(2) Supporters of APNU/AFC were misled into believing that the Coalition had won the election;”

Mislead – just like how she attempted to mislead you for 35 minutes. They were misleading the whole country.

“(3) There was then a deliberate attempt to discredit the entire elections;”

When they could not rig it, they then decided to discredit it.

“(4) No evidence has been provided to support the claim of vast numbers of rejected ballots among... the disciplined...”

...Forces...

“...let alone the allegation of a deliberate attempt to invalidate the votes of the disciplined services; (5) No power on earth...”

Let me repeat for the Opposition Leader’s benefit.

“No power on earth can convince the APNU/AFC leadership that it lost the election”

No power on earth can convince them that they lost the 2020 elections. Up to now, they are not admitting that they lost.

“(6) All that... occurred since March 4<sup>th</sup> will make it extremely difficult for the APNU and...AFC to ever defeat the PPP in...”

...2020.

It is not me who said so. It is their own saying that about them publicly. Let me skip. It continues to read:

“Having paid close attention to the tabulated results of the 2020 elections and having done some projections of my own, I knew by Wednesday, March 4<sup>th</sup>, that the Coalition victory while... possible was unlikely.”

12.21 p.m.

By 4<sup>th</sup> March the man had already known they had lost. They knew even before.

“I was aware that we had lost the East Coast Demerara sub-district by several thousand votes and the East Bank Demerara sub-district by close to one thousand votes. At the time, the Returning Officer for District Four, Mr. Clairmont Mingo, had completed the tabulations for the Georgetown area, showing the Coalition ahead in District Four by nearly forty thousand votes. This was clearly not enough to close the more than fifty thousand vote lead that the PPP-C had gained in the other nine electoral districts...”

Then the recount came.

“The nation puts its faith in the CARICOM observer team...”. In the end the CARICOM team delivered its report, endorsing the elections and the results of the recount, only to have it rejected by the Coalition in favour of a devious piece of reasoning by Chief Elections Officer Keith Lowenfield.

The claims of fraud were grossly exaggerated and, unfortunately, designed to fool party supporters, who had placed their faith in the coalition, into believing that there was actual evidence of serious elections rigging by the PPP-C.

All of this leads me to a very uncomfortable conclusion. The APNU+AFC has no intention of relinquishing control of government. Five years after winning an election and gaining office with a fair amount of goodwill, the coalition is saying to the people who put us there, the equivalent of “unless and until WE are satisfied beyond a shadow of a doubt that “more votes are cast” in favour of another party in a an election that WE deem credible, WE ain going nowhere”.

It does not matter what the arbiter thinks, no matter what the judge thinks, no matter what GECOM does, no matter what

the people say if they are not satisfied, they are not going. Let me conclude.

“My message to my colleagues in the APNU+AFC is simple.”

The man was begging them. This was since 2020. They had five years to heed the man’s advice. Hear what the man said:

“My message to my colleagues in the APNU+AFC is simple. No one elected us to remain in office forever. There is no reasonable basis on which you can claim to have won more votes than the PPP-C in these elections. Level with your supporters and start directing your energies towards becoming a credible opposition party in time for 2025. Above all, try to regain the trust...”

Do you remember, I begun the speech with the word ‘trust’?

“... of the swing voter.”

You will never win another election without...”

...them. They have not learned anything, nothing on that side.

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, I require an extension for you to complete your presentation.

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

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Thank you. Please, continue, Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs.

**Mr. Nandlall:** Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I will go quickly. You have heard them make promises after promises. They documented it in a manifesto. Do you remember I told you about trust? My Colleagues on this side have already set out a slew, hundreds, if not thousands of promises that they made, but they never fulfilled. Let me deal with a couple of promises related to my sector. They promised the people that within 100 days, they will complete constitutional reform. You are bright people. It states:

“The APNU/AFC will immediately appoint a Constitutional Reform Commission consisting of representatives of all major Stakeholders – trade unions, the private sector, religious and faith-based organisations, women, youths, professional organisations and the University. Its mandate will be

to undertake the urgent task of fashioning comprehensive reforms, ...”

...for the constitution. Did you hear the lineup - women organisations and faith-based organisations. Guess what they did? They appointed a steering committee, headed by Mr. Nigel Hughes who is the husband of the Member who spoke and the leader of the AFC. Do you see the connection? They appointed Mr. Hughes to head a group of about four persons: Hon. Member Ms. Chandan-Edmond, who is another PNC APNU person on the committee. Remember, they promised independence and broad-based. They had Ms. Haslyn Paris, who is another member of the PNC on the committee and two other token appointments. They paid \$20 million to this group. [Dr. Singh: Who did they pay it to?] They paid that to the gentleman in this picture.

[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]

Look at the Kodak moment. There is a handing over of a phantom report that none of us or nobody in this country has ever seen. Five years after, there was not a single step towards constitutional reform. I will come to this one because it tickled me a little. Dr. Singh, hear this one. The caption reads.

“Powers of President and Prime Minister”

Hear what it states:

- “Re-balancing the powers and responsibilities of the Prime Minister and the President in a manner meant to reduce abuse, avoid conflicts of interest and facilitate the more efficient execution of state functions;”

When I read this, I wanted to cry for Mr. Moses Nagamootoo. *Aw me God*, look how all of you promised him. Not only did you fool the people, but you also fooled your own Prime Minister. You told him that he will get great powers and all he ended up with is responsibility for the *Guyana Chronicle* newspapers. He was the most diminished Prime Minister on planet earth. That is what you promised. Let us go on. This is another one. This is an interesting one too, Dr. Singh. They promised that they would agree on a protocol to break the deadlock over the appointment of a consensually agreed Chancellor and Chief Justice, and bring an end to this impasse. They will devise a protocol to break... [Dr. Singh: A protocol] ...a protocol. You cannot stop them with language – a protocol. It is not an amendment to the Constitution but it is a protocol. You will hear the Leader of the Opposition, the People’s National Congress/Reform – a protocol. Where is the protocol? This

one is particularly relevant to the Parliament. This is what they said in relation to Parliament and the National Assembly. Mr. Clerk, I will ask you, through the Speaker, to comment on these at a later stage.

All of us know that we have a Parliamentary Management Committee (PMC) comprising of five on that side and five on this side but, according to them, it is not working. This is what they promised:

“Appointing a Parliamentary Committee dedicated to making recommendations for the continuing reform and improvement in the working of the Parliamentary system”.

Where is that committee, Mr. Clerk? Let me go on quickly. They will appoint... Again, the language ...

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Hon. Member, I will give you 30 seconds to conclude, please.

**Mr. Nandlall:** Yes, please. They will appoint an *in situ* Parliamentary Counsel and they will establish a National Assembly Budget Office. An *in situ* Parliamentary Counsel means an in-house Parliamentary Counsel and a National Assembly budget office. Mr. Clerk, where is your National Assembly budget office? Where is your *in situ* Parliamentary Counsel? Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I went through that and I have much more materials to show the people of this country that they can never be trusted. They are going to come to the electorate later this year; they will promise the skies; they will promise the mountains; and they will promise the oceans; but it is all a farce. It is nothing but a three-card trick. I thank you, very much. [Applause]

**Mdm. Deputy Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Member. Now is a good time for us to take a break. We have one hour.

[Sitting suspended at 12.32 p.m.]

[Sitting resumed at 1.46 p.m.]

[Mr. Speaker assumed the Chair]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, Hon. Members. Please, be seated. Now, we invite the Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, to make her presentation.

**Ms. Lawrence:** Mr. Speaker, thank you. I rise to present to this House and the Guyanese public my views on *Budget 2025*, which the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, Dr. Singh, presented with great flourish and fanfare under the theme sustainability, improving the lives of Guyanese, that is a national budget which has elicited a wide

range of reactions. As was expected, *Budget 2025* revealed the biggest and most ambitious plans envisioned by the Government. To my mind, the biggest is not necessarily the best. Against the backdrop of the business sector applauding the high percentage of capital investments and the country labelled as the fastest growing economy in the world, others are gravely concerned about the reduction of inequality and the creation of an enabling environment for small businesses to thrive.

Further, juxtaposed with the unparalleled spending spree cushioned in this \$1.3 trillion Budget are 48% persons living in poverty agonised over how soon they will receive the next paycheque, as well as the \$100,000 promised last year to temporarily fill their empty purses while they will be remembered, and whether they will be remembered in any further distribution to improve their desperate and indigent situation. Hon. Minister Ms. Rodrigues, in Linden, Vanessa of Jack Low village; Bacchus of Albouystown; Dev and Gajeree of East Bank Berbice; Savitri and Devanand of Parika; and many others from across the country are looking for a phone number to contact Mr. Azruddin Mohamed to address their dire needs. That is the reality. *Budget 2025* is put in a large bandage over a festering sore. This purulent sore to which I am alluding to is the inescapable poverty besetting some 50% of our nation. I want to elaborate on the strangle hold in which the ordinary people of Guyana are caught and which *Budget 2025* has not effectively and adequately addressed.

1.50 p.m.

Poverty and measures – Old Age Pension – *Budget 2025* has provided old age pensioners with \$5,000 monthly increase and Public Assistance recipients with \$3,000. They are commendable but it is well known that this will have little to no effect on the lives of many of our pensioners, especially those who have no other source of income. The cost of living, healthcare, and other miscellaneous expenses is exorbitant which daily encumber the pockets of our elderly. *Budget 2025* is themed improving the lives of Guyanese but, at last Hon. Minister, the well-being of our pensioners is being eroded as they grapple with the stark realities of not having enough to offset the tentacles of poverty. Perhaps subsidise housing for the very poor and the \$50,000 that was promise in 2020 need to be a consideration given prevailing circumstances.

I also wish to highlight, the pensioners at age 55 whose situation is just as dire. For those unable to benefit from a post work pension scheme, the wait until 65 for old age



benefits is a harrowing experience, hence the pursuit of odd jobs, which are risky at times to make ends meet. If per chance their National Insurance Scheme (NIS) is short of the required number of contributions, they then have to manage the one-half payment until 65 years. How do they deal with severe health conditions rife at this age? I speak of stroke, diabetes, cardiovascular and mental health issues among others. The situation is alarming. Their needs and the root causes of persistent poverty must be strategically embraced if the ordinary people are to really enjoy the benefits of the fastest growing economy. We all welcome cash grants but that is not the answer to transform the lives of our citizens.

National Insurance Scheme – each year, many pensioners have their hopes dashed after working for many years and planning on receiving both NIS and old age pensions to eke out post work existence. They are left on the hopeless bench. The National Insurance Scheme's yearly report starkly relates a story. A quick scan for the years 2019-2022 reveals that some 4,403 pensioners or a yearly average of 1,100 of hopefuls were denied pension benefits. Hence, their plans of surviving under two pensions never materialised.

There were some 1,170 pensioners in 2019, 2020 – 979, 2021– 846 and in 2022 – 1,408 persons who reached the age of 60 were left to the mercies of the unknown for the next five years until they became eligible for old age pension at age 65. There must be efforts made to target and bridge the gaps for those pensioners. It is noted that there is \$10 billion allocation to provide grants for those persons with 500-749 contributions. However, this proposal is already in cooperated in the *National Insurance and Social Security Act* which makes provision for such grants. Is this an oversight? None of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) explicitly mention older people but several goals and targets, directly and indirectly, speak to their needs and rights. These include poverty, Goal number one – older people often face economy insecurity due to inadequate pensions or lack of income. Yet, at NIS, those who did not qualify for survivors' benefit – average 700 persons each year for the last four years – not to mention thousands of persons who have appeal to the board every year.

Zero hunger, Goal number two – ensuring access to nutritious foods for older people is essential particularly for those who are living in poverty or rural areas. Goals three, five, eight, 10, 11 and 17 speak of the need to ensure that older people are included to achieve these Goals. Therefore, given our wind fall of oil revenues, the time has come for us to implement comprehensive reforms; and look at added programmes; areas such as hot meals, especially in rural

areas; increasing mental health; geriatric care, through home visits by health personnel; decent pay and working conditions for those still employed; accessible housing and transportation; and protection of their rights. All these and more are there to improve the livelihood of our pensioners.

Mr. Minister, your one-half elections injections will not suffice. The scheme must demonstrate a willingness to go after employers both private and public who fail to honour employee's contributions and visualise mechanisms and structural reform that will impact positively on the entitlement of the pensioners. The scheme has had challenges whereby this very Government lost approximately \$5.7 billion or US\$28 million the Colonial Life Insurance Company (CLICO) investment. However, the oil proceeds now provide a unique opportunity for the scheme's framework to be revamped to allow for the enhancement of benefits for all pensioners.

Newborn cash grant – a \$100,000 cash grant for newborn, while seemingly generous, falls short of effectively addressing poverty or serving as a meaningful safety net for several reasons, particularly in the context of a stagnant population growth rate and declining crude birth rate. Offering a cash grant does little to address the root causes of a declining birth rate, high cost of living expenditure, lack of work life balance or adequate child support. In reality, this only offers temporary relief in an election year rather than long term stability and sustainability. While substantial on paper, this cash grant represents a mere fraction of what a family will need over decades to adequately support a child – pampers, baby formula, healthcare among other items.

Studies have shown that one, declining crude birth rates are linked to broader socio-economic factors such as job security, affordable childcare, housing cost and gender equality in the workplace. Certainly, a one-time elections cash grant does not address these systemic issues. Two, in countries where similar pronatalist policies, financial incentives alone rarely lead to significant increases in birth rates, especially when broader societal challenges such as receiving child support from one of the parents remain unaddressed. I trust the Government will review their approach to address our stagnant population growth and declining birth rates, by adopting some comprehensive policies that tackle systemic issues, such as subsidies childcare – I speak here of both day care and night care – affordable houses for single parents, ensuring that parents pay their child support, removal or reduction of the value-added tax (VAT) among others. Perhaps the Hon. Minister can share with us the study or studies which guided this

measure. We can look at several countries which encounter similar problems, such as France which offers family allowances, tax breaks for families with more children, subsidies childcare, paid parental leave for both parents; South Korea looks at families with a large number of children; and Singapore gives subsidies to fertility treatments among many others. Certainly, we can look at various successful programmes that were tried and tested by many countries and introduce two or three of these programmes which will result in the growth of our population.

Economic and oil reserve – in 2024 Guyana's economy experience a remarkable growth of 43.6% marking the fifth consecutive year of double-digit expansion. This growth was primarily driven by the oil sector which expanded by 57.7% with production averaging 616,000 barrels per day. The Government earned \$2.5 billion in revenues from oil exports, a significant increase from \$1.62 billion in 2023. However, despite these impressive figures many have expressed concerns that the 2025 Budget does not translate this economic prosperity into meaningful improvements for the lives of the general population. According to the World Bank, 48% of our population, we are speaking of approximately 384,000 Guyanese of our approximately 800,000 population.

Value-Added tax – despite various arguments put forward, that reducing or removing the VAT imposed by this Government in 2007 would lessen the financial burden on all citizens, especially those struggling with the high cost of living. To date, this has not materialised; hence the Government missed an opportunity to provide a broader relief to the mass underprivileged in our country. I call on the Government to remove VAT on all food items. This is not a partisan issue; this is an issue of survival for the people of Guyana. We, on this side of the House, will give our full support.

Labour – all governments know the importance of aligning educational programmes with market demands. On page 74, paragraphs 4.196 and 4.197, the Hon. Minister spoke of the Government's commitment to train Guyanese to access local content. He stated:

“...attention to labour market dynamics is consistently on the front burner for us policymakers.”

Last year, the Minister told the nation the same thing on page 106 of his Budget presentation, yet the Hon. Minister cannot provide this House with the labour force survey for 2021, 2022, 2023 nor 2024. As a matter of fact, the last

labour force survey was done in 2020. At page 28 paragraph 4.24, the Hon. Minister states training Guyanese at every level – nice talk, Mr. Minister. However, with the absence of a labour force survey, I must ask, what source of data are you using to identify areas of training, number of persons to be trained, which category of workers, what age groups, which skills, whom are you targeting – the employed for their second jobs to whom you alluded in your income tax measures or the unemployed? Perhaps, the Minister had a needs assessment done. Where is the data Hon. Minister? The Minister also spoke of importing skilled labour. May I ask, what is guiding this policy? How do you know who to import in the absence of the labour force survey?

2.05 p.m.

The Government cannot, on its own, achieve the turnaround in the training of our employed and unemployed. What the Government needs to do is, one, provide more financial support, grants for small and medium-sized enterprises, to encourage entrepreneurship and job creation; provide tax incentives to Guyanese employers that hire locally and invest in employee training; bridge the gap between education and employment by targeting our youths into internships and apprenticeships with a cost-of-living stipend attached; ensure our labour laws are updated to protect workers' rights while promoting flexible employment. They can also provide unemployment benefits linked to training and retraining. They can, lastly, encourage Guyanese expatriates to return by providing incentives. What about reviewing the retirement age at 55 years from the public service, Hon. Minister? Once again, Guyana has many countries we can learn from, such as the Republic of Singapore (Singapore), the Federal Republic of Germany (Germany), the Republic of Costa Rica (Costa Rica), the Netherlands, the United States of America (USA) and our own neighbour, the Federative Republic of Brazil (Brazil), to name a few. It is my hope that a part of this abundance of earnings will be used to create a human infrastructure to bequeath to our generations a country that can sustain itself.

Transparency and accountability. Beyond specific fiscal measures, there are broader concerns about the Budget's transparency and the equitable distribution of the nation's oil wealth. I wish to reiterate that, despite the significant revenues generated from oil, citizens have yet to experience the lofty improvements in services and general well-being; services such as the issuance of passports – Why must a person have to go to the passport office at 3.00 a.m. in the morning? – birth and death certificates, burial, garbage disposal and collection, encashment of National Insurance

Scheme (NIS) and old age vouchers, transportation, hospital services such as the availability of beds, drugs and medical supplies among others.

Further, despite the acclaimed lofty reform of the financial sector, yet the risk at the banks persists for the ordinary Guyanese who resort to *Facebook* to express frustration when moneys are withdrawn from their personal accounts with no proper accountability. Imagine the dismay of a pensioner who, last December, went to do a withdrawal transaction only to be told of the negligible amount remaining in her account. The account had been breached and used for online shopping at Macy's and Burberry. Even foreign transactions are also difficult to conduct. Lack of foreign currency or sums required are not readily available. We see a lot of it in newspapers. When the Hon. Minister tells us that they have spent the moneys passed in the budget, he boasts of spending more than 90% of the moneys allocated, but it is all a misappropriation of the truth. What is known and recorded is that this Government encourages ministries and agencies to withhold moneys at the end of the year in the form of cheques instead of returning them to the Consolidated Fund, as outlined in section 43 of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) of 2003. For example, for three years, 2021 through 2023, they withheld some \$3.439 billion – in 2021, \$623.4 million; in 2022, \$352.6 million; and in 2023, \$2.463 billion were all withheld. The holy, sanctimonious and expropriators have been well known over the past 32 years in Government for their network contracting. I know they will not want me to tell the Guyanese public about their overpayments to contractors of \$153.23 million and the lack of transparency continues.

In an interview in August, 2020, on the programme *GlobeSpan 24x7* with host Dr. Asquith Rose and Mr. Charles Sugrim, the Hon. Dr. Anthony said that the ministry inherited approximately 1.6 million expired items valued \$742 million and an additional \$200 million in items was projected to expire in December, 2020. When I was asked for a comment on Hon. Dr. Anthony's statement by Dr. Rose, I said that time will tell. Time has spoken, so let us look at the wastage. The Auditor General said that, for the period January, 2022 to June, 2024 – just two and a half years – Guyana threw away some \$5.974 billion in expired drugs. In four months, between January and April, 2022, \$413.3 million was thrown away. For the year 2023, \$1,000,306,000 was thrown away. From January to June, six months in 2024, that is last year, *muh* boy up he game to \$1.923 billion. In June, that very June, they had on hand for disposal \$2.332 billion. When we add overpayments and disposable drugs,

some \$9.413 billion has been wasted – gone to friends, family and favourites – while 48% of Guyanese in our midst are not even allowed to dream. Mind you, this amount of \$9.413 billion only represents two areas of the entire budget.

I am calling for investments in drugs and medical supplies to be quantified and managed correctly. It is my hope that we will see some expedient action in the area of digitalising the health sector systems, which we heard of since 2023. In the interim, however, the Hon. Minister Anthony may want to use artificial intelligence (AI), like the United States of America, the United Kingdom (UK), the Kingdom of Spain (Spain) and the Italian Republic (Italy) and endorsed by the World Health Organization (WHO), which can provide data faster and more accurately – but do something to stop this leakage.

What has happened to the glorious promise to the Guyanese people of promoting good governance, including openness, transparency and commitment to improve public accountability? Mr. Speaker, I have had cause to rise in the House to ask you to have several Members on the Government side produce the evidence of the Coalition Government's raising 200 taxes while in Office. A few days ago, I heard the Hon. Minister Walrond mention how unconscionable the Coalition Government was, that they raised Hucksters' taxes. Minister Oneidge Walrond, I have news for you. You can refer to page 41 of the 1993 PPP Budget, *Reconstruction for Human Development*, section 6.19. I am not giving you all the other taxes, but it speaks of the Government levying fees and penalties on the following: Weights and Measures Act, Miscellaneous Licenses Act, Coconut Products Control Act, Rice Factories Act, Consumption Tax Act, Customs Act, Spirits Act, Beer Regulations, Fisheries Act, and Hucksters Licenses and Control Act, Banking Act, Petroleum Act... *Oh* my God. Betting, Road Traffic Vehicles, Airport Departure Tax, Tax on Airline Tickets, Professional Fees, Revenue stamp on passports, and the list goes on and on. I also refer her to *Budget 1994* and *Budget 1995*. Matthew 13:25 states:

“But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.”

A perusal of the Estimates begs more questions of this 2025 Budget figures. Looking at two subheads – Other goods and services and Other operating costs – the line items 6284, Other, and 6294, respectively, tell a grim story about *Budget 2025*. For example, under the Ministry of Education, we see an increase of \$321.6 million and \$1.021 billion. The Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,

under Programme 134, we see an increase of \$300 million. The Ministry of Finance is not to be left out. Just taking two Programmes for them, 031 and 032, we see under the line items Other, 6284 and 6294, a \$400 million increase. Under the presidency, Programmes 011 and 013, we see in line item 6294 a \$186 million increase. What are the ministries doing to cause an increase under these broad line items of over \$2.3 billion?

Guyanese people need to wake up. Wake up, fellow Guyanese; we are being attacked from within. Here is the proof – this Budget is an elections campaign fund. What more evidence is needed? This Budget is rife with slush funds, dollars for elections and campaigns. Throughout his remarks, former Minister Jordan repeatedly called for transparency and accountability in government spending to good effect. He highlighted the lack of detailed reporting on oil revenue and the absence of feasibility studies for large-scale projects. His question: Where is the plan? We are asking you, Mr. Minister, where is the plan? Where is the vision? Revert...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Member, as you pause, we are at the point where you have to get an extension.

**Mr. Jones:** Thank you. 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 to conclude.

2.20 p.m.

**Ms. Lawrence:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He urged the Government to prioritise long-term development over short-term political gains. Former Minister Jordan heard a call for a comprehensive social safety net that includes revamped NIS benefits, structured cash transfer programmes and sustainable poverty reduction measures. He warned that without such reforms, the country's current trajectory would be unsustainable. Did you hear him?

Value-added products: Mr. Speaker, value-added products are one way in which we can have sustainable growth and less dependence on oil. This is the view held by many, including His Excellency the President and the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service. Yet, we do not see the Government investing our moneys nor making a bold step to open up the sector. I refer to financing concessions for those who wish to invest in things like cosmetics, rice-based

products, things like noodles, snacks or flour. I talk about those who want to invest in floor tiles from our wood, or various types of tiles from our clay or aluminium, just to name a few.

The Hon. Minister said that the manufacturing sector increased by 13% in 2024, and auto manufacturing increased by 15.7%. He went on to say that this growth was driven by non-metallic and fabricated metal products, but in reality, those were for the oil sector. We have invested \$527.4 million in 2024 in the agro-processing sector, but we are not aware of the total value of the products processed and sold both locally and overseas.

In this Budget, we are told, there will be a further investment of \$800 million. There are many Anansi stories. Last year, on page 3, paragraph 4, the Hon. Minister told this House there were two large-scale investments totalling some 250,000 hectares for production and value-added in the forestry sector. Yet, in *Budget 2025*, there was not one single word about this great investment. Yet again, on page 31, paragraph 4.38 in this Budget, he speaks of the manganese company and its creation of 300 new jobs in Region 1, benefiting residents of Arakaka, Matthews Ridge and Port Kaituma. The Hon. Minister speaks as though this investment was done under this Government, but I have news for you, for I hold in my hand a press release dated 27<sup>th</sup> January, 2017 titled:

“Minister of Natural Resources approves agreement between Bosai Minerals and Reunion Gold Corporation; Manganese project aiming for as many as 400 permanent workers.”

Mr. Speaker, I rest my case. I wish to thank all those who contributed towards the production of the 2025 Budget. May God have mercy on the Guyanese people. *[Applause]*

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Member Ms. Volda Lawrence. Now I invite our Hon. Prime Minister Brigadier Ret'd Mark Phillips to make his contribution.

**Prime Minister [Brigadier Ret'd Phillips]:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Many of the speeches that we are hearing during this presentation are indeed farewell speeches. And we have to take them in good measures because, of course, they are filled with... **[Mr. Mahipaul:** This is your farewell one.] Farewell one for the first five-year term.

As always, I rise with great pride and honour in support of the 2025 national Budget presented under the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government by our Senior Minister in the Office of the President with responsibility for Finance

and Public Service, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. I take the opportunity to commend the hardworking staff of the Ministry of Finance, under his leadership, for putting together yet another developmental budget that will see benefits for all of the people of Guyana. Mr. Speaker, with a 20.6% increase from *Budget 2024*, this \$1.382 trillion Budget is the largest in Guyana's history and paves the way for even greater development in our country. In the words of renowned development economist Amartya Sen:

“Economic growth without investment in human development is unsustainable – and unethical.”

For Guyana, this observation rings ever true. We are a country blessed with abundant resources and a determined spirit. Here, progress is measured by how we use it to transform lives, a mission that the PPP/C Government has continued, to seek avenues of building upon the prosperity of our people since the moment we resumed Office in 2020. Our Government has strived to expand the pie of our national prosperity while ensuring that its fruits are equitably distributed. Our mission remains to secure continued economic growth, empower our people, and lay a foundation of sustainability that will endure for generations to come. Over the past five years Guyana has experienced much progress, emerging as one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. The 2025 Budget stands as a bold demonstration of Guyana's journey of recovery and progress under the stewardship of the PPP/C Government. After inheriting an economy weakened by years of mismanagement and further challenged by the global pandemic, this Administration embarked on an ambitious people-centric agenda that has yielded impactful, positive results to date. From recording a staggering 43.6% economic growth in 2024 to creating over 60,000 new jobs across various sectors in Guyana, the result speaks volumes about Guyana's economic resilience and potential.

Strategic initiatives such as the aggressive expansion of the housing sector, with over 40,000 house flats distributed, and investments in education, including the graduation of thousands under the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship, are all examples of our commitment to improving lives at every level. These successes are underpinned by our Government's vision to ensure Guyana's oil wealth benefits all citizens, which is evident in robust infrastructure development, cash grant initiatives, and monumental advancements in healthcare and education. *Budget 2025* consolidates these gains and sets the stage for even greater strides towards a brighter future for all Guyanese, as we have promised. Let us not forget that this

success has a purpose. The purpose lies in ensuring that every family has access to opportunity, every community is resilient, every child grows up in a country where their dreams can take flight. Development and democracy must go hand in hand in Guyana. The 2025 national Budget themed, *A Secure, Prosperous, and Sustainable Guyana* will help us to achieve this vision. It demonstrates our shared values and aspirations as our Government charts a course that uplifts our people. As we reflect on how far we have come, this Budget asks us to look towards a future where economic security, prosperity, and sustainability are lived realities.

Mr. Speaker, it is important that we reflect on the past, especially after listening to the last two presenters. The very last presenter talks about a Guyana where everything seems to be going downhill. But this very Minister of Health, former Minister of Health in the last administration, should be aware that today, after five years of corrective developmental work, we have rescued Guyana. The people of Guyana can today access, free of cost: cardiology, adult and paediatric open-heart surgery; angiograms and stents; bariatric weight loss surgery; orthopaedic, scoliosis, knee, and hip replacement and revision surgery; neurosurgery; kidney transplant; oncology, cancer treatment, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, brachytherapy, *et cetera*; plastic surgery, breast reconstruction, cleft lip; burn care; dialysis, hemo- and peritoneal; pathology and histopathology services. Free of costs. That is happening in Guyana, as I speak. It is important – listening to the very speaker and the previous presenter, the Hon. Member Catherine Hughes – for us to remember from whence we came, from whence we came as a people. Sixty years of developmental struggles in Guyana – 1964 to 1992 Guyana was under stewardship of the PNC Government.

2.35 p.m.

This is what was written in the Mc Intyre Report of that stewardship. I do not want to bore the House, but it is important that I read this part:

“Guyana has slipped below Haiti...”

This is an article in the *Stabroek News* written 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 1989. It is based on the Mc Intyre Report of 1989. It states:

“Guyana now ranked below Haiti – *Mc Intyre Report*

GUYANA has slipped below Haiti and is now marked as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.”

This is it. If you want to read it, it is available. [Ms. Manickchand: Lay it over PM.] I will lay it over, Mr. Speaker.

“This is the startling conclusion in the just-released McIntyre report which also says the country needs a political system ‘which encourages...’”

Let me read again.

“...‘which encourages the participation of all Guyanese in the recovery programme.’”

The report suggests that what is also needed is ‘a restoration of confidence in the ability of the government to manage the economy and share its benefits widely.’”

Share its benefits widely; we must leave some time for that to sink in.

“It puts inflation at 50 per cent per annum and unemployment at 40 per cent of the workforce. Government’s excessive control of the economy...”

Does everyone remember controlling the commanding heights of the economy?

“Government’s excessive control of the economy, which limited the role of private initiative and investment, also contributed to massive migration of ‘Guyana’s best and brightest,’...

...government’s corrective measures over the past decade lacked political support and the institutional capacity to undertake strong adjustment measures.

...Guyana is among the most heavily indebted developing countries in the world...”

That is where, as a youngster, I learned the meaning of the abbreviation HIPC – Heavily Indebted Poor Countries. Guyana was listed among the HIPC countries – Heavily Indebted Poor Countries. I ask the Hon. Members on the other side of the House, is the Mc Intyre Report the distortion of truth? I lived through it in Guyana. I assume you live through it too, Mr. Speaker. I assume that the Leader of the Opposition, who grew up in Linden, like me, lived through it. Is the Commission of Inquiry’s (CoI’s) report, that was shown to the House during the presentation of Hon. Ms. Gail Teixeira, on the General and Regional Elections 2020, a distortion of the truth that recently occurred in Guyana, five years ago? Are the statements by the head of the Organization of American States (OAS) Electoral Observation Mission, the former Prime Minister of

Jamaica, a distortion of the truth? Is the Norconsult Report that supported the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project as still being feasible, a distortion of the truth? The Amaila Falls Hydropower Project only failed because of the lack of support by those who are now in Opposition. However, with or without your support, the gas-to-energy project will not fail. It will be completed in the last quarter of 2025. It will lead to a reduction in the cost of electricity that will be enjoyed by even you, the Members on the other side of the House.

Today, the development policies of the people-centred PPP/C Government and its ‘One Guyana’ policy have all Guyanese having a say in the development of their communities, in the development of Guyana, working on projects and earning from projects in their communities. These are our friends, families and favourites, and they are throughout Guyana. The people are building their roads, clearing their own drains, and are being paid for that. Our friends, families and favourites have now expanded, as I mentioned, to all villages throughout Guyana. I could recall, recently, that I went to sign some contracts for roads in the community of Ituni. On signing the contracts, all the people told me – Bishop Edghill was there – that everything they asked this Government for they are getting and *gat ahready*. The people of Ituni said that. We are at the stage today where community roads and community grounds are rehabilitated in all the communities where our friends, families and favourites live – Melanie Damishana, Ann’s Grove, Beterverwagting, Buxton/Friendship, Victoria, Haslington, and Annandale/Eastville; in Region 10 – Ituni, Kwakwani, and Linden. There were over 40 road contracts handed out to our friends, families and favourites. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] Over, over 400. *Yuh cant hear? Ah know y’all cant read, now yuh cant hear.*

This is not only at this time when we have oil and gas. The PPP/C has a history of developing all the communities in Guyana. In Linden, from 1992 to 2015 we built the Linden Hospital. In Mackenzie, a state-of-the-art, brand-new, hospital was built next to the old one – that I was hospitalised in as a child in Linden – by the PPP/C Government. Do not tell me otherwise. A new hospital was built in Wismar by the PPP/C Government. Burnham Drive was repaired by the PPP/C Government at a time when the people in Linden were complaining – no oil and gas money. A state-of-the-art Linden Foundation Secondary School (LFSS), in 2023, was built by the PPP/C Government – no oil, no gas. We do not take money away from people. We did not take money away from the people through increased taxes and fears. We increased the disposable income

available to people. By my reckoning, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) was in Government. It had five budgets – 2015 Budget, 2016 Budget, 2017 Budget, 2018 Budget, 2019 Budget – and failed to pay the \$10,000 'Because We Care' Cash Grant that was paid in 2014. So, by my reckoning, the APNU/AFC Government owes every child, who was in our school system from 2015 to 2019, \$50,000. When *yuh gunna* pay up?

They like to talk about 'One Guyana' but 'One Guyana' ensures that development comes and is available to people in all the communities of Guyana – Annandale to Aishalton; Belladrum to Baracara; Cornelia Ida to Chinoweing – you name it, Mr. Speaker. Only today, I saw a post from the Hon. Minister of Education about Chinoweing Primary School having information and communications technology (ICT) connectivity. From Diamond to Dadanawa, Everton to Eteringbang, Mara to Mahdia and Masakenari, Port Mourant to Paramakatoi, from coastland to hinterland, schools are being constructed and repaired. **[Mr. Mahipaul:**

*(Inaudible)]* You did not build any secondary school; as a matter of fact, no school in the hinterland.

Hospitals are being constructed. Infrastructure – roads and bridges – are being constructed. Yet, you want to tell people that they cannot eat roads. You go to all the communities and tell the people that. In fact, do not go to the communities, as you did on Tuesday, and hand out pieces of paper to the people. Tuesday, you were in communities handing out papers to the people. You were walking on roads that were constructed for the people by the PPP/C. Housing schemes, water treatment plants, police stations, and prisons all constructed to improve the livelihood and the lives of the people throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. The only memorable and substantial budgetary Manifesto promise made by the APNU/AFC and delivered was to increase the Ministers' salaries by 50%. The APNU/AFC is afraid of all the development initiatives of our Government. We announced that the toll for bridges will be free and the first thing we had was a protest in the newspapers – Why make it free? – from the ultimate leader himself. The ultimate leader himself added his voice to the protest.

The Hon. Member, talked about the digitalisation of the health system. That will be realised this year. You were in this House, in 2023 and 2024, when we passed all the enabling legislation, and this year the electronic Identification (ID) card will be a reality. You will be among the first to be issued with your electronic ID cards. You like

to talk about strongholds and the fact that we are not bringing development. The Hon. Figueira, only the other day, in his presentation, lambasted this House about the lack of development for Region 10. He needs to be truthful. It will be inexcusable of me not to examine the track record of the PPP/C Government in the last four years in relation to the hard-working people of Region 10. I will now be speaking of the transformational projects in infrastructure.

2.50 p.m.

The reconstruction of the Soesdyke/Linden Highway for \$161 million. It is ongoing. I went to the signing ceremony of that project and it is being done right now – the Soesdyke/Linden Highway at US\$161 million. That is your stronghold. You spent five years in Government, and you failed to patch a single hole on that highway. The construction of the soon to be toll-free and soon to be commissioned, Wismar/Mackenzie Bridge, at a cost of US\$35 million. You do not know about construction. The construction of the Linden/Lethem Highway at a cost of – that is the forest leg of course – \$155 million. They do not know of the transformational projects in agriculture in Region 10 and they claim to represent Region 10, like the Tacama corn and soya project. I would like to emphasise how much the people of Region 10 benefited directly from the vision and policies of the PPP/C Government. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, that in the last four years, we spent \$3.2 billion, as compared to the meagre \$226 million the APNU/AFC Coalition Government spent between 2015 and 2019? The sum of \$3.2 billion represents a more than 1300% increase in the investment in the children of this region with the 'Because We Care' cash grant, school grants, textbooks, meals and the rehabilitation and construction of schools. Since I mentioned the construction of schools, I am advised that the school I attended 50 years ago in Linden will be rebuilt by the PPP/C Government, a school that needed attention before or during the time when they took Office. They failed to do anything at that school.

In the last four years, we spent more than \$4 billion in agriculture in Region 10 on projects like the Region 10 Agriculture Development Programme – \$500 million; the black eye peas project at Kimbia – \$765 million; the regional food hub at Kuru Kuru, Soesdyke/Linden Highway – \$587 million; development of approximately 300 acres of pasture at Kwakwani – \$39 million; Genetic Improvement Programme for cattle, sheep, pigs, embryos for dairy, milk plants, *et cetera* – \$164 million; the expansion of honey production – \$4.3 million; agro-processing and value addition – \$15 million; the National Drainage and Irrigation

Authority (NDIA) construction and rehabilitation of conservancy dams, drains and irrigation channels in West Watooka/Linden; NDIA construction of concrete drains and soak aways in Blueberry Hill Linden and NDIA maintenance of over 5,000 rods of drains and 3,500 rods of creek, annually, to name a few. I was amazed when I went to Linden less than six months after we were elected. First Alley, Second Alley, Third Alley, Water Lily Road known as Poker Street and Back Road, all were redone by Bishop Edghill and the Ministry of Public Works. Mr. Norton has his family property in Third Alley, and they did not do any maintenance on that road from 2015 to 2019. I know about him and his property. How much did the APNU/AFC Government spend on agriculture for the people of Region 10 between 2015 and 2020? Less than the PPP/C Government. They only spent \$456 million.

Between 2015 and 2020, the APNU/AFC Government literally and figuratively took the breath out of the people of Region 10 when they caused the following: the closure of the call centre in 2015, immediately impoverishing 100 persons; the cessation of operations by the Russian Aluminium (RUSAL) Rusal/the Bauxite Company of Guyana (BCGI), displacing more than 360 workers and indirectly affecting hundreds of families; the removal of the ‘Because We Care’ cash grant that I mentioned before; and failure to make homeownership a reality for the people of Linden. At this stage, I want to use an interesting exhibit. I just mentioned that they failed to make homeownership a reality for the people of Region 10. On 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 2023:

“An APNU government would build houses and rent to citizens – Norton.”

At a time when we are having dreams realised and having exercises all over Guyana and in Linden by giving out more than 1500 house lots in Linden, he wants to build houses and rent them. We are giving house lots, we are building houses, and we are empowering people in Linden. They have the transport, they could take it to the bank, and they could take it anywhere as collateral. He wants to have them in bondage by paying rent. At a time when freedom and liberalisation are the words that are of importance to all of us, he wants to keep them in bondage.

**Leader of the Opposition [Mr. Norton]:** Mr. Speaker, if I may?

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Leader of the Opposition...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

Let us hear the Point of Order on which the Leader of the Opposition rises.

**Mr. Norton:** Mr. Speaker, on a Point of Order, under section 41. If there is a quotation in here, it should be factual. I said, “rent to own”.

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Prime Minister, I do not know the quotation, so I cannot pronounce if he is...

**Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips:** Mr. Speaker, the document has “rent-to-own” but the word “rent” is most unacceptable at a time when people are owning their own house lots and their own homes. The bottom line is, from 2020 to 2025, hope was restored and a new lease on life was injected into Region 10 by the PPP/C Government. We have invested 383% more than they did in resuscitating the tourism sector in Region 10 and we have invested more than \$37 million as compared to a measly \$7.8 million spent by the Hon. Members on that side of the House when they were in Government. We have invested more than 47% on small business grants, loans and trading for small business entrepreneurs in Linden. We have invested more than \$5.1 billion in four years on hinterland roads, bridges and miscellaneous roads to improve the transport and logistics network in the region. How much did the APNU/AFC spend? They spent \$289 million in five years – most despicable.

Overall, this proactive and caring PPP/C Government has invested 580% more in the people of Region 10 than the APNU/AFC did between 2015 and 2020. More than \$37 billion has been spent by my Government, the PPP/C Government, for the people of Region 10, my region, as compared to the APNU/AFC’s measly \$5.4 billion for the five years they were in Office. Yet, they barefacedly sit in this honourable House and criticise the vision of *Budget 2025* when their own actions and inactions are indefensible. All is here. I know. I would not go to the *Stabroek News* on the history of rigged elections in Guyana. The Hon. Attorney General (AG) went into this. I shall start by saying: ‘The last free and fair election...’

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Prime Minister, let us give you some more time so that you can continue.

**Ms. Parag:** Mr. Speaker, may the Hon. Prime Minister be given five minutes to conclude and complete his presentation, please?

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Prime Minister, you can continue.



**Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips:** Mr. Speaker, as I said, I would not go through this but I need to say what was underlined. 'The last free and fair elections prior to 1992 were held in December 1964.' I say no more. You can read it. This was laid over. Democracy and development must go hand in hand or hand in glove. I have two lists, and I should call it the scandal lists, but in the interest of time, there are some big ones. The sum of \$1.1 billion was expended on the D'Urban Park rehabilitation. We heard a lot about that. The sums of \$400 million and \$600 million cannot be properly accounted for. Mr. Speaker, I could go quickly.

The management of drugs and medical supplies at the Ministry of Public Health – where is the former Minister? She is not here – poorly written contracts led to over \$300 million being paid out without receiving the drugs and supplies. The former Minister came to this House just now and talked about all of the ills she discovered at the Ministry of Health, but she is not here to answer for her own misdeeds. The management of health care – waste at hospitals, receipt, storage and distribution of textbooks through the Ministry of Health – \$989 million. D'Urban Park will hurt all of us. It is in the centre of the city. It is a \$1.1 billion eyesore, and it is a monument to mismanagement. That is what it is. The State Asset Recovery Agency (SARA) – over \$600 million was spent from 2017 to 2019 and the agency was just used as a political tool and resulted in no convictions. Non-operational – the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) Hospital – we heard about that. It was just a ribbon cutting and a legacy exercise to say they built that. These are some of the big ones here: settlement – \$1.17 billion, Government of Guyana and BK International for Haags Bosch.

3.05 p.m.

"The case was just filed. There was no trial, not a head of evidence was led. The Government has proof of the substandard work, yet they were afraid of losing. That sounds like a Nancy Story. Nobody gives up on litigation that easily unless there are extraneous matters influencing the situation."

These were the words of the Hon. Mr. Anil Nandlall. Sussex Street scandal – you have heard about the Sussex Street scandal. We will not bore you with that again.

"No Apologies!"

From...

"Harmon...salary increase for Ministers justifiable..."

...before the increase the salary of a ...senior minister... was \$500,000"

Mr. Harmon said this,

"...is money I paid to my attorneys who worked with me when I was in private practice."

"We did not do due diligence" – Bino admits on Videomega saga."

It was revealed that Videomega Productions,

"...had been awarded contracts to do ads for Department of Energy."

It gets even more interesting.

"Housing Minister's husband has contract to build houses for her Ministry.

Mrs. Patterson-Yearwood said,

...her husband was given contracts..."

When?

"...in 2016 and 2017, just before they were married."

She was the Minister. [An Hon. Member: Your point is?] The point is she gave her husband-to-be a contract. That is the point. You do not wake up tomorrow morning and marry a man that you do not know. You have to know him before.

"TIGI calls on Govt to review contracts awarded to Minister's husband"

The APNU/AFC spent \$1 billion – where is the Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence? – for expired medicine supplied from January to August.

"1,663,032 items, valued at \$732 million, have expired. Another \$200 million is scheduled to expire..."

In December. I am coming close to home now.

"Opposition MPs flagged as SLED audit finds millions in State funds wasted"

There was a \$4.9 million grant for the procurement of barbershop equipment. I do not know if I am allowed to call the Hon. Member's name in the House, but the Hon. Member who is in the House does not operate a barbershop. The Hon. Member, Mr. Christopher Jones, did not operate a barbershop at that time, since construction had not

commenced. Another Hon. Member, most Honourable, my dear Friend, Mr. Vincent Henry – \$19 million for the construction of a multipurpose building at Shulinab. The Treasurer of the Shulinab Women's Development Cooperative Society Limited, indicated that

“she was not aware of the amount of the...grant...”

And has asked for an extension of the building. Further, she indicated that

“the facility is not currently being utilised, since...”

There is no water, no electricity or shelves.

To my own hometown that is close to my heart – \$5 million –

“Pig rearing facility – chaired by brother of Jermaine Figueira.”

The facility was not operational and was abandoned. Mr. Speaker, these are the articles and there are so many more. Mr. Jordan told this nation, ‘I will check and see whether we received any bonus of any kind, signature or otherwise’. How much was it? If it was all. Then he went on, because the reporters were persistent, ‘I thought the signing bonus was a gift’, according to Jordon.

“According to Mr. Jordan, “when the individual who apparently negotiated this, look am not going to call it bonus yet, this number, he represented it as monies being given by Exxon for the specific purposes of the border and training in petroleum activities....

I am not saying the individual lied or anything, but if fairly represented what Exxon wanted then we did not get a signing bonus.”

No signing bonus. Mr. Jordan again, when questioned by the media, said it was a figment of their imagination, but here is why he said that, in the National Assembly,

“Speaker: How did we arrive at \$18 million? Winston Jordon: I don't know. I cannot tell you, I know. I wasn't part of any negotiations. I couldn't tell you how we arrived at \$18 million. Speaker: So, you do not know who negotiated it? Winston Jordon: I couldn't tell you who negotiated the thing. I don't know, to be honest, you know. In fact, I thought it was a gift. You know, initially, I thought it was a gift coming to us.”

Mr. Speaker, there are so many scandals – Mismanagement by the People's National Congress Reform at the Mayor and City Council Georgetown (MCC) – disaster – It is here.

*[Hon. Member displayed a document.]*

Well, you know, Mr. Speaker, I am conscious of the time I have remaining and it is important that I leave the House knowing about what is being done by the Office of the Prime Minister. Gas-to-Energy Project (Phase I): selected operations and maintenance contractor; completed procurement and installation of turbines and natural gas liquid processing plants – that will be done this year. Transitioned to workforce training and knowledge transfer programmes for long-term operations, integrated with Wales Industrial Substation for grid connectivity. Transmission and distribution upgrades: achieved 89% completion of transmission lines; Wales to Versailles substation reached 52% completion – delayed due to seamen's switchgear supplies. Fabricated and delivered transformers to Guyana – awaiting installation. Storage and offloading project: initiated the contractor prequalification process; conducted site selection for Natural Gas Liquids (NGL) evacuation infrastructure; completed the pipeline infrastructure; and completed ExxonMobil pipeline scope, preserved with nitrogen – awaiting plant readiness. Coordinated pipeline safety awareness campaigns – begins with ExxonMobil and the Government.

Renewable energy projects: commissioned 0.7 megawatts Moco Moco hydropower plant in December, 2024; operationalised 0.65 megawatts (*inaudible*) solar photovoltaic (PV) farm in December, 2024, at Mahdia; commissioned 1 megawatt Lethem solar PV farm in 2022 and 1.5 megawatt Bartica solar farm in 2023; procured 4 solar PV mini-grids in 2024 for Paramakatoi, Nappi, Awaruwaunau and Yupukari; installed 167.6 kilowatts of solar PV across 33 schools, health centres, and police stations in the hinterland; and distributed 30,000 solar PV home energy systems in hinterland regions, totalling 4.8 megawatts in capacity. Solar mini grids were upgraded at Canal Bank, Waramadong, and other regions to meet growing energy demands. Additional renewable energy installations, including 34.35 megawatts solar farms planned for commission in 2025 in Wakenaam and Leguan, Linden will come later. On the Essequibo Coast and Berbice, the contracts were signed for most of them. In 2025-2026 they will be delivered to the people.

The Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) expansion – we added 124 megawatts of new generation capacity with

the addition of 60 megawatts Power Ship 2 Demerara; 36 megawatts Power Ship 1 in the Berbice River and 28 megawatts Colombia. We installed localised energy systems for the Essequibo Island with 1.2 megawatts in Anna Regina, 450 kilowatts in Wakenaam, and connected 1,000 new households in 17 previously unserved communities. Our friends, family and favourites are now getting electricity.

Hinterland electrification and generator upgrades – we upgraded generators at all the locations. We procured and upgraded generators benefitting thousands of households – Matthews Ridge, Port Kaituma, Lethem, Mahdia, Mabaruma, and Karasabai. Lethem has two times more power than they could need right now and that will augur for the expansion of Lethem. We did it in less than four years. We expanded the grid and built substations in Kwakwani, Minab, Pakira Hills, and other communities. We also initiated several network upgrades, including Mabaruma, Mahdia, and Port Kaituma to improve reliability and cater to increased demands.

Projects planned for 2025: Gas-to-energy project – full transition to round-the-clock operation in 2025; Phase 2 expansion – increase capacity to 300 megawatts, which was previously planned at 250 megawatts; finalise contractor selection and construction schedules; and conduct environmental assessment for NGL evacuation infrastructure. The Guyana National Control Centre (GNCC) and Smart Grid project – foundational work and design reviews underway; temporary building materials arriving at Port Georgetown by 21<sup>st</sup> January, 2025; Quality Assurance System (QAS) and Operating Training Stimulator (OTS) system delivered and site preparation ongoing. Transmission and distribution expansion – complete construction of 155 kilometres of 230 kilovolt (kV) transmission lines, 214 kilometres of 69 kV transmission lines, and 363 kilometres of primary distribution lines in Region 3, Region 4, Region 5 and Region 6; establish new substation in Kuru Kuru, Enmore and Williamsburg. Only the other day, for the first time, I went to Laluni and promised the people they will get electricity, and we would deliver that.

Renewable energy – 8 megawatts solar PV farm in Essequibo, and 10 megawatts solar PV farm in Berbice; install 750 kilowatts solar PV micro-grid in Wakenaam Island; expand solar mini-grids to new communities, including those in Paramakatoi, Nappi, Yupukari with the four solar mini-grids procured already, as mentioned in 2024.

Hinterland electrification expansion in 2025 – expand electricity access to Canal Bank, Wauna, places that you never heard of and never went to before, and unserved areas in Region 1; install new generators, expand distribution networks and upgrade existing systems. Electrification projects for Itabali, Mahdia and other locations – you never hear about these places. Hinterland electrification generator capacity upgrade – we mentioned already. Port Kaituma – install 900 kilovolt-ampere (kVA) generators; Mahdia – install 800 kVA generators; Kwakwani – upgrade the switch gears. The Hon. Member talked about Kwakwani being out of power. They were out of power because they were upgrading the switchgear. You did not check properly. Mabaruma was supplied with a 1.5 MVA transformer to address the increase in power demand and improve distribution. Kato – you tried. You did a friends-and-family contract with Kato. It failed and we rescued it. We are going to deliver it to the people this year.

3.20 p.m.

Electrification projects: extended grids to Mahdia Housing Scheme, Khan's Hill... Do you know where Khan's Hill is? It is off of Mabaruma. Also, White Water Junction; completed electrification for Itaballi benefiting 100 households and supported Tiperu schools and clinic with solar PV. Solar PV installation this year will be done and delivered to the people at Sebai, Kwebanna, Wakapau, Riverview, upgrade of facilities for Santa Monica, Karaburi and Baramita. They already have it, but they asked for upgrades. We are going back to the people, and we are going to upgrade it this year. Expanded grid for housing schemes, clinics and public facilities in underserved communities, especially in the hinterland, thus bridging the development divide. That is what we are doing for people. The coastland and hinterland must enjoy the prosperity of this nation – shared prosperity.

Telecommunications – Hon. Member, she does not want to be here when I talk about communications – liberalised telecommunications sector, 2020. On 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2020, on my birthday, I signed it. Increase in competition, 90% reduction in what people are paying for data in this country. Connected 215 out of 253 hinterland communities to high-speed internet, benefitting 127,000 people. They will have better internet than many places on the coastline right now in the hinterland. Expanded fibre optic network from 187 kilometres to 700 kilometres. Safe City has now expanded to safe country. Established 153 ICT huts with 126 fully operational; trained 1,560 individuals in ICT skills across nine administrative regions; executed Girls Code

programme, 150 participants took part in that; and girls conducted ICT accessibility training programme.

What more do you want to hear? Things are happening in Guyana. We are developing. We are developing at a terrific rate. The people are seeing development; the people are feeling development; the people are discussing development; and the people are saying they want five more years of development by the PPP/C Government. The digitisation of Government services – you promised it and we are delivering it. The digitisation of centre services, including the processing of birth certificates, passports, marriage and death certificates under the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Single Window Planning System, launched in June, 2024, enables digital applications and tracking of land development permits, thus improving efficiency. Mobile cash grant system, developed in October, 2024, demonstrates the efficacy of digital governance by enabling the efficient distribution of the \$100,000 cash grant to beneficiaries. That is ongoing. They are getting their moneys, and the President promised more money.

Complain management system at the Ministry of Labour – a complaint handling process was deployed in May, 2024. Job Bank Application Skills Connect – a mobile Job Bank application deployed in October, 2024 where persons can easily access job opportunities and market their skills. Inspection system mobile applications that enable labour officers and inspectors to perform labour inspections utilising tablets that can store data.

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) complaint management system, license management system, which was deployed in October, 2024, this simplifies the complaints workflow and provides an online presence for citizens to submit complaints and environmental issues. A module has also been developed to digitise applications for the processing of various licenses under the EPA.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, immigration and service support, visa and e-services, and system improvements to the visa application system are being made.

The Ministry of Human Services and Social Security's Social Workers – the social workers registry to manage and track Social Workers across the country for capacity development and direction of resources where they are needed. The WIIN – Women Innovation and Investment Network – this is a directory of female business owners online, female business directory for the Women Investment Innovation Network and mobile app and website. This was done in January, 2022.

Infrastructure expansion – plan infrastructure expansion – completed. The LOI - low orbiting internet rollout to the remaining 38 communities will be done this year. Expand the *WiFi* gy programme to more schools and health centres this year. Launch national e-ID system – a \$1 billion investment; facilitate, streamline identification services, fingerprint verification and elimination of redundant audit document card issuance to begin in 2025 with International Organisation for Standard (ISO) Certified International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) accepted standards. Training initiative – trained 1,800 young people nationwide in ITC skills; continued the Train the Trainers programme and expanded accessibility training – enhanced and grew the Guyanese girl code programme; innovation programme – launched innovation camps during school vacation, introduced IDEathon and Tech Trivia programme, Safe Country Expansion – expand to 320 additional Intelligent Video Surveillance (IVS) sites and regions in 2025 with \$6.2 billion allocated in the budget. Enhanced national security through smart technologies and command centre. Safe Road Intelligence System (SRIS), implement traffic management technology, including radars and automated ticketing, disaster preparedness response. Completed projects – 2024 ...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Prime Minister, we have been very generous. It is time that we wind down.

**Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips:** Mr. Speaker, I thank you. I was going on for a while and I thank you for the five minutes to wrap up. Disaster preparedness response and management: completed projects – infrastructure, built multi-purpose Disaster Relief Centre in Georgetown; upgrade Lethem Regional Disaster Relief Complex; training – 500 personnel from over 20 organisations in disaster management; infrastructure development – establish new Disaster Response Centre in Mahdia, Region 8; conduct flood mitigation projects in Kwakwani – \$50 million budgeted for that; improved water sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools in Region 1, Region 7, Region 8 and Region 9; training and capacity building – to train this year, 1,000 emergency response personnel; conduct multi stimulation exercise, including ExxonMobil oil spill exercise in November, 2025; community projects – execute community-based disaster risk projects; Government Information and Communications – we have completed installation of the 400 feet digital broadcast tower at Home Stretch Avenue; computerised 99% of the post offices throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. This year, we will install new radio relay stations at Port Kaituma, Kato, Kwakwani and New Amsterdam. We will upgrade the Essequibo Broadcasting

facility, tripling the transmission strength. That is what we did for four years, and that is what we will do for the remainder of our term in Office.

Mr. Speaker, in concluding, I want the Hon. Members to listen to the conclusion. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh's biggest budget, \$1.384 trillion, to date places more money in the hands of all the people of Guyana, more than what the former Minister of Finance did in his biggest budget. He took bread out of the people's mouth. We are placing money in the people's hands. As I close, let me emphasise that the 2025 National Budget embodies the aspirations of a country determined to secure a prosperous future, unlock endless potentials and embrace a destiny as a global leader in development and sustainability. This budget is our collective, not we on this side, and you on that side too. It is our road map to a Guyana that is secure and sustainable, a Guyana where every citizen, regardless of origin or station, has the opportunity to thrive.

I urge every Guyanese, including you, Hon. Members on the other side of the House, to join us as we seize this moment *carpe diem* and forge ahead with unity and purpose. I call on every Member of this honourable House to lend their support to this budget - a vision of hope, progress and opportunity for all Guyanese. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and may God bless all of us and all the people of Guyana. Thank you very much. [Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Members, let us recognise the Mayor of the City of Georgetown and, also, a former Deputy Speaker. Having been well energised by that massive electrification plan by the Hon. Prime Minister, let us take 10 minutes, stretch our legs and come back for another marathon session led by the Leader of the Opposition.

[Sitting suspended at 3.32 p.m.]

[Sitting resumed at 3.50 p.m.]

Thank you, Members. Let us be seated. Let us now invite the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Aubrey Norton, to make his contribution.

**Mr. Norton:** Mr. Speaker, permit me first of all to congratulate our Members of Parliament on this side of the House. They have done an incredible job of critiquing this budget. They have also made significant proposals that, should the Government listen and become responsive, we should have a better budget. It would be remiss of me if I do not respond to some of the things I heard here. For instance, the Hon. Member Gail Teixeira suggested that, in 1992,

when they came to power, there were no proper houses. I can recall seeing her in South Ruimveldt in the 1980s, and those were complete housing schemes, not house lots. She must know that it is totally untrue, Guyanese in that era lived in what she described. We have a proud record of not giving house lots but putting people in houses and in communities. I can call from South Ruimveldt, even Amelia's Ward, that the Vice-President claimed he built, Vryman's Erven, and Vryheid's Lust. We can name a whole plethora of housing schemes that were built in our time in Government. I listened to my Friend, the Prime Minister, and an old quotation came back to me that says:

“The only thing worse than a liar is a liar that is also a hypocrite”.

Had I not known the Prime Minister personally and the fact that we came from the same community, I would have felt he was misled by his Colleagues. Something is wrong with him. Do you recall him saying that there was a state-of-the-art hospital in Linden and he went into that hospital as a child?

3.50 p.m.

He stopped being a child in 1982. The PPP came to power in 1992. What the Prime Minister did was establish that there was a quality hospital in Linden long before the People's Progressive Party. I believe Members of Parliament (MPs) should try and stick to the truth. I heard the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, talking about the growth rate in 1992. Then, the Hon. Prime Minister quoted part of the McIntyre Report, but he did not deal with the part that suggested that the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) had turned around the economy in Guyana, and when they came to power, there was 7% growth. The Hon. Member, Ashni Kumar Singh, will know that. He did not inherit it, but he should know.

There are a number of things that worry me in this place and the first is that we cannot use history for positive purposes. Since you do not want to, let me help you. The Hon. Attorney General seems to want free and fair elections, which we have no problem with, but the best way to guarantee that in 2025 is to give us biometrics and a clean voters list. How do you come here and argue that you want elections that are credible but outside you are fighting biometrics and a clean voters list, which are two essential ingredients to have free and fair elections? I believe it is just mouth talk. This nation must be saying thank God this is the Government's last budget. This budget puts wealth in the hands of the few, the PPP elites, family, friends and

favourites. I do not like getting personal, but the Prime Minister must remember that if he is looking at his family, as he claims, he has a family that is living in terrible conditions in Linden. [Ms. Walton: His mother.]

I would not say it so, but he has a family that is living in terrible conditions in Linden that he should have dealt with. I do not want to get too personal but continue to be factual.

This budget gives little or nothing to the small man. It is self-contradictory. The numbers are fudged. It hides the reality behind the use of percentages rather than actual figures. It is a slush fund and a recipe for waste and illegal enrichment. There is the poor allocation of resources, especially the overfocus on infrastructure at the expense of the development of our human resources and the working people of Guyana. More importantly, it is not guided by a well-thought-out vision. It is the lumping together of projects that do not constitute a national plan. The next coalition government will reallocate the resources in a way to ensure its effective and efficient use. I want to remind you that in 2015, you said you were going to be over there until Jesus came and we got right over there. I want to remind you that it is the people who determine, and the people out there are fed up with this Government.

We will put the people of Guyana at the centre of development in keeping with our people-centred development strategy. We are cognisant that this cannot be done by the Hon. Members on the other side of the House, since their actions are guided by their Christian name and surname which are ‘cor’ and ‘ruption’, respectively. This ‘cor’ and ‘ruption’ family is destroying Guyana. [An

**Hon. Member (government):** (*inaudible*) You are slow, man. If you listen to those on the other side of the House, you will believe that the PPP/C’s existence in government began in 2020. They are eager to forget their failures and, therefore, they compare five years of the coalition government with 27 years of PPP/C mismanagement, discrimination, victimisation, and the illegal accumulation of wealth by the PPP/C regime.

There is a lot of talk about what we inherited in 2015 and some of them speak as if growth was glorious. Let me remind you. In 2013, the economy grew by 3.7%. In 2014, the economy, under PPP/C, grew by 3.9%. It declined to 0.7% in 2015. What that means is that we took over an economy in trouble. Growth under the PPP/C was extremely low. Dr. Ashni Singh, Hon. Member, tell them that figures do not lie. Listen to the figures. When we left office, we were able to stabilise the economy and the growth rate for 2019 was 5.4% without oil, higher than the PPP/C in their last five

years. It was the Coalition Government that stabilised the failing economy it inherited. Mr. Speaker, figures do not lie. In 2020, oil resources began to flow and, therefore, there are adequate resources for development. It is critical, therefore, that significant attention be paid to the non-oil sector since it is the non-oil sector that is the future of Guyana and should be developed in a structured way. If one accepts that the non-oil sector is an important gauge of how the economy is performing, then one would have expected significant growth in the non-oil sector. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Growth is very marginal amidst failure. The Government seeks to obfuscate this reality by using percentages and hiding the role of the oil sector in producing the so-called growth in the non-oil sector.

The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance stated that oil supply will surpass demand in 2025, leading to a 10.5 drop in oil prices to around \$71 per barrel. Such a decline in oil has serious consequences for Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth in Guyana since he noted that 2025 growth is expected to slow to 10.6% from 43.6% in 2024. This decline should have signalled to the Government that spending 95% of the income from the National Resource Fund is criminal and dangerous and may have already placed us at risk due to the overdependence on oil and the lack of significant improvement in the non-oil sector.

I turn to the non-oil sector. [Mr. McCoy: *Ashni gon deal with yuh tail.*]

You are accustomed to your tail being dealt with. Non-oil sector – sugar: key among the failures in the non-oil sector is sugar. Sugar is in rapid decline. It was minus 21.8% in 2024, and like the Minister’s figures suggest, it is a drain on the economy. This drain is a result of Government’s incompetence among other things. The Minister stated:

“The average world price of sugar declined by 13.1 per cent to US\$0.45 per kilogramme in 2024.”

The Minister understands that under the PPP/C sugar has been in steady decline, but he hurtles to suggest that it will grow by 115% in 2025. This is wishful thinking and *jumbie* economics. This makes no sense and must be a political joke leading up to general and regional elections. The declining prices in the world market, incompetence, and mismanagement of the industry’s resources... There is a clear sign that the economics of sugar is getting worse. No child will buy the Minister’s laughable pronouncement on the sugar industry. The sugar industry cannot increase production by 115%. It is impossible. As the next

government, we will increase sugar production, we will manage Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) effectively; we will diversify GuySuCo; restore it to sustainability; and ensure the workers receive a liveable income and obtain the concomitant training. We have developed a clear path for a successful GuySuCo by diversifying the agricultural product and appointing competent managers. I want to repeat this: appointing competent managers, not appointing them and when they prove incompetent you make them ambassadors; upgrading the skills of the existing workforce and creating alternative employment for people in the sugar belt as we right-size GuySuCo.

Gold: History reveals that when gold price rises, production increases. The Minister said that gold prices increased by 22.9% but the sector only grew by 0.5%, which the Minister, unfortunately or deliberately, described as record growth. This should have been a worrying sign for the Minister since the gold price was high and the actors in the gold sector were not incentivised to increase gold production. That is the issue. The next coalition government will engage the gold miners with the aim of including them in decision-making and incentivising them to increase production.

Stone, sand and construction: I have to reveal some of your tricks here, Minister. While stone declaration and sand extraction are estimated to grow by 80.4% and 48.5%, respectively, this is clearly not driven by policies and programmes developed by this Government. It is driven by the demand for construction activities linked to the development of the oil sector. The Minister estimates that construction grew by 30.8% in 2024. What he did not say...

[**Bishop Edghill:** (*inaudible*)] If you listen, you will recognise that it is not the housing programme, Bishop Edghill. Take lessons. Hold on. What he did not say was that these developments are a result of construction that is linked to the oil economy, not housing. This clearly should not have been categorised as non-oil development since it is a function of development in the oil sector.

[**Bishop Edghill:** People are listening to you. *Dem* children listening to you.] They were listening to you talk garbage. They were listening to you and calling Cevon's Waste Management.

4.05 p.m.

Had the Minister done the decent thing and removed oil-related construction from the non-oil sector figures, economic growth in the non-oil sector would have fallen to single digits. Having included oil-related construction activity, the growth in the non-oil sector is inflated. He is a

master of hiding the reality under fancy language, misused percentages, and concealment in categories in which they should have not been included.

The manufacturing sector: Again, we see the attempt to conceal the reality, *vis-à-vis* manufacturing. The Minister contends that the manufacturing sector grew by 3.5% in 2024, with other manufacturing helping with an increase of 15.7%. When one looks beneath the surface, it is clear that this growth, and I quote the Minister:

“...was driven primarily by an expansion in the production of non-metallic products and fabricated metal...”

I hope that answers you, Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill. Since there is no other sector of the economy that needs such fabricated metals, it is clear that they were destined for the oil sector, and, therefore, are only used to inflate the non-oil sector percentage in manufacturing.

He acknowledged that:

“...a significant expansion in fabrication services amid a fabrication workshop being progressed in 2024 at the Vreed-en-Hoop Shorebase.”

He told you where it was going. So, Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, do not tell us it is going to house construction. This is a clear indication that these developments are not, in the true sense, non-oil sector development, but oil-sector-dependent development, which in the long-term will not contribute directly to the development of the non-oil sector. The reality is the figures in the non-oil sector were fudged so that they could appear great. The Minister can fool himself but the reality will face us as Guyanese. The reality will face us as Guyanese if we do not change course and ensure that we develop a non-oil sector, which is independent of the oil sector, to guarantee sustainable economic development into the future. That is the task. As the next Government, we will produce a non-oil sector development plan to ensure the development of a viable and sustainable non-oil sector that is not oil dependent. Agriculture, manufacturing and new industries will be the base of the emerging new oil economy under the next Government.

I turn to agro-processing. The Minister, in his budget, commits the common sin of the PPP/C regime. He said that there were many achievements in agro-processing in the last four years. In this regard, he pointed out that (1) fifteen agro-processing facilities were established in four years, benefitting 104 agro-processors; (2) one packaging facility and nine solar drying facilities were constructed and

operationalised while 190 farmers and agro-processors were trained; (3) 12 Guyana Shop spaces will be added to create 93 such spaces across the country; and “\$527.4 million was expended in 2024 and a further \$800 million is budgeted for 2025. We welcome and will promote investment in agro-processing and will support agro-processing. We believe it is important for Guyana. Interestingly, however, the Minister did not tell us what the products produced in the agro-processing sector are. He did not tell us how many products were produced and their contribution to non-oil development. The Minister failed to tell us the total value of those products produced in the agro-processing industry. We do not even know what amounts are sold to the Guyana Shop, which he spoke about, and other institutions, and if there were exports. How much was exported and how much has been consumed locally?

The answer to these questions is the only way we will be able to judge the effectiveness of the programme and its contribution to the non-oil sector. This budget tells us nothing, absolutely nothing, about its contribution to the non-oil sector. The Minister, in response, should answer these questions so that we can judge whether there is value for money allocated to agro-processing. For now, he is just throwing around projects and expenditures without telling us about output. As the next government, we will invest far more resources in agro-processing and develop the mechanisms to assess its effectiveness as it relates to value for money. We believe that the expansion and development of agro-processing is critical to the development of the non-oil sector. The major problem is that billions are being spent with no means of reporting on the returns from these investments. Any proper economist will know that it is necessary to analyse the data to be able to determine if the nation's resources are being properly utilised. No such analysis was undertaken.

The PPP/C has a history of investments that waste taxpayers' money – be it the Skeldon sugar factory, the fibre optic cable, the poor infrastructure construction, and the regular waste of taxpayers' money in projects like the Enmore Packaging Plant that do not contribute to the development of Guyana. There is no evidence in the budget of significant improvement in the non-oil sector and this is worrying. The reality is the Government sought to conceal the truth by not providing the relevant data and using oil-dependent activities to appear to have had significant improvement in the non-oil sector. The Government is hallucinating. The non-oil sector is not performing in a way that Guyanese can feel that the process of diversifying the Guyana economy is making progress.

I turn to power generation. Power generation is important for the advancement of Guyana, but it is laughable that the Minister offers to:

“...remove VAT on electricity generators, which will cost the Government over \$200 million annually.”

Clearly, this is signalling that the Government will not be able to solve the electricity crisis by fixing power generation. That is what it manifests. After two power boats and significant financial investments, blackout is still the order of the day. Last night, I was in East La Penitence, and there was a blackout. You could try to conceal this by talking about how much money you spent. [Mr. McCoy: You should have been in Parliament.]

That is why you are nonsensical. I could have gone there after Parliament. It happens when you have an infinitesimal brain. I have many times said that the figures produced in these budgets are questionable. In the Estimates, the Government places its indicators as they... [Mr. McCoy: (Inaudible)]

I want you to listen to this, you and the Prime Minister. In the Estimates, the Government places its indicators as they relate to power generation. It states that the proportion of the population with reliable access to electricity was 99% in 2024 and will be 99% in 2025. If that is true, why then is there a need for value-added tax (VAT) to be removed on generators? It further states that the proportion of the hinterland population with reliable access to electricity was 93% in 2024 and will be 99% in 2025. You are not only joking, but you are also dreaming.

In the same breath, you state only 93% of the hinterland population has reliable access to electricity, and even that is inflated. Guyanese do not have access to reliable electricity unless they are from the elite on the Government's side and they have generators and other backup mechanisms. The stark reality of Guyana is that there is little or no access to reliable electricity. If those schoolchildren were here, they would have laughed at you all again. This is just another indication of the self-contradictory nature of the budget and its estimates and the use of data that are plucked from the skies. Every Guyanese knows that 99% of the people do not have access to reliable electricity. They know they are affected by blackouts and no fudging of the numbers can change that or else last night when the Hon. Member, Mr. Indar, was talking, he would have changed it and gotten current. In addition to that, again, it states in its indicators that the installed capacity of renewable energy (solar, hydro and wind) for off-the-grid areas in 2024 was 6.7% and will be 5.14%.” This signals that there cannot be 99% of the Guyanese people accessing reliable electricity. It is important



to note here that, in places like the Pomeroon River, except for Government buildings, the people have no access to reliable electricity. I have travelled the entire Pomeroon River and the most you have is some Government buildings that have. I come to the next point. You could call out how many generators and how many kilowatts. The reality is that there is no such. You, Mr. Prime Minister, hold a minute. You are contending that 99%...and hear you in your words, unserved areas will get electricity this year. How on earth? Which are the unserved areas? Is it the 1%? You can find places close to Georgetown that do not have electricity, so cut this nonsense out.

The Minister said that he intends to strike an appropriate balance between short-term imperatives and long-term consideration. The present approach of the Government is a clear indication that their sole focus is on spending out the money as fast as they can. Could it be that they expect to be removed from the Government and are seeking to give the next government *basket to fetch water*? He cannot be talking about short and long-term balance when they changed the law to be able to take out 95% of the revenue accrued from oil. This approach suggests that all that matters are short-term imperatives. At the current rate of depletion of funds from oil, there are little or no savings. There is little or no money to invest and little or no money to cushion the ill effects of a decline in oil prices, which the Minister himself stated will decline to US\$71 a barrel. Clearly, poor management.

4.20 p.m.

This is more serious when it is recognised that there is no concerted effort to develop the non-oil sector. With the present Government's approach, it will be years before significant funds will be available to invest so that we have funds to stabilise the economy and ensure prosperity for future generations. You on that side of the House are destroying the future of this nation. You are spending money as if it is yours. You are spending money without a proper plan. We know you do not have a proper plan because the President came right here once and declared that we would have gotten \$200,000 instantaneously. I know some people, like my friend, Mr. McCoy, do not know what that means. It means right away. Then, another Government official came and said... [An Hon. Member: *Inaudible*] Man, you know I got to wake you up. Go back to sleep. Another Government official came and said, it was going to take five months. They have no plan.

In the oil sector, as the next Government, we will change the law to ensure oil resources are not plundered and misused and that those resources are effectively managed and invested to transform the non-oil sector while ensuring we have funds saved for future generations and bad times when the oil price is low, as is now imminent. We have made it very clear that we intend to engage ExxonMobil, in keeping with Article 32.1 of the Production Sharing Agreement (PSA), to make changes with the aim of putting more resources in the hands of the people of Guyana. This budget does not put sufficient money in the hands of the people. It is our intention that our people should be the main beneficiaries of our oil resources. I want to say to the Hon. Minister of Natural Resources that if there is one thing historically that the People's National Congress (PNC) was good at and continues to be good at, it is having an understanding of the English language and good choice of words to convey what we mean. We never, at any stage, said anything about renegotiation. All we did was promise that the people of Guyana would get more from oil.

The poultry industry: Mr. Speaker, I am happy that it is stated in this budget that there has been an increase in the production of soya and corn. I say it is good. [An Hon. Member: *Inaudible*] It is not a function of you. Why are you hollering yes? This measure could contribute significantly to the development of the poultry industry. Here what is about you. Unfortunately, the majority of poultry farmers are small operators and are experiencing significant losses, and many of them have already been decimated by the inclusion of body hepatitis. The Hon. Member Jordan gave a full account of the problems small poultry farmers face. The Government should come to the assistance to help them to surmount the challenges they are facing.

High cost of living. The Government is denying the existence of the high cost of living, and if I am lying, you can say you are not. As a consequence, there are little or no measures in this budget to reduce the high cost of living. It was interesting to watch the students in this Parliament. When they were here when Hon. Jordan was speaking, they were nodding their heads in approval as Mr. Vincero Jordan outlined the prices for goods in Guyana, especially food. It is not linked to them alone. Today, this is what was posted by the Caribbean Agricultural Cooperative Organization (CACO): Chicken - \$900 to \$1,000 a pound; beef - \$1,500 per pound; eggs - \$360 a tray; fish - \$1,200 to \$1,500 per pound; rice, sugar, and flour - \$450 a pound; milk - \$1,500; oil - \$1,500 per bottle; gas for engine and so on - \$3,000 a gallon; tomato, cabbages, *etcetera* - \$1,000 per pound; banana - \$350 a pound; packaged farine - \$1,000' and

cassava bread - \$1,500 to \$2000. That is the people who feel it speaking. These people live it, so they know it. The Government on the other side of this House knows of living, but it is out of touch with the cost and reality. You are out of touch with the cost and reality.

I wish to remind this House that we previously offered measures to reduce the high cost of living. For example, we recommended the waiver of electricity charges for low-income individuals, the waiver of water charges for low-income individuals, grants to small farmers to increase production, an immediate 35% salary increase for all public servants, the writing off of UG students' loans, giving \$50,000 per month to every student at the tertiary level, and the development of agriculture in every region to boost food production, *inter-alia*. We cannot be mouthing food security when there are still many people and regions in Guyana that are not food secure. I want to talk to the Hon. Minister of Agriculture who went back to the things we banned. He had the year wrong; he said 1966. We restricted items in 1970, and we are proud of it. We were importing saltfish when saltfish could be made by taking fish and salt and placing it in the sun. May I say this to you? The people who sell saltfish at Lusignan and at Annandale are happy that we restricted saltfish so that a saltfish sector could have developed in Guyana, and the people of Guyana could have benefitted from it, regardless of race. So, do not tell us about food security. Your food on your table is secure, but not for the average man.

Mr. Speaker, this budget does not have a social net to protect the poor and vulnerable. It does not even have protection for our children. When we were in Government – I want Hon. Ramson to listen to this – we promoted early childhood development for our children. In this regard, Minister Singh stated in the budget that the Government has completed two early childhood development centres in five years, one at Rose Hall and one at Bartica. Glad to hear that. Let us compare. This Government should be ashamed that with oil money, they could only develop two such centres in comparison to the Partnership for National Unity and Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition that developed six such centres in Suddie, Dartmouth, Anna Catherina, Linden, Ann's Grove, and Ithaca. Those are facts. We did it without oil money. Some of the money that is going to waste in infrastructure could have been better spent to give our children a good start through more early childhood development centres, which will result in better for the children. As part of our people-centred development strategy, we will focus on early childhood development.

Youth: Our youth is probably the most important human resource in our country. In Government between 2015 and 2020, this National Assembly adopted our National Youth Policy, which placed significant focus on the development of youth, especially educational development, entrepreneurial development, leadership skills development, and ensuring that the child is nurtured from childhood to youth in a structured way. Youth development is not going with your head in the air at a ground and lording over people. It is about doing the things that are necessary for the development of youth. We will revisit our youth policy, since the Government has none, update it, and provide our youth with a clear pathway to development, especially in reducing their contact and conflict with the law and promoting their economic, political, and social empowerment. We will structure youth development programmes to ensure we produce a law-abiding society and end the lawlessness that has characterised our youth over the years under this PPP/C regime. It is our youth that will have to be at the forefront of those changes.

We will put more resources into the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) to improve its ability to offer benefits and social protection to the people of Guyana. Our social sector is badly managed. Its benefits are at the whims, fancies, and caprices of the Minister. As the next Government, we will put in place objective criteria for people to access social service benefits. People should know and be able to predict their entitlement. Not turn up for the Minister, to say no, you cannot get it, you can get it, you cannot get it, you can get it. You do not run countries like that. Objective criteria. As I am on NIS, the Minister should tell this House how much money has accrued to NIS as a result of the 60,000 jobs you claim to have created. If you created those jobs, then NIS should have reflected an increase. NIS has not experienced an increase in revenue as a result of the so-called job creation. Or is it that most of these are temporary jobs if they exist at all? Or is it that these workers and employers do not pay NIS? I await this information from Minister Ashni Singh, the Minister with responsibility for finance and sometimes platitudes.

This budget has a lot of piecemeal measures that purport to bring relief to the people of Guyana, like \$100,000 for a newborn baby, and another \$100,000, and it is all over the place. A lot of them will put resources in the hands of the wealthy, the owners of businesses. If this Government genuinely wanted to help the people of Guyana with the high cost of living crisis, it could have reduced VAT to 10% or 12%. Had it reduced it to 10% or 12%, it would have put \$34 billion or \$17 billion directly in the pocket of Guyanese,

which is far larger than the \$9 billion in the budget for the direct cost of living mitigation. Every person who goes to the shop pays VAT on virtually everything. Therefore, the best way to give them back money is to reduce it. This will benefit and impact positively the average Guyanese in a direct way. It is sad that the Government seems hell-bent on collecting large income from tax from the small man who pays Pay As You Earn (PAYE), rather than reducing vat to bring direct relief to the people of Guyana.

4.35 p.m.

I urge you, Minister Dr. Singh, to reconsider and bring it down to either 12% or 10%. The people of Guyana will be grateful. As the next government, we will adjust VAT as is appropriate to bring direct relief to the people of Guyana.

I turn to cash grants – this Government have been pressured by the Opposition to deliver a cash grant programme to the people of Guyana; I can substantiate it. When we first talked about the cash grant, the Vice-President Dr. Jagdeo said it will fuel inflation and President Dr. Ali said the same thing. As we continued to campaign and it became efficacious among Guyanese, they were compelled to give a cash grant. The handling of the cash grant by the Government is a manifestation of their incompetence, their love for illegalities, and the desire to dominate and control the people of Guyana. What is worse? The cash grant, as presently structured, cannot take people out of poverty. As the next government, our cash transfer policies and programmes will aim to ensure all Guyanese receive a liveable income to increase their ability to plan, purchase, save and invest. The cash grant, as they structured it, cannot do that – today one has it, tomorrow one does not. If Mr. McCoy feels like telling the Government to give one, he will come and say give them – get them. It has to be structured. We aim to give households no less than \$100,000 in cash and other benefits per year. [Mr. McCoy: I am looking for a doctor; only People's National Congress (PNC) people.] You are the patient.

Housing – the Government failed to recognise several realities in the housing sector because they dislike two critical things. The first is data and the second is planning. It is obvious to anyone looking to rent in Georgetown that there has been a sharp increase in the typical rent and its surrounding neighbourhoods; whereas, only a few years ago, a one-bedroom apartment could be found for \$30,000. Now, there are many who rent for no less than \$100,000. This is testament to the demand for housing as well as a persistent shortage of supply. Many hardworking Guyanese families

who cannot afford this rent have been displaced. If income rose as quickly as rent, no one would be complaining that rent has begun to resemble developed countries rates. For several years, the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) neglected to carry out and publish the Guyana Labour Force Survey (GLFS) which could have tracked wage growth and highlighted the wage stagnation relative to rent prices. It would be clear to the Government that much more aggressive actions need to be taken to address this housing crisis. This Government do not like data; they like guesswork. The rent prices have been allowed to grow while income growth has withered. Further, the consequence of this income stagnation is that many Guyanese cannot afford to build on their existing house lots when they do get them. As we know, the waiting list is decades old.

Inflation has caught up with or, in many cases, surpassed any minimal wage gains. This too has eroded the ability of Guyanese households to build. Unlike the Government, we are well aware that a house lot is not a house. The Government seem to equate the allocation of house lots with the housing of people – it is not. We, in the Opposition, are not afraid of data. We are not afraid to commission studies and act in an informed way. We need to do this to know the needs of the people as we develop and implement our people-centred development strategies, which must be data-driven. One of the biggest problems of this Government – little or nothing – is data-driven. We will immediately commission a study on Guyana's housing needs and incorporate those insights into our existing analysis. [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: *(Inaudible)* studies.] I want you to listen, Prime Minister. Similarly, we will, at once, begin a rent-to-own housing drive where the government will build houses on existing house lots and new lands for which citizens will pay rent to the government monthly. This rent will be paid until the cost of the house is recovered and the house will become the property of the tenant. If you used to read, you would know that there is rent-to-own in this world.

This approach of rent-to-own will ensure that they overcome the access to finance problems that so many clearly face and it will swiftly increase our nation's housing stock. If they were paying attention as a government, they would see that many are given house lots but they do not have the requisite capacity to go to the bank. A rent-to-own scheme is aimed to help poor people who do not have the requisite resources to go to the bank. In the process, we will simultaneously generate thousands of jobs in this and other housing initiatives, benefiting citizens and our economy. No longer will citizens be forced to pay developed countries' rent

without developed countries' salary. In addition, we will deliver rent subsidies to those who are still forced to live in rented houses until they can be provided with their own houses. We know that the PPP/C have little interest in planning. It is no small wonder, that they have focused their housing efforts on the low-lying coast, while mouthing about climate change and continuing to place people there. We cannot afford to ignore the risks climate change possesses. We must strategically develop inland housing to mitigate these concerns. There are highlands all around Guyana that must be utilised immediately to develop large-scale housing schemes. Over time, tens of thousands of Guyanese can comfortably live in those communities. This is not new to us; we on this side of the House are proud of our record of delivering houses in well-structured communities so that our people can live comfortably. Ask the people of South Ruimveldt; ask the people of Amelia's Ward; ask the people of Scottsburg in Corriverton; ask the people of Vryman's Erven; ask them in Vryheid's Lust and they will tell you they moved into houses built by us in the communities.

Our government will focus on the development of new housing schemes on the corridor along the Soesdyke/Linden Highway, Linden to Lethem and others with highlands, while also building out the transportation infrastructure to support the movement of so many people. This Government built roads and built this but there was no attempt to deal with the transportation issue. We recognised that Guyana cannot rely on the one road in and one road out approach at the Diamond and Tuschen Housing Schemes which have been a traffic disaster. The farther from Georgetown Guyanese work and live, the more comfortable they will be with structured communities and concomitant transportation. To this end, we will ensure that the Soesdyke/Linden Highway's resurfacing project is done to the highest standards with the possibility of developing a rail network to link communities with Georgetown to the north and Lethem to the south. In this regard, I endorse our Hon. Member Mr. Patterson's proposals. A mixed-use rail network powered by our own natural gas reserves shows great promise, as both passengers and those transporting goods can benefit as the cost of transportation will be slashed. This issue of the slashing of transportation cost was not addressed in this Budget – lowering the cost of transportation. Our people-centred development strategy dictates that we seek to lower the cost of transportation in pursuance of giving Guyanese a high-quality life.

The establishment of these road networks will generate jobs in the agriculture, tourism, mining, logistics, forestry sectors and the construction industries, among others, which would

boost Guyana's economy while helping our nation mitigate climate change risks. This will also facilitate the transport of goods from Brazil for export, generating billions in revenue annually. This will contribute to our desire to develop new industries. It is time we develop robust infrastructure that links our country from one end to the other. In government, we will lead the way on this front. Duly, we will – I know they do not like hearing this. – commission a study on the best way to approach this and build out such mixed-use transportation. Mr. Speaker, you know, there is a dislike over there for studies and we will always be in trouble. They did Skeldon without proper studies. They did the fibre-optic cable without proper studies. Do they not learn? Are their ears hard? You need feasibility and other studies.

I turn directly to infrastructure. We in the Opposition are clear that there is a need for infrastructural development but we are concerned that this is undertaken within a narrow framework and not in the context of a wider vision for the development of infrastructure. At the same time, more significant resources for human resource development are committed. We welcome the work being done to pave roads in Guyana. However, we are appalled at the poor-quality work and the narrowing of some roads, as if they were pavements. Only recently, residents of Tucville complained that their road was not only narrowed, but it was also built without shoulders and only one vehicle can pass at a time. Bishop Edghill, is that development? It cannot be. They further complained that the roads do not have proper shoulders, thus resulting in damage to motor vehicles. This needs to be rectified. I am not criticising you, Hon. Member. I am merely bringing to your attention the concerns of many people in the village that you are from – Plaisance – right next door. You grew up there. You know the clay brick road. They complained, previously, that two vehicles could pass on the clay brick road and now they cannot pass. Do not see it as merely criticism; see it as an opportunity to rectify the problems you have. The PPP/C Government consistently show a lack of vision for Guyana's future. If we listen to the Members of the PPP/C boast, it is all about how much money they spent.

*4.50 p.m.*

Their measurement of successful governments is to equate progress with how much money is spent, with little regard for efficiency, illegal use of money or waste. They are behaving like the money now available to us is because of their effective governance and prudent management of the economy – but it is not. They are enjoying the good fortunes. You are enjoying the good fortunes of the oil resources and

it is incumbent on you that you use them judiciously. This money is available because of an expanding oil sector that has delivered resources like never before. This money is available despite the PPP/C's poor leadership and widespread involvement in activities that are not legal, since I cannot use the 'C' word. The Guyanese people demand better stewardship of our resources.

In contrast to the PPP/C's visionless spending, the Opposition's vision is one of responsibility to present and future generations. We believe that effective management of our oil wealth has potential to deliver a transformational increase in the standard of living of the Guyanese people. This transformation will mirror the economic transformation seen in countries such as Singapore and Malaysia. Our strategy will focus on reducing waste, eliminating the 'C' word thing and channelling resources into sustainable, high impact projects that truly enhance our people's quality of life. Singapore is a good example for us. Before Singapore's transformative projects in 1960, it had a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita of just US\$516. However, by investing sensibly in infrastructure and efficient governance, it emerged as a global economic powerhouse and not bringing power ships that do not have power. Today, Singapore boasts with a GDP per capita of over US\$93,000. Today, the citizens of Singapore enjoy a high-quality life with access to excellent healthcare, education and infrastructure. This is the sort of development we will pursue.

Today, we take the United States of America (USA) for granted. However, it was the United States Interstate Highway System, established in 1956, that transformed America's economy and society. Before the construction of the Interstate Highway System, the USA's economy relied heavily on inefficient, disconnected roadways and railways. However, the Interstate Highway System enabled faster movement of goods and people. It reduced transportation costs and boosted productivity. The USA's economy has grown sixfold since the construction of those highways. The construction created millions of jobs, both directly and indirectly, and stimulated industries, such as steel, concrete and automotive manufacturing. It transformed the economy of the United States of America. The highways bridged urban centres with rural areas which enable regional trade, better access to services and balance the development.

We, in the Opposition's vision, mirror the strategic foresight of those nations. By wisely managing our oil wealth and prioritising transformative infrastructure projects, Guyana can achieve similar economic success and uplift generations

of citizens. Guyana can replicate these successes with an inter-regional highway network that connects all parts of the country, unlocking economic potential and transforming lives. As the next government, we recognise that infrastructure development directly correlates to the transformational improvement in the quality of life of the Guyanese people. Our approach to infrastructure will focus on three key pillars.

Expanding the road network – the PPP/C's neglect has left Guyana with a 1990's road network. Since 1992, the PPP/C have been in Government for a total of 28 years and the result has been little or no expansion of the road network. This cannot be allowed to continue. As the next government, we will build a comprehensive inter-regional highway (IRH) system. This includes the construction of paved highways linking Linden to New Amsterdam, Linden to Lethem and other key towns. Imagine, goods from the hinterland farms moving seamlessly into urban markets within hours, thereby creating wealth, employment and opportunity in every region. A coast to hinterland network connecting Bartica to Upper Mazaruni, the Essequibo Coast to Cuyuni and the Northwest District will be part of the IRH. Picture a vibrant economic corridor where hinterland communities are no longer geographically isolated but are integrately connected to the national dynamic.

We will bridge the Essequibo River at multiple points with connected roadways... **[Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips:**

Which part?] You are laughing. Let me say this to you, Hon. Prime Minister, there are parts of the Essequibo River that are narrower than the Demerara River...to improve connectivity. These bridges and roads will knit the country together like never before and transform the quality of life of residents. We will end this *ad hoc* approach of building roads that are not part of a well thought out national road network.

Addressing the traffic congestion – the Coalition is aware that traffic congestion severely impacts productivity and the quality of life of Guyanese. Today, residents who travel from West Coast Demerara along the East Bank Road and East Coast Demerara Road, face long commutes because of inefficient traffic management systems. Even in Georgetown, there is a daily gridlock that impacts productivity and, quite frankly, happiness. Our current road infrastructure struggles to cope with the growing volume of vehicles. While Minister Bishop Edghill is boasting about the roads being built, none of them are structured to ease the gridlock to ensure free moving traffic and opening new lands for economic development. The mere building of roads is

not the solution. As the next government... [Mr.

**Nandlall:** I am keeping this speech Mr. Norton. This is one of your best speeches.] Which means you know that

we are coming into government. ...we will implement smart technologies, such as radar systems, fisheye cameras and intelligent traffic lights to optimise traffic flow and monitor road use in real time. This adaptive traffic signal technologies will significantly reduce congestion. It is true that a part of the problem in Georgetown is that there is a capacity problem. [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We did it already. It is already there. We did that already.]

You do not have any smart traffic light. If there was one, once a buildup occurs and one side was empty, the traffic light would let the traffic go. You probably do not even know what you are talking about. All roads constructed in the future that will link to the current road network will be constructed to modern international standards for optimised traffic flow and safety. As the Government constructs the roads, they are creating directional conflicts as is evident on the highway from Mandela Avenue to Diamond. We will solve this problem as much as possible and, as far as practical, we will have grade separation to avoid directional conflicts.

Enhancing road safety – the current state of road safety in Guyana is dire, with frequent accidents, inadequate signage and poorly maintained roads with many substandard design elements. Families live in fear of losing their loved ones to preventable crashes, while the PPP/C seem to have abdicated their responsibility to ensure our roads are safe. The PPP/C's response to this problem is to blame everyone else. According to this, the crisis of our roads is caused by motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. They accept no responsibility. According to the Minister, Mr. Benn, to reduce road deaths, it will require a change in culture, change in behaviour and a greater level of awareness among the population. We agree that there is need for such changes, but we worry when nothing is said about what the government must do to address contributing factors that fall within this sphere of responsibility. We will address them.

We, in the Opposition, believe that the Government have a responsibility to keep Guyanese safe. Very early in our term of government – let me repeat – very early in our term of government, we will commission a comprehensive review of traffic accident statistics, so as to review key causes such as speeding, driver inattention, driving under the influence (DUI), pedestrian conflicts and intersection crashes as we identify the trends. We will audit major highways such as the Soesdyke/Linden Highway, the Corentyne Highway, West Coast Demerara Roads and the East Coast Demerara Road to

identify substandard design elements such as poor surfaces, unsafe turns, inadequate sight distance and proximity of fixed objects to the traveling lane. We will use audit results to direct target funding for safety improvements. We also understand that improved infrastructure ensures roads meet high standards. It is not just the money you have spent; it is the quality of the roads. Roads being built, at present, do not meet such standards and anybody coming down the so-called Heroes Highway. [Mr. Mustapha: What happen with it?]

As you know long ago, the little *wutless* boy... In your days, do you know what would have been done if your girlfriend got pregnant? They would have been driven on that road – it is a sure abortion.

We will have a road safety element built into our infrastructure development programme. This is badly lacking in the present *ad hoc* road construction. We will also have sustained education campaigns on safely driving and awareness when using the roads. We will launch year-round public awareness programmes on safe driving and road use. We clearly have to eliminate the corruption as it relates to obtaining driver's licence. We will focus on changing behaviours of drivers, pedestrians and motorcyclists through education. To this end, we will create a dedicated road safety agency for traffic management and road safety. It will focus on data collection, audits, public education and coordination with law enforcement. This agency will work with engineers and traffic management professionals to develop and implement a comprehensive road safety plan. Our highways will open vast areas for agriculture, housing and manufacturing.

Creating new economic opportunities in hinterland communities – the benefits will include wealth creation, moving beyond handouts to foster local enterprise and self-sufficiency, thriving communities where farmers and artisans benefit from direct market access. Hinterland farmers will have easier access to urban markets, boosting incomes and reducing post-harvest losses. Better roads will unlock ecotourism opportunities, making heritage sites and nature parks more accessible to visitors. Our infrastructure development plan will be based on this sound vision for infrastructure. Our infrastructure vision is grounded in responsibility, sustainability and transformative impact. By building inter regional highways, addressing power supply issues, creating wealth in hinterland communities and ensuring transparency, we will deliver a high quality of life for all Guyanese. Guyana will be positioned as a model of development and prosperity in the Caribbean with a strategic and visionary approach.

5.05 p.m.

Disaster risk reduction and management – as we are a low-lying coastal country, more emphasis needs to be placed on disaster risk reduction and management. There is need for an all-of-government approach, with all the various ministries, departments, agencies and local government organs involved to build resilience across the country. This all-of-government approach will reduce risk and reduce the impact from emergencies and disasters. As the next government, we will place disaster risk reduction and disaster risk management under a ministry with authority to table bills and represent its budget in this National Assembly. The profile of disaster risk reduction and disaster risk management needs to be raised. At present, it comes over as an insignificant institution in Guyana under the purview of the Prime Minister. With the advent of the oil and gas industry – I want to repeat this for you – with the advent of the oil and gas sector, more attention needs to be paid to this area.

Human resource development – human resource development is one of the most critical elements of economical development. Therefore, we are surprised that, in percentage terms, the allocation to education continues to decline. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] *Is wuh*

*you do dem?* We need to have a survey... [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] It is an old one but it is true. We need to have a survey of the jobs available and likely in the future to be able to align our training with demand. Clearly, Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) is not the solution. We demand that more resources be allocated to the University of Guyana, so that it becomes the leading institution of human resource development in Guyana at the tertiary level. At the tertiary level, many senior, local and regional educators have expressed deep, deep concern that the GOAL project has been unable to produce the requisite results. The awardees must have been the *crème de le crème* of students for 378 of them to have received their Doctor of Philosophy (PhDs) in three years – unbelievable. PhDs were given away from the highest level here. While a few of these universities are credible, there are question marks over many of them. I urge you to relook at this programme. As the next Government, we will focus on training human resources we have, in the best institution in the world, to ensure that we produce quality professionals who can contribute to the development of Guyana. We will significantly improve technical and vocational education to ensure they are aligned with the demand for skills as dictated by Guyana's economy.

Liveable income – this Budget fails to deliver a liveable income to the people of Guyana. We will deliver a liveable

income since we are aware that, at present, most people live from pay cheque to pay cheque. If we are to get improved performance and production, we need to pay people well, ensure good working conditions, ensure the existence of adequate social security, and offer proper health and other services. Our measures will aim to train high-quality personnel, retaining them and provide them with a high-quality of life based on high-paying jobs. The present state of our health facilities, water, schools and general working conditions must be improved considerably. It is only if we improve the quality of life of our people that Guyana will progress.

Security – our aim is to ensure that Guyana is a safe place to live. In this regard, the training, reorientation and development of the Guyana Police Force's (GPF) capacity to prevent and solve crimes are critical areas that we will act upon. We will reintroduce professionalism to the Guyana Police Force and allow it to operate as an independent institution, in keeping with its motto: *Service and Protection* to the people of Guyana. We cannot afford a police force that is politicised; embroiled in all forms of illegalities, popularly known as *runnings*; and the 'c' word that has been banned from this honourable House.

Reimagine and reinventing government – considering the widespread public rejection and disappointment in this project, I wish to present to the House and to the nation how, as the next Government, we will reimagine and reinvent Government for the benefit of the people. I know that some of what I revealed will subsequently end up in the President's speeches or in the PPP/C's election manifesto but we, on this side of the House, are obligated to let the Guyanese people know that, under a more capable Government, they can live better lives and our country can be one of the best places to live in. In any case, Guyanese now understand more than ever before, from the cash grant payout fiasco, that what matters is not who speaks about the ideas but who can effectively implement them. Those on the other side are free to jot down points.

While I was coming, I got a note from a village called Masakenari, a remote Wai-Wai village in the deep south. It was said that the village has not been registered for the \$100,000 cash grant, no one has either visited or written the village to provide any information regarding the cash grant for this community. The core idea of government is to serve the people as is the reason for their existence. This is the foundation of the social contract between those who govern and the rest of the citizens. The PPP/C Government have so violated and contorted this contract that they believe citizens

must be obligated, subservient and indebted to them. Even worse, the PPP/C believes their mode of operation must be through control and domination. Not unexpectedly, we therefore have a Government today rife with arrogance, incompetence, self-deception, self-absorption and indifference to the plight of ordinary people. Equally and not unexpectedly, the Guyanese people today feel hopeless when they should have been feeling hopeful.

We, as the next government, will give government back to the people. We will ensure that Government – ministers, ministries and agencies – respond to the needs, concerns, complaints, demands and aspirations of the people with competence, respect, promptness, fairness and effectiveness. As a government, we will give substance to a proper government's moral obligation to ensure that citizens live a decent and comfortable life and to ensure that they can enjoy the full range of human, political, social and economic rights. To achieve this, we will reimagine and reinvent government. What are some of the specifics? We will use our people-centred development strategy as our guiding philosophy. We remain fully committed to this approach as more and more citizens embrace our ideas and proposals. As one plank of our people-centred vision, we will eliminate poverty and raise the quality of life as a national priority. As another plank, we will establish a comprehensive social protection system based on three core principles: (1) Social protection is an inalienable right of every citizen; (2) No Guyanese must be deprived of the basic necessities of decent life, irrespective of any unfortunate circumstance; and (3) Social protection must provide a life cycle guarantee from the womb to the tomb.

As part of our reinvention plan, we will establish new ministries and government agencies or reshape them to better deliver on our people-centred development goals. Possibilities for new ministries include a ministry of women, children and family, whose mandate will be to ensure that comprehensive policies are designed, implemented and monitored to ensure no effort is spared in guaranteeing women, children and families can live their best lives. Another possible ministry is the ministry of public safety, which will oversee and coordinate our government's efforts at natural disaster prevention preparedness, road safety, health security, climate resilience, and anticipating and preventing other potential threats to the public. Under this heading, we will most definitely have to recreate the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security into a high-performance entity to oversee massive expenditure on social protection and cost of living relief. The Ministry will be professionalised and guided by a multiyear strategic plan

since none currently exists. Going further, we will expand the mandate of the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce to assume responsibility for building image and brand internationally. The world must see Guyana in all its positive light. In this regard, we will seriously consider returning the Guyana Airways Corporation to serve both domestically and internationally. It is a sad thing to remember...

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

Do you know that you talk about all of the developments but you do not tell anyone that the Guyana Airways Corporation was destroyed by the People's Progressive Party/Civic?

In another effort in our plan to reimagine and reinvent government, we will be employing a whole-of-government approach for critical national issues such as the Indigenous welfare, national security, and climate resilience. On the Indigenous issues, for example, our whole-of-government approach will see the creation of a cross-ministry task force chaired by the Minister of Indigenous Affairs on which the National Tshaos Council (NTC), Indigenous non-governmental organisations (NGOs), other stakeholders and experts will have seats. Such an approach will ensure we implement a critical mass of coordinated programmes aimed at overcoming the key hindrances to the development of Indigenous people, families and communities. We say here and we will do it. Tshaos and councillors should be paid no less than \$200,000 a month. We will also...

**Mr. Speaker:** Hon. Leader of the Opposition, we may need to start winding down.

**Mr. Norton:** What might you need?

**Mr. Speaker:** We have had almost...

**Mr. Norton:** Could I wind up how the Prime Minister did it? I only have a couple of pages more. We will also...

**Mr. Speaker:** I have been very generous with an extra half an hour so far. He had only half an hour total.

**Mr. Norton:** Okay. I can summarise. Do not worry. We will reimagine the Government. We will take transparency and accountability to new heights. Over the last four years, the Government have shown no real interest and urgency in data collection and analysis to identify, evaluate problems, measure policy performance and guide decision-making. The PPP/C fears facing the facts as much as they reveal the truth. We have not, for example, seen a quarterly labour force survey since late 2021. The Bureau of Statistics (BoS) has received increased allocations but has not delivered an improvement in the quality and quantity of its work. I do not



want to blame the Bureau of Statistics, but until now we have not seen the census.

When it comes to facilitating public consultation on major issues, when last or whenever has this Government produced a green paper on their policy intentions? For those who may not know, a green paper is a document published by a government containing information about a possible new law or policy with the intention of starting a public discussion and collecting input from the wider society. You are not likely to know what it is. We, as the next government, will facilitate public consultation through regular publication of green papers and hosting public forums.

5.20 p.m.

We believe that this Budget will not serve the people of Guyana. We believe that this Budget is a hodge-podge of projects and an avenue for money. **[Hon. Members: 'Jordan, Jordan'.]** That word existed before 'Jordan'. We, on this side of the House, are deeply concerned that this Government continues to talk about the amount of cars on the roads, the amount of buildings they built, as if that is development. We will pursue genuine development in which the people of Guyana are involved, in which resources are meeting our people and we are improving the quality of life of the Guyanese people. It is unacceptable, for the money we have at our disposal, for us to be hearing about malnourished children, for us to be hearing of poverty. The time has come for a change. Every time I listen to speakers in this House, more and more I am convinced that if Guyana is to grow the PPP/C must go. There is potential in Guyana. The only thing that is missing is a competent government. I thank you. **[Applause]**

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you very much, Hon. Leader of the Opposition, just being congratulated by the Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo. Now to close the debate, the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh.

**Dr. Singh (replying):** Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I have said on multiple occasions how important we consider these annual budget debates. I have elaborated why we consider these budget debates to be as important as we do. They allow us, on our side of the House, to elaborate our vision for our country, our plans and policies, programmes and projects in our respective sectors. We allow ourselves to be subject to the scrutiny, and indeed critical scrutiny of the people of Guyana, and in the same breath these debates allow those on the other side of the House to do the same, to articulate their plans and policies, their perspectives on the

critical and pressing issues of our time, and the approach that they would adopt to confront these issues. This 2025 Budget debate was no exception in this regard. My colleagues on this side of the House availed themselves of this opportunity, and those on the opposite side of the House endeavoured, I believe, the same. Having listened to the five days of debate thus far, I believe that the Guyanese people are richer for the time that they would have devoted to following these debates.

**[Mr. Ramson:** Except to the Opposition.] No, I think it is important that the Opposition be listened to.

I was particularly pleased to see young people. There are many in the House, in the visitors' gallery today. I was particularly pleased to see so many young people. We had school children. We have university students in the gallery today. We have young people watching television and on social media. I was particularly pleased to see and to hear, outside of the House, how many young people followed these debates over the past week. For example, I spoke with a young teenager just yesterday, and I asked him, were you following the budget debates', and he said to me, 'yes', he was. I said 'is there any particular speaker that you want to single out', and he said, 'I enjoyed Minister Edghill'. I asked him why and he said, without batting an eyelid, 'he slaughtered 'Patterson''. I have no doubt that if I had asked him on another day he might have identified another person. I asked him yesterday and Minister Edghill spoke yesterday. I have no doubt had I asked him today, he might have referred to any one of the excellent speeches that we had from my colleagues on this side of the House who, systematically, outclassed those on the other side of the House and put on show, once again, why the People's Progressive Party/Civic is in Government, and why the APNU/AFC are sitting over there.

On many occasions I looked, as I often do, at the young Members of the APNU/AFC benches, Hon. Members of the House as they are, and I saw a particularly glum expression on their faces. I even engaged many of them on the margins of Parliament, as I always do, and they would not admit it in public, but they did very generously in private, their understanding of why they are consigned and condemned to the Opposition benches, and will be consigned and condemned to the Opposition benches for at least a generation to come, and they understand it. They know, as do the young people of Guyana, including many of them who I will say, to their credit, have the courtesy and decency to remain in the House to listen to the conclusion of this debate. I want to acknowledge all of them who have the courtesy to remain in this House while their senior colleagues make their presentations, and contrary to official

guidance, scurry out of the House without affording those on our side of the House even the courtesy of a listening ear. You will note, Sir, that our benches were full. Someone sent a screenshot of a comment where they said, ‘we want a wide angle shot of the Opposition benches when ‘Ashni Singh’ is speaking, because we see the Government benches are full when the Opposition is speaking, but we see the Opposition benches are empty when the Government benches are speaking’. That Mr. Speaker, in a simple thought, captures and expresses the striking and stark difference between the People’s Progressive Party/Civic and the APNU/AFC.

If you were to begin just with the simple courtesy of listening to the other side... It is in the Parliamentarians Handbook. It is in writing. If one were to begin with the simple... It might seem like something simple, but if you cannot get the simple things right, if you cannot even stay in the House to afford those on the opposite side... You come and you speak about inclusivity and listening and consultation, and all of these lofty and fancy sounding words. We heard a lot of those lofty, grand, and grandiose words from the Leader of the Opposition, all big and fancy words. If you cannot display, no matter what you come and say about inclusivity, listening and consultation, and you want to be listened to... We sat here and listened to you. You do not even have the manners to stay here to listen to us. I hope the cameras are not aimed at me. I hope the cameras are aimed at the Opposition benches to show that the whole front bench is empty except, of course, for the Hon. Member, Ms. Chandan-Edmond. But they come here and pontificate about inclusivity and listening and being given... We listened to them; I was here. I was here throughout almost all of their presentations, and throughout all of their presentations today we listened to them. They do not even have the manners to stay in the House to listen to what the other side has to say. Of course, as the Hon. Member, Ms. Manickchand points out, if you cannot respect the small rules, then small wonder that you are incapable of respecting the bigger things that matter. I am saying this because the young APNU/AFC Members of Parliament who are still in the House, you must understand why you are sitting where you are today, because the leadership of your Party let you down, and they let down the people who voted for them. They let you down and they let down the people who gave them a chance to be in Government.

We heard from the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs earlier, quoting from Mr. Dominic Gaskin, a former Minister and Member of this House. They let down the people of this country when they were given an opportunity. Having spent 23 years in Opposition, and

finally having had an opportunity to come into Government, and in no time at all, lost no time at all, in demonstrating to the people of Guyana why they were unworthy of being in Government. I have always said that there is an almost perfect correlation between the political and economic history of our country, as there typically is in any country. I spoke in the opening of the Budget speech about the nexus between democracy and development. When the history of our country is written, or indeed when any one of us, particularly younger people look back, including younger Members of the APNU/AFC look back, on the history of Guyana, and the history of their own Party even, they will see that the PNC, the APNU/AFC, on every occasion that they had an opportunity to serve in government, they had absolutely no regard for the will of the people. They had no respect for democratic norms that are accepted worldwide. They displayed no concern for the people whom they are supposed to serve. As a result of which, their successive tenures in office, and their respective tenures in office, at various times in history, were marked by destruction and decimation. Any objective student of history will unavoidably arrive at that conclusion because they do not learn.

5.35 p.m.

As Mr. Norton was speaking, I was reminded of an old saying. I do not know if it has the status of a Guyanese proverb, but I remember hearing older people, older than myself, saying, *turtle cyant walk if he nah push he head outta shell*. I do not know if it has the status of a Guyanese proverb quite as yet, but I have heard it said, *turtle cyant walk if he nah push he head outta shell*. As I listened to Mr. Norton, the Hon. Member, I was reminded, first of all, of how little they have learnt. The pushing the head out of the shell, is of course a figurative or a symbolic or has metaphoric significance. I was struck by how little they have learnt. They like to speak about inclusivity. I was struck by how little they have been listening. [Mr. Ramson: They are in the little league.] That might have something to do with the fact that they are perpetually stuck in the little league, as was first pointed out, of course, by the distinguished Vice-President and former President. I was struck by how little they have learnt. I listened and the only conclusion that I could have arrived at is that they remain just as clueless and as confused as they were between 2015 and 2020. And as they were before 1992, they remain just as clueless and confused as they have always been – incompetent. The PNC, I will say this very clearly, and here again through you, Sir, I am addressing the Opposition Members of Parliament who have demonstrated, the tiny

number who have demonstrated, the eight out of 31 of them who remain in the House this afternoon, I am minded to say to them that the real problem is that the APNU/AFC has not learnt, has not listened. I heard, for example, Mr. Norton, Hon. Leader of the Opposition, speak, speak, speak. I had to turn to my colleague to the right to ask if I had heard correctly, because I heard Mr. Norton regale us with a justification of banning basic food items in Guyana. I believe Ms. Nima Flue-Bess did the same. I had to clear my ear and turn to Minister Edghill and say, am I hearing correctly? In 2025, I heard Mr. Norton stand up, today in this House, to justify, not only to justify, to say that they are proud. He said we are proud of it, not to mention all of the other things. It reminded me of so many little titbits that I heard during the Budget debate that steer me unavoidably to the conclusion that these people have simply not learnt.

I heard, we heard, the Hon. Member Juretha Fernandes speak so disparagingly about workers in the tourism industry, tourism and hospitality, so disparagingly. It was in the 1980s that former President Burnham, PNC President Burnham, described the tourism industry as a parasitic industry, and decades later they still hold the same view. In 1982 Mr. Forbes Burnham was quoted, by no less a publication than the *New York Times*, as saying that the tourism industry is a parasitic industry, and he has no interest in promoting Guyana as a tourism destination.

I would not even attempt, I would not even endeavour an imitation of the mannerism and accent; I would leave that for the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes. I heard the Hon. Juretha Fernandes repeat the same thing, disparagingly, like tourism has no place in Guyana. So out of touch with reality they are. Then they are so confused that Mr. Norton comes back and speaks today about an expanded mandate for the Ministry of Tourism – so confused and clueless and dysfunctional they are – to justify, but I am glad that he did it. I am glad that he said clearly that he is proud of the fact that their Party banned basic food items, because there is still alive in Guyana, today, a generation from amongst whom, if you consumed sardines in a can you could not dispose the cans in your garbage bin; you went to your backyard and buried those sardine cans. There is still a generation alive today for whom wheaten flour was as illegal as cocaine, and if you were caught with it you were thrown into jail... [Mr. Nandlall: And your vehicle was seized.] ...and

your vehicle was seized. Mr. Norton comes today to say they are proud of doing that. Without a modicum or morsel of regret for the people, without a modicum or marcel of regret for the thousands of people who were criminalised because they ate potatoes, or they ate split peas or *dhal*, or because

they had a roti made of flour or a *dhal puri* even. Mr. Norton comes to tell this House that the PNC, the APNU... So they have a new name but they are proud of the fact that they criminalised thousands of people; they criminalised all of the people of Berbice amongst others, for eating roti or eating *dhal*. These people want to present themselves as electable.

[Mr. Nandlall: The police locked up a lady; he could not find the roti, but he *seh* he hear the roti clap and lock *de* lady up. The lady hide *de* roti (*inaudible*)].

You might believe that Mr. Nandlall, the Hon. Member, is joking, but there are famous stories from Berbice of people being stopped at the toll gate. You remember in those days you had the toll gate; you use to *gah* pay *fuh* drive *pun de road*. You remember how many toll gates you had in Berbice; there was one in Adventure and there was one further up. There are famous stories about people who were stopped by police at the toll gate and the policeman pulled them over and *seh ah* smell *de* sardine on *yuh* breath; *ah* carrying *yuh* to the police station; sit down *pon dis* bench.

[Mr. Ramson: That was a form of breathalyser.] Breathalyse them for sardine and lock them up, and Mr. Norton comes today to say he is proud; he is proud of making these people criminals for eating a dish or food of their choice.

We heard Mr. Norton for weeks, for weeks they have been regaling us with arguments about why we should not be investing as much as we are in infrastructure. We heard this outside, we heard *yuh cant* eat road for weeks since the Budget was tabled; and for one week, speaker after speaker was trotted out to tell us about investing too much in infrastructure, and about the absence of feasibility studies. Then, Mr. Norton comes, even in his own speech he started out by saying that we are investing too much in infrastructure; we are doing far too much on infrastructure, building too many roads and bridges. Then, when he put the two halves of his speeches, I do not know if he had two contributors to the speech that he was given to read and, apparently, the two contributors did not consult with each other. So, the person who wrote the first half of the speech gave him a *cuss down* on why too much infrastructure is being built by the PPP/C, and then the person who wrote the second half of his speech and sent him to read, little leaguer that he is...

[Mr. Nandlall: ...was pro-infrastructure.] The person who wrote the second half of his speech was clearly pro-infrastructure.

So hear what they said. The second half of the speech started out with a lecture to us on the developmental impact of the United States of America's Interstate Highway System and how transformational the Interstate Highway System of the United States of America was, but not to be outdone, he

wants to build more than the US interstate. So, he said he will build bridges across the Essequibo River at multiply points. Not content with one, he *aint seh leh* we do a *lil* drop from Parika to Wakenaam, Wakenaam to Leguan and then you go on to Supenaam or so. Not content with one bridge, Mr. Norton *seh, afta he dun spen de fuss owwah* cussing infrastructure, he comes now to tell us, to promise the people of Guyana, that he will build highways across the Essequibo River at multiply points, not one, at multiply points.

I give these examples, and I cannot be exhaustive, to illustrate the sheer absurdity of what is presented to the people of Guyana as an Opposition today – the sheer ludicrous absurdity of what presents itself as Opposition today. Mr. Speaker, mind you, the champion and god of feasibility studies as he is, I do not know if he has done a feasibility study on these multiply bridges across the Essequibo River. Perhaps he might like to share them with us because he advocates and champions feasibility studies. I do not know if Mr. Mahipaul and Mr. Figueira have these feasibility studies; they have been left to represent APNU in the House. The champion of feasibility studies as Mr. Norton is, I do not know where these feasibility studies are for these multiply bridges. Not content with these multiply bridges, I heard a few of my colleagues say, what about the road to the moon because is only *duh* they *leff*; the only thing *leff fuh* him to announce was a road to the moon. [Mr. Nandlall: He spoke about a national railway.] He spoke about a national railway; he spoke about bringing back the Guyana Airways Corporation.

Mr. Norton spoke about bringing the Guyana Airways Corporation (GAC), and then he went on to say... Mind you, here again, I do not know if he had a feasibility study for the GAC that he is bringing but, or perhaps he might need, first of all, a green paper.

5.50 p.m.

Perhaps he might need a green paper. He says that they will reopen the Guyana Airways Corporation and then he goes on to say the GAC was destroyed by the PPP. [Mr. Mahipaul: He is correct.] I know that I still have a lot of years ahead of me, but I am old enough to know differently. The Guyana Airways Corporation operated under the following conditions: they offered scheduled services – flights to a few cities, New York, Miami, and so on – but when the maximum leader decided that he needed to travel somewhere, the aircraft was commandeered. It was taken out of the corporation, taken off the route – never mind that *yuh* had thousands of people with tickets that they had paid for,

never mind that the airline had thousands of people who had booked their tickets, saved up their money and booked their tickets. When ‘Burnham’ decide that he want *de* plane, the plane was taken out of the corporation, off the route. Not only that. Do you know what they call the aircraft livery? The word is livery. Do you know the livery? They used to *gah* change the seat cover to put on ‘Burnham’ favourite colour because ‘Burnham’ *guh* only sit down *pun* a purple seat. They used to *gat tuh* to change... [Hon.

Members: (Inaudible)] This is a true story. It is widely documented. You know this too, Mr. Speaker; you were around too. You were a young man, admittedly, but you were around too. The Hon. Minister Teixeira knows this too; she has historic connections with Guyana Airways Corporation. The livery of the aircraft had to be changed. The seat covers had to be changed...

[Mr. Ramson: ...for the ‘Kabaka’.] ...or the self-styled ‘Kabaka’ – purple seats. I do not want to say that the royal rear would only allow itself to be seated upon a purple seat. The royal rear end must only make contact with a purple seat, so the seat covers had to be changed.

We have copies of the menus. A special menu had to be prepared...

[Ms. Manickchand: ...and printed in purple.] ...and printed, in purple. That is their hero. That is why you are sitting over there. Look, ‘Mahipaul’ running; he *cant tek* it. That is why you are sitting over there. It is because of these excesses that you are sitting over there and that you will be sitting over there for more than one generation to come. It is because of these excesses; it is because of the sordid and disgraceful legacy of the PNC in this country. You come now and you say GAC. ‘Burnham’ used to commandeer the plane, change the seats, change the menu and *fullup* the plane with friends, family and favourites. We have the passenger manifest. We were a starving country and when we went to a meeting like the non-aligned meeting – we still have the list of people who went – when you read the delegation to the Non-Aligned meetings, we had one of the biggest delegations to the Non-Aligned meetings. *Fullup de* plane – Ministers and their families, extra crew because, obviously, *yuh gat* to have a spare crew. Of course, it *gat* to be the preferred crew. Ministers and their family and friends.

Young Members, like those on that side, must understand why they are over there. They must understand why they are over there. You come here now and believe that you can delude people and try to rewrite history. You have to understand why you are sitting over there. You have to understand the sordid legacy of your party in Government. Come here and misrepresent all sorts of facts with lofty, big

ideas. The reality is that the APNU/AFC, PNC as they really are, no matter what they call themselves, suffer a few very fundamental problems. The first is a credibility deficit that they are unable to repair. They have a credibility deficit that they are unable to repair. The problem is that they do not even seem to want to try to repair it because, coming here year after year and repeating the same, I do not want to say nonsense. As a young student in the United Kingdom, I used to hear the word malarkey. They come here year after year... It is not a word that is widely used in Guyana, but I intend to use it more frequently in association with the APNU/AFC. They come here and repeat the same malarkey. [Dr.

**Anthony:** 'Biden' does use it.] Is that a word that President Biden uses? They come and repeat the same malarkey, year after year.

The Hon. Member Catherine Hughes. [Bishop **Edghill:** Not so young.] The Hon. Member... Did I say young? *Oh*, I said the Hon. Member Catherine Hughes. I did not say... My apologies. I did not mean to offend Ms. Hughes. The Hon. Member Catherine Hughes comes here and speaks about integrity, and regales this House with accusations, insinuations and innuendos. It was the Hon. Member, Minister Joseph Hamilton, who said let me tell you who you are and what you are. Let me invoke his words to tell this honourable House once again who the Hon. Member, by parliamentary convention, Ms. Catherine Hughes is – who she is and what she is. *Guyana Chronicle*, 9<sup>th</sup> September, 2024:

“Cathy Hughes admits signing cheques, approving payments to her company at her ministry.”

They have the audacity and temerity to speak about that C-word, as they have been saying. Ms. Catherine Hughes, the Hon. Member, by parliamentary convention, admits to signing cheques and approving payments for a company that she owns. Mind you, not *shi* friend. I hope *shi* friend and *shi* family them *watchen* because is not *shi* friend or *shi* family or *shi* favourites, is *shiself*. They like *taak* about friends, family and favourites. They *ent* even look at *deh* friends, family and favourites, is *dehself*. She comes here and speaks about Amaila. I can quote from a letter carried in *Stabroek News*, headed up, “What about Cathy Hughes’s conflict of interest?” The letter states:

“The bombshell revelation that...”

I am quoting here from *Stabroek News* of 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2013.

“The bombshell revelation that Mr Nigel Hughes is in fact Secretary of the Amaila Falls Hydro Project

Inc, while serving as Chairman of the Alliance For Change has naturally captured the public interest. His subsequent offer...”

This is an important sentence.

“His subsequent offer to resign his AFC post...”

...in order to retain his position with the Amaila Falls Hydro Project Incorporated, that says it all. It goes on:

“The smoke-screen of the Nigel Hughes bomb continues to obscure the role of his wife, Ms Cathy Hughes. Her company Video Mega Productions did public relations work for Synergy and Sithe Global. She personally interviewed Mr Fip Motilall in a PR infomercial. Ms Hughes was introduced as Public Relations Officer of Sithe Global. She is therefore intimately involved with the project. At the very least, she gained materially as owner of Video Mega.”

She comes here and now wishes to pontificate on integrity. They promised to liberalise telecommunications in their first hundred days. The Prime Minister has already addressed this matter. They came into Office in 2015, enacted the new Telecommunications Act in 2016, and sat on that Act. Demitted Office in 2020 – squatting for two years as they did – and refused to bring the new Telecommunications Act into operation, for reasons known best only to herself. The Prime Minister has already spoken and others before me. *News Room* and *INews Guyana – News Room* of 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 2019:

“Housing Minister's husband has contract to build houses for her Ministry.”

Her own ministry. Her husband has contracts to build for her own ministry. I am not going to repeat what the Prime Minister said on this matter earlier. Ms. Volda Lawrence comes here, preaching sanctimoniously as they do... [Ms. **Manickchand:** And ending with Matthew something.] ...quoting, ending with biblical quotations and invocations. *Stabroek News*, 30<sup>th</sup> April, 2018:

“The only friends I got is PNC, so the only people I could give work to is PNC.”

[Ms. **Manickchand:** And I looking for a doctor that can speak Spanish and it has to be a PNC one.] That is correct.

“...right now, I looking for a doctor who can talk Spanish or Portuguese and ah want one that is PNC,”

They want to know why the people of Guyana promptly banished them back to the Opposition benches for the next 50 years. They want to know why they were banished. I did not intend... The Hon. Member Ms. Hughes comes here and tries so pathetically to reopen this issue of the signing bonus. Young people are here, and young people are watching us. They can *Google*. They just *gat* to Google ‘Winston Jordan signing bonus’. *Yuh* know *wha* is *de fuss* story that come up? The 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2017:

“No signing bonus with ExxonMobil – Finance Minister”

And a big picture of Mr. Winston Jordan. *Google* it on your phones, ‘Winston Jordan signing bonus’. No signing bonus with ExxonMobil, 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 2017. Then, *yuh gunn get* another story that tells you, “Finance Minister says no rules broken with special account”. I skipped some. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*) was discovered.] Then after he discovered... Mind you, his own Ministry, in 2016, wrote for a secret bank account to be opened. Mind you, in 2017, he said, no signing bonus. Since November, 2016, his own Ministry wrote, asking for a signing bonus. Hear the caption of the letter, 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2016, a letter written to the Governor of the Central Bank. Hear the caption of the letter.

“SIGNING BONUS GRANTED BY EXXONMOBIL....”

[**Ms. Manickchand:** That was before it (*inaudible*).] One year before.

“SIGNING BONUS GRANTED BY EXXONMOBIL -REQUEST TO OPEN BANK ACCOUNT.”

The 20<sup>th</sup> September, 2016. In 2017, Mr. Jordan was still saying to the world, no signing bonus had been received. Imagine they have the audacity and temerity to come here, the gumption even, to come here and speak about mendacious. That was the word; and she said it with such aplomb like she had discovered a new word.

6.05 p.m.

She said it with such aplomb, such evident pride, ‘mendacious,’ as if she had discovered a new word.

[**Ms. Parag:** With an accent.] I would not even try to imitate the accent. When finally, the APNU Minister of Finance, Mr. Winston Jordan, discovered that he could not

hide the signing bonus any longer, he changed his tune somewhat. He said the Coalition was misled by Exxon’s negotiators with a US\$18 million gift in 2016. That, Sir, was carried in the *Kaieteur News* of 18<sup>th</sup> August, 2021. Mind you, Mr. Speaker, the account was opened, the moneys deposited, and their existence denied when there was no Natural Resources Fund (NRF) Act, which means that the money, by law, should have been deposited in the Consolidated Fund. Nobody has the right to decide that they would keep it out. They have made all sorts of excuses that they kept it out of the fund to meet this type of expense and that type of expense. The Parliament of Guyana was denied the opportunity, firstly of the knowledge that this money, which is public money, existed and secondly, denied the opportunity to appropriate the use of the money. [**Ms. Manickchand:** And the people.] And the people were denied knowledge of the existence of this money. Somewhere in the mix he also said – this is *INews* now – 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2017. An amount of “US \$20 million Exxon bonus to the Govt: the Finance Minister ‘cannot confirm’ receipt, says he will check” – says he will check. One year previous to that, his Ministry requested the opening of a secret bank account. We saw instance after instance of that throughout this debate.

Amaila Falls – the Hon. Member David Patterson tried to rewrite history. My Colleagues Minister Edghill and the Prime Minister cited the involvement of the Blackstone Group – one of the world’s largest institutional investors, willing to invest in the Amaila Falls project. The sum of US\$80 million of climate funds earned under our first-generation Low-Carbon Development Strategy was deposited and accepted by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) for investment in that project. They selectively cited some reports. I think both Mr. Patterson and Ms. Hughes read from a 2014 IDB Report. To illustrate their incompetence, they are reading triumphantly from this report, which the staff and management of the bank submitted to the board. They are selectively reading one paragraph to say, ‘*uh-huh*, the project is a risky project’. Well, we were never in doubt about the fact that the project was a risky project. If they had even the slightest knowledge of how these institutions work, that matter would not have reached the board, if there was no intention to proceed with it. In fact, subsequent – and which they omitted to say – to that 2014 Report, the matter having gone to the board, in 2015, the IDB issued a mandate letter signalling its intention and willingness to participate in the project and to structure its financing – a signed mandate letter, conveniently omitting to mention that.

The shared daftness and incompetence – I do not know if it is the shared daftness of my Colleagues on that side of the House. The Hon. Member Catherine Hughes comes, and she is reading from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) Article IV Report and she is boasting. Hear the boast, Mr. Speaker. She says the Central Government's overall deficit... let me not even try to... I would do this House a grave disservice if I tried to mimic the mannerisms and accent. I could not do that. She comes here, and she reads from the IMF Article IV Report – somebody apparently gave her this sheet of paper and said, 'Read this. This is a trump card'. She comes, and she reads, pulls out the trump card that she was given by somebody, and says the Central Government's overall deficit came in at 3.5% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), better than the 2018 Budget and the Article IV estimates of 5.4% of GDP. She comes here and boasts about their deficit in 2018, and that the IMF commended them that their deficit in 2018 was better than budgeted. They budgeted a deficit of 5.4%, and they reported a deficit of 3.5%. A two-percentage-point difference. They overperformed by two percentage points. There are two ways that you overperform your deficit: you either do not spend the money in your budget, or you tax the people more and collect more revenue from the people. They did a healthy dose of both.

In that year, they had already imposed more than 200 new taxes and increased fees on the Guyanese people. Some, in fact, have counted it to be almost 400. They had already taxed the Guyanese people and projected higher tax revenues, and they overperformed their tax revenues by more than \$20 billion. In other words, putting on the shoulders of the Guyanese people, taxing – mind you, this thing that Catherine Hughes comes to boast about, this improvement in the deficit, was as a result of putting Value Added Tax (VAT) on water, putting VAT on electricity... [Ms. Manickchand: Wheelchair.] Putting VAT on a wheelchair, putting VAT on medicine, putting VAT on educational items, putting VAT on baby formula, and putting VAT on heavy equipment, taxing the blood – taxing the life and the blood out of people. Overperforming their tax revenue performance and not giving the people back any relief. She comes here, very proud, to say we returned a smaller deficit in 2018 than we had projected. Not even understanding such, not even understanding what she was reading nor its implications.

Mr. Speaker, small wonder that, when we come back to this House, sometimes with a request to spend more because we are executing our programmes so aggressively, small wonder that they are perplexed. Are you doing more roads? Well, the

people of Guyana need their roads to be done, and we will do their roads. The people of Guyana need their schools to be built, and we will build their schools. She comes with and, here again, I do not want to slip into the accent or anything like that. I mean, I grew up in an urban setting too, so I should not... Like the Hon. Minister Charles Ramson, I grew up in Georgetown, notwithstanding that I am very proud of my Berbice roots. I spent a lot of my formative years in Georgetown. Mr. Speaker, she comes and regales us with her school experience. She said, when she went to school, they had textbooks, and she went on to tell us how she used to paper her books. She went on to talk about the brown paper she used to paper her books with. Do you remember? Telling us about the brown paper she used to paper her book, nice and so on and how people use to... I do not know what cocoon the Hon. Member Catherine Hughes lives in. I do not know what bubble. I mean, we know that they live in a little bit of a bubble. Is that right? We know that they live in a bubble removed from reality. I do not know why Members, those who are in the House, like Mr. Jermaine Figueira, do not share with them, not to single him out. Ronald Cox is here, and Hon. Member Jermaine Figueira is here. I do not know why they do not tell them the experience of... [Bishop Edghill: The ordinary man.]

The ordinary man. They live in this cocoon. The Hon. Member Catherine Hughes comes and regales us about this wonderful education experience that she had with her books, with their brown paper covering them.

In 1985, I do not know if she was at school in 1985, but they made a lot about this matriculation rate, and that we are building buildings. Even the Hon. Member Coretta McDonald, who is supposed to have some interest and familiarity with the education sector, says, 'We are building buildings'. Let me share with you some numbers so you understand what is going on here. In 1985, do you know how many people wrote the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) Math? A number of 2,700 students wrote CXC Math. Mind you, that was 1985, out of which, incidentally, 22% passed. In 1990, do you know how many people wrote CXC Math? Number of 3,000.

[Mr. Bharrat: Five thousand.] Not 5,000. It moved from 2,700 to 3,290, barely 500 more. Over five years, 500 more people wrote. It moved from 2,700 to 3,290. Mr. Speaker, in 2024, do you know how many people wrote CXC Math? A number of 10,440. Guyana's population has not grown by five times. Is that right? But 3,000 people wrote CXC Math in 1990, and we came into Government shortly after that. The number of 10,000 wrote CXC Math last year. Of course, she lived in this beautiful little cocoon. Sir, and if you think Mathematics

is an isolated example, let us move on to English. She clearly learned good English; she speaks very well. If nothing at all, you have to give her credit. She speaks very eloquently. Sir, that is their strong point, incidentally, all of them – very eloquent. They are very eloquent. That is their strong point, but it stops there. There is no substance beyond that eloquence but let us put that aside for the moment.

Do you know how many people wrote CXC English, how many people entered to write CXC English in 1985? A number of 3,337. Do you know how many people wrote CXC English in 1990? A number of 3,845. [Mr.

**Ramson:** They got another 500.] They got another 500 – it must be the same 500. Do you know how many people wrote CXC English in 2024? A number of 9,462, and the population did not triple. Let us talk about how many passed. I told you about how many wrote but let us talk about how many passed. In 1985, do you know how many people passed CXC Maths? A number of 612. In 1990, do you know how many people passed CXC Math? A number of 556. In the whole country, 556 students passed CXC Math. Do you know how many passed in 2024? It was 2,917. For CXC English, do you know how many people passed in 1985? It was 648. Do you know how many passed CXC English in 1990? The number came down to 514. Mr. Speaker, hold for a moment – hold for a moment. In 1990, 514 students passed CXC English. After these wonderful *Burnhamite* and Hoyte glorious days they came and told us about, only 514 people passed CXC English in 1990. Do you know how many persons passed CXC English in 2024? It was 6,536.

6.20 p.m.

It was more than 10 times the number that passed in 1990. They can live in their little cocoon where to pass CXC English, one had to go to maybe one or two schools in Georgetown. They can live in their little cocoon that if one goes to one or two schools in Georgetown, which, perhaps, she had the good fortune of – one might pass the CXC Mathematics and English. If one did not have the good fortune of going to, one or two good schools in Georgetown, he/she stood no chance of passing CXC Mathematics and English, much less at matriculating and preparing to have a productive and successful life. Guess what, Mr. Speaker? The People's Progressive Party/Civic came into Government and we changed that. [Mr. **Ramson:** Tell them how many schools they had.]

We have built schools in all 10 of our regions. Minister Manickchand spoke about how many schools we built from 1992 to 2015. We are building more schools than ever before.

I am saying, Mr. Speaker, through you and through the privilege afforded me by the cameras today, I am saying to the young people of Guyana that our commitment to you is that we will never return to those days where they must go to one or two schools in Georgetown to do well. Our commitment to you is, no matter where you live, you will have access to good quality education. They can come here and throw all manner of tantrums they want about building schools, infrastructure and buildings. We will build the schools; we will build the dormitories; and we will build the teachers' quarters so that all the children of Guyana can go to school. You see, for them on that side of the House, particularly those on the front benches caught in this urban elite trap. Life is all rosy and good. They are so far removed from the realities of the people of Guyana... [Mr.

**Ramson:** Even on the Opposition.] Whether in Government or Opposition, they do not even have a clue what is going on. The young people of Guyana deserve a chance, and we will give them that chance by building the schools, by putting textbooks in the schools, by putting the school feeding programme in the schools and by giving them the cash grant. We will give them that chance that the APNU/AFC and the PNC before them failed to give them.

I can give you so many examples of their efforts to rewrite history. They keep challenging this thing about the taxes they increased. Their budget speeches used to have some appendices that we do not have anymore. The 2016 Budget Speech had an Appendix IX which stated, "Proposal for the Increase in Licence Fees". They are coming back now to ask me to answer a parliamentary question on something that was captured in their budget speech. They are making a big hullabaloo about this – a big hullabaloo – and a load of malarkey. In Appendix IX of the 2016 Budget, enshrined for posterity in the Parliamentary Library and the National Archives of Guyana, there is the proposal for the increase in licence fees for everything, you name it – hire car, cycle, tractor and bus. Appendix IX continues with goods vehicle, articulated vehicles and other vehicles. Sir, there is a motor hearse fee which got carried up. [Mr. **Nandlall:** Do not forget the mule cart.] I have not come to the mule cart yet.

There is Appendix X which states the Liquor Licences went up. There is Appendix XI which states that the Trade and Miscellaneous Licences went up – everything, Trade Licence, Butcher Shop Licence, Cigarette Factory Licence and Pawn broker Licence. Cart Drawn Horse – this is item 119. They want me to list 200 items. One table alone has 147 items. Sir. Appendix XI alone has 147 items. This is the 2016 Budget Speech. They came here and jumped about a



question that somebody wrote for the Hon. Ms. Ferguson and set her up to look stupid. Item 119 of 147 states, "Cart Drawn Horse, Pony or Mule". I cannot remember when I last saw a mule. Mind you, they have a different rate. Mind you the carts drawn by horse, pony or mule have one rate. If it is a cart drawn by horse, pony or mule kept or used in Georgetown, it has another rate. It has another rate and that one went up too. Sir, just in case the cart man does not have a horse, pony or mule, and he is bulling his cart with a bullock... There is one for a cart drawn by bullock or ox.

Mr. Figueira, and you want to know why you are sitting down over there. Mr. Rajkumar and young Mr. Sears from Linden, do you want to know why you are sitting down over there? This is what your leaders did to you. Guess what? That is why you will spend another generation over there. This is what your leaders did to you – cart drawn by bullock or ox. If the mule is weary and the cart man says he is going to get a bullock or an ox – another fee on him. Then, if the bullock or the ox, not the cart drawn by donkey... [Mr. Nandlall: I thought the donkey was ....] No, this is the cart drawn by a donkey and there is a different rate – one for a donkey inside Georgetown and one for a donkey outside Georgetown. Mr. Dinesh Jaiprakash, you came here, they are rolling you out to curse the PPP/C. This is what the PNC did to you and the people of Guyana. This is what the APNU/AFC did to you and the people of Guyana. They have you, rolling you out here to come and ask *stupidness* in the National Assembly. They want to know why the Guyanese people ... This was for everything – cinematography, ball and dance. If you wanted to have a little dance, they jacked up the fee for that too. [Interruption] Mr. Sinclair must have felt left out because I did not call his name. Do not feel left out, I was getting around to you, Mr. Sinclair. Do not feel left out.

We must understand this. The examples I just gave are drawn from 2015 to 2020. The PNC/R is incapable of learning, as was demonstrated today by its Members saying we are proud of the band and living with their *heads buried like ostriches in the sand*. The PNC/R and its leadership are incapable of learning... You know, we lost a General and Regional Election in 2015. We regrouped our leadership, sat with our membership and said, we needed to think about what we need to do differently. We need to think about what we need to do more of. We need to think about what we need to do less of. We need to go there and do the real hard work, and we did it. Within three years, we won a majority in Parliament, and within five years, we were back in Government. The PNC/R spent 23 years in Opposition, came back to Government and did not learn anything.

It was the same rigging that they used to carry on with. Imagine, Sir, you rigged elections in 1968 and 1973. Hon. Mohabir Nandlall, I am not going to repeat what he said. I could not possibly do it as eloquently and as comprehensively as he did. He delivered a master class on the history of electoral shenanigans and electoral rascality in this country by the PNC/R. I am not going to repeat what he said. Imagine they came back in 2020 and believed they could pull off the same stunt. Do you tell me that this is an entity that is capable of learning? They only exited the Office reluctantly. They were dragged from the Office when faced with sanctions by the international community. Imagine that is where they took Guyana, to a point where they had to be sanctioned to be removed from the Government. The United States of America (USA) Secretary of State at the time, Mike Pompeo, issued multiple statements. More than 100 countries around the world, the Organization of American States (OAS) Electoral Observer Mission, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Commonwealth, the Carter Centre and the United Nations (UN) Secretary General, all issued statements about the attempt to subvert the will of the people in 2020, in Guyana. We had a whole Commission of Inquiry (CoI) – the Hon. Gail Teixeira raised the report and quoted from it. Such an attempt to steal an election cannot be recalled anywhere else in the civilised world. I think it was the late Bruce... Was it the late Bruce Golding who said it?

[Hon. Members (Government): Yes.] Bruce Golding said it. It was the most transparent attempt to rig an election, to alter results were the words that he used.

We have to understand that the APNU/AFC has not learned. The Members have not learned. They are, as I said some years ago, the same old PNC/R. I made the nexus between democracy and development in the Budget Speech, and several of my Colleagues developed on this nexus, including those who spoke earlier today. You see, if you do not understand that you have to deliver services to people in order to persuade them to vote for you and there are young people in the audience today and young people who are watching. It is important you understand that if a political party does not understand it has an obligation to deliver results to people in order to persuade them to vote for the said political party, if it does not understand that it has to deliver to people, then such a party has no regard for the will of the people. This is because it does not care how they vote. There is an unbreakable nexus. If you understand that you have to win votes from people, you understand that you have to deliver results to them. If you believe that you can steal an election, then you do not care about delivering results to

people. The inevitable path that you will go down is a path of destruction. Mr. Norton and the Hon. Member Ms. Hughes, when they come and they speak through these rose-coloured glasses with such nostalgia about the beautiful, great Burnham years and the good old days when the PNC/R was in Government, let me quote a few selected newspaper articles from 1987. This was 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 1987, it was the front page. It was also a budget season.

6.35 p.m.

Mr. Carl Greenidge had just presented the budget for that year. On the front page of the *Stabroek News* stated:

“Greenidge Presents A Ten-To-One Is Murder Budget

Guyana devalues \$”

The story goes on:

“Ten-To-One is Murder”

That is what the budget was called. On 23<sup>rd</sup> January, later on in the newspaper, it states:

“Economy Continued Dismal Performance.

Budget '87- Union Sources Cry Foul.”

Sir, this habit about taxing everybody – they taxed the horse cart the other day. Look at what they did:

[*The Hon. Member displayed documents.*]

“Levy May Force Betting Shops Underground.”

Their target was the betting shops in that year.

On 17<sup>th</sup> April, 1987 it states:

“SOESDYKE – LINDEN HIGHWAY BEING BADLY NEGLECTED.”

In 1988, a new housing scheme was being developed but not for low-income earners. The headline was:

“New Housing Scheme But Not For Low Income Earners.”

I do not know who it was for. Sir, nobody was immune. I am quoting here from *Stabroek News*, dated 20<sup>th</sup> February, 1988. (9<sup>th</sup> March, 1988) Nobody was immune.

“Budget Hampers Work Of Caricom Secretariat.”

Even the Caricom Secretariat... [**Bishop Edghill:** *Ain't* get spared.] ...*Ain't* get spared. Then they had another story at the bottom:

“GTSL Selling Off Wrecks.”

GTSL was incidentally the Guyana Transport Services Limited. They used to run buses. There is a picture with a graveyard of buses:

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

“GTSL Selling Off Wrecks”.

Sir, on 6<sup>th</sup> January 1988, it states:

“1987 Was A Traumatic Year.”

“Blackouts - Fuel Crisis - Queues - Shortages - Scandals - Floods - Devaluation - Protests - Defections

A city under water...”

[*The Hon. Member displayed a picture.*]

I see a man driving a Morris Oxford through the water. Look at the Morris Oxford.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a picture.*]

I think the Hon. Member Indar is old enough to remember the Morris Oxford. You must understand where Guyana was heading with the APNU. These are all parts of a bigger picture. We must understand where Guyana was heading with the APNU, and if they had been allowed to get away with the rigging in 2020, we would have been right back there. You just have to judge from their behaviour. It was not like a one-off phenomenon. On 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1989 in the *Stabroek News* again, it states:

“Feeling The Shockwaves

People Stunned By Devaluation, Prices.

Linden protest.”

*Oh Lord*, even the prices for the newspaper went up.

“New Stabroek Prices.”

Look it is here.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

“New Stabroek Prices”

The price for *Stabroek News* went up. Literally it was for every sector. They talked about building. He spoke glowingly about their housing programme. Listen to what the headline was on 5<sup>th</sup> April, 1989:

“Hollow Block Factory Under Heavy Pressure”

It is here.

“Building Industry In Crisis.

Hollow Block Factory Under Heavy Pressure.”

That was in 1989. They loved the bauxite workers. In 1989, the People's National Congress in its heyday:

“Bauxite Workers Walk Out

On The Spot Report From A Worker.”

“Anti-Budget Pressure Mounts...”

“Linden Strike Still Solid.”

The Hon. Members, Mr. Figueira and Mr. Devin Sears, are from Linden. This is what the PNC did to Linden:

“Adequate Subsidies Needed To Counter Budget Blows.”

I could go on and on and on, Sir. They talked about consultation:

“Government Won't Talk To FITUG.”

They refused to talk to the biggest trade union in the country. We laugh at some of these headlines today. Sir, listen to this one. I know you are going like this one:

“Pegasus Taxi Operators Feeling The Squeeze.”

On the same page, it states:

“Thieves On The Rampage On West Dem.”

Things were rough and even for the chic-chic men:

“3- Card Men Pulling In The ‘Suckers.’”

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

Do you know the men at the chic-chic board? Nobody was spared.

“Airfares, Truck Charges Threaten Mining Industry.”

“1988 Was A Tough Year-CAGI”

Even the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) lost its chaplain:

“GDF Seeks New Chaplain”

Sir, on 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1989, it states:

“The Small Businessman.

We're Only Working To Eat... And Losing \$\$.

Budget Hits Cookshop Business Hard...”

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

Mr. Speaker, this is a cookshop. There is a picture with a man in a cook shop and it looks like things are really hard. The headline in the *Stabroek News* states:

“Budget Hits Cookshop Business Hard...”

Businessmen Suffering After...”

This was life under the PNC, and I could go on and on. They love the University of Guyana (UG) now. Mr. Speaker, this was the headline on the front page of the *Stabroek News* on 31<sup>st</sup> May, 1989:

“UG Faces Crisis”

That was in 1989. In the same day's newspaper, it states:

“Housewives Forced To Scrounge For Rice Flour”

Sorry, my correction, Sir.

“... For Rice, Flour.

I must not forget the punctuation. It is rice and flour.

“Housewives Forced To Scrounge...”

It is here in the *Stabroek News*.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

It was reducing ordinary Guyanese to scrounge, and, mind you, they were not scrounging for gold and diamond. They were scrounging for rice and flour. There is a photograph of a sign board in a shop, and it states:

“What's Available...”

Notice

No Rice

No Oil

No Flour

No Chicken

Until?”

Then they talk about accountability. Still in the same day's newspaper, it states:

“Public Accounts Seven Years In Arrears.”

They are now the champions of accountability. For seven years, the people of Guyana – and eventually it became 11

years – never had a single year of audited accounts. It goes on and on and on, year after year, as recent as 1991. They talked about the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) and so on and so forth. Mr. Norton said that the ERP was saving Guyana. **[Dr. Anthony: Empty Rice Pot.]** The ERP, as we all know, was abbreviated to mean Empty Rice Pot. Two years after this ERP that he likes to boast about, look at what the Guyanese people had to face.

*[The Hon. Member displayed a document.]*

On 20<sup>th</sup> January, 1991, it states:

“Panic buying creates shortages of basic items.”

This is what surrounded the PNC’s budget speeches, and this is where we were heading had they been allowed to perpetrate the heist they attempted. They cannot run from their legacy. This is their legacy; this is their track record. What is more astonishing is that with that legacy in mind, they came back in 2015, implemented the same policies and caused the same hardships. First of all, they came back with almost the same people – almost all of them were the same people, just considerably older – with the same policies, causing the same hardships to the same Guyanese people and they expected to be kept in government. They wonder now why they were sent packing to the Opposition benches. The unavoidable reality is that the PNC is associated in every incarnation with destruction, decimation and hardship to the Guyanese people. In the pre-1992 period, in the 2015 to 2020 period and even in their policies today, they have condemned themselves because they refuse to acknowledge their mistakes of the past, and because, they refuse to change course and correct their strategy, they are condemned... **[Mr. Ramson: They do not know better.]** Perhaps, they do not know better.

You see, this is the problem. I do not know if it was Chat Generative Pre-trained Transformer (ChatGPT) or Artificial Intelligence (AI) or two speakers or maybe part was Deep Seek and part was ChatGPT that drafted the two halves of the speech and then he put them together. He spoke about Singapore. You would recall he spoke about Singapore. In 1966 and I will quote, but I am not using our numbers. I am quoting from the World Development Indicators, a database that is globally available online. In 1966:

“Guyana’s GDP (Gross Domestic Product) *per capita* was US\$353.”

Bear with me a little, Mr. Speaker. It was Mr. Norton who spoke about Singapore, so let us talk about Singapore. In 1966:

“Guyana’s GDP *per capita* was US\$353.”

Singapore’s GDP *per capita* was US\$567. They were a little ahead of us. We were US\$353 and they were US\$567. By 1991, after a quarter century of the PNC’s dictatorship in Guyana, Guyana’s GDP *per capita* after 25 years had moved from US\$353 to US\$466. These were the glorious days, the Burnham days, that they like to boast about. Guyana’s *per capita* GDP during 1966 to 1991 had moved from US\$353 to the grand and princely sum of US\$466. Do you know how much Singapore’s GDP moved? It moved from US\$567 to US\$14,502. Do you know how much Barbados’s GDP moved? It moved from US\$462 to US\$7,790? Do you know how much Trinidad and Tobago’s GDP moved? It moved from US\$768 to US\$4,205. In 1991, we were stuck at the princely sum of US\$466 *per capita*. **[Mr. Ramson: Meanwhile, Ms. Catherine Hughes living in a cocoon.]** Meanwhile, they continue to exist in their cocoons, their little bubbles commandeering the Guyana Airways Corporation (GAC) aircraft, sitting on their purple seats, accompanying the maximum leader as he trots off to some other corner of the globe.

6.50 p.m.

This is what the PNC did to Guyana. Let us talk about Guyana’s debt. As we started the decade of the 1970s, as we banked the turn into the 1970s just after independence – mind you, we got independence in 1966 – Guyana’s debt to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was in the vicinity of 100%. By 1991, Guyana’s debt to GDP had moved from 100% to 617%, after 25 glorious years of PNC rule. They come now and want to lecture us about fiscal prudence and fiscal responsibility. Mind you, they are building *highways to heaven and roads to the moon*. Let me make this point. Having inherited a debt-to-GDP burden equal to 617% of the size of our economy, by 2014, before a single barrel of oil was found, much less produced, Guyana’s debt-to-GDP ratio had been reduced to 38.7% – less than 40%. This was without a single barrel of oil in sight. They like to say oil money. We did that without a single cent of oil money and without a single drop or barrel of oil.

They talked about sugar. The PNC has a historic animosity towards the sugar industry. Let us be frank. Let us call a spade a spade. **[Mr. Ramson: But they like sugar,**

**though. They do not like the sugar industry, but they like sugar and rum.]** Why are you taking a jab at Mr. Ramjattan? They love sugar. Let us examine what they did to sugar. Let us just take a small window of their period in Government. Around 1977/1978, Guyana was producing

more than 300,000 tonnes of sugar. By 1989/1990, Guyana was producing less than 150,000 tonnes of sugar – completely destroyed. We were importing sugar from Guatemala in those days. Half of our sugar production was wiped out because of their hostility towards the sugar industry. That was pre-1992. We came back, we nurtured the sugar industry and restored it to its glory days. There were challenges. We have never been shy about saying that. We built the sugar industry back to producing 330,000 tonnes of sugar. We achieved back the peak production of 340,000 tonnes. We went through a period of loss of the preferential market in Europe. We made adjustments to the industry, and it was difficult. The reality is that the cost of the production of sugar in Guyana is high. However, sugar is so germane, fundamental, intrinsically and inextricably linked to the well-being of entire communities in Guyana that we said that we would ensure that we manage the sugar industry to bring it to a point of viability and ultimately to a point of competitiveness.

They come year after year and attack us for providing support to the sugar industry. [Mr. Ramson: Now they want to expand GuySuCo.] Then, in keeping with their want, as they say, they come here and say...because once again they want to mislead the sugar workers. Mr. Vinceroy Jordan said they will...what was it? Was it resuscitate? It was not resuscitate – [An Hon. Member: Revive.] Revive. We will revive the sugar industry. The sugar workers know better, and they do not have to go back to 1991 to know better. You promised them the same thing...was it a 40% salary increase? You promised them a huge salary increase in 2015, and then you came in and closed the industry down. You closed down estates wantonly and randomly. You come here now, once again, with promises being plucked out of thin air, as if you believe that the Guyanese people are gullible. There are children of sugar workers watching you, like Hon. Member, Mr. Suresh Singh, who shared his personal experience when his father was terminated. There are children of sugar workers watching you. They know what happened to their parents. When you made a false promise, you came into Government, and you betrayed that promise. They are watching you. Having not learned from their previous experiences, they come again and make all sorts of promises.

It is the same with rice. They spent from 1970 to 1992 hardly ever achieving 150,000 tonnes of rice. They were struggling. On every single economic chart – I have plotted it – if you look at rice production, it was limping along under the 200,000-tonne mark for two decades, from 1970 to 1980 to 1990.

[The Hon. Member displayed an image.]

When we came in 1991, rice production was less than 200,000 tonnes or thereabout. By the time we left Office in 2015, we were producing in excess of 600,000 tonnes of rice. Today, we are producing in excess of 700,000 tonnes of rice – the highest production ever.

It does not matter which industry you look at. Bauxite: They destroyed the bauxite industry. No matter how you twist it and turn it. They love bauxite workers. They sat back and looked at Russian Aluminium (RUSAL) being chased out of Guyana. A total of 1,000 bauxite workers were put out of work. Their families were put on the bread line, but they will come and tell you that they love bauxite workers. They will go and say they love bauxite workers, they love the people of Linden, they love the people of New Amsterdam, and they love the people of Kwakwani and Ituni. They sat back and watched RUSAL, and instigated, and were complicit in the forcing out of RUSAL – an international investor that we worked hard to bring and keep in Guyana. They forced out RUSAL, closing down the bauxite operations in the Berbice River and putting 1,000 direct employees out of work, not to mention all of the indirect people who were affected – transportation providers, boat owners, boat captains, and suppliers of materials. They come again now, and they claim to love bauxite workers.

It does not matter which economic indicator you look at. They claim they love public servants. In 1981, the public service minimum wage was the equivalent of US\$96. For the young people watching there, many of you have parents out there, and many of you have parents who are public servants, policemen, teachers, *et cetera*, in 1981, the public service minimum wage was the equivalent of US\$96. By 1992, it was the equivalent of US\$25. In one decade, under the PNC, from 1981-1992, the public service minimum wage was wiped out from being the equivalent of US\$96 to US\$25. Public servants were pauperised by the PNC. Well-educated, committed and hardworking public servants were pauperised. Public servants had to moonlight as traders. Teachers and nurses had to moonlight as traders and be disrespected across the Caribbean. They went to Trinidad and Barbados with some big polythene bags to see what they could have bought to bring back to sell to supplement their incomes. Sometimes they slept at the airport. If you 'scrape up' a couple of dollars or you bought a couple of dollars and went to Trinidad or Barbados – because everything was banned or nothing was being imported – to see what you could have bought to bring back to sell on the black market, obviously you did not have money to stay at any hotel or

guesthouse. You did not have any family there. They slept at the airport.

Why do you think Guyanese people were disrespected at airports across the Caribbean? Why do you think Guyanese women were disrespected at airports across the Caribbean – in Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados? We have to be frank. We have to tell this history. There was a Guyana bench in Barbados. We have the best relations with Barbados now, and we have always had the best relations with Barbados as a country and as a party. [Ms. Teixeira: In Trinidad and Tobago.] In Trinidad and Tobago, it was the same thing. As an ordinary passenger, when you went there, the traders would come up and say, boss man, can you help me carry this bag? [Bishop Edghill: *Check in dis fuh meh.*]

Check in *dis fuh meh*. [Bishop Edghill: I used to help out.] The Bishop, who had the privilege of travelling in those days – most people could not afford to, but being a prominent member and a leader of the church, he had the privilege of performing his responsibilities in the Christian ministry and so he used to travel – used to be approached. *Big man, check in this bag fuh meh nah.*

Hon. Member, Mr. Indar, do you remember those days or are you too young to remember those days? Mr. Indar wants us to believe that he is too young to remember those days. It is alright. I will not put you on the spot. Prime Minister, you were in the military. You were in the check-in line in Trinidad and Barbados, and ordinary Guyanese women, public servants, teachers, nurses – sometimes took sick leave from their jobs to go and do a hustle – had their bag, the polythene bag. You know the polythene bag. They begged you, *help meh check in dis bag nah*. It is because they could not pay for the bag. They could not afford to pay the overweight. If they saw you with one suitcase, they expect you could check in two. *Check in dis one fuh meh nah*. Ordinary Guyanese people, parents of today's generation, proud and well-educated people, were reduced to paupers and beggars, thanks to the PNC. [Dr. Anthony: And they want to return us to those days.] Mind you, they had an opportunity to return to Government in 2015, and in no time at all, they were putting our country back on the same path, not having learned a single thing. The budget speech has a big appendix about how heavy they taxed you. Then, they came and made a big deal that they asked Dr. Ashni Singh to list the 200 taxes. It is at the back of your own budget speech. Their big trump card – we have asked Dr. Ashni Singh to list the 200 taxes. Must I list what is in your own budget speech? Go and read it.

7.05 p.m.

Today, the public service's minimum wage...Mind you, I said in 1992, it was the equivalent of US\$25.00. Today, it is more than US\$490.00 and it is rising. Our President has said that before the end of this year, no public sector employee will be working for less than \$100,000. That was achieved, despite five years of the APNU/AFC dictatorship from 2015 to 2020. The APNU/AFC...they are all PNC anyhow. The AFC is really a subset of the PNC. They have this style of coming here with a lot of fancy talk or going out there on social media with a lot of fancy talk, thinking that they can fool the Guyanese people. For example, I presented this budget on 17<sup>th</sup> January, 2025. One week before that, a few days after I had announced the budget date, the leader of the PNC faction that calls itself the AFC, Mr. Nigel Hughes – and I am quoting here from him – in a social media post, dated 10<sup>th</sup> January at 8:51 pm ... Having heard that we will be presenting the budget, he made a social media post. [Mr. Ramson: Was it artificial intelligence (AI) written?] I do not know if it was AI written. I have not placed it in the AI machine to back out if it is 87, 97, or 100% AI written, but you could put it in the machine to see. They have this air of intellectual superiority so hear what he wrote:

“Some of the AFC's Proposals for the 2025 budget.

The budget must be located within the following Fiscal Rule which should be enshrined in legislation”.

Full stop. [Mr. Ramson: I thought he was supposed to have gotten a colon there.] He did not put the colon. He then articulated this rule:

“The non oil primary deficit as a share of non oil GDP should expand only by the sum of oil revenues withdrawn from the NRF and foreign borrowing”.

Let me read that again. I will read it again slowly:

“The budget must be located within the following Fiscal Rule which should be enshrined in legislation.

The non oil primary deficit as a share of non oil GDP should expand only by the sum of oil revenues withdrawn from the NRF and foreign borrowing”.

Now, on the surface, a lot of people out there might look at this and say, wow, this man is bright bad. It is understandable. This is heavy stuff. I do not claim to have gone too far in high school. This is heavy stuff. Anybody reading this, the innocent bystander reading this, might think this man is bright bad. This is the man to lead Guyana. Let me not come to any of his MPs. I am challenging him to

explain this publicly. I am challenging him to explain, not by doing a PowerPoint slide where he will get one of the geniuses within the APNU/AFC to do it and then post it on Facebook. I am challenging him to go with an unwritten script, unprompted in front of a camera or in front of any live crowd, and explain what he is saying there. Having read this, I struggled to understand it. I know what I know, and I know what I do not know. I know my own limitations. I read this thing, and I tried to figure out what this man was really saying. Then, I said to myself that this man has MPs in Parliament, and I am sure that they will illuminate for the uneducated amongst us, myself included, and explain what he meant. I sat for one week waiting for one of them, any one of them, the chief economic spokesperson, the Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes, all the way down to... [Bishop Edghill: Mr. Sinclair.] No, all the way down to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition in the House. Outside of the House, there are some who might call him the little leaguer. I listened to every one of their MPs, from Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes to Mr. Norton. This proposal from the Leader of the AFC *never saw the light of day*. Not one of them even mentioned it. Now, this is the big framework, right? These are big words, fancy words.

There is another Guyanese word. I am not talking about the turtle anymore. There is a word, kerfuffle. When you want to kerfuffle people ... There are the big, fancy words there – fiscal rule. From Ms. Fernandes to Mr. Norton and everybody in between, including Mr. Figueira, ... Mr. Figueira, do you know about this rule? [Mr. Ramson: What about Mr. Jaiprashad?] Or Jai or Mahipaul. Mr. Sears is supposed to be an AFC man. He came here and he jumped all over and he danced all over in his speech. He did not tell us about his leader's fiscal rule. I was hoping somebody on that side would have explained it to me. I wanted to be educated. I genuinely wanted to be educated. I wanted to understand what he was proposing here. Apparently, they read it, and they put it where it belongs – right in the garbage bin because not one of his MPs, ... This is the big budget, that it must be located within the fiscal rule that their Leader... and I understand he wants to replace Mr. Norton as presidential candidate. None of his MPs came and made even passing reference to his grand fiscal rule. I am giving them a chance, like I said. Let them come back at any other time and explain it here. I do not know if they had a rethink after 10<sup>th</sup> January, and they decided they were abandoning the leader's fiscal rule. I do not know what happened, but we never heard back about it, Sir. [Dr. Anthony: Did he post anything after?] He posted a lot of other stuff after that. He posted a Venn Diagram and some

charts. They had a big chart. He got somebody to draw a diagram, and he posted this diagram on *Facebook*. Here is the big pronouncement:

“Oil GDP plus non oil GDP equals overall GDP”.

It is on *Facebook*. Check it. I do not really follow *Facebook* and social media. Somebody had to show it to me. I do not follow those stupidness. [An Hon. Member: Profound] Profound. Fancy words. You will say they are the intelligencers. These are the intellectual sophisticates in Guyana. When they talk, the words, the vocabulary, the accent, ... [Mr. Ramson: Look, I found it here, Dr. Singh.] Have you found it? Look, Mr. Ramson, Hon. Minister, has the diagram. Did you see the big pronouncement? Oil GDP plus non-oil GDP equals overall GDP. When they speak with big words and fancy accents, you think to yourself that these people are bright bad, but guess what? It is a load of malarkey.

Over the course of the days, from the time we announced the budget... I am not getting into the 32 and 33 story again. Over the course of the days that have elapsed since we announced the budget date, the APNU ... Well, they do not brand themselves as APNU/AFC. They have been preparing some banners that are branded as PNC/R/APNU. I saw several banners here – PNC/R/APNU. I do not know what decisions have been made about the life support machine, and who is on life support and who is not on life support, but I saw several banners headed up as PNC/R/APNU – one is here – announcing their proposals, what they will do. I was doubtful whether these things were genuine. Like I said, I do not really follow social media too closely. I do not really know what is going on. I was sceptical when somebody brought this to my attention, and this is what the APNU/AFC is saying out there. I asked if they were sure it is genuine. They had several proposals. I subsequently came to discover that these proposals are genuine because I heard them repeat the proposals in this House. For example, the Chairman... What is his name? Hon. Mr. Holder, I think, is the Chairman of the PNC. Is he still the Chairman of the PNC? He is the Chairman of the PNC, no less. In his speech, he repeated their proposals. That was their 90-day plan, right? Good. [Mr. Ramson: It has been reduced from 100 days.] They are doing it faster. They are moving quickly. It is not 100 anymore. Mind you, this is what they will do in their first 90 days in government – \$400,000 per month tax-free threshold; cash grants, regular, guaranteed; over \$100,000 per month cash, plus benefits for households. Not satisfied there, \$100,000 hard cash, not ordinary cash. I am reading, Mr. Speaker. I am reading the people's own words.

Cash grant: Apart from the \$100,000 per month for households, \$100,000 hard cash, and they could not have made up their minds about how frequently. Here is what they said. It would be once or twice a year.

7.20 p.m.

I am reading the thing. I am holding the thing up, if the camera can zoom in.

[*The Hon. Member displayed a document.*]

It is \$100,000 hard cash, once or twice a year for adults; *hear nah*, to be increased. Then, the next one: PNCR/APNU will invest over \$25 billion yearly in the University of Guyana (UG). A whole set of things are here – to let the citizens pursue their aspirations, *et cetera*. Students' stipend: \$50,000 per month to students attending UG and technical institutes such as Guyana Technical Institute (GTI), New Amsterdam Technical Institute (NATI), Essequibo Technical Institute (ETI). This stipend is intended to raise student attendance and motivation. Free university and tertiary education for all, apparently not noticing that we have already done that, plus \$50,000 stipend per month.

Subsidies for water and electricity. Does it sound familiar? Free electricity up to \$10,000 a month and free water. The same jokers who put Value Added Tax (VAT) on electricity and water a couple of years ago are coming back now, thinking that the Guyanese people are stupid, to tell you that they are giving it to you for free now. Free electricity up to \$10,000 per month and free water up to \$5,000 per month. Then, they slipped in a piece – cheap cooking gas. It is here – cheap cooking gas. I am reading.

[**Mr. Ramson:** Is it cheap as in the quality is cheap?] You know what they say in Guyana – *I selling it just how I buy it*. I am reading what the people wrote. Old age pension: \$100,000 per month in our first year in office. Remember, the last time they promised to double it immediately. In our first year in office, \$100,000 per month.

[**Dr. Anthony:** Same trick just bigger.]

You are right. Same trick but bigger. I am coming back to the trick. Salary increases up to 35% in our first year in office. They are on a roll.

We have more than 100% mobile telephone penetration in Guyana. We have more mobile phone subscribers in Guyana than we do people because a lot of people have two cell phones. So, if you take all the telephone companies together, we have more mobile phones out there than we have people. A lot of people have two, as I said, and most of these phones are smartphones. Most of these phones can add and subtract. They have calculators on them.

[**An. Hon. Member:**

(*Inaudible*)] No, you turn it sideways. Turn it sideways and you get the scientific calculator. So, everyone has a pocket calculator in their pocket. So, you can calculate what most of these measures would cost. Some are a little bit more difficult to calculate than others. For some, you need a little bit of inside knowledge to calculate. So, I did a back-of-the-envelope calculation. You cannot calculate cheap gas. *Duh lil rough*. I did a back-of-the-envelope calculation that I want to take the Guyanese people, because there is a lot of people who at one point or another will be watching this. We continue to have the smartest people in the world. Guyanese are smart people. *Yuh cyant pull wool over deh eyes*. We have always been, even in the worst PNC years, reasonably well-educated people.

So, I will share with you a few back-of-the-envelope calculations of their measures. Now, the tax-free threshold of \$400,000 monthly, most people out there may not be able to calculate that, but we have calculated that at the Ministry of Finance, and I want you to keep a tab. It is very easy because you can look at how much the threshold adjustment will cost us. We have, of course, increased the threshold from \$100-\$130,000 and we told you how much that would cost. So, you can easily extrapolate. It is not quite as simple, but you can do a rough extrapolation. Increasing the threshold to \$400,000 monthly in the first year in office, we have estimated will cost about \$34 billion. For the \$100,000 hard cash, once or twice a year for adults, let us work with an estimate of 600,000 adults, which is what we are working with for our cash grants. Let us work with 600,000 persons, 600,000 beneficiaries. That is \$60 billion a year. If you go with the 'or twice', that is \$120 billion. So, we are now at 34 billion plus 120 billion, \$154 billion.

Making UG tuition free, *et cetera*, they said how much they would put in. They said \$25 billion so take that number and add it. Yes, Mr. Indar, I saw you pull out your calculator. It is \$34 billion, plus \$120 billion plus \$25 billion. Sir, pay \$50,000 a month to students attending UG and technical institutions. Let us work with 11,000 students at UG and 3000 students at the technical institutes. That is 14,000. Some 14000 a month with 12 months in the year is \$8.4 billion. Mr. Indar, stop me if I go wrong. Add that. For UG students, they said they were going to reimburse all loans, cash payments and reimburse everyone who had paid fees, graduates, *et cetera*, they will reimburse loans and write off loans and cash payments, *et cetera*, with five-year proof of work; let us assume a billion. Add on another billion. Subsidies for water, free water for up to \$5000 a month. You could do a rough calculation. If you work with maybe 250-300 households, \$5000 a month times 12, you end up with



about \$11 billion. Free electricity up to \$10,000 a month. Again, \$10,000 a month times 12 months, you work with roughly 230-250 households, and you end up with roughly our estimate of \$27.6 billion. Old age pension – \$100,000 monthly. We have about 76,000 old age pensioners. Some \$100,000 per month times 12, multiplied by 76,000, that is \$91.2 billion. Salary increase – if we work with the 2024 wage bill and slap on the 35% that they said they will put on that, your wage bill would go up by \$73.5 billion to \$283.5 billion.

A raise in the minimum wage to \$200,000 per month. That is going to cost you roughly about \$43.2 billion. Another \$20 billion for direct cost of living measures that they said they would do. They gave us that number. They said they would put another \$3 billion into the Small Business Bureau; I did not list all of the measures there. They said they will put another \$3 billion to small businesses. Put another \$3 billion. They said they would put \$50 billion into a development bank with a focus on improving productivity, *et cetera*. Put another \$50 billion. They said they will allocate \$100 billion for the Rent-To-Own Programme. You remember the Rent-To-Own Programme. That is another \$100 billion. They said they will support Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL) for the maintenance and the upgrade of the grid and they gave us the number for that, \$200 billion. Then they said that job seekers would benefit from \$40,000 monthly. Let us estimate maybe about 10% of the adult population. Let us work with maybe 50,000 to 60,000 persons benefitting from \$40,000 monthly. The \$40,000 times 12, times 60,000, I am advised that rounds out to roughly about \$28.8 billion.

Those measures come up to \$799 billion. You got \$763 billion. I may have glossed over some very quickly. Maybe our assumptions differ a little bit. Mr. Indar said he has \$766 billion. Our estimate – and I challenge them to say that these things will cost differently from what we have estimated – is that those measures alone will cost...the incremental impact will be \$799 billion – almost a trillion. The fictitious, fictional, imaginary measures that they have announced, the whimsical and fanciful dream that they have been painting. [Bishop Edghill: The delulu.] The delusion that they are living. [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The malarky.]

The malarky that they have been spinning. Mind you, they have not *built* a school as yet. They have not done any of those schools that Minister Manickchand is building. They have not built a single hospital yet. They like to talk about Panadol in the hospital. They have not put a single Panadol in the hospitals or a single X-ray machine as yet. They have not sunk a single well as yet, and they have already spent

nearly a trillion dollars. They have not opened a single housing scheme or allocated a single house lot as yet and they have already spent... [Mr. Ramson: What about a community ground?]

They have not levelled a single community ground; they have not put a single fence or a single light in a community ground anywhere, and they already spent \$800 billion. [Mr. Ramson: Hard cash.]

Hard cash, not ordinary cash, right? They already spent \$800 billion in their measures, nearly a trillion. Anyone at home, do not take my numbers. I do not want you to take my numbers. I want you to go and see what they promise you, pull out your pocket calculator and calculate it for yourself. These things that they are promising you will cost nearly a trillion dollars. [Mr. Singh: The whole budget.]

Mind you, that is the whole budget. That is correct, Hon. Member, Suresh Singh, and as I said, that is before a single bottle of Panadol or vial of Panadol is bought, that is before any drugs or medical supply for a hospital, much less any hospitals, any police station, any school, any ground any shelter for vulnerable people... [Mr. Ramson: Any road, any bridge.]

Any road and bridge, I *ain* talk bout... [Mr. Singh: No cash grant for the kids.]

... oh yes, I did not count 'Because We Care'. A trillion dollars done.

Mr. Figueira, Hon. Member, when you go home, you calculate these numbers and ask yourself if your leaders are not setting you up to look stupid. The reality is that they hold the Guyanese people in grave contempt. Up to now, they believe that they can come and spin any yarn, they can spin any tale, they can tell any story, they can make any promise and they believe the Guyanese people will believe it, and go and vote for them. Guess what? They may have been able to pull that off in 2015 because there was a whole generation of Guyanese people who had forgotten them from their pre-1992 ways. However, they gave the Guyanese people a very timely reminder of their true nature.

7.35 p.m.

Today's generation all of whom have their pocket calculators in their pockets, have access to social media and can calculate this stuff for themselves. They know that it is all rubbish. They know it is all a load of malarkey. I am using the word 'malarkey' because I cannot use the real word that I want to use. I am paying due deference to the authority of your Chair, Sir. You know I am always respectful of your Chair as I should be. We have to understand what we are dealing with here. In *Budget 2025*, I said 2025 is an election year and they will come with all manner of criticisms, almost all of them are completely baseless and unjustifiable. We

listen keenly because there are things that they say that we need to correct and we correct them. We do not necessarily out of the hundred things that we do, we perhaps will get 90 right, the other 10 perhaps do not get done as quickly or as well as we would like to and we fix them because that is what a truly listening government do. They have not heard a single word from the Guyanese people since 1992. They still believe it is okay to justify rigging. It is okay to justify as they came here... The Hon. Member, Ms. Hughes, came here and said, "What is this thing about rigging?" There has been no something at Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) and something... as though she is living in a parallel universe. The Guyanese people saw you trying to steal the elections. The world saw you trying to steal the elections and you are coming here and still trying to debate about whether you made an attempt to rig the 2020 elections. We are justifiably proud of what we have delivered to the Guyanese people over the last five years.

We did not make the biggest promises in 2020. We sat and we consulted with everybody. There was a massive consultation on the East Bank, Providence – the big New Thriving room there – with every stakeholder. We brought everybody into the room and said, what would you like from a government? We listened to them and we wrote a manifesto. We said, if you elect us back into government, this is what we will deliver. Could you guess what, Mr. Speaker? We have delivered... [**Mr. Ramkissoo:** In less time too.] We have delivered in advance of time. Whether we look at the schools that we have built; whether we look at the hospitals that we have built and are building, the health centres and the telemedicine centres; or, in the case of the schools, the smart classrooms; the wells that we have been drilling; the water distribution systems that we have been installing throughout the hinterland to bring water to communities that never had water; or the more than 30,000 solar panels that we have delivered to communities that are not connected to the grid and are too far away to be connected to the grid – we have delivered. We are not satisfied because we will continue to deliver. We will continue to outperform every single commitment that we have given. In our next term in Office, we will continue to deliver in every single sector.

They jump up and say, what does the Budget has for the Guyanese? The Budget has nothing for the Guyanese people. Every single taxpayer will benefit from the increase in the threshold. I will repeat – we have doubled the income tax threshold in one term of Office from \$65,000 to \$130,000 a month. We have lowered the tax rates from 28% and 40% to 25% and 35%. We have given additional deductions in the

form of – first of all – the mortgage interest relief (MIR), which they have vindictively cut. We have doubled it back. We have given additional deductions from the taxable income for medical and life insurance. We have given an additional deduction for the number of children that a person has. We have given, now, an additional deduction if a person is working overtime and we have given an additional deduction if a person has a second job – incentivising effort and hard work – not disparaging hard work. Anybody who has come from a responsible home would have had their parents instil in him/her the virtues of hard work. Any responsible leader has an obligation to advocate the virtues of good, honest hard work. The APNU/AFC come here and disparage honest hard work. We have incentivised effort and hard work by all of those additional deductions from a person's taxable income that he/she has introduced. Every single Guyanese person will benefit, can benefit and has the potential to benefit from those measures.

Every single old-age pensioner will benefit from the fact that we have doubled the old-age pension – from \$20,500 to \$41,000 a month – a commitment that we gave. A commitment that they gave, failed to deliver and that we have delivered. The list goes on. A baby bonus, as some are calling it, for the first time in the history of our country, Guyanese mothers giving birth to a baby in Guyana will get a baby bonus or a grant of \$100,000. Never before.

They say the Budget has nothing for anybody. Tell that to the young Amerindian boys and girls who will be going to brand-new schools in Kopinang, in Micobie and in Monkey Mountain – when Hon. Member Ms. Manickchand goes there to open those schools. Tell that to the patients who will be going to the hospitals in Kato, in Lethem, in Region 1. Tell the people in Barabina, Imbotero, Khan's Hill and Savannah Blackwater that the new health posts that they will have, that the Budget has nothing for them. Tell all of the people who will benefit from telemedicine. In the good old glorious days... Well, in your glory days, one did not even have a health hut there. Today, one can go to the health centre in the most remote community in Guyana and telemedicine allows one to be diagnosed by specialists living in Georgetown. They do not understand the value of that because they live in their little cocoon and their little bubble. The glory days – when the Hon. Member, Ms. Hughes, spoke of the glory days when she went to school – removed from the reality of the ordinary Guyanese person. [**Dr. Anthony:** The vouchers.] The universal health voucher and the list goes on. I could keep going on and on. They keep saying, the Budget has nothing for anybody. Tell that to the 40,000 people who have benefited and will benefit

from one of our 85 new and existing housing schemes that we have been expanding and building, including Number 75 Village in the Corentyne, La Bonne Intention (LBI), Cummings Lodge, Charity, Lethem – even in Region 9 – or the 25,000 persons who will be able to get a letter allocating a house lot to them as a result of our ramped up housing programme in 2025.

They come here and they pretend to understand and be able to relate to the Guyanese population. It is easy for the likes of the frontbenchers of the APNU/AFC. **[Mr. Ramson:** Meanwhile they were collecting house lots for themselves.] That is correct, they were only interested in collecting house lots for themselves. **[Mr. Ramson:** 22 out of 32 collected house lots for themselves.] That is correct. We will ensure that another 25,000 people get their allocation letters in 2025. Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, do you understand why you are sitting on that side of the House? Not only did they abandon the Guyanese people but they have abandoned you and young Hon. Member Mr. Jaiprashad today.

The sports... **[Mr. Ramson:** There are five stadiums.] Yes, the five stadiums. The special training programmes that we will have, the coaches, *et cetera*, who we will be bringing the hard surfaces that we will be building for people to play basketball in every single community... **[Mr. Ramson:** ...and school.] ...and school, and the coaches that we will be putting in those communities. They do not understand the values of those things. They do not understand. The multi-purpose centres that we are building, young people will go to practise their sports and be able to achieve – some will just get fit, some will achieve a competitive level and, who knows, some may even become international stars as a result of these investments that we are making. They do not understand – the APNU/AFC – the value of those things because their speciality is to make grand and lofty promises, big words and fancy-sounding pseudo-intellectualism. They love that. Like the fiscal rule – they love the pseudo-intellectualism. They specialise in pseudo-intellectualism sounding. We have heard Hon. Member Mr. Norton with his big words and all sorts of plans, policies and green paper. The Hon. Member is confusing people about green and white paper plans. Have you heard what his solution was? The Hon. Member announced so proudly, we will update the national youth policy. He was talking to the young people of Guyana and he was telling them... I made a note of some of these things here. I do not know if I heard correctly.

He said, we will commission a study on the housing needs of the country. The people want their house lot. You ask any Guyanese person who does not own a home – they want their house lot. That is what they want. **[Ms. Walrond:** You do not need any study to tell you that.] He is doing a study. They specialise in these pseudo-intellectualisms, these pretensions and delusions of grandeur. **[Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips:** I like that word.] Do you like that, Prime Minister (PM)? **[Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips:** Yes, grandeur.] They specialise in pretensions, delusions of grandeur, big words, fancy language, fancy accents, big policy papers, green paper and so on. That is what they specialise in and study. You heard him – they want a data-driven approach and they want this study and that study. **[Ms. Rodrigues:** Scientific.] Scientific was the word – scientific. **[Mr. Nandlall:** I am thinking if this study says no more house lot, that is it?] Then, perhaps... Well... Let me say this and let me put this very simply: let the APNU/AFC continue to promise and, in particular, continue – as they have always been doing – continue to promise things that they neither can nor intend to deliver. They have not changed; they have not learned; and I suspect they are not capable of learning. Let them continue to promise things that they are neither capable of delivering nor have any intention of delivering. They can continue.

7.50 p.m.

We, in the People's Progressive Party/Civic, will continue to deliver to the Guyanese people. *Budget 2025* represents this latest instalment in our continued delivery to the Guyanese people. We will continue to deliver and we will execute *Budget 2025*. We will win the election later in 2025. He can *pam-pa-zet*, puff up his chest and talk about the next government, the next government – the next government for APNU coming two generations from now. We will execute and deliver *Budget 2025*. We will win the election later in 2025 and we will continue to deliver to the Guyanese people all the way to 2030 and long beyond 2030. Long live the People's Progressive Party/Civic and their delivery to the Guyanese people. Long live Guyana. Long live the Guyanese people, my Guyanese brothers and sisters.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Sir, once again I take great pleasure in thanking all who contributed to this debate, including my Colleagues on that side of the House. In particular, to my Colleagues on this side of the House for articulating as effectively as they did our programme.... Our Colleagues on that side of the House thank you for displaying once again why you are on that side of the House in the Opposition benches; why that is precisely where you

belong and why that is where you will be remaining for a very very long time to come. Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

**Mr. Speaker:** Thank you, very much, Hon. Minister Dr. Singh. Hon. Members, the general debate on the Budget has concluded. Before we adjourn, we will need to consider and dispose of the report of the Business Subcommittee of the Committee of Supply and this is the allocation of the time for Consideration of the 2025 Estimates of Expenditure. We will have to go into Committee of Supply for this purpose.

*Assembly in Committee of Supply.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Hon. Members, I wish to report that the Business Subcommittee of the Committee of Supply met yesterday, Wednesday, 29<sup>th</sup> January and considered the allocation of time for the Consideration of these Estimates. The Subcommittee passed the resolution on the matter, and copies of the Subcommittee's minutes, resolutions and schedules have been circulated. Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service will now move the necessary motion.

**RESOLUTION OF THE BUSINESS SUBCOMMITTEE OF THE COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY 29TH JANUARY, 2025 CONSIDERATION OF ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025**

RESOLVED, That the Business Sub-Committee of the Committee of Supply recommend to the Committee of Supply that –

- (i) the number of Sittings to be allocated to the consideration of the 2025 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure in the Committee of Supply, should be a maximum of four;
- (ii) the allocation of time for the consideration of the Programmes and Agencies of the Estimates in the Committee of Supply should be as shown in the Schedule attached:
  - Any time saved during the consideration of agencies on a particular day would be allocated to any remaining agency or agencies during that day.
  - Time saved after concluding the consideration of agencies for the day would be carried over to the next day.

- Furthermore, once the allotted time has expired, the question would be *put* regarding any remaining agencies.

- An additional half-hour to be added to the time allotted in 2024 for the following agencies:

- Ministry of Public Works; and

- Ministry of Education.

- Reduction of the time allotted to the Ministry of Tourism Industry and Commerce from one hour to thirty minutes.

(iii) the Committee decided to rearrange the consideration of the Estimates of Expenditure, moving the Agencies, which were initially scheduled for the first day, Friday, January 31, 2025, to the second day, Monday, February 3, 2025. Alternately, the agencies listed for consideration on February 3, 2025, would now be considered on January 31, 2025.

(iv) to forgo the 7.00 p.m. break on Friday, January 31, 2025.

(v) approval for Ministers to answer questions and vote away from their seats would be sought from the Speaker (Chairperson of the Committee).

(vi) the proceedings at the Sittings of the Committee of Supply during consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure should, if not previously brought to a conclusion, be concluded at the time recommended in the Schedule attached.

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

**Dr. Singh:** Certainly, Sir. With pleasure, I now move:

“That this Committee doth agree with the Business Sub-Committee in the said Resolution.”

*Motion put and agreed to.*

**Mr. Chairman:** Thank you, very much, Minister. Hon. Members, the Committee of Supply has allocated four days for the Consideration of the Estimates. Consideration will begin tomorrow, Friday, 31<sup>st</sup> January at 10.00 a.m. and will continue thereafter on Monday, 3<sup>rd</sup> February at 10.00 a.m.,

Tuesday, 4<sup>th</sup> February at 10.00 a.m., on Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> February also at 10.00 a.m. and 5<sup>th</sup> February being the last day. This is in accordance with the resolution.

Just to note, tomorrow we will start with the Ministry of Agriculture and the Constitutional Agencies, which we normally begin with will be taken on Monday. Instead of the 13 or 14 Constitutional Agencies each being allocated 10 minutes, there is a block figure of two and a half hours for all of the Constitutional Agencies. We will take them one after the other, but only two and a half hours allocated. Those are the major changes.

*Assembly resumed.*

## **ADJOURNMENT**

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 7.56 p.m. on 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2025.”

*[Prime Minister]*

**Brigadier Ret’d Phillip]:** Mr. Speaker, I ask that today’s Assembly be adjourned until Friday, 31<sup>st</sup> January, 2025, at 10.000 a.m. – that is tomorrow.

**Mr. Speaker.** Hon. Members, we adjourned until 10.00 a.m. tomorrow. Have a safe trip home.

*Adjourned accordingly at 7.76 p.m.*