



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*

29TH Sitting

Monday, 14TH June, 2021

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

Assembly convened at 2.06 p.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE [For Written Replies]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there are 13 questions on today's Order Paper. Questions Number one to eight are for written replies and questions numbers nine to 13 are for oral replies.

Questions numbers one, two and three are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson and are for the Hon. Minister of Housing and Water.

Questions numbers four, five, six, seven and eight are in the name of the Hon. Member, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul and are for the Hon. Minister of Local Government and Regional Development.

The answers to all of these questions have been received and have, therefore, in accordance with our Standing Orders, been circulated.

1 Lands in Pomeroon-Supenaam

Ms. Ferguson: During a visit to the Pomeroon-Supenaam on 9th December 2020, His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali announced that an additional 600 house lots will be developed and distributed to residents in several Region 2 communities. The Chief Executive Officer of the Central Housing and Planning Authority, Mr. Sherwyn Greaves further explained, "that the areas identified for house lots are Charity and Lima Sands."

Could the Honourable Minister state:

1. Where in Charity and Lima Sands are the lands located?
2. How many house lots are expected to be developed in each area?

Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Croal]:

1. The lands identified for allocation in Region No.2 are located at:

- a. St. Joseph and Buxton for Charity.
 - b. Onderneeming Phase 4.
2. Three hundred and fifty (350) house lots each are to be developed in Charity and Onderneeming Phase 4

2 Houses for Young Professionals

Ms. Ferguson: On September 10, 2020, the Honourable Minister stated, “there will also be the construction of houses catering for young professionals... three areas in Region 4 have been identified to start construction and we have had several expressions of interests.”

1. Could the Honourable Member state the three (3) areas in Region Four (4) where the professional houses are expected to be constructed?
2. How many professional houses will be built as per area?
3. What is the expected cost (s) per unit?

Mr. Croal: Currently the three (3) areas in Region Four (4) where the professional houses are expected to be constructed are Plantation Little/Great Diamond, Plantation Prospect and Plantation Providence and the number of expected professional houses to be built are 100, 100 and 200, respectively. There are three models for which prices vary.

3 House Lots Distribution

Ms. Ferguson: During an outreach hosted by the Ministry of Housing and Water, Department of Central Housing and Planning Authority in East Berbice Corentyne on December 29, 2020. It has been reported via the Department of Public Information, “over 3,600 house lots have been delivered over the span of four months by the Ministry of Housing and Water; during the Dream Realised exercise.”

Could the Honourable Minister provide the following:

- (i) A disaggregation of the 3,600 house lots allocated in the various areas/regions where the “Dream Realised” outreaches were held?

- (ii) Provide for each area, the number of house lots per category that has been allocated?
- (iii) Has the Central Housing and Planning Authority paid in full for the lands listed below?
- Meten-Meer-Zorg, West Coast Demerara
 - Anna Catherina, West Coast Demerara
 - Stewartville, West Coast Demerara
 - Edinburgh, West Coast Demerara
 - Corneila Ida, West Coast Demerara
- (iv) If no, what mechanisms, or procedures are being utilized by the Central Housing and Planning Authority in acquiring the lands above?
- (v) When are developmental works expected to commence on the lands listed above?
Kindly provide schedule for each area.

Mr. Croal: The table below shows the disaggregation of the 3,600 house lots:

(i and ii)

Region	Area	No. of Lots Allocated
3	Edinburg	292
3	Anna Catherina	335
3	Cornelia Ida	197
3	Stewartville	225
3	Meten-Meer-Zorg	451
4	Little Diamond	290
4	Great Diamond	210
	Cummings Lodge	462
4	La Bonne Intention Tract NY	149
4	La Bonne Intention Tract MK	33
4	Annandale	220
4	Vigilance	156
4	Bladen Hall	70
4	Strathspey	210

6	Ordinance Fortlands	187
6	No. 75 Village	35
6	No. 79 Village	14
6	Hampshire	25
6	Williamsburg	39
	Total	3,600

- (iii) No, CHPA has not paid in full for those Lands.
- (iv) The transfer of the said lands to CHPA by NICIL/GUYSUCO is in process. The final payment will be made upon completion of the transfer process.
- (v) Developmental works for each area has commenced and is on-going .

4 Community Infrastructure Improvement Project

Chief Whip (ag) [Mr. Mahipaul]:

1. From Budget 2021 (Details of Capital Expenditure – Project Code 1302200 – Community Infrastructure Improvement Project), a sum of \$1.172B was approved. Can the Hon. Minister say how much of this lump sum will be spent on the Parika, Charity and Mon Repos Markets?
2. Can the Hon. Minister state what is the allotted sum for the rehabilitation of Neighbourhood Democratic Council buildings at Annandale/Riverstown, Aberdeen/Zorg-en-Vlugt, Leguan, Canefield/Enterprise, Black Bush Polder and No. 52/74?

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Mr. Dharamlall]:

1. “Refer to the National Estimates passed at the 12th Sitting of the National Assembly.
2. Refer to the National Estimates passed at the 12th Sitting of the National Assembly.”

5 Revaluation of Properties

Mr. Mahipaul:

1. In view of the recent Ruling by the Chief Justice concerning Rates and Taxes and the need for the Valuation Officer to do a countrywide revaluation of properties so that proprietors can pay their rightful taxes in keeping with the Laws of Guyana, can the Hon. Minister say when will the revaluation begin?
2. What is the salary and other benefits of the Chief Valuation Officer?

Mr. Dharamlall:

1. “The Ministry is not in receipt of the Chief Justice’s Ruling.
2. The Chief Valuation Officer is not a staff of the Ministry”.

6 Procurement of Goods and Services from August 5, 2020 to March 5, 2021

Mr. Mahipaul: In keeping with Section 10(2) of the Procurement Act 2003, can the Hon. Minister provide a description of the goods, services, construction or consulting services procured from August 5, 2020 to March 5, 2021, from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, the names and addresses of suppliers or contractors that submitted tenders, proposals or quotations and the names and addresses of the suppliers or contractors with which contracts were entered into and contract prices from August 5, 2020 to March 5, 2021?

Mr. Dharamlall: “Refer to the National Estimates passed at the 12th Sitting of the National Assembly.”

7 Reference Technical Assistance – Planning and Support for Local Councils

Mr. Mahipaul:

1. Reference Technical Assistance – Planning and support for Local Councils, would the Ministry be hosting a Local Conference on Local Democratic Organs and a National Conference on Local Democratic Organs, and, if yes, which month is it likely to be hosted?
2. In keeping with the Government’s policy, can the Hon. Minister state exclusively what is the Ministry’s policy on Local Government and Local Government Organs?

Mr. Dharamlall:

1. “Refer to the National Estimates passed at the 12th Sitting of the National Assembly.
2. Refer to the National Estimates passed at the 12th Sitting of the National Assembly.”

8 Programme 731 – Regional Administration and Finance

Mr. Mahipaul:

1. From the details of the current expenditure 2021, Programme 731 – Regional Administration and Finance – Staffing Details, there is no increase in Clerical and Office Support staff and Semi- Skilled Operatives and Unskilled staff. In 2020, the number of staff members were 42 and 44 respectively, but the amount of money budgeted in 2021 is not the same as the amount expended in 2020. Can the Hon. Minister explain why the amount budgeted in 2021 for Line Items 6114 and 6115 are not the same as what was expended in 2020?
2. Could the Honourable Minister provide a list of the vacant positions that are currently existing within Programme 731 – Regional Administration and Finance?

Mr. Dharamlall:

1. “Refer to the National Estimates passed at the 12th Sitting of the National Assembly.
2. Refer to the National Estimates passed at the 12th Sitting of the National Assembly.”

[For Oral Replies]

Mr. Speaker: The questions for oral replies, question number nine, the Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, please ask your question.

9 Overdraft Balance on the Consolidated Fund

Ms. Ferguson: Could the Hon. Minister state the overdraft balance on the Consolidated Fund as at 31st December, 2020.

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance [Dr. Singh]:

As of 31st December, 2020, the Consolidated Fund's account was in overdraft in the amount of \$116.6 billion.

Ms. Ferguson: How does the balance compare with the balance as of 2nd August, 2020?

Dr. Singh: The end of December, 2020, overdraft balance of \$116.6 billion on the Consolidated Fund account represented a deterioration of \$47.9 billion compared the 2nd August, 2020 overdraft of \$78.7 billion.

In this regard, it should be noted that if one were to take an account of all Government's bank accounts at the central bank, at the time that the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government demitted Office in April of 2015, Government was a net depositor in the central bank with \$16 billion in aggregate deposits held at the bank. By the end of July 2020, towards the end of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) extended stay in Government, the Government had moved to a net overdraft position of \$93 billion, taking into consideration all Government bank accounts held at the central bank.

In comparison, the balance on all Government bank accounts held at the central bank at the end of 2020 was an overdraft of \$128 billion. It is worthwhile to note that the question of this overdraft had been flagged by a number of domestic and international agencies and authorities, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which, on more than one occasion, drew attention to the fact that this overdraft was being accumulated, and that it reflected the fact that Government's fiscal operations were being conducted without appropriate financing being mobilised. It is worthwhile to note, too, that if the overdraft inherited, as a result of the 2nd August, 2020, was to be aggregated with other domestic debts incurred and aggregated with contingent liabilities that were issued, or borrowings that were contracted by other public sector entities and supported by Government guarantees, such as the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) bond which, I think, is the subject of a subsequent question, and Government's accumulated indebtedness, such as the \$12 billion owed by various Government agencies to Guyana Power and Light (GPL) just to give one example, that, in fact, at that time, from the 2nd of August, 2020, when the People's Progressive Party Civic assumed Office, if all of those debts had been aggregated, the then Government would have been in violation of the statutory ceiling on

debts. It would be recalled that it was a direct result of this that the new Government had to come swiftly to the National Assembly to adjust the ceiling.

What is even more significant is that this overdraft that had been accumulated by the 2nd August was accumulated at a time when the APNU/AFC was already overtaxing the people of Guyana and the businesses of Guyana. The tax revenues, in 2019, amounted to \$226 billion, which is a 58% increase when compared to the 2015 level of \$142.9 billion. I made that point to emphasise that one would expect that, at a time when tax revenues were increasing so dramatically and when the tax burden was being imposed on the people and on the private sector of Guyana so steeply, the budget would be adequately financed without recourse to these overdrafts.

In fact, the tax measures introduced by the APNU/AFC are well known. The introduction of Value Added Tax (VAT) on water and electricity, the imposition of VAT on basic food and household items, the imposition of VAT on exports, increases in land fees *et cetera*. At the same time, critical social programmes were being eliminated, for example, the \$10,000 school grant, the termination of 2000 Community Service Officers (CSO's), the unconscionable removal of water on electricity subsidies to pensioners, the removal of the one-month bonus for the discipline services and the refusal to provide critical support to the sugar industry. One would have expected that all of these initiatives would have resulted in an improved fiscal situation and would have alleviated the need for the incurrence of this overdraft. Alas, that was not to be and, notwithstanding those harsh and punitive measures implemented by the APNU/AFC Government while in Office, they nevertheless, as a result of their extravagant and wasteful spending, caused this massive overdraft to be accumulated. Thank you very much.

Ms. Ferguson: I would not even want to labour some of the responses alluded by the Hon. Member, since I deem them all irrelevant to the actual question asked.

As I move on, what caused the deterioration or improvement in the two balances?

Dr. Singh: As I mentioned earlier, there was a \$37.9 billion change in the balance which is attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, there was a stock of cheques that were issued by the APNU/AFC Government that had not yet hit the bank balance. That, in fact, amounted to approximately \$5.2 billion.

In addition, a number of other payments had to be made by the Government to liquidate liabilities inherited. I alluded earlier to the \$12 billion debt that was owing to GPL and which needed to be cleared. I believe that it is already a matter of public record that our Government had to move to liquidate that debt, and we paid off, very early in our term in Office, \$6 billion worth of that debt. Payments also had to be made in relation to the National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited bond, which I am not going to elaborate on now because we are coming back to our second question on that matter.

In addition, it could be recalled that when we assumed Office, there was no plan in place to respond to the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19), no support had been provided to the people of Guyana and very little preparations had been made to address this matter. As a result of this, the People's Progressive Party Civic Government had to move swiftly to take action to bring relief to the people of Guyana. That relief included outfitting the health sector to conduct testing. It could be recalled the shockingly limited extent of testing that was being done by the APNU/AFC during its term in Office. It could be recalled the lack of preparedness of the health sector to cope with COVID-19. Our Government, upon assuming Office, had to rapidly equip the health sector to respond to COVID-19. It would be recalled that no relief had been provided to households.

2.21 p.m.

We had to implement a programme of providing Covid-19 relief to households which resulted in \$7 billion worth of expenditure.

It would also be recalled that no provisions had been made to support our frontline workers. We introduced a special one-off payment to our frontline workers. It would be recalled that the two-week one-off payment that was made to the frontline workers cost in excess of \$1.1 billion. In addition, recognising the challenging circumstances in which our public sector employees, as a whole, were operating under, it would be recalled that we also introduced a one-off payment to all public sector employees, which benefitted more than 60,000 persons at a cost of \$2 billion.

In addition to this, this honourable House would recall in the “emergency budget”, that was tabled by my distinguished Colleague, the Hon. Minister Edghill, on behalf of our new Government, an extensive list of measures aimed at alleviating and removing the burdensome and unconscionable taxes that had been introduced by the APNU/AFC Government... All of those measures have had

a fiscal impact which would have contributed to the movement and the balance on the Consolidated Fund. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Ms. Ferguson: As national leaders, whenever we come to the National Assembly, we must be able to come with truth and facts. For the Hon. Member to say, in his response, that the APNU/AFC Government had no plan to deal with Covid-19, he is telling untruths and giving false information. I wish to remind this honourable House that, when the People's Progressive Party/Civic came to Government on 2nd August, there were 21 deaths.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, and the supplemental question is...

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much but, as I said before, as responsible leaders, when we come here, we must come speaking the truth. To date, our nation has had over 400 deaths due to Covid-19 and due to the inapt and incompetence of the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I guess you do not have a supplemental question and I would not allow you to make another speech.

Ms. Ferguson: I am moving on, Cde. Speaker. What instruments does the Government plan to use to retire the overdraft?

Dr. Singh: Our Government plans to retire this overdraft using debentures with varying tenors.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I want to bring your attention to a technical issue we are facing in the Assembly with respect to sound quality. Some of the monitors are overhead and they pick up the feed for those of us who are speaking under them. If you shout into the microphones, then we would not hear you well. I will have no choice but to use the device at my fingertips to control the shouting so that you could speak in a manner that persons could hear.

We are working to remedy that. Initially, we had placed monitors on the ground. That helped but, somehow, we are still getting the issue of muffled sound. Thank you very much. Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson...

Ms. Ferguson: The response given by the Hon. Minister to the previous question did not come over clearly. Perhaps, in his response to the final question, which is a follow-up from the last question, he could provide clarity.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member.

Ms. Ferguson: With respect to ...

Mr. Speaker: It was not clear, so you want him to repeat.

Ms. Ferguson: Pardon?

Mr. Speaker: You said that it was not clear or that you did not hear it clearly.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: Would you like him to repeat it?

Ms. Ferguson: Yes, repeat, in response to the last question.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, we have also re-facilitated the two podiums from which you could speak. You could speak from them without your masks.

Dr. Singh: Very well. I am happy to repeat the response. I said that the Government is planning to retire the overdraft using debentures of varying tenor.

Ms. Ferguson: To the Hon. Minister, with respect to question 4, please provide an approximate time when this will be done.

Dr. Singh: Certainly. Sir, through you, it would be recalled that we actually came to this House, I believe it was on 4th February, 2021, seeking approval to increase the external and domestic borrowing limits. This would be recalled was largely for the purposes of addressing, precisely, this matter – regularising of the accumulative overdraft. Having sought and obtained approval of the increase in the relevant limits, we have now initiated action to extinguish the overdraft by replacing it with the debentures to which I have just referred. That process is, in fact, already under way and will be completed before the end of the current month. Thank you very much.

10 Bond secured by NICIL to be used by GuySuCo

Ms. Ferguson: Through you, Mr. Speaker, could the Hon. Minister state the amount of the bonds secured by NICIL for use by the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo)?

Dr. Singh: The full amount of the bonds subscribed to by subscribers was an amount of \$30 billion. However, of the \$30 billion, \$17.479 billion was drawn by NICIL so far, a net of trustee fees of \$121 million. It should be stated, once again, that this bond has a tenor of five years on a fixed interest rate of 4.75%. The bond is backed by a sovereign guarantee issued by the Government of Guyana, which effectively makes the instrument risk-free lending, and which effectively makes the instrument comparable to Government's borrowing. I say this because it is relevant to note that this bond was not raised through a competitive process, as far as can be ascertained, and permitted the Government to paying an interest rate of 4.75% while, at a time, when Treasury Bills would only have cost 1% or thereabout.

The cost savings that would have resulted had the Government, at the time, raised the relevant financing at 1% instead of the 4.75% would have been in the vicinity of \$2.1 billion.

In addition, I might add that the bond includes a clause that prevents or penalises early repayment of the instrument, which effectively means that we are stuck with this 4.75% interest rate that was committed to by the APNU/AFC while in Government.

Ms. Ferguson: With respect to the question asked earlier, could the Hon. Minister state the amount secured and how much has been disbursed to NICIL by the bond holders?

Dr. Singh: I am somewhat puzzled because the various parts of the questions included some element of repetition. The part that asks whether the Minister could state the amount secured is indistinguishable from the question that was asked at part (i).

That, notwithstanding, I will beg your forgiveness in committing some measure of repetition. I will say, as I indicated when I answered part (i), the full potential value of the bond is \$30 billion. Amounts totalling \$17.479 billion have been drawn by NICIL; I believe a net of trustee fees of \$121 million. I hope that answers the question. The full amount of the bond secured was \$30 billion, out of which \$17.5 million was drawn. Thank you.

Ms. Ferguson: With respect to Part ii, could the Hon. Minister state the amount disbursed by the bond holders to NICIL and how much has been disbursed to GuySuCo as of 2nd August, 2020 and as at 31st December, 2020?

Dr. Singh: So as to ensure that I am not misreading the question and that I do not answer to the wrong thing, I am struggling again with this repetition. I am seeing here the question asks, again, whether the Hon. Minister could state the amount disbursed by the bond holders to NICIL. That looks exactly like part (ii). Mr. Speaker, before I proceed to answer the question, might I ask through you to the Hon. Member, the distinction between parts ii and iii of the question?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, if I heard her correctly, she was asking how much was disbursed from NICIL to GuySuCo? That is the part.

Dr. Singh: There are two parts with respect to it. It states:

“...can the Honourable Minister state the amount disbursed by the bond holders to NICIL...”

That is the first part and I am trying to understand how that is different from the question that was already asked at part (ii)? Then there is a second part to part (iii):

“...how much has been disbursed to GUYSUCO...”

Which has not yet been answered.

Mr. Speaker: Right.

Dr. Singh: The second part, I am perfectly happy to answer but might I, with the greatest of respect to you, seek clarification from the Hon. Member about how the first part of the question differs from the question that was asked at part (ii)?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I will suggest that you proceed to answer the second part of part (iii).

2.36 p.m.

Dr. Singh: Sir, I made it crystal clear that I have no difficulty answering the second part of the question.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, for us to be pellucid, my understanding was that the amount of \$17.5 billion was repeated twice. I will ask the Hon. Member, who is asking the question, to repeat so that the Minister can be quite pellucid in his understanding.

Dr. Singh: Thank you, Sir.

Ms. Ferguson: With respect to part (ii), could the Hon. Minister state the amount disbursed by the bondholders to the NICIL and how much of the moneys were actually disbursed to GuySuCo as of 2nd August, 2020 and at 31st December, 2020?

Dr. Singh: In relation to this two-part question, regarding the amount disbursed by the bondholders to NICIL, as I indicated when I answered part (ii), a total of \$17.478 billion or \$17.5 billion, a net of trustee fees of \$121 million, has been disbursed by the bondholders to NICIL. For the second time.

Out of that amount, as of 2nd August, 2020, amounts totalling \$10.27 billion had been disbursed to GuySuCo. As of 31st December, 2020, amounts totalling \$11.47 billion had been disbursed to GuySuCo.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, through you, Sir, to the Hon Member, with respect to part (iii), could the Hon. Minister state how the money was expended by GuySuCo between current and capital expenditures?

Dr. Singh: As at 2nd August, 2020, of the \$10.27 billion that had been expended by GuySuCo, \$1.293 billion had related to capital expenditure and \$8.978 billion to current expenditure. As of 31st August, 2020, of the \$11.471 billion expended by GuySuCo, \$1.293 billion related to capital expenditure and \$10.178 billion to current expenditure.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, through you, could the Hon. Member state how much of the bond has been repaid by NICIL?

Dr. Singh: The total amount paid by NICIL to bondholders to date is \$5.152 billion. It may be worthwhile to note that, when we came into Office, we discovered the rather astonishing situation that NICIL was actually servicing the bond out of the proceeds of the bond, which basically meant that they borrowed for the purposes of repaying the borrowing.

Ms. Ferguson: Through you, Mr. Speaker, could the Hon. Member state whether Government, as guarantor, has had to meet any of the repayments made to date?

Dr. Singh: As I indicated earlier, this bond was supported by an unconditional Government guarantee necessitating Government to *step into the shoes* of the borrower, if needed. That circumstance did arise, and, to date, bond payments made by Government, under this bond arrangement, amount to \$4.019 billion, comprising principal of \$3.41 billion, interest of \$606 million and the payment of agency and trustee fees amounting \$1.57 million each.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, through you, again, could the Hon. Minister state whether the Government will continue to retain the balance of the bond for use by GuySuCo?

Dr. Singh: The answer to that question is, yes. It will be retained for, at least, two very different reasons. First of all, as I indicated earlier, this bond was concluded at an exorbitant interest rate of \$4.75, considering that it was backed by a Government guarantee and it locked in that interest rate with a penalty clause for early repayment.

Secondly, given the state in which the sugar industry was inherited, after five years of complete neglect and abandonment by the APNU/AFC, our Government has expressed, very clearly, our commitment to revitalise and restructure the industry to support the achievement of a diversified and modern sugar industry; one that is sustainable and economically viable.

We have already started to take steps to recapitalise the industry. It would be recalled that, in the 2020 and 2021 Budgets, appropriations were sought to ensure that the industry is recapitalised, restructured and brought back to some level of viability and, ultimately, competitiveness. Against this background, it is apposite to note that I had the privilege of representing His Excellency the President only last week at an event hosted by the United Nations (UN) International Labour Organisation (ILO), at which the ILO launched a report that documented the results of a socio-economic study that the entity conducted; a study of the socio-economic impact of the closure of sugar estates. That report is publicly available, and it paints an extremely distressing picture of the manner in which the APNU/AFC Government proceeded to close the estates with absolutely no consideration of the decimating impact that these closures were going to have, not only on sugar workers, directly, and their families but, indeed, on entire communities and the entire rural agricultural economy, which were so closely intertwined with the sugar industry. Like I said, that report is publicly available. Thank you, very much.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I can say that the report thus far is a bias report. I would like to remind the Hon. Member, that the APNU/AFC...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, this is a time for asking questions. There are five minutes remaining. I will give you back one minute. Please ask the question.

Ms. Ferguson: That is all right, Sir. I will do a supplementary question to the question posed earlier. Is the Hon. Minister aware that the APNU/AFC Government had injected \$60 billion into GuySuCo?

Dr. Singh: What I am aware of is that the APNU/AFC purported to constitute a commission of inquiry (CoI) into the sugar industry. That commission went on to do its work and stopped short of recommending the closure of any industry. Despite the fact that its own commission of inquiry stopped short of recommending the closure of any estates, the APNU/AFC Government, nevertheless, proceeded with the closure of estates with absolutely no regard, whatsoever, for what that decision was going to mean for tens of thousands of Guyanese people living in those communities. Thank you very much.

Ms. Ferguson: I have another supplementary question. Is the Hon. Member aware that, in October, 2010, these were the words uttered by the then President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana:

“If Skeldon Factory does not work, sugar is dead.”

Dr. Singh: What I am aware of is that the APNU/AFC Government made absolutely no attempt to try to get Skeldon Sugar Factory or, indeed, any other estate to work.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, this is my last supplementary on this particular question. Is the Hon. Minister aware that, when those estates were closed, the APNU/AFC Government took full control of the health centres, the drains and paid full severance to the workers?

Dr. Singh: What I am aware of is that, when the workers were severed, instead of readily paying their severance, the workers had to literally beg; fight; and, ultimately, go to the courts with the support of Guyana Agricultural and General Workers' Union (GAWU) to get their severance. That is what I am aware of.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, I know for a fact that the response given by the Hon. Member is not accurate. I now move on.

With respect to vii above, if the answer is yes, please, provide the schedule of disbursement of the balance?

Dr. Singh: The balance remaining will be disbursed as needed in accordance with an action plan that is being prepared by the management and the Board of Directors, under the supervision of the Ministry of Agriculture.

2.51 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson before you ask your question, the 40 minutes is up, but remember I promised you an extra minute. Please, go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: With respect to question (v), if the answer is no, when will the balance of the bond be returned to the bondholders?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, permit me. There was a part (vii) of the question, it stated:

“Can the Honourable Minister state whether the Government will continue to retain the balance of the bond for use by GUYSUCO?”

Yes or no; and I answered that question and I said ‘yes’.

Part (viii) stated: If the answer is ‘yes’ and I believe the whole world heard, not just me and the 65 Hon. Members of this House, but the whole world heard that the answer was ‘yes’. Part (viii) of the question then states:

“With respect to part (vii), if the answer is YES...”

Which the entire world just heard me say.

“...please provide...”

Et cetera. And I have answered that.

I am struggling to comprehend by what stream of logic the Hon. Member then reads, I would not use the word parrots, but reads part (ix) religiously, the script that has been put into her hands and which, apparently, she is not terribly acquainted with. She then religiously read part (ix) of the question that states, “With respect to (vii), if the answer is NO...” *et cetera*. I place myself at your gracious mercy and I ask what is expected of me in these circumstances?

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Minister, I will tell you what I have to do. This is the end of the question period. I want to draw the National Assembly’s attention to Standing Order No. 22 (8). It states basically that if there are questions remaining, not answered orally during this period, then those questions will revert to the Hon. Minister to be answered in writing. Thank you, very much.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

MOTION

Consideration of Financial Paper No. 1/2021 – Current and Capital Estimates

“Be It RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approve of the proposal set out in Financial No. 1 of 2020 – Schedule of Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling one billion, nine hundred and six million and seven hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars (\$1,906,775,000) – Advances made from the Contingencies Fund for the period 2021-04-01 to 2021-06-08.”

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the Assembly will now resolve itself into Committee of Supply to consider Financial Paper No. 1 of 2021.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, in accordance with Article 171 (2) of the Constitution, I signify that Cabinet has recommended for consideration by the Assembly the motion for the approval of the

proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 1 of 2021 Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling \$1,906,775,000 for the period 1st April, 2021 to 8th June, 2021 and I now move the motion.

Motion proposed.

Mr. Chairman: We will now consider the financial paper as usual. The items will be taken from both current and capital estimates in the order for which the Hon. Minister is responsible.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Chairman...

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

Mr. Figueira: It is Mr. Figueira.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, sorry.

Mr. Figueira: Items 47-473, could the Hon. Minister...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, I was about to propose the items. I have to propose the items and then you could stand.

Mr. Figueira: Okay.

Current Expenditure

Item 1: 47-473 Ministry of Health – Family and Primary Health Care Services – \$1,283,250,000

Leader of the Opposition [Lt. Col. Ret'd Harmon]: Mr. Chairman, is the Office of the Prime Minister responding to these questions? Let me leave that.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, you have the floor.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Agency 47- 473, the Ministry of Health – Family and Primary Health Care Services, Chart of Account 6221; Description - Drugs and Medical Supplies. The revised Budget in 2020 was \$571,640,000. That was at the end of 2020. In 2021, there was a budget of \$1,101,268,000 voted for this item. I do not know how much was spent out of that, but

here the Minister is coming for another, more or less, \$1.3 billion for ‘Drugs and Medical Supplies’. The remarks here states:

“To facilitate payment of vaccines, vaccine supplies and vaccines rollout activities to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus nationally.”

Hon. Minister, could you tell us what vaccines are we talking about? What type of vaccines? I know that recently the Ministry had the Sputnik V vaccine coming in. Is it more Sputnik V vaccines? What is the quantity of the vaccines coming? For example, how many AstraZeneca, Sputnik V and Sinopharm vaccines and to which regions are they going? This is because anybody looking at a plan from the outside would say, well, I do not know where they are going, how many we have and what is the epistemological state of affairs. That is the first question; the type of vaccines, the quantity of vaccine and the regions where they are expected and, preferably, if you could give us how many first doses and second doses.

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, very much, Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings for the questions. The vaccines that we are currently using in Guyana are three types; the AstraZeneca vaccine which we got through COVID-19 Vaccines Global Access (COVAX). We have now bought the Sputnik V vaccine and we have also bought the Sinopharm vaccine. Initially, we got a donation of the Sinopharm vaccines from the Government of China and that was 20,000 doses. Now, we are buying 100,000 doses. So, those are the type of vaccines.

In terms of regional distribution of vaccines, what I could tell the Hon. Member is that we have looked at the adult population for each region. We have vaccines allocated for each of those regions. To date, as of the 13th June, in Region 1, we have completed vaccinating 9,684 persons. In Region 2, we have completed vaccinating 12,817 persons. In Region 3, we have completed vaccinating 31,495 persons. In Region 4, we have completed vaccinating 95,802 persons. In Region 5, we have complete vaccinating 15,766 persons. In Region 6, we have completed vaccinating 37,842 persons. In Region 7, we have completed vaccinating 5,279 persons. In Region 8, we have completed the vaccination of 2,061 persons. In Region 9, we have 6,712 persons who received their vaccination. In Region 10, we are at 3,538 persons. This is the first dose for all of the regions.

Dr. Cummings: You have said how many persons have been vaccinated. For instance, in Region 1, you said more than 9,000 persons. What is the figure we are looking at for the total number of persons to be vaccinated?

If everybody was to decide, okay if there are some incentives, we are coming and to get vaccinated. Do you have enough vaccines if they came? You told us more than 9,000 persons would have been vaccinated in Region 1, but how many should have been the total persons vaccinated had they come?

Dr. Anthony: In Region 1, we are targeting 18,016 persons. To date, with the numbers that I just gave, we would have completed 53.8% of that population, which means that we have 8,332 persons remaining to be vaccinated in Region 1.

In Region 2, we are targeting 30,505 persons and, of those, as I said, we have already vaccinated 12,817 persons, so we have 17,688 persons more to vaccinate in Region 2.

In Region 3, we are looking at 70,245 persons. To date, we have vaccinated 31,495 persons. We have 38,750 more persons to vaccinate. I could go on and read for all 10 regions.

Dr. Cummings: Could you lay it over?

Dr. Anthony: What?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, please. If you want to have a conversation with the Hon. Minister, we could allow you to go out.

Dr. Cumming: All right. Let him continue. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. If you want the Hon. Minister to layover the information, you could ask me to ask him, thank you.

Thank you, Hon. Minister. The Hon. Member says if you want you could lay that over.

3.06 p.m.

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, could he continue, he has started?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, please continue.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. In Region 4, we are targeting 203,046 persons. To date, we have completed vaccinating 95,802 persons. We have 107,244 persons remaining. In Region 5, we are looking at a population of 32,474 persons. We have completed vaccinating 15,767 persons. We have 16,707 persons remaining. In Region 6, we are targeting 71,459 persons. To date, we have vaccinated 37,842. We have remaining 33,617 persons. In Region 7, we are targeting 11,976 persons. We have already given 5,279 first dose and we have 6,697 remaining. In Region 8, we are looking at a population of 7,220 persons. To date, we have given out 2,061 vaccines and we have 5,158 vaccines remaining. In Region 9, we are targeting 15,798 persons. To date, we have given 6,712 vaccines and remaining would be 9,086. In Region 10, we are targeting 26,063 persons. To date, we have given 3,538 vaccines and we have 22,525 more persons in Region 10 to give vaccines. Just to say that we have procured vaccines for all adult persons in Guyana.

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, the Minister would have spoken about COVAX. We have partnered with COVAX, World Health Organization (WHO) and so forth and they are committed to providing about 30% of the vaccine doses, I think, throughout the different regions. Am I to believe that, out of what you have spent, the money expended here, you were assisted by COVAX with 30% of the cost of the vaccines? Am I correct?

Dr. Anthony: This line item does not take into consideration the donation that we received from COVAX. The COVAX has committed to deliver to countries and we are one of those countries. We are called an Advance Market Commitment (AMC) 90 country. They have committed to give us vaccines for 20% of our population. What we are seeking here in this allocation is to purchase vaccines and these are Sputnik V vaccines and Sinopharm vaccines. That is what we are seeking here. The sum of money that is allocated here is for 200,000 doses of Sputnik V vaccines and 100,000 doses of Sinopharm vaccines.

Dr. Cummings: The remarks here states that the money is also for ‘vaccine rollout activities’ to mitigate the spread of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19). As you know, the focus is on cold chain and cold chain logistics. The Ministry may have a good cold chain situation or infrastructure I should say in the urban area and in Georgetown. With there being this uptake in cases not only in Georgetown and on the coast, but also in the hinterland, what transformative change, taking into consideration the last mile distribution as it relates to cold chain, do you have in place?

Dr. Anthony: The cold chain that we have for vaccination was built for vaccines between 2-8°C. The vaccines that are necessary for COVID-19 ranges from -70 to 228°. Therefore, a significant component of that chain, which is the ultra-cold to the -20° was not available in Guyana. We have since built that. We have enough storage for vaccines that require -20° and we have storage for vaccines that require -70° or -80°.

We have been able, with the allocation given by this National Assembly, to build several hubs for vaccines. At the Kingston bond, we have a hub which has been augmented with the -20°. We have a walk-in freezer at Kingston with -20° capabilities. We also have 10 freezers at Kingston with -70° or -80° capabilities. We also have at the Materials Management Unit (MMU), Diamond a container there that is capable of storing at -20°. We also have a similar arrangement in Region 6, and we have re-purpose one of the freezers in Region 10 to have similar capacity. We have also, over the last several months, built more than 15 locations that could serve as regional hubs and we have equipped them to ensure that they have capabilities to take in vaccines. We have also, in addition to that, been running regular flights to all the different destinations using dry ice because some of the vaccines that we are using, to transport them requires that they be transported at -20°. To be able to have that type of temperature, we have bought the right containers to move those vaccines around, also, to make sure that we have a constant supply of dry ice when we are moving those vaccines around.

One could appreciate if he/she is moving vaccines, for example, from Lethem to Aishalton, and if one is going to vaccinate someone in Aishalton with Sputnik V, we have to use containers that would be equipped with dry ice to move the vaccines there and then we thaw it out to give those vaccines. We have been doing that right across the hinterland.

The logistics of moving vaccines, moving dry ice, supplementing the dry ice, are done on a daily basis with a number of partners which include the Guyana Defence Force (GDF) that has been helping us get dry ice to a lot of these locations. In some cases, we have been using some of the private aircrafts to get dry ice to those locations. The manufactures of dry ice locally are Banks DIH Limited and Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL). Every day we are purchasing dry ice from them to make sure that we have adequate supplies to take out these vaccines and keep them at the right temperature until we are able to give it to someone.

Yes, we have adequate cold chain from the top right down to the regional level. We use these containers to take out vaccines to any one of the villages that one could think. You would recall when we had a case where a team went into Gunn's Strip and they had to spend a longer time than was anticipated, more than three days. Because of the conditions of the landing strip, no plane could have gone in there to pick them up and because of that we had some spoilage of vaccines there. This was because we could not maintain the cold chain. We had to discard those vaccines.

These are the practical challenges that we face when we are rolling out this immunisation programme. Nevertheless, we have been able to make a lot of progress, I would say, with more than 44.3% or so nationally being vaccinated with first dose vaccines.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do not have any further questions, except to say I would like to have the list of the regional hubs and where they are located. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Member. Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have the floor.

Lt. Col. Ret'd Harmon: Hon. Minister, we understand that this is money that has already been spent. What I would like to find out from you is: What vaccines did we purchase, how many did we purchase and from whom were these purchases made? I asked questions. How many vaccines by type were purchased, what price did we pay for them and from whom did we purchase these vaccines? Those are the question.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, very much Hon. Harmon for the questions. As I said before, with this contingency, we have been able to purchase 200,000 doses of Sputnik V vaccines. We have also purchased 100,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccines. With the Sputnik V vaccine, we have been supplied through the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and through the offices of Mr. Ahmed Dalmook Al Maktoum. He has, through his offices, been supplying us with the Sputnik V vaccines. With the Sinopharm vaccines, the manufacturer of the vaccine has been supplying us with those vaccines. I think that would answer your questions.

Lt. Col. Ret'd Harmon: Hon. Minister, could you say what was the procurement method used to acquire these vaccines? You gave us a name there just now. Could you indicate to us what was the procurement method we used to purchase these vaccines?

Dr. Anthony: The method of procurement was direct sourcing. That was because, and I think everyone in this room should be aware, there is vaccine scarcity. Just to make it pellucidly clear, we have had discussions with the manufacturer of the Pfizer vaccine to try to acquire vaccines for Guyana. Unfortunately, as I have said before, the manufacturer of the Pfizer vaccine told us that they would not be able to give us vaccines until 2022. We have also had discussions with the manufacturer of the Moderna vaccine to try to source vaccines for Guyana. Similarly, we got a similar answer. Therefore, we would not be able to get the Moderna vaccine until 2022. We have also been engaged with the Johnson & Johnson company to be able to acquire vaccines from the Johnson & Johnson company. Again, we have not been able to conclude directly with the Johnson & Johnson company, but we are getting the Johnson & Johnson vaccines through a supplier.

In terms of the other vaccines now: the Sputnik V vaccines, we have been engaged directly with the Russian Sovereign Wealth Fund. Unfortunately, they have not been able to give us vaccines directly. They have sent us to suppliers. This is one of the suppliers who has been licenced by the Russian Direct Investment Fund to supply countries with vaccines. Therefore, if we wanted to have these vaccines, we had to go to the supplier. That is what we did. We got vaccines from the supplier.

3.21 p.m.

In the case of the Sinopharm vaccine, we have had discussions directly with the manufacturer of the Sinopharm vaccine. Out of those discussions, we have been able to acquire these 100,000 doses. In the next Financial Paper that we will be looking at, I would be able to talk about how we are sourcing the Johnson & Johnson vaccines. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has brokered an initiative with the African Union. Out of that initiative, the African Union has allocated to the Caribbean 1,500,000 doses, of which Guyana has been allocated about 148,000 doses. Most of that is going to be the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. At least that is what we are being told for now.

These things are still work-in-progress. As vaccines become available, we are trying to acquire them. This is where we are. Without acquiring these vaccines, we would not have been able to vaccinate our population at the level of 44.3%. Because of these vaccines, we have been able to do that. All we have to do is look around in the Caribbean and we would see that many of the

countries have not been able to acquire vaccines. They have been depending solely on COVAX and because of this, COVAX has not been able to supply them with the vaccines although there were many promises. If we had gone that route, today we would not have been able to vaccinate more than 10% of our population. *[Applause]*. Thank you so much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Leader of the Opposition, would you like to ask a supplemental question?

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Yes, Mr. Chairman. One last question. Mr. Chairman, could I ask the Hon. Minister what was the actual price per dose that we paid for the Sputnik V and Sinopharm vaccines?

Dr. Anthony: For the 200,000 doses of the Sputnik V vaccine, we paid \$957 million. For the 100,000 doses of the Sinopharm vaccines, we paid \$326 million, approximately.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, I saw you getting up.

Mr. Ramjattan: This sum of money, did it go towards any pharmaceuticals that are outside of vaccines for purposes of treatment?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much for that question. No, this is solely for vaccines. We have used the budgeted allocation that we had from the National Assembly to procure things like Remdesivir and so forth. That is not included here; this is solely for vaccines.

Mr. Figueira: Sir...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Figueira and then I see the Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley,

Mr. Figueira: Hon. Minister, could you inform the Committee what was the unit cost for each cycle procured under this sum? How many cycles were procured?

Dr. Anthony: What cycle?

Mr. Figueira: By cycle, I mean first batch, second batch. If I may, while I am on the floor, Sir – you have indicated that each region has a particular target for the adult population. What is it that informed you of the adult population for each respective region? What was used by the Ministry?

Dr. Anthony: I would leave the Hon. Member to do the unit cost. I have just, in my answer to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, gave the sum and the numerator and denominator. I think the Hon. Member would be able to calculate the cost.

There was something else. **[Bishop Edghill: (*Inaudible*)]** Oh. How did we arrive at the numbers? We were able to use the numbers that were provided by the Bureau of Statistics. We looked at the adult population, persons 18 years old and above. These vaccines that are currently available are only for persons 18 years old and above. We looked at each age cohort, calculated them and then did it by the regions to see how many persons approximately. That is why we have these numbers here.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: If I am correct, the Budget speech was read on 12th February, 2021. Could the Hon. Minister state whether he was aware of the COVID-19 pandemic on 12th February, 2021?

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, I think that I have to constrain myself, so I will take a couple of deep breaths. You know, we have persons who have mismanaged this pandemic from our ‘patient zero’ who we had on the 11th March, 2020, when we had the first patient. We have seen how, over that period, this whole pandemic was mismanaged. We did not have testing capability; we did not have medicines to treat people; and we did not have the ventilators. In fact, the hospital that was being prepared was totally unprepared with no equipment. Today, we are getting questions here about who was aware of the pandemic. If the Hon. Member does not know when this pandemic started in the world, perhaps, we can give her a lesson in history, but I am not here for that. I am here to answer on this line item for this Contingencies Fund.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I am guessing from that response that the Hon. Minister was aware of the pandemic on 12th February. Could the Hon. Minister state if he was aware that vaccines were produced and available to be purchased on 12th February, 2021?

Dr. Anthony: Again, perhaps I should ask the Member for a clarification. That is, could the Member explain to me, first of all before I could answer her question, what vaccine she is talking about? The COVID-19 vaccine is a big entity, could the Member please be more specific about which vaccine she is talking about. After the Member could explain that to me, maybe then I will proffer an answer.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I am asking the Hon. Minister of Health whether or not he was aware that COVID-19 vaccines, whether it be the Pfizer, Moderna, AstraZeneca, Sputnik V, Sinopharm or any others – because there are many more than those that we are mentioning – were produced and available to be purchased on 12th February, 2021?

Dr. Anthony: Again, we know that the Sputnik V vaccines were available and were given emergency use authorisation sometime in September, 2020. It was not widely available at the time; less than 10 countries in the world would have approved the use of the Sputnik V vaccine. The Sinopharm vaccine, in 2020, did not complete its third... *[Interruption]*

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Minister.

Dr. Anthony: The Sinopharm vaccine did not complete its third phase clinical trials. That was only completed about three or four months ago and then the WHO approved that particular vaccine. We have also seen emergency use authorisation being given to the AstraZeneca vaccine, which was sometime in late December. Those vaccines were not available for purchase because the majority of them were only available through the COVAX mechanism and for those countries that would have tied up some bilateral deals directly with some of the manufacturers. We were able then to acquire the AstraZeneca vaccine through a bilateral arrangement with the Government of India, which kindly donated to us 80,000 doses. We also were able to acquire the AstraZeneca vaccine through COVAX for which we have been negotiating with since 2020. We were part of that negotiation and that is why we have been able to get those vaccines free of cost. We continue to pursue those negotiations with COVAX. We have also looked at, as I have said before, both the Pfizer and Moderna vaccines. Those suppliers have said to us, very clearly, that they did not have vaccines to sell us because they had orders which exceeded what they were manufacturing. Therefore, we were unable to get those types of vaccines. For the Johnson & Johnson vaccine, which was recently approved, we have been making attempts to get it. As I have just explained, we have done so using the mechanism that CARICOM has initiated and, hopefully, we will be getting them through the African Union.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Minister of Health for clarifying that for us. I do not think that it was that difficult. Could the Hon. Minister state whether it was his intention on the 12th of February, 2021, to request or to make available to the public vaccines for use in Guyana?

Dr. Anthony: We know that vaccines are the safest way out of this pandemic. From very early, when we started looking at the development of vaccines, from the time they became available, the Government of Guyana started working on multiple mechanisms to acquire them. As they became available, we started issuing, through our Food and Drug Department (FDA), the emergency use authorisation for these vaccines. We have been working since then to make sure that we could have adequate vaccines come to Guyana. So far, we have been able to procure vaccines for every adult person in Guyana. We are working to make sure that, once vaccines are available for persons under 18 years old, mechanisms are in place to acquire them as well. We have been working on this and I am very happy that we have been able to acquire vaccines for our adult population.

What we need to do now Mr. Chairman is have every Member in this House assist us to make sure that every adult Guyanese take their vaccines. That is what is important because vaccines are available. What we need now is for people to take the vaccines. If we can get that support, where we go to every area and encourage people to take their vaccines, then we would be able to exit this pandemic very quickly. If we continue to be hesitant and we continue to send these ambivalent messages pertaining to vaccines, then it is going to cause more vaccine hesitancy.

3.36 p.m.

I want to appeal, again, to all the Members to make sure that we have a united stand and voice in encouraging people to take vaccines. Once we do that, Guyana would be much safer.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: It is all well and lovely for the Minister to stand and ask us to be involved when they refused to allow us to be on the task force. Maybe, he could answer that question. Why is it that they have not requested that the Opposition go on the task force, so that we will be better informed to speak with our people on the matter and not have to come to the National Assembly to ask?

Dr. Anthony: As far as I am aware, I can say there is Mr. Seeram, who is the Chairman for Region 4, on the National COVID-19 Task Force. If I am not mistaken, Mr. Seeram is a senior member of the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) and there are other such persons on the task force. All the information that APNU/AFC would need is being given to persons like Mr. Seeram who is on the national task force. There is nothing to hide. It is all there.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: This has to do with the price for this vaccine that we are paying. When I calculated it, it works out, Hon. Minister, to US\$16 per shot for the Sinovac and for the Sputnik V, it is about US\$24 per shot.

The report that I read from the World Health Organization (WHO), which is called *Sizing up the Shots*, lists these vaccines, that is to say that the Sputnik V at US\$10 a shot and the Sinovac at US\$5 per shot. Could you say whether in fact this is a reasonable price we have paid of US\$24 for the Sputnik V and US\$16 for the Sinovac in the circumstance? Thank you.

Dr. Anthony: I am very happy that the Leader of the Opposition has asked that question. If the Leader of the Opposition can, today, get Sputnik V for US\$10 and the Sinovac for US\$5, then the Government of Guyana would certainly want to buy from the source which the Leader of the Opposition would be able to get. The thing here is availability. If it is not available, then we have to buy at the price at which we are getting it. If my calculations are correct, it is about US\$22 and not US\$24. When we also look at the Sinopharm vaccine, and this includes the doses plus the transportation, and it goes for the same thing for the Sinopharm vaccines – doses plus the transportation. If you can get it at a better price, we will be willing to look at it because, as I said, we are all in this together and if we can negotiate better prices, we would be happy to work with you.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: It was never my intention to indicate to you that there is a cheaper source. What I am saying is that this is the World Health Organization saying these are the prices, and we are paying almost double what it has said. What you have now indicated, also, is that, apart from the vaccine itself, you are factoring in the cost of transportation from wherever you have purchased it to here. Hon. Minister, we need to know all these things. It is important for all of us to know. I am not saying that I have vaccines to sell, but what I am saying is as a Guyanese, we are here interrogating sums of money that have already been spent and so we need to know how this money was spent. That is all. Thank you.

Dr. Anthony: I do not think there is anything to respond to. I think it is a comment.

Mr. Mahipaul: If I may follow up on a question that Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley asked, reference participation, the Hon. Minister answered by saying that Mr. Daniel Seeram, Regional Chairman of Region 4, is on the national task force. I want to know if all Chairpersons of the 10

Regions are on the national task force and if they are representing their respective regions. That is one.

Secondly, is the Hon. Minister aware that the Hon. Dr Cummings, on numerous occasions, wrote requesting to be a part so that the Coalition could have information and understand what is happening with COVID-19 and the country, so that we can participate fully in making representation with reference to people taking the vaccines? That is two.

My third question is: of the three vaccines that are in Guyana, the AstraZeneca, Sputnik V and Sinopharm, are all three of these vaccines WHO approved?

Dr. Anthony: I think the composition of the task force, I would leave to the Hon. Prime Minister because he is the Chair of the task force. Nevertheless, the task force is a very broad-based body comprising a number of organisations and people could go there, make representation, learn what we are doing and so forth. I do not see a problem there.

What I find very disturbing is that, somehow, a nexus is being created that we cannot go out and talk to people about getting them vaccinated unless somehow, we are on the task force. You do not have to be a member of the task force to go and tell people to get vaccinated. You do not have to do that. Therefore, the appeal that we have been making is to make sure that every single Member of this House speaks with one voice and encourages people to get their vaccines.

The last question was about whether all of the vaccines that we are using are WHO approved. All of the vaccines have what is called emergency use listing by the WHO. AstraZeneca has been given WHO use listing and it has also been approved in several countries around the world. Sinopharm vaccines, about a month ago, received emergency use listing by the WHO and the Sputnik V vaccine is on the list to go through that process of finally being certified. It has not yet received the emergency use listing, but it is in the process of getting that. While that is so, when we look at the vaccines and the technical things pertaining to the vaccines, the results of the phase three trial for Sputnik V has been published in a very prestigious, global journal called the *Lancet*, and in that journal, it talks about the efficacy of the vaccine and the safety of the vaccine. Based on that, it is, at some point, going to be approved by the WHO.

I have been a member of the Executive of the WHO. Only recently, I came off that board. I have been privy to have been in several of the technical meetings dealing with vaccinations and I know that this one is going to be up soon for approval and for emergency use listing. We have been using it, based on its technical merits. In fact, there are many, many countries right now that are working to get Sputnik V because all of the clinical data are showing that it is an extremely good vaccine to have, and that is why we are using it.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I asked a number of questions that did not sound sensible at the time, but let me bring it all together. With the Hon. Minister's facetious response, I am guessing he is saying that he was aware that we had the COVID-19 pandemic on 12th February when the budget was read. He also responded in the affirmative that he knew that vaccines were available. He also responded in the affirmative that there was intention for the Government to bring vaccines to Guyana. As far as I am aware, we are dealing with contingency advances granted and the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA), Section 41 (3) – Contingencies Fund states:

“The Minister, when satisfied that an urgent, unavoidable and unforeseen need for expenditure has arisen...”

Given the fact that the Minister responded in the affirmative to all of these things, the question then begs, why is it that this money was not, firstly, in *Budget 2021*, and why is it that we are now coming for a contingency fund for this now?

Dr. Anthony: Apparently, the Hon. Member does not understand the section that deals with contingency. We just heard...and we are trying to make a case that, perhaps, we should not buy these vaccines.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, could I clarify?

Dr. Anthony: How could we have put it in the budget if we did not know the price that we were going to pay for it? How could we have put it in the budget if we did not know the source we would have gotten it from?

We want to make much out of nothing. We know that vaccines are good; we know that they are saving lives; we know that they have saved lives; and here it is, we have Members coming now trying to tell us that we should not be buying the vaccines. Is that what they are saying? Is that

what they are really implying? We have bought these vaccines and we have started...
[Interruption]

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel]

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley, do you have an issue? I see that you are standing.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Yes, I am.

Mr. Chairman: But if you stand, you will have to stand on a Point of Order, not to stand and wait to ask another question. Hon. Minister, you are still on the floor, sir.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We know that these vaccines save lives, and we are going to use them to save people's lives. As I keep saying, and I keep appealing to the Members on the other side, talk to people and let us get as many persons vaccinated as fast as possible. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I am not sure if we are in the same room, but no one here, on the Opposition side, is saying that vaccines should not be bought. No one here is saying that. That is not the premise of the question being asked. The reality is that we are dealing with budget. We are dealing with moneys, taxpayers' dollars, and they must be accountable for them. Mismanagement will not be tolerated in this House. If the Minister is aware that we have COVID-19, if the Minister had intentions of getting vaccines...On 12th February, I was aware of the cost of those vaccines, so that means that he should have been aware of that. That means it could have been budgeted in the 2021 Budget. Do not come and say that it is unforeseen. It is not unforeseen because we know there was covid.

3.51 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, what is the question?

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: The question, then, to the Hon. Minister is: if on 12th February, they had intentions of buying the vaccine, then why is it that they did not place it in the 2021 Budget?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I heard you make that statement. I give you another chance to respond.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you again, Mr. Chairman. Again, vaccines are important. We have been able to acquire these vaccines and we are using these vaccines. I heard the Member try to imply that, because we did not budget adequate sums of moneys under this heading, somehow that becomes mismanagement. That is not mismanagement. By no stretch of the imagination is that mismanagement. Therefore, the Member should think about what she is saying, because we need to have vaccines. At the time when we laid the budget, those vaccines were not available to us and the cost was not known to us. That is why, now that we know, and we have gone ahead and acquired these vaccines, we are coming now for this contingency. I hope that the Members would agree that these vaccines are important and in the national interest, and that they will support this contingency funding that we have here.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: I wish to ask the Hon. Member a question. Could the Hon. Member say whether there were shortages, in Europe and other parts of the world, of AstraZeneca and other vaccines in the month of February, 2021?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you so much for that question. Not only was there a shortage of AstraZeneca in Europe, but there was a shortage globally. Not only was there a shortage of AstraZeneca, but there was also a shortage of Pfizer, because many countries in Europe could not have accessed Pfizer. Up to now, many countries cannot get access to Moderna because it was produced for the domestic market in the United States of America (USA). The Sinopharm vaccines were very limited and were not available, and, as I said before, they were still doing clinical trials. While you now have Sinopharm and Sinovac, again, those vaccines were not widely available. Indeed, there was a shortage. There continues to be a shortage, because, as of a couple days ago, the WHO said that only two plus billion persons have received their first dose of vaccine, which is about 5.6% of the global population. There is a shortage because, if we had enough vaccines, more people would have gotten vaccinated by now. Unfortunately, that is not the case. If people do not get vaccinated, we are going to see more cases, we are going to see more hospitalisation, and we are going to see more deaths. That is why it is important that we ensure that our population get vaccinated. Again,

thank you very much for that question to illustrate the point of vaccine scarcity, globally. That continues to happen up to today.

Mr. Duncan: Mr. Chairman, on the same item on the agency, quite recently, when it was said by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and Dr. Carissa Etienne that there was a strain, a variant of the COVID-19, locally, the Hon. Minister said that he was not up to date. I had asked for a report on that. Has he received that report, and how in this regime of purchases is he catering for a new strain or a variant? Is there a new strain or a variant in the country? That is number one. How, in this regime of purchases, is he catering for that?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, before that, could I rise on a Point of Order? Standing Order 75 (2) deals with supplementary financial papers and the way in which the debate is carried on. Moving to variants, *et cetera*, has no place on the issue of a supplementary financial paper. I am asking you to invoke Standing Order 75 (2) with regards to the way in which the supplementary financial paper is being dealt with in this Committee.

Mr. Chairman: I note your observation, Hon. Minister. Hon. Minister of Health, please, you may proceed.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Variants have nothing to do with this subhead, but I would answer the Member, nevertheless. One, when the original strain of the virus from Wuhan started, we saw, over the last year or so, that there have been several mutations. Those mutations can lead to strains that are more infectious, and those strains can also cause more severe diseases. Some of them would also have the capability of undermining the immune response. There are strains that would have developed and have changed from that original one from Wuhan. In December, 2020, there was one that was called D614G which then became the dominant strain. Subsequently, we saw mutations that would have led to what was known as the United Kingdom (UK) variant or one that was discovered in the UK. There was one that was discovered in South Africa and one that was discovered in Brazil.

Now, to be able to determine what variants you have, one of the things you have to do is gene sequencing. We do not have the capability, in Guyana, to do gene sequencing. We had sent 10 samples to the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) to look at whether or not there are variants. Those 10 samples, when sent there, the results that we got back, officially from the

CARPHA to the Ministry of Health, did not detect any variant. We have subsequently learnt that there is talk of a P.1 variant that was found in Guyana, but we have not seen any results of that P.1 variant. Hence, when I spoke on the matter, I said that I did not have any results to show that there is a P.1 variant in Guyana. That is true. That is factual because we do not have any gene sequence to show that there is a P.1 variant.

It is not impossible for us to have variants here because we know that the dominant variants that were in Brazil were the P.1 and P.2 variants. Given the long borders we have, despite the measures that we have put in place, there can be a possibility that persons would have come over and things like that. We just do not know what the variants we have in Guyana are. What we can say, however, is that we are seeing an increase in cases; we are seeing hospitalisation; and we have seen an increase in deaths. All of these are proxy characteristics that can be attributed to the circulation of variants. That is not anything novel. If you look at what is happening in neighbouring countries... For example, we have seen what is happening in Suriname and we have seen what is happening in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, where there is an increase in cases, increase in severity, increase in hospitalisation, and an increase in deaths. These things, in a region, you would find them. There is nothing abnormal about strains replacing each other. As the variants become dominant, you will have different strains taking over. We have seen those evolutions happening in different countries, so it is just a matter of time.

Having said all of that, the treatment does not change, the public health measures do not change, wearing masks does not change, keeping distance does not change. In fact, what we have to do is be more vigilant. Getting the vaccine becomes more important if we are going to defeat these variants. The higher number in your population that is vaccinated, you can prevent variants from mutating in your country. We have seen that with the examples of countries that have high immunization rates. You are not seeing these types of evolutions of variants. Therefore, the logic is to make sure that we get as much of our population as possible vaccinated in the fastest time. If there is one take home message, I would want that to be the take home message.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, before I call on Mr. Duncan for his supplemental, I want to, again, draw your attention, as the Hon. Minister did, to 75 (2) with respect to the questions on the subhead and to refer also to the principal which is in question for answers, which is that the opinion of the Ministers should not be part of your questions. Hon. Member Mr. Duncan, proceed.

Mr. Duncan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I was only referring directly to the remarks in the section that states why you want the expenditure that you are requesting.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I did not mean to comment on what you said.

Mr. Duncan: I want to quote. It states:

“To facilitate payment of vaccines, vaccine supplies and vaccine roll out activities to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 virus nationally.”

One would think a natural part of that is variants and so forth, hence the question. I did not hear, in the response, whether or not the Hon. Minister would have gotten the response he wanted so as to bring himself up to date with whether or not there is an actual variant that is circulating locally, as part of that PAHO statement, and whether or not he has received that report, and the vaccine too. With that, I want to know how, in the Government’s thinking, in terms of vaccination and the efficacy of the vaccines... Recently, we learnt that, sadly, the Region 10 Vice Chairman passed and it was widely reported that he would have taken the first dose. Also, in the public domain – the Minister is asking us to go and tell people to be vaccinated – is news that persons have taken their second dose as well and have met their demise. I want to know if there is any evolution in the thinking of the Government, within the regime that we are seeking here, in terms of how the virus might be evolving and mutating and not being sufficiently addressed in the regime of vaccines you are offering.

Dr. Anthony: Let me say, first of all, regarding the first part of the Member’s question, I think the Hon. Member needs to bring himself up to date with a very technical matter as it relates to variants. It is obvious that the Member does not understand variants, and I do not have ... I would be willing to have a session in this National Assembly for Members of Parliament (MPs) to talk about variants. I would be willing to do that, but I do not think that this is the session. That is the first thing.

4.06 p.m.

I can stand here and talk for the next two hours about variants, but I do not think you will want to hear that.

Let me go to the second part of the Hon. Member's question which I think is very important. The Hon. Member said some persons who took the vaccine have gotten sick and, in one instance that we know of, that person died. When you have your first dose of the vaccine, it does not mean that the vaccine automatically starts working. It starts working but you would not reach the level of immunity the first second after you have gotten the vaccine. It takes time for your immune system to produce antibodies and for you to have enough in your body to be able to fight off the virus. In many cases, it takes between 14 to 21 days after the first dose for you to have enough antibodies in your system to fight off any virus. Hence, at that point in time or sometime a little bit later, you are given a booster shot – the second dose.

People can still get sick if they do not maintain the wearing of a mask and if they are not keeping their social distance. We have, on umpteen occasions, repeated this to get people to understand that after the first dose of the vaccine, they are not immunized. You have to get both doses of the vaccines. We have not seen... Just to correct the Hon. Member... We tend to be a little glib in how we pass off certain misinformation; we heard a bit of that just now. I would want to say that it was unintentional. I want to make sure that everybody understands that since we have been vaccinating people in Guyana, no one who has received both doses of their vaccine, meaning who has been fully vaccinated or fully immunized, has died. I just want that to sink in.

Secondly, for persons who have received their second dose of the vaccine, there is a small chance that they can get infected. If they get infected, they probably would be asymptomatic or mildly symptomatic. Since we have been giving out vaccines and people have been fully immunized, we have not had a case where any fully immunised person came into the hospital, ended up in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) or died from COVID-19. I think that is very important for the population to know.

Please let us work together to make sure that we keep our population safe, and the only way we can do that is to make sure that everybody is fully vaccinated. Thank you.

Mr. Holder: I think that taking the vaccine is important, but the public has legitimate concerns about taking the vaccine, and so we must ask these important questions here. The Minister said, essentially, that his Government was on the ball and was checking around for vaccines as early as 2020, as they became available. Yet, availability seems to be the only factor that guided their

decision in purchasing the Sputnik V and the Sinopharm. My question to the Minister is, were there any other factors or criteria considered when making a decision to purchase the Sputnik V and the Sinopharm vaccines? You spoke about the efficacy of the Sputnik V but, Sir, many countries in Europe are still not using the Sputnik V vaccine. Countries such as Switzerland have experienced problems with the type of vaccine they used for the older persons as against what they used for the younger folks. I believe right now they are using the Moderna vaccine for the older persons and the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine for the younger generation. Again, I am asking if availability was the only factor your Government considered or were there other factors like blood clots and other things that might be associated with the vaccine. *[Interruption]*

[Mr. Chairman hit the gavel]

Dr. Anthony: Obviously, it is not only about availability. That would be one of the considerations, but we do have a national vaccine committee. There are technical people on that committee, including a number of experts who understand vaccines, the types of vaccines and a whole host of other things. That national committee would have gone through all the available vaccines and made recommendations, and based on those recommendations, that is how they would have issued those emergency use authorisations for vaccines that could work in Guyana. It was not an *ad hoc* process. It was a very well thought out scientific process, based on all the evidence that we have about the vaccines, including efficacy, safety, side effects and a whole host of other things. Again, we can go through the advantages and disadvantages of each one of those vaccines.

The Hon. Member also spoke about the types of vaccines. He started by talking about the Sputnik V vaccine not being currently available in the European Union (EU). That might be true because application has now been made to the regulatory body of the European Union for Sputnik V, and they are now going through a process for approval. The Hon. Member should also know that plants to manufacture the Sputnik V vaccine are being established in Italy and Germany. In these two European countries, they have gone ahead to set up manufacturing sites for the Sputnik V vaccine. In terms of the efficacy, if the Hon. Member would look at the articles from *Lancet*, he would notice that the efficacy of the vaccine is quoted as 92.3% or something like that. Countries having used the Sputnik V vaccine now in the field, the real-life data is closer to 97% efficacy, once you have your two doses. In terms of efficacy, it is one of the best vaccines there is globally.

The Hon. Member also spoke about Switzerland not using vaccines because of clotting. That can be attributed not to the Sputnik V vaccine, but there have been issues with the AstraZeneca vaccines, which led several countries to suspend or to put a pause on the use of these vaccines until they did proper investigations into these things. What was the issue? Perhaps, for one in every million persons, you would find that somebody might have some clotting issue. When Europe stopped using the vaccine or at least put a pause to it, it was because they had about 16 cases or so of clotting. They have since investigated those cases and issued guidance on how to use those vaccines. For example, that is why in the United Kingdom (UK) they do not recommend that the younger age group in their population use it. It is because when they looked at the profile, they said it is better to use these vaccines in the older age group.

So, different countries have looked at this and have come up with different answers to what they going to do in their country. We have been using the AstraZeneca vaccine that has been certified by the WHO and that was donated through the COVID-19 Global Access (COVAX) Facility to us here in Guyana. Since we have started using those vaccines – that were the first set of vaccines we got – we have not had problems with clotting. We do have a pharmacovigilance committee that is monitoring for those things. We did not have any cases of clotting. I want to put that on the table so that everyone is very clear about it. We continue to use the AstraZeneca vaccine and we have not had any adverse side effects with this vaccine. I want to differentiate between adverse events and side effects. The side effects are when you get the vaccine you would get little pain at the site of the vaccine, or you would get a little fever or nausea after the vaccine. We have had people with those, but we have not had any adverse events like clotting. We have been monitoring for that.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, I have the Opposition Chief Whip quite a while with his hands up. Hon. Member Mr. Jones, proceed. While we wait for the Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, the Hon. Member, Mr. Shurwayne Holder, has a supplemental question.

Mr. Holder: Over the last few months, we have seen a real spike in COVID-19 deaths and persons contracting the COVID-19 virus. Could I ask the Minister what he believes is the reason for that spike? That is one. Secondly, he mentioned a task force, in his answer to my question just now. I would like to ask him what the task force's composition is and could the assessment that he spoke of be provided, as that will certainly assist us...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let me draw your attention to something. The Hon. Minister is answering for the Ministry of Health on the purchase of vaccines. So, let us stay with that. He has already said that with respect to the task force, the Hon. Prime Minister can receive questions for that somewhere else and in some other format.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My next question is: how many Sputnik V vaccine first doses have been bought and how many second doses have been bought?

Dr. Anthony: In this particular allocation, we are talking about 200,000 doses of vaccines, which would be 100,000 of component one and 100,000 of component two. The others would be the Sinopharm vaccines.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Let me just try to see if the Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, is accessible. The Informational Technology (IT) persons...the Hon. Member, Mr. Christopher Jones.

4.21 p.m.

Hon. Member, Mr. Holder, do you have a supplemental question?

Mr. Holder: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I do. The Minister did not answer the first question which is: what is causing the spike in deaths and the contracting of the virus?

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, there are a number of things that relate to disease dynamics, which include the type of virus that is circulating, people's behaviour and whether or not people are complying with what they are supposed to be doing. They are literally several factors that we could put together, and we could see how those are contributing to the increase in cases. We could give and provide all the information that you want pertaining to how one must behave, but if people do not modify their behaviour, then they are putting themselves at risk for infection.

If people are going into environments without masks, then they are putting themselves at risk for infection. We have seen that type of behaviour in our society and, somehow, we act as if we are very surprised when the cases are going up. Those cases are going up because people have not been practicing what they ought to be doing, which is wearing masks, keeping their distance and taking the vaccine. If people do these things, we will start to see a decline in cases. For example,

in the United States of America (USA), we have seen a substantial portion of the population vaccinated and big drop in active cases, hospitalisation and deaths.

If you go to Israel, where a high portion of the population has been immunised, it is very similar with the drop in cases, hospitalisation and deaths. We have, within our hands, the means of doing that. We have the vaccines and so we are able to do that. What we need now is to make sure that we get people to take these vaccines. There are communities that have been resistant, and I am sure that if we could all act, say the same things together and reinforce the same things, then we would see a difference in those communities. When we have one set of persons promoting a vaccine and another set trying to disparage the vaccine or trying to come up with misinformation, it is not going to work. We all have to be in this together. Unless we meet herd immunity, none of us would be safe; that is what we have to work towards. This is a national task to work towards getting to herd immunity, and once we get there, we could then relax the measures and so forth.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Holder, do you have a supplemental question?

Mr. Holder: Yes, I do.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, we have been exhausting and repeating ourselves on this question. I have been extremely tolerant with some of the questions. I still have, for first question, the Opposition Chief Whip and the Opposition Member, Ms. Maureen Philadelphia. Go head, Mr. Holder.

Mr. Holder: These questions are legitimate questions. They are questions being asked by the public on a daily basis. The Minister just gave the reason he believes there is a spike, which is, among other things, the behaviour of the people in society. When he says the people – I do not think that I am quoting him directly – but is it the behaviour of Government officials or the behaviour of the populace? In a nutshell, what has changed from the 2nd of August to cause the spike in the contraction of COVID-19 and deaths?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, before you answer that question, if you want to answer that question, Hon. Member, we are dealing with the policy with respect to this particular allocation for vaccines, and what you are asking for is, in my view, something else. Hon. Minister, please.

Dr. Anthony: If the Hon. Member lays over his question, I would be happy to answer him. I would give him a very detailed analysis and report.

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

Mr. Jones: Cde Speaker, my question has passed already. So, it is fine. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Chief Whip. Our best wishes for your speedy return. Hon. Member, Ms. Philadelphia.

Ms. Philadelphia: My question was asked by the Hon. Shurwayne Holder. Thank you.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Minister say how many vaccines were thrown away because of expiration?

Mr. Chairman: Again, Hon. Members, this is another question that was asked before. One would have asked how many vaccines, if [*inaudible*] from this batch.

Dr. Anthony: It is a simple answer. None.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Minister say how many persons are due for their second dose of Sputnik V, and if it is unavailable for them to get it?

Dr. Anthony: As the Hon. Member should know, we have publicly stated that we do have... [**Mr.**

Mahipaul: I would not know; I do not listen [*inaudible*]]. Well, you should because, if you were listening to us, you would have learnt that.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, please, go ahead with the answer.

Dr. Anthony: Again, the Hon. Member should know that we have put out a public statement to say that we had a delay in supply of the second dose of Sputnik V. However, the second dose of Sputnik V could be taken from four to 12 weeks. The latest guidance that we have from the Gamaleya Institute states the longer you wait, it would increase the durability of your immune response. Within this four to 12-week period, if you receive the second dose, you would be fine. We are working to get the second dose supply in, and as soon as we receive it, we would make the announcement, so that everyone who received their first dose, would be able to receive their second dose.

Mr. Mahipaul: The remarks column of this request – well, the money has already been spent, so this is just for ratification – states that it is to facilitate payment of vaccine, vaccine supply and vaccine roll out activities. Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate this sum so that we would be able to know how much money is for the payment of vaccines, how much for the vaccine supplies and how much for the vaccine roll out activities?

Mr. Chairman: Again, Hon. Members, I would like to draw your attention to the Standing Orders with respect to repetition.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, let him answer it.

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, they say that repetition is probably the best way to get someone to learn. I would just repeat for the Members... [**Mr. Mahipaul:** We did not hear you, Frank.] When I answered the Leader of the Opposition, I said to him that, under this heading, we are doing two things. We are paying \$957 million for 200,000 doses of Sputnik V and we are also paying \$326 million for 100,000 doses of Sinopharm vaccines. I have answered that several times already.

Mr. Mahipaul: I hear the Hon. Minister with his answer pertaining to how much money he is spending for the two vaccines, but there are two other considerations, which are vaccine supply – I am assuming that means moving it around – and vaccine roll out activities which may speak to the resources that would have to be used, the buying of ice and all the other stuff. So, I am asking for the breakdown of the three activities the Hon. Minister spoke to in this remarks' column. All the Hon. Minister did was answer the one aspect of telling us how much he is spending to purchase vaccines. I would like to know about the other two activities.

Dr. Anthony: It looks like we are engaged in going around in circles here. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** *[inaudible]*] Well, you had a long preamble. I would do one too.

Again, the Hon. Member keeps repeating himself and keeps trying to make a whole set of issues where none exists. If the heading is giving you several things, but I have said to you that we have used the money to buy vaccines and I have shown you how much money we have spent on the vaccines, it would mean that whatever categories he has conjured up in his head, they are zero. We are paying for the vaccines and this is the sum. If he would care to add it up, he would see that it would come back to the amount that we have spent. That is it.

Mr. Sears: With regard to clinical trials, the Hon. Member mentioned earlier that the Sputnik V vaccine was not approved by the WHO. If that is the case, could the Hon. Minister state in this Committee if any Guyanese is currently taking part in any clinical trial and is any person taking the Sputnik V a part of such a trial?

Dr. Anthony: Before vaccines become available, they have to undergo rigid clinical trials. There are three phases and none of those phases for Sputnik V has been done in Guyana or, for that matter, for any vaccine. Before we bought the Sputnik V vaccines, they had completed those clinical trials. The journal that I mentioned, if the Hon. Member would care to read it, he would see that the results of those clinical trials are published in the *Lancet*. So, those trials were not conducted in Guyana.

Mr. Sears: My final question to the Hon. Member: most recently, we would have heard that the United States of America, through President Joe Biden, might be entertaining the thought of releasing the patents for COVID-19 vaccines that were produced in the United States.

4.36 p.m.

Given the fact that Guyana is spending so much money on vaccines, does the Government have any intention of, should those patents be released, developing vaccines of our own?

Dr. Anthony: I want to, first of all, commend the Government of the United States of America for supporting the call to make sure that the patents are released so that vaccines could become available globally. What that would do is ramp up the supplies so that, globally, we could have enough. If those patents are successful, they would go to countries that already have capacity to be able to develop these vaccines as quickly as possible. I would wish today that we could have capacity in Guyana to have our own pharmaceutical section or industry and where we could, at some point, develop vaccines too. We are not there yet. To put that infrastructure in place would require a lot of money.

Right now, what we are in is a pandemic. There is an urgency for us to get vaccines as quickly as possible and immunize people. What the Hon. Member is probably talking about is more of a medium to a long-term plan. We are not there yet. For our immediate purposes of reversing the effects of this pandemic, what we need to do is acquire the vaccines and make sure that we give

them to people. Once we do that, I think we will be able to reach herd immunity and exit this pandemic.

Mr. Mahipaul: It pains me to come back to this same part because I really want to get this over with quickly. When you add the two figures, you get the \$1,283,000,000 but the legend is telling us that it is to facilitate payment of vaccines and vaccine roll-out activities. When you add them, there is no sum here that caters for vaccine roll-out activities. Could I ask the Hon. Minister what are the vaccine roll-out activities that he spoke to from this line item?

Dr. Anthony: Again, I thought by repeating myself the Hon. Member would have at least grasped something. Obviously, the Hon. Member, perhaps, does not understand how the budget works. If he would look at the provision there, he would see that under line item 6221, there was a voted provision, meaning there was money there before. Those moneys plus the additional would give you what you are trying to seek to find. With the moneys that we have spent and this contingency that we are asking for, we are buying vaccines. For the other things, we have used the voted provision to do that.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we have really exhausted the questions here, but I really want to thank the Members who asked questions and the Hon. Minister for the much-needed information with respect to vaccines and this programme.

Item 1: 47-473 Ministry of Health – Family and Primary Health Care Services - \$1,283,250,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 2: 51 – 512 – Ministry of Home Affairs - Guyana Police Force - \$5,400,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Through you, Mr. Chairman, one of the largest budgets was passed a mere couple of weeks ago. Three hundred million dollars was allocated for the purchase of land and water transport for the Guyana Police Force (GPF). According to the legend, this allocation catered for the purchase of motorcycles. An advance of \$5.4 million was taken from the Contingencies Fund for the purchase of motorcycles. This is against the backdrop that this advance was taken between the period April and June, a mere matter of weeks after the budget was passed.

May I ask, how many motorcycles were purchased, the type, the make, the manufacturer and the cubic capacity (CC) of the motorcycles?

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: I would like to thank the Hon. Member for her question. The Guyana Police Force, through the Ministry, purchased 21 motorcycles to boost the Guyana Police Force's anti-crime fighting capabilities. Of the 21 motorcycles purchased, 12 of them were 150 CC, and they were funded from the Contingencies Fund at the cost of \$5.4 million. The remaining nine motorcycles, eight of them were 150 CC at a cost of \$3.6 million, and one 125 CC at a cost of \$302,000, giving a total of \$3.9 million which was funded by the Guyana Police Force's capital budget.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Through you again, Sir, could the Hon. Minister state what was the process used to tender for these motorcycles?

Mr. Benn: The sole source method of procurement was used for the purchase of these motorcycles.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: The Hon. Minister mentioned that the motorcycles were sourced through sole sourcing. Could the Hon. Minister, and it is for emphasis that I am asking ... For those of you who are making a lot of noise and are not allowing me to ask my question...It is our right for all of us on this side to ask questions. We believe in transparency. All of you who are making noise over there, it means that you have a lot of things to hide. It is our right, on this side, to ask questions.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, the Chairman is not denying you any right to ask any question. So, please ask the question and do not lecture me.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Could the Hon. Minister please, therefore, state when the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) was approached for approval and when Cabinet granted its No-Objection to this contract?

Mr. Benn: I do not have that information at the moment, but I will lay it over for purposes of the...

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Could the Minister commit to a timeline or a deadline for the submission of this information?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, do you want to give a commitment or a timeline?

Mr. Benn: I will give a commitment for Thursday when next we meet.

Mr. Chairman: Are we meeting on Thursday, Hon. Minister?

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Could the Hon. Minister state the regions or Divisions that benefitted from the purchase of these motorcycles?

Mr. Benn: The 4A Georgetown region was the Police Division which benefitted from the majority of these motorcycles.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: In the legend it is stated that the motorcycles were purchased for anti-crime patrol. Could the Minister state what studies or statistics were relied on to arrive at placing the motorcycles at the location he just mentioned?

Mr. Benn: The studies relate to the occurrences of crime and the types of crimes in the city, region, and area 4A particularly. Most of us might be aware that many crimes have been committed by the use of what are called XR motorcycles. In addition, we had situations where we had a deficit in pick-ups for the Guyana Police Force. We are still awaiting the delivery of those pick-ups. The quickest resort and the most efficacious response to the problem, which is on-going, was the purchase of more motorcycles. I would add that the result has been, so far, a 26% reduction in serious crimes overall in the country, much of it as a result of the institution of these patrols.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: If I am hearing the Hon. Minister correctly, is he saying that there is a reduction in crime and yet he is purchasing more motorcycles for anti-crime patrol? If the Hon. Minister is purchasing more vehicles for anti-crime patrol, this gives the impression that there is an upsurge in crime. Could the Hon. Minister make whatever statistics he is relying on available to us and the public?

Mr. Benn: Despite a perception that is out there and perhaps been fed by certain persons, there is a reduction in serious crimes in Guyana, compared year-to-date as of now, and I will provide those figures when we next meet.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. Minister, are you saying that when we next meet on Thursday, which I am now hearing for the first time, you are going to lay over those statistics which prove that there has been a reduction in serious crimes?

Mr. Benn: Yes, I will.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: In addition to the purchase of motorcycles, could the Hon. Minister state what are the Government's plans or strategies to tackle crime? You, most Hon. Minister, are saying that crime has reduced, but given what is in the public domain, we are of the view that there is an upsurge in crime. Could the Hon. Minister state what steps are being taken to prevent the escalation in crime? Could the Hon. Minister explain the Government's long-term policy to address the rising crime level in our country?

Mr. Chairman: Before you go on, Hon. Minister, I want to say to the Hon. Member that this particular question – the Government's long-term strategy for crime – cannot be covered in \$5.4 million, so that might be best for another written question to the Minister. [**An Hon. Member:** *[Inaudible]*] Yes, it is my place, Hon. Member.

The question has to pertain to this amount here. If you ask this question in a different way, I would say yes. Hon. Minister, please go ahead.

4.51 p.m.

Mr. Benn: The effort, as I had suggested previously, was that there was a deficit in pick-ups, and we are awaiting the acquisition of those pick-ups. In the meantime, the resort was to buy motorcycles, which had a quick response to the particular type of crime that we are seeing happening at the moment. That is what we are doing. In relation to the issues suggested in relation to policy, *et cetera*, I will await the questions of the Hon. Member or Members when they appear.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: I was really looking forward to hearing the Minister address this question in terms of what the Government's policies, strategies and plans are to deal with this issue. Is it that you plan to buy more vehicles? But I respect your ruling. Could the Hon. Minister say if with the purchase of these motorcycles, there is an increase in the cost for fuel and lubricants?

Mr. Benn: In a fairly general way, I would say that we can correlate a reduction in the costs and the buying of more fuel and lubricants for the Guyana Police Force. However, we are still examining some issues relating to the misuse of fuel and lubricants, amongst other things, in the force.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Could the Hon. Minister tell this Committee what was unforeseen, unavoidable, and urgent about this expenditure? Could you also state what arrangements are in place to negate future shortfalls?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I have to admit that what was unforeseen, at least for us coming into Government and coming into the Ministry, is the serious deficit in the mobile assets of the Guyana Police Force. We had to respond to it by getting more mobile assets to make up for that deficit.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. Minister, if I am hearing you correctly, are you saying that, albeit two budgets were passed by this Government, this is still considered an unforeseen, urgent expense? It is either yes or no, Hon. Minister.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I gave an explanation as to coming into the position where there was a serious deficit in mobile and other assets, and resources required by the forces. We are responding to this. We have not completely covered all the dynamics related to it. Along with the particular mobile assets, there are questions in relation to some of the factories which had to produce or deliver some of the mobile assets in a timely fashion.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. Minister, you are saying there is a deficit. This does not qualify as an unforeseen expenditure. You have had the opportunity to prepare for two successive budgets. On that note, I wish to draw the Hon. Minister's attention to article 220 of the Constitution, which outlines the condition that would allow one to spend from the Contingencies Fund. If you wish, I can layover article 220 to you. I would also like to draw the Hon. Minister's attention to article 218, which outlines the condition...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I would like to draw your attention to the question you would like to ask.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: I am going to ask the question, Sir. I have listened to the Hon. Member's explanation, and I am asking him whether he is aware, by his utterances, that he is clearly in breach

of the Constitution in relation to these expenditures. That is why I am prepared to layover article 220 to you because, clearly, you have not satisfied this test.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister, are you aware of this?

Mr. Benn: No, Mr. Chairman. I am not aware that I am in breach of the Constitution.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Through the Chairman, is the Hon. Minister accepting that he is in breach of article 220 of the Constitution?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, are you accepting that you are in breach of the Constitution?

Mr. Benn: No, Mr. Chairman. I think that the Hon. Member is a lawyer. She could not have attempted this better to have me accept something...

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Minister.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. Minister, you are maintaining that this is an unforeseen... you have not satisfied or laid out your case that this is an unforeseen expenditure. I am putting it to you that you are in breach...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, the Minister has answered. You can put all you want in more questions to the Minister through the other format. At this stage, I would like to call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: Through the Chairman, with respect to the procurement method, could the Hon. Member state the reasons for the sole sourcing? Secondly, who is the supplier from which these motorcycles are to be procured?

Mr. Benn: The sole source method of procurement was premised on the fact that the majority of motorcycles used by the Guyana Police Force are Hondas. In Guyana, this type of motorcycle is supplied by Marics and Company Limited, on Charlotte Street, I think. The motorcycles were readily available. We got them within a few days, and we put them out into the streets to fight crime.

Item 2: 51 – 512 – Ministry of Home Affairs - Guyana Police Force - \$5,400,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 3: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – \$618,125,000

Mr. Mahipaul: I rise to ask if it is possible for us to take the break and return to consider this head, in light of the time.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, we will complete this paper and then we shall take the break.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Chairman, the sum of \$618 million to facilitate the advance payment for an Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV). Could the Hon. Minister indicate how the purchase of this item become urgent, how it become unavoidable and why it was unforeseen in the circumstances?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, it is with pleasure that I answer the question. The Hon. Member has had a long association with security. Therefore, I assume he may be familiar with what is unavoidable and unforeseen many times in security matters. However, in this case, Guyana, as he would remember, has a territorial issue with our neighbours in the matter at the International Court of Justice (ICJ). We also have one vessel – the Essequibo – that has not been doing well and is old. Therefore, to protect our waters, the decision to acquire an Offshore Patrol Vessel – a new one, not a second-hand one but a new one – was thought to be an urgent matter. I am sure the Hon. Member is familiar with some incursions that have taken place in our waters. This is not a boat to deal with inland travel. It is a boat to go out to the exclusive economic zone (EEZ). In case Mr. Duncan knows that we can take him there. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** It is the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan.]

Yes, the Hon. Member. Yes, we know that it is the Hon. Member. We have a border issue, we have our waters and there were incursions, we have one old vessel and therefore the decision was taken that one should acquire a new one. If my memory is correct, it is the first time that Guyana, as a nation since independence, is buying a brand-new patrol vessel. [**An Hon. Member:** *[Inaudible]*] The first time. We have always dealt with gifts and second-hand. This is the first time we are buying a brand-new vessel. Mr. Harmon may be interested to know that...

Mr. Chairman: The Hon. Member, Mr. Harmon.

Ms. Teixeira: ...it came after a number of consultations with reputable ship builders and the final decision with one of the ship builders to procure the Offshore Patrol Vessel. The company is Metal Shark. I am sure Mr. Harmon is familiar with Metal Shark boats. The boat had been acquired in terms of the agreement of the Government to purchase it and it is being constructed. We have made the first payment and we will continue to pay, as is in the agreement until 2022, since the vessel will take about a year to be constructed and delivered.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Chairman, I am particularly disturbed at the way in which we are dealing with the security of our State, and the fact that we are going to make a decision to purchase a major asset and it now comes as part of a Contingencies Fund. This has to be carefully planned. This is really ridiculous. The question I want to ask is: when was the decision made to purchase this Offshore Patrol Vessel?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, please forgive me. I am amused because I remember, in the last Parliament, questioning Mr. Harmon, as he is questioning me, with regard to... [**Mr. Mahipaul:** It is the Hon. Member, Mr. Harmon.] According to the Standing Orders, Mr. Harmon is fine. Mr. Chairman... [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** *[Inaudible]*] That is why we are up here on these desks. This is allowed. Mr. Chairman, could I have your protection please? I heard the Hon. Member, Chandan-Edmond, ask for it and you gave it to her.

Mr. Chairman: Kindly continue, Hon. Minister.

5.06 p.m.

Ms. Teixeira: I ask for the same respect. I want to remind the Hon. Member about the last Parliament. I listened to my Friend speak and I had to smile to myself because I remembered, vividly, my questioning of the same Hon. Member with regards to the purchase of a certain of a number of aircraft, which was over \$700 million plus \$400 million, of which one never worked at all and is still not working up to now.

Secondly, the other plane that came had to go through huge investments by the Cabinet to acquire more parts to fix it. So, if I am going by Hon. Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon Government's expertise in dealing with old equipment, this Government has recognised that the Essequibo vessel has served Guyana well. The Essequibo vessel had served Guyana well but...

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, I stand on a Point of Order.

Ms. Teixeira: But, Mr. Chairman, we need to acquire a new vessel and I am still answering the question which was asked by Mr. Harmon.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, Mr. Mahipaul has risen on a Point of Order. Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, you have the floor.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, Standing Order No. 41(5). The Hon. Member keeps referring to and saying Mr. Harmon. The Standing Orders guides us, Sir. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Let me just refer to Standing Orders No. 41(5):

“Contents of Speeches”

“(5)A Member shall be referred to in the Assembly either with the title ‘Comrade’ before his or her surname or official designation or as the ‘Honourable Member Mr./Ms.”

Thank you, Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul. So, Hon. Minister, please [*inaudible*].

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, I corrected myself when you corrected me. I do not need to be corrected again.

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

Mr. Teixeira: When we consider the Auditor General’s report in the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), I am sure it will help us to answer why Guyana bought such an old, dilapidated, second-hand, junk aircraft. But, in this case, we have had negotiations with five reputable shipbuilders. Maybe the Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon may or may not be familiar with them. They are the OCEA Shipbuilders; Damen Shipyard builder; Gravois Aluminium Boats; Limited Liability Company (LLC), which is formerly known as Metal Shark Boats; the Israel Shipyards; and the COTECMAR Shipbuilder. Having gone to all of these to find what we were looking for, the decision was made to procure the vessel offered by the Metal Shark Boats.

I think we, as Guyanese, should be proud that we will be building the capacity of our Coast Guard unit and that we are proud to develop the capacity of our Coast Guard unit, so that if there are incursions in our waters, we will be better able to take care of ourselves.

It is not just about the borders. It is about piracy and illegal fishing and so on. Certainly, this House must have concerns about our capacity to take care of or protect our territorial and maritime waters and surroundings. For this boat, there is an agreement and there is an arrangement of the payment schedule. This is the payment of \$618 million that was made on the 20th May, 2021. It is unforeseen, but it is urgent. It is required because the alternative is that Guyana would have no vessel, whatsoever, in our waters. That would be reprehensible. Do you not think so as Members of Parliament?

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Chairman, I think the Hon. Minister went on what I would call a frolic of her own because the equipment that we purchased, they were purchase under the Budget. They were not brought as a contingency. First, I want to make that very clear.

Secondly, the Hon. Minister speaks about the GDFS Essequibo Vessel. The Hon. Minister would know that vessel was acquired under the PPP/C Regime, under your time, and we got the step going. I am not going to argue about that.

What I would like to find out... because you are saying Mdm. Minister that this offshore patrol vessel is going to deal with piracy, it is going to deal with the Venezuelan threat and that it is going to deal with I do not know whatever else you are talking about. But, an offshore patrol vessel has a specific pass and specific use. What I would like to find out is: What is the specific use to which this vessel is going to be put? Again, I ask the question: When was the decision made to acquire this vessel? The Hon. Minister did not answer that question.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, I am sure that you are aware of what are security issues and about what, usually, are not discussed in this House. These are the Defence Board decisions, and the Constitution and our Standing Orders make provisions for that.

Secondly, it is a Defence Board decision to acquire to vessel. Thirdly, the purposes of the vessel, I cannot disclose for obvious reasons. I never said that the one vessel would do all those things. I said it would be enhancing the capacity of the Coast Guard unit of our country to be able to protect our waters and to fight against piracy and illegal 'things'. Maybe you should listen more carefully Hon. Member.

I am sure Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon knows what an offshore patrol vessel is. The Hon. Member knows all of that. However, I am not going to disclose, at this forum, the use of the vessel. This is part of the Coast Guard unit and, therefore, it has work to do according to the protection and the security of our nation. That is as far as I would go.

In relation to the point the Hon. Member made to do with the aeroplanes. I want to remind him that it was a supplementary Order paper that came to the House. I would go and bring it to him, but of course, I would not bring it now. It was not part of a budget of the National Assembly or an annual budget. So, I think, as Guyanese, we should be pleased that we are upping and upgrading our capacity as a country and enhancing the ability of our Coast Guard unit to do what is its mandate. We should support this 100%, Sir.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: The sum of money here has already been paid. We would need to know to whom this money was paid and whether, in fact, there is a larger sum. This is an advance. What we would need to know is the full sum to be paid for this vessel and to whom this \$618 million was paid?

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Sir. As I said in the very beginning, there is a contract and a payment schedule. There are six payment schedules. The sum of \$618 million represents the first payment that was paid in May, 2021. The first payment was made to Metal Shark Boats and that is the [inaudible] figure of \$618 million. It is expected that, after the payments are made, we will be into 2022. So, there is a schedule that takes us into 2022. Of course, the last payment will not be made until the vessel arrives in Guyana. So, there is no payment for the final amount before the vessel arrives in our country.

What was the other question? I think I have answered all your questions.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Could you repeat what you said before?

Ms. Teixeira: Okay, beg your pardon. It is the sum of US\$11.5 million.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Could the Hon. Minister state whether this transaction or the contract of the purchase of this vessel was a Government to Government transaction or whether it was a private company. If so, what is the competence of that company to build a specific type of vessel

that we have asked for and whether, in fact, this vessel [*interruption*] I am not finished as yet; I was hoping to get your attention.

Ms. Teixeira: Okay.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: ...whether in fact this is a...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, you have my attention. That is good enough.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Well, at least, I would need the Hon. Minister to hear because she has to answer. We would need to know whether this is a vessel that has been purposely built for our circumstances or whether it is a vessel that you could actually just go and buy. Is it a special purpose vessel for Guyana or, in fact, is it just part of a vessel that has already been manufactured?

Ms. Teixeira: The contract has been signed between the company, Metal Shark Boats, and the Guyana Defence Force (GDF). Secondly, on the issue of whether the vessel is being purpose built; yes, it is being purposed built for the requirement as designed by the Guyana Defence Force – the Coast Guard unit.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Chairman, you would recognise that I did not asked about the specific capabilities and so on because I know that really borders on the security line. I would not go there.

Ms. Teixeira: Good.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: What I would like to find out, finally, is whether there has been any specific training that would come with the purchase of this vessel, because when one buys a vessel for US\$11.5 million, there has to be some element of training, and spare parts and so on, that would come with it. I would wish to know whether the contract makes provision for training of our Coast Guard ranks to use this specific vessel and whether, in fact, there is, what we call, interoperability between this vessel and any other vessel that the Coast Guard is using?

Ms. Teixeira: It is not a horse or a dog. The requirements are defined by the GDF Coast Guard with regard to its operational needs. The training aspect, which the Hon. Member raised, is not part of the present package to do with the construction and building of the boat. But, that will, possibly, be a follow-up or a separate package to do with training, once the vessel is nearer to

construction. As I said, it is the first payment that is being made now. But, the present agreement does not include training as part of the construction of the vessel.

Item 3: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – \$618,125,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, this concludes consideration of all items for this financial paper. I will now put the motion.

Question

“That this Committee of Supply approves of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 1/2021 – Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling \$1,906,775,000 for the period 2021-04-01 to 2021-06-08.”

put and agreed to.

Assembly resumed.

5.21 p.m.

Dr. Singh: I wish to report that the Committee of Supply has approved of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No.1/2021, and I now move that the Assembly doth agree with the Committee in the said resolution.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: The motion is carried. This completes the consideration of Financial Paper No. 1/2021. Before I take the suspension, there is a meeting of Committee of Selection. I would ask the Members of the Committee for us to reconvene at 6.00 p.m. to deal with the business of that meeting. Thank you very much.

Sitting suspended at 5.21 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.32 p.m.

Motion to approve Supplementary Financial Paper No. 2/2021

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves of the proposal set out in Financial Paper No.2/2021 – Schedule of Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling twenty-one billion, three hundred and sixty million, three hundred and eighty-five thousand and fifty-one dollars (\$21,360,385,0510 for the period ending 2021-12-31.”

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

Mr. Speaker: The Assembly will resolve itself into Committee of Supply to consider the Financial Paper No.2/2021.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Dr. Singh: Mr, Chairman, in accordance with article 171(2) of the Constitution, I signify that Cabinet has recommended, for consideration by the Assembly, the motion for the approval of the proposals sets out in Financial Paper No.2/2021 – Supplementary Estimates (Current and Capital) totalling 21,360,385,051 for the period ending 31st December, 2021. I now move the motion.

Mr. Chairman: The motion is proposed. We will consider the paper as usual. That is, the items will be taken from both current and capital estimates in the order for which the Minister is responsible.

Current Expenditure

Item 1: 02-022 Office of the Prime Minister – Disaster Preparedness, Response and Management – \$10,000,000,000

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could the Hon. Prime Minister, who has responsibility for this very important agency that has to do with Disaster Preparedness, Response and Management, give us some explanation for the \$10 billion?

The Legend speaks to flood relief, repairs to infrastructure and supporting recovery. Could the Hon. Prime Minister disaggregate this sum so that we could better be able to interrogate what is happening in each of these areas to which you are asking for moneys to be allocated? Thank you.

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Mr. Chairman, to answer the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, there is no disaggregation at present because [*interruption*] Allow me to speak. We are doing the assessment now.

As a responsible Government, we are in the relief phase of this operation. It is expected that, following the relief phase, we would have a recovery phase. What we are doing here is asking for this money because we are assessing, now, and we are planning for the recovery phrase. We know that there will be an expenditure to repair. I do not want to go *into the weeds*, but there would be an expenditure to continue to provide food hampers for the people who are affected. There are expenditures related to repairs to roads that are affected; a lot of drainage and irrigation and related works; and the purchase of equipment, for example, water storage, water tanks, water purification and manning of shelters over an extended period of time.

The bottom line is that the assessment is being done by the Civil Defence Commission (CDC). At present, we are aware that there would be a substantial need for expenditure in moving forward. As a responsible Government, we are not going to be reactionary, we are forced to be proactive and ask for moneys now so that we could deal with these issues as we go on.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Prime Minister, you have three specific areas here. While you are not able to say, specifically, what sum would be spent under what heading, I am asking you, even if you are able to say one third or one fifth of this sum would be spent on disaster relief...

Mr. Prime Minister, you are aware of the suffering of the people of this country as a result of this flood. The President has declared this to be a level two disaster and that has certain consequences. The people of this country, particularly, Liverpool, Lancaster, Hogstye, Eversham, and those areas, have asked me to ask you: What is it that you are doing for them? Thank you.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I wish to assure the Hon. Leader of the Opposition that the people of this country will be looked after by my Government.

As Leader of the Opposition, if you have any information pertaining to gaps in our assessment, we will welcome it on board as we put together the package to bring relief to the people of Guyana; all the people of Guyana.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Prime Minister, I welcome your invitation. I want to say that we have offered our assistance in working with the interagency task force and with a task force to deal with the consequences of flooding in this country. This is a national disaster and we have said that we are prepared to work with all the agencies to ensure that we bring relief to our people. I take your challenge up. I trust that, when we provide information to you and your office or the Civil Defence Commission (CDC), it would not be treated as if it were a political matter and be dealt with in the way in which the relief has been going on so far.

I thank you very much, Mr. Prime Minister.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Thank you very much for your words of encouragement and support, Hon. Leader of the Opposition. I wish to assure you that we will take on board any information, especially with me as leader of national disaster in Guyana. I am not letting any secrets out of the bag. As the national disaster coordinator in Guyana, I would take on board any suggestions. This is our interagency approach. This is for all Guyana.

Mr. Mahipaul: The Civil Defence Commission has done an assessment and is continuing to do more assessments concerning the flood disaster. Could the Hon. Prime Minister say, to date, how many persons are affected by this natural disaster and give a breakdown by region? Thank you.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, based on the updated report, we have just over 30,000 households that are affected by the floods throughout Guyana. I do not have a breakdown by region, but I could follow up with that information.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Prime Minister say what are the losses or damages that these 30,000 households faced during this flood relief?

Within these 30,000 households that were assessed, I am certain that there is infrastructural work within their villages that was also damaged, such as roads, bridges and so on. Could the Hon. Prime Minister tell us the names of the areas where the infrastructure was damaged, specifically what roads, bridges and those kinds of things, Sir?

6.46 p.m.

I am assuming, if I may before the Hon. Prime Minister answers, that arriving at \$10 billion dollars means that there was some assessment done which caused them to know a definitive number, and then projected more to get to the \$10 billion. I would love to know some of the areas that will be addressed with this \$10 billion.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, this is just an initial figure based on what we saw when we went into the areas. The Civil Defence Commission, as I mentioned earlier, continues to do its work in the area of damage assessment. There is the likelihood that we will come back to this very House to request more moneys.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. I am happy that the Hon. Prime Minister said that this is an initial figure that was catered for after what they saw. Could the Hon. Prime Minister tell us what is it that he saw which caused him to come with \$10 billion?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I would just like to be very patient with the Hon. Member and use the important word here, 'responsibility'. I think that word, more or less, captures us coming to this House with that figure because we are a responsible Government. Do not let us get *into the weeds*. There are roads that are damaged, there are households that are affected and there are animals that are affected. We have to feed almost everyone in over 180 communities in our hinterland because all of their farms are affected by this flood. That will have to go on for, who knows, maybe the next three months or until the water subsides. During the recovery phase, we could help them to get back on their feet and into their livelihood until the next crop.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, I agree with the Hon. Prime Minister that the flood has affected hundreds and possibly thousands of people. I would like for the Hon. Prime Minister to be specific in terms of the areas that he visited which caused him to conclude that there is need for \$10 billion to fix infrastructural works. He must have seen a river that has overflowed and damaged roads and bridges.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, the Prime Minister answered twice that this is an initial amount. I think the line of the question is now bordering on badgering. I will ask you to conclude it and then offer the Prime Minister to answer.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much Cde. Chairman. Cde. Chairman, I heard the Hon. Prime Minister when he said that this is an initial sum and that they are very much likely to come again. I want to remind him that we just considered Financial Paper No.1/2021, which is where they spent money without coming to this House.

Mr. Chairman: We are talking about Financial Paper No. 2/2021, please.

Mr. Mahipaul: I know that we are talking about Financial Paper No. 2.

Mr. Chairman: Please ask the question.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I would like to ask the Hon. Prime Minister if he could layover a list of those 180 communities that are affected by this flood and will get attention from the Government. This is pertaining to the \$10 billion spending.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I have no problem with laying over a list of the 180 hinterland communities. Please recall that that I did mention that it is over 30,000 households in 300 communities. I specifically talked about the 180 communities when I was referring to the hinterland area of Guyana.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, could he layover the list with the 300 communities? Could he say, Sir, when am I likely to receive the list of 300 communities that were affected by the flood?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, the Civil Defence Commission, the agency tasked with managing disasters in Guyana, is, at present, doing its damage assessment and needs assessment. The list of the 300 communities is based on the work of the Civil Defence Commission. I will gladly supply the information to this House at the right time when the Civil Defence Commission has concluded its work.

Ms. Ferguson: On this very line item, I would like the Hon. Member to explain to this honourable House what role or roles the CDC will be playing in rectifying the infrastructural damages? Is it responsible for executing infrastructural damages?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: For the education of the Hon. Member, the Civil Defence Commission is a coordinating agency. The approach to any disaster in Guyana is a multi-agency or inter-agency approach. The Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Health and

all the important Ministries are involved in working with the Civil Defence Commission. This is an agency that has been conducting exercises and practices over the last three decades. I was intimately involved in those exercises and practices. This is a well-oiled agency that has worked on every disaster in Guyana. I agree that we should commend the work of the Civil Defence Commission. Rest assured, Hon. Member, that the Civil Defence Commission will not be executing any specific work in the recovery phase, but it is responsible for the damage and needs assessment, which will inform Government as to the priority of work.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much. Mr. Chairman, I understand the Hon. Member very well. The concern I have, Cde. Chairman, is this: There are moneys budgeted, out of this \$10 billion, for infrastructural rectification. If you look further down in this very Financial Paper, you will notice that the Ministry of Public Works is also requesting sums for roads and infrastructural works. We need to get a clear understanding of the sums of the \$10 billion... I understand the Hon. Member stated that they are still doing assessments, but you are coming to this House to seek approval for taxpayers' money and you are unprepared to offer us the necessary answers to the questions that we are asking. Could the Hon. Member share some clarity with respect to the works to be done by the CDC, and also the Ministry of Public Works?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I mentioned responsibility just now. I would like to recall that I also mentioned relief and recovery. I wish to simplify this whole issue in my answer by mentioning to the Hon. Member that these are emergency works. That is why we have it under Current Expenditure. We have to do this right away so that people could get to their communities. Bridges and roads must be repaired. That is the simple answer to this whole issue. This is separate and apart from what you are going to hear later.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, I agree with you that the approach is an inter-related agency one to deal with this national disaster. Has the inter-relation of different agencies incorporated the Ministry of Housing? I asked that specifically, Mr. Prime Minister, because a lot of the houses in Kwakwani and in Rockstone are covered with water. Has the relocation of these affected households to higher lands been taken into consideration? More so, with you coming back to the House to ask for more moneys, will some of those moneys be given to those residents to assist them in the rebuilding of their homes?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, in response to the Hon. Member, I think that we have to be very cautious here and do not go about making promises about giving moneys to households. What is important, at this stage, is removing people to a place of comfort and safety and providing shelter, food, medical attention – food includes potable water.

As the water recedes, of course, the Ministry of Health will move in its brigades into the different communities because the issues of sanitation and safeguarding health will become of primary importance to everyone. As we move onwards, in the phase of recovery and mitigation, that is, when the medium and long-term issues of relocating households based on floodplain analysis...

A lot of work has to be done. I wish to assure you that, yes, there are houses which are under water at Kwakwani right now. But, in the next five or ten years of the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government, there may not be houses there. They may be somewhere else on a hill, away from the flood plain. In the middle to long-term, as we complete our floodplain analysis, we will relocate people. The next time we have an occasion like this, less people will be likely to be affected. It is disaster mitigation.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Chairman, it is quite evident that the Government had not done a flood plain analysis. It is the PPP/C Administration, Mr. Prime Minister, who had regularised the very said areas in Kwakwani and allocated those areas for house lots for the people of Kwakwani. I am saying to you, Hon. Prime Minister, that I understand development happens on a phase-by-phase basis. You would agree with me that five years of waiting for the Government to provide housing for people who, by no fault of theirs, were victims of a natural disaster... You are saying, at this particular forum, that shelters are what is being considered, as if they are a permanent solution for these individuals. The Kwakwani Primary School was converted into a shelter. When school reopens, where will these people go? I am suggesting to you, Mr. Prime Minister, to give serious considerations for the use of higher lands that are close by, right in Kwakwani, for these people to be relocated.

Mr. Prime Minister, we appreciate the assistance that the CDC is giving with regards to giving cleaning agents and food hampers to the affected households.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, the question...

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Prime Minister, have you taken into consideration that, in relation to the very cleaning agents and food hampers, which you are giving households that have been affected, they cannot use the cleaning agents because the very surrounding where they are to use it is under water. They cannot use the food hampers because all of their electrical appliances are under water. What...

7.01 p.m.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you have asked the Hon. Prime Minister a question, you are now proceeding to provide some answers for him to consider. I would now ask the Prime Minister to answer your questions. Mr. Prime Minister, I think he dealt with the issue of you considering whether these cleaning agents will be of use because the place is flooded right now. Hon. Prime Minister, you may have the floor.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: If I am responsible for the confusion in the mind of the Hon. Member, I apologise.

I did start by stating that what is happening now is a 'relief operation'. Schools and buildings like community centres will be converted into shelters. It is not a permanent position. It will not be there like that for five years down the line. As soon as the water recedes and we start the cleaning up with the sanitation, people will be encouraged to go back to their homes. The schools and so forth will be cleaned up and handed back to the Ministry of Education and the community centre will be handed back to the communities. As we do that, we will morph into the recovery phase where all the floodplain analysis, all the relocations to higher grounds, new housing schemes – and the Ministry of Housing will go in there with their experts and allocate areas for new housing development – all these things will happen. These are medium to long term measures. The end result is that, maybe, after the next 10 or 20 years, when we are faced with a situation like this, people will be better off because less persons will be living along the riverbanks.

Of course, people have rights. Some people will decide that, notwithstanding the last flood, I want to remain here. The Government will work during the recovery, during the disaster mitigation phase, to assist people to move to safer grounds and, at the end of it, we will have a more resilient population and a more resilient approach to dealing with climate change. It is an holistic plan, but it will take time. It will not happen in three months, in five months or in nine months. Maybe, it will happen in five or 10 years. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. Before a supplemental question is asked, I just want us to pay a little regard to those who have their hands up virtually. I have Ms. Philadelphia's hands up, so, after Mr. Figueira completes, I will be taking Ms. Philadelphia. Yes Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, you may have the floor.

Mr. Figueira: I want to assure the Prime Minister that there is no confusion in what I am asking. Hon. Prime Minister, I am saying to you that a lot of the recipients of the hampers and the cleaning agents, they cannot use them. Sir, I am asking, in recognition of the difficulties these people are experiencing. You have given them, but they cannot use it. What is the Civil Defence Commission's (CDC) plan to mediate this present situation of those said persons whose homes are under water? What is the long-term or medium-term plans of the CDC with respect to providing assistance to the number of farmers within that area whose farms are under water? What form of assistance are you going to give them to put them back on their feet, Mr. Prime Minister?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, I have answered that question already. The second point that I would like to make is, on Saturday, I was in Kwakwani, I was in Hururu, I was in Landsville, I was at Bamboo, and you have not reached there yet.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Members, this is the second time I heard a Member asked on the floor if this emergency provision is for long term and medium-term plans. Those questions are best asked in terms of another format of questioning. Hon. Member Ms. Philadelphia, you may have the floor.

Ms. Philadelphia: (*Inaudible*)

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Duncan, you may have the floor.

Mr. Duncan: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Prime Minister said that there is a preponderance of indigenous communities that are under water and so the \$10 billion is particularly focused there. According to the CDC's assessment, there are communities that are level three flooded and are not Indigenous and I am wondering why the Prime Minister's assessment is differing from the Civil Defence Commission as to what needs money.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I wish to assure the Hon. Member that my assessment is not different from the CDC's assessment. I am just repeating what I was briefed on by the CDC. Thank you for

giving me the details about level two and level three flooded. The bottom line is, we have the communities in the hinterland that are affected and, as you should know as a Member of Parliament (MP), many of the communities in the hinterland, their food security is based on subsistence farming in the environments in which they live. Those areas are under water; they are waterlogged. What is below the root crops are all destroyed, what was saved was converted into food. I do not want to go into the weeds, but in some communities, they were able to reap some of the crops and convert them into cassava bread, *et cetera*. Therefore, they could have stored some foods for example, farine, *et cetera*. The reality is, until the water recedes and until they can go through the cycle of planting and reaping again, we have to support those communities.

Perhaps, that is the reason why the CDC mentioned level three flooding. Maybe, you could follow up with them. The bottom line is some communities are affected in a great measure or to a greater degree than other communities. The bottom line is, the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government is committed to reaching every community and every individual affected by this flood and bring relief to them.

Mr. Duncan: I was labouring under the impression that the Hon. Prime Minister is an integral part of the Civil Defence Commission. By that token, I was posing my questions to someone who is integrally aware of the activities of the CDC.

Again, I am saying this: The CDC has said to this nation and has offered us information which suggests what are level two affected flood areas and level three affected flood areas. For instance, it has said to us that the level three flooded areas are the most affected. I want to point out that, according to the CDC, Region 5, for instance, is a level three affected area. I am simply asking, according to the CDC's assessment, and I have no trouble with all the assistance that we are giving all Guyanese but, why, initially, is the hinterland areas being specifically identified, while even some of the catchment areas... *[Interruption]* Mr. Chairman, could I finish the question?

Mr. Chairman: Yes Sir, I did not stop you.

Mr. Duncan: According to the CDC's estimates and information it has supplied, this is not according to the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC), some of the catchment areas of the hinterland are level two flooded, Region 5 is a level three. Why then is the

preponderance of aid for the hinterland communities as against, for instance, Region 5 which is a level three flooded area?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The Hon. Member should be fully aware that the Civil Defence Commission is an agency, it is a technical body. I am a politician, I listen to the technical people, I come here, and I simplify it for you to understand. We have a national disaster, flooding in Guyana, 10 administrative regions, four different geographical land formation, hundreds of rivers and only two of them flowing southwards. The Ireng River and the Takutu River flow into the Rio Branco River, which flows into the Rio Negro River which flows into the Amazon River. All of the other rivers flow northwards. The reality is, all the areas of Guyana, where the rivers are flowing northwards, are all affected by flooding, some to a greater degree and some to a lesser degree.

I am only saying perhaps because I am being humble here – perhaps, that is the reason why the CDC is talking about level three and level two flooding, *et cetera*. The bottom line is, we have flooding throughout Guyana in all 10 administrative regions, some areas are suffering more than some other areas.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, could the Hon. Prime Minister say how much money was given out, so far, to affected persons?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: We have not given out any cash to any affected area. We have given out food hampers, sanitation hampers and we have medical packages that are being given out. These are all deemed 'relief supplies' or 'first response' items.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Prime Minister say how many food hampers have been distributed so far?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: As of today's date, the report for today, 21,935 food hampers were distributed throughout Guyana and 18,654 cleaning hampers.

Mr. Mahipaul: The Hon. Prime Minister said 30,000 households are so far affected by this flooding and he has confirmed that they have distributed 21,935 food hampers and more than 18,000 cleaning agents. Could the Hon. Prime Minister say when will the remaining 8,100, or thereabout, food hampers go to the affected persons of this flooding?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Let us go back to basics. Mr. Chairman, I would like to take the Hon. Member back to basics in a sense that we started by stating clearly that the Civil Defence Commission will normally do a needs and damage assessment. That needs and damage assessment is what informed the distribution of the hampers. The distribution of the hampers is an ongoing exercise and to support your concern, we will reach every household that is in need of a hamper, in due course.

Mr. Mahipaul: The APNU/AFC Opposition has been on a series of outreaches, and we have also been providing assistance to affected persons who were skipped by the assessment team.

7.16 p.m.

I want to ask if the Hon. Prime Minister is aware that communities such as Fyrish in Corentyne, Berbice; Recht Door Zee in Region 3; La Parfait Harmonie in Region 3; Goed Fortuin roadside in Region 3; communities on the Barama River in Region 1; Karasabai and Surama were not visited as yet; Yarakita only got 30 hampers; and Annai got 50 hampers to cater for 130 persons. Is the Hon. Prime Minister aware of that, and when will it be rectified so that these persons can be provided with assistance in terms of food hampers?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I would like to reassure the Hon. Member, again, that, as I speak, hampers are being transported to all affected areas based on the needs assessment and they will be distributed to those communities. On social media and in the newspapers, I noted that, indeed, yourself and team, led by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, were in those areas. It is not painful for us because we have already deployed representatives from Civil Defence Commission to do further checks in those areas. That is what I talked about, us working together during a time of natural disaster. You identified, as you claimed, some gaps. We are being very objective, and we have deployed our people to do needs assessments in those areas, and the hampers will be distributed.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, I will allow you this last question because your Colleague has been waiting for the last 10 minutes to get to ask a question.

Mr. Mahipaul: After this last question, will I be allowed to come again? Thank you, Cde. Chairman. There are, in terms of the number of persons per household, cases where there are three

persons per household, one person per household, 10 persons per household and the likes. Was that considered when the hampers were distributed to these households, and what length of time is the hamper expected to last these families who were affected by flooding in terms of the assistance provided?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: The Civil Defence Commission has put together a hamper to last a family of five for two weeks. [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*]. A big one.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Hon. Prime Minister, I have listened to your presentation earlier when you spoke about coming up with the \$10 billion you are asking for. Based on the Legend, it states that you are looking at relief, repair and recovery. I would like to know what percentage of the \$10 billion is allocated for relief. The reason is because I know that the CDC has been distributing food items, and I am quite sure they are probably working with a figure in terms of what a hamper would cost. I would like to know, what percentage did they calculate will go directly towards relief from this \$10 billion?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Hon. Member, as I mentioned before, the assessments are ongoing. The assessment reports will inform our further intervention. It is too early for us to divide this amount of money and say, 'So much will go for hampers; so much will go for recovery; and so much will go for this'. We are doing an assessment now. This is an objective process. With regard to the other part of the question about the cost of a hamper – \$10,000 is the cost for the food hamper that we have prepared.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am grateful that the Hon. Prime Minister indicated that the Civil Defence Commission is providing a \$10,000 hamper for a family of five for a period of two weeks. Since the commencement of distribution of hampers, two weeks have finished. Is the Prime Minister revisiting these families who were given the hampers, and two weeks have expired, to provide more hampers to them?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Just over two weeks ago, His Excellency, President Dr. Mohammed Irfaan Ali, visited the Kwakwani area, accompanied by the Hon. Bishop Edghill and Hon. Sonia Parag. The next day, they received hampers. Two weeks after, on Saturday, yours truly, Hon. Bishop Edghill and Hon. Sonia Parag visited Kwakwani and we took hampers again. This is an exercise that is ongoing, and it will be replicated throughout all the affected communities. Based

on the reports that I have received so far, that is being done by the CDC, working with the Regional Democratic Council (RDC), and the Regional Disaster Management System (RDMS).

Mr. Mahipaul: I was happy to hear that the Civil Defence Commission, through the Prime Minister and the other Hon. Members, went back into communities to provide additional assistance to households that were affected and still continue to be affected. I would like to ask the Hon. Prime Minister if he believes his department is being unfair to communities that were not visited as yet? I would have mentioned some names earlier of communities that are affected, continues to be affected, but were not visited as yet. When is it...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I think the Hon. Prime Minister did answer that. The part you are asking is if it was unfair, and that is an opinion. I have also said that we are going to apply the issue with respect to opinion where questions are concerned. I will ask the Hon. Prime Minister to answer on the issue of unfairness.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Cde. Chairman.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, as I answered earlier, all communities will be visited, and hampers will be distributed based on the needs assessment done by the Civil Defence Commission. I wish to assure the Hon. Member that it is an ongoing exercise and we will reach to every affected community in the shortest possible time.

Mr. Sears: To the Hon. Prime Minister, in regard to the distribution in Kwakwani, is the Prime Minister aware that the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, indicated that he is not Noah and that he cannot save everyone.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I do not think this is a particular issue with respect to the allocation.

Mr. Sears: I am getting there, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: You are asking about a prophecy by an Hon. Member.

Mr. Sears: No prophecy, Sir. Do you believe, Hon. Prime Minister, that the hamper distribution has been politicised, given the fact that there is substantial evidence that shows that some supporters, who might have voted for the APNU/AFC, did not receive hampers, whereas those

that voted for the PPP/C received. I would want to believe that this Government is fair in their hamper distribution.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I wish to assure the Hon. Member that this Government is fair in the hamper distribution, because this Government is distributing hampers based on the needs assessment done by the Civil Defence Commission, and the Civil Defence Commission is the lead agency.

Mr. Sears: Just a follow-up question. Could the Hon. Prime Minister indicate if any international aid has been sought as yet or if any aid has been given to this country as yet to assist with this flood?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: President Dr. Mohammed Irfaan Ali, on the 9th, has declared it a national disaster. The level two disaster means that we are not overwhelmed but we can seek assistance. We have since done so. We have written and had engagements, through the CDC, with the European Union (EU) and with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), and both agencies have indicated their desire to offer assistance. The CDC and the CDEMA, along with the National Disaster Organization in Suriname, had a virtual meeting, and soon the CDC will be rolling out their assistance to Guyana. I think it is a bit too early to say exactly what that assistance is, however, that will be communicated as the assistance is rolled out to Guyana.

Mr. Henry: Is there a policy in the distribution of relief to communities in the hinterland that allows the Toshao and the village councils, that were elected by the people, to be involved in the management and the distribution of those articles?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: It is more than a policy, it is a practice, because this is happening right now. At Hururu, the Toshao was responsible for the distribution, him and his councillors. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** *[Inaudible]*]. That is happening in many communities throughout Guyana.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, you are supposed to be shepherding people.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I wish to assure you, every community, that is the report... [**Mr. Mahipaul:** *[Inaudible]*]. I am just trying to answer the question, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Prime Minister.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: That is the report we are getting back to the CDC, that the Toshaos and the village councils are part and parcel of this whole process.

Mr. Henry: Thank you very much, Hon. Prime Minister. I just want to inform you that is not totally accurate. I hope, in the future, that will be done, where we involve our duly elected leaders to be part and parcel for the benefit of their communities.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Prime Minister, the accuracy of your statement is being questioned.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I stand by my statement.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Members, this is a good time to put the question.

Mr. Mahipaul: No Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, you have the floor.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. In view of the extraordinary nature of the crisis and disaster, is there any reason why Government is not going into the Natural Resources Fund for emergency spending of this nature? We have US\$359 million there. Should we not go there, knowing that it was created for that?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, with respect to this line item and this allocation, the question would be fair, but with respect to a policy regarding the Natural Resources Fund, that has another forum for questioning.

7.31 p.m.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I wish to assure the Hon. Member that we are doing what is in keeping with the procedures before us, that is, coming back to the House to ask for a supplementary provision to deal with this disaster.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Hon. Member, I would not be too difficult with you this afternoon, or I would try not to be. I just wanted to get some clarity on something that you would have said. You stated

that the CDC is doing an assessment. You also suggested that some amount of the assessment would have been completed because hampers have started to be shared. I am trying to get a sense of, if it is that hampers have begun being distributed that means that some assessments have been completed or all of the assessments, where that is concerned, have been completed. Do you understand what I am asking? I am trying to get a sense from you whether or not, where hampers are concerned, the assessment for those who needs hampers have already been completed? That is the first question I have for you. Are you not getting me?

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Kindly repeat...Mr. Chairman, I am asking if the Hon. Member could repeat the last part of the comments there.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, please repeat the question.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Sir, I am trying to ask of you whether or not you have a clear sense of the assessment that has been completed or not completed by the CDC as it relates to giving hampers to persons.

You are hearing from a number of us on this side that there are some communities that have not been looked at and there are some communities where only some persons have received hampers and not others. This should have been done based on an assessment. If the CDC would have done an assessment for a particular community, then the numbers from that community would be, for example, there are 2,000 hampers to give to this community, but only five were given to that community. I am trying to get a sense of one, the kind of assessment that has been done to ensure that persons who need hampers are getting them, and, also, [**An Hon. Member (Government):** *(Inaudible)*] I will get to the second part right now. Secondly, whether or not you are ensuring that the persons who are on the ground are not political persons and that they are giving persons, who require and need hampers, the hampers they deserve.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, again there are Standing Orders with respect to repetition. Hon. Prime Minister, you have the floor.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: I am trying to use the right language or the right words to ensure that there is some clarity here. We were faced with floods and the Civil Defence Commission went in. They did an initial assessment and that led to the distribution of hampers. There is an ongoing

assessment of the damage caused by the floods and the needs of the people going forward through the flood and after the flood. So, hampers were given out and, based on the ongoing assessment, additional hampers will have to be given out. It is an ongoing exercise on both sides. The assessment is continuing, people have to live, so we have to continue giving out hampers.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Members, Ms. Philadelphia is ready. Hon. Member Ms. Philadelphia, you have the floor. I had a message saying she was ready. Maybe there is an issue with the connectivity. Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, you have the floor.

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, when the APNU/AFC was in Office there was a heavy flood in...

Mr. Chairman: The question with respect to this particular allocation...

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, I am getting to the question Sir. During that period...

Mr. Chairman: The policy of the allocation, Hon. Member.

Mr. Mahipaul: The question is for the allocation.

Mr. Chairman: No preamble, Hon. Member.

Mr. Mahipaul: There was always consideration for the involvement of the local leaders to assist with...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I am deeming that a repetition. I just heard that from the Hon. Member, Mr. Henry. Hon. Members, if there is no repetition and there is a new question for the Hon. Prime Minister, I will put...

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

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, you have the floor.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Prime Minister, I understand and I got clarity that there will be an initial assessment and then a further assessment. The question is: Can we ensure or assure the Guyanese public that what happened with the cash grants where there was an initial assessment, and now they are coming back for the second assessment and people are still with the pink slips that does not happen in this case?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley, I did not hear anything so far on cash grants. Are we talking about the cash grants for COVID-19 or the cash grants for flooding?

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I was just trying to get the Prime Minister to assure the Guyanese people that what transpired with the cash grant will not happen with the hampers.

Mr. Chairman: If you have an issue with the cash grant, I think the Minister of Human Services and Social Security is the best person to answer that.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, it is all the PPP/C Government, so I am guessing they would be able to answer.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, I think this is a good time to put the question...

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I have a new question. Cde. Chairman, I have a new question. Cde. Chairman, are you not going to...What is this?

Item 1: 02-022 Office of the Prime Minister – Disaster Preparedness, Response and Management – \$10,000,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 2: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services – \$1,500,000,000

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Chairman, I was just referred to section 24 of the Supplementary Appropriation Act, and I thought it would be important that the Committee and the people get an explanation. It states here:

“The Minister, when introducing a supplementary appropriation Bill, shall present to the National Assembly the reasons for the proposed variations....”

By the way, this is the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA).

Mr. Chairman: Please, go ahead Hon. Member, make your point.

Mr. Ramjattan:

“...and provide a supplementary document describing the impact that the variations, if approved, will have on the financial plan outlined in the annual budget.”

This is almost \$23 billion. I searched my documentation, and I did not see that supplementary document. I rather suppose it was not done. Could the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance indicate whether he did a supplementary document to say how this, once approved, is going to affect the annual budget and the financial plan thereof?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I am going to provide my understanding and my decision on your observation. With respect to the section you quoted in the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, it is apt. Also, what is apt is the Standing Orders. Your observation speaks to the point of the Appropriation Bill. It has always been taken that these supplementary estimates that are presented, along with the remarks herein, form part of the information provided before that Bill is considered. That is why we go through this questioning too. Here, in the Financial Paper, in the remark's column, the Minister has supplied some information prior to that. This has always been the convention, and how it has been done. I ask that we proceed with the supplementary paper before us and then we will get to the Bill.

Mr. Ramjattan: Sir, please...

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

Mr. Ramjattan: It is important that when we get the itemised thing and there is a remark saying that the provision is made for it, that does not meet the statutory requirements as to how it has affected the financial plan outlined in the annual budget. For example, we are going to get \$1.5 billion for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) and the remarks section states, 'provision for GuySuCo'. In an annual budget the entire budget speech of the Minister of Finance talks about how the country will be affected for the year. Now, when it comes with a variation you will have to state in a supplementary document how will it affect it. Are we going to get inflation this year? Is the deficit going to grow by another \$23 billion, *et cetera*?

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. I will maintain my position with respect to the convention which we have always adopted in the House with respect to supplementary papers. I am confident that the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for

Finance, when that Appropriation Bill comes, he may have something to say. Could you please now ask the question with respect to item 2, agency code 21-212.

Mr. Ramjattan: An amount of \$1.5 billion is going to be provided for GuySuCo again. Could the Hon. Minister indicate whether the \$2 billion that was given in the Budget has been completely spent so that another \$1.5 billion is needed?

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: For the Hon. Member's information, we are continuing to restructure GuySuCo. There are critical parts that are needed to rehabilitate and recapitalise the present estate. Also, we need to reopen the sugar estates which you closed. We are on the verge of doing that, and those moneys that were budgeted in the national Budget is almost exhausted. We have to continue with our commitment to the people of this country and to the sugar workers to reopen those closed sugar estates.

Mr. Ramjattan: Hon. Minister, when you indicated that it is almost completed, could you give a percentage as to the present state of affairs? Is it about 75% or 90% completed that caused you to now come for \$1.5 billion?

Mr. Mustapha: I could lay over the amount of money that was expended so far to the Hon. Member. As I said, the money is almost exhausted that is why we are coming now for a supplementary provision to continue the programme.

Mr. Ramjattan: In relation to the amount of \$1.5 billion, is any of this going to be spent on the Skeldon Estate?

Mr. Mustapha: For the Hon. Member's information, let me break it down and disaggregate it for him. For the Skeldon Estate – \$40 million; Enmore Estate – \$40 million; Rose Hall Estate – \$292 million; Albion Estate – \$718 million; Blairmont Estate - \$149 million; and Uitvlugt Estate – \$259 million, which gives a total of \$1.5 billion.

Mr. Ramjattan: The money that is going to be spent on those factories or estates, is it going to be for capital works, or is it going to fund sugar workers' pay?

Mr. Mustapha: All these will be for capital works, and I will give you the disaggregation, also, because we are not hiding information from you all.

7.46 p.m.

We are giving you the information because the International Labour Organization (ILO) report that I have here, shows that you have increased poverty, suicide, and rum drinking in this country. We want to end that. [*Interruption*] I will give you a copy. [**Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon:** You have not answered a question yet.]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: I was saying that the Hon. Member promised to answer a question and, in fact, he just sorts of waved an ILO report. He said that he would give a disaggregation of the sums that were spent, so we are waiting on that.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I could not hear what the Hon. Leader of the Opposition said – the question.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member said that he was going to give a disaggregation of the sums of money that were spent with respect to each one of the estates; the capital expenditure.

Mr. Mustapha: Again, like my Colleague, we would have to go back through these items. The Leader of the Opposition probably did not comprehend what I said earlier, but I will go through it. For example, the Skeldon Estate, \$40 million, long reach excavator... [*Interruption*] Comrade, listen. For the Enmore Estate, long reach excavator. For the Rose Hall Estate two [*inaudible*] 200 horsepower – \$54 million, two harrow ploughs \$10 million, five ploughs \$7 million, three rotary distractors 100 horsepower \$36 million, three ditcher implentary \$9 million, 100 new cane punt at \$100 million, one long reach excavator \$40 million, two 20-feet aluminium boats and outboard motor \$4 million, 40 inches of high density polyethylene (HDPE) drainage tube \$4 million, three 80 horsepower tractor tubes \$24 million, three Arnold's pumps at \$4 million, which gives a total of \$292 million for the Rose Hall Estate.

Three long reach excavators \$120 million; two drones \$6 million; one 20-feet aluminium boat and outboard motor \$4 million; cane tug \$40 million; three 80 horsepower tractors \$24 million, three Arnold's pumps \$4 million; new AWR 70/30 loam sand mix crusher run \$100 million; sectional spot repair, 70/30 \$30 million; 2000 metre light duty revetment \$100.1 million; 2 timber high

bridges \$20 million; 80 cusec mobile pumps with trailers \$140 million; 100 15-inch x 20-feet length drainage tubes \$4 million; mobile welding plant \$6 million; and drainage pump \$120 million which makes a total of \$718 million for the Albion Estate.

For the Blairmont Estate, sectional spot repair \$18 million; long reach excavator \$40 million; paddle tug \$20 million; boat and engine \$4 million; 40 cusec mobile drainage pumps \$40 million; crusher run \$25 million; and polyvinyl chloride (PVC) tube \$2 million which gives a total of \$149.9 million.

Forty long reach excavators \$40 million; aluminium boat \$4 million; outboard engine \$4 million; 80 horsepower tractors \$24 million; Arnold's pump \$4 million; loam mix \$25 million; sectional repair \$10 million; 100 metre light duty revetment \$50 million; timber bridges \$20 million; timber flat bridges \$8 million; 80 cusec mobile pumps \$70 million; and mobile welding plant \$4 million which gives a total of \$259.9 million.

The Albion Estate \$718 million; Blairmont Estate \$149 million; Uitvlugt Estate \$259 million; Rose Hall Estate \$292 million, Skeldon Estate \$40 million and Enmore Estate \$40 million which give the total of \$1.5 billion.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, before I allow you to ask questions, let the House resume.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, could we get you to move the suspension of the Standing Orders to go beyond 8.00 p.m.

Suspension of Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54 be suspended to enable the supplementary Appropriation Bill 2021, Bill No. 1 of 2021, Bill No. 13 of 2021 to be introduced at this stage.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I move that Standing Orders Nos. 13 (n) and 54, be suspended to enable the supplementary Appropriation Bill 2021, Bill No. 1 of 2021, Bill No. 13 of 2021, to be introduced at this stage.

Question put, and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Suspension of Standing Order No. 11

BE IT RESOLVED:

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

[*Prime Minister*]

Mr. Speaker: I am sorry, Hon. Prime Minister, we have a resolution to go up to 8.00 p.m. because of COVID-19. We need to move that in particular so that we could go beyond 8.00 p.m. to conclude the business for today.

Mr. Phillips: You have my apologies, Mr. Speaker. I ask that we suspend the Standing Orders to go beyond 8.00 p.m.

Question put, and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. We now revert to Assembly.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Figueira: Could the Hon. Minister state if GuySuCo is presently in a position to pay its current bills?

Mr. Mustapha: Yes, GuySuCo has money to pay its current bills and will continue to deal with value-added products, so that we could increase production and increase the profitability of

GuySuCo. We have seen a little turn around with GuySuCo, and it is now moving in a positive direction, unlike before last August.

Mr. Figueira: Could the Hon. Minister inform the Committee what is the cost of the production for one tonne of sugar locally?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, we are asking you to ask a question pertaining to the allocation before us. The cost of production is a different issue.

Mr. Figueira: Sir, this money is to GuySuCo. This issue...

Mr. Chairman: Yes, the policy for which it is going to be used is [*inaudible*], the cost of production is something else.

Mr. Figueira: Sir, these are matters relating...

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

Mr. Figueira: I have another question.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, you have the floor.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. With respect to the request for provision of additional resources to support the reconstructing of the sugar industry, could the Hon. Minister say which is the first estate is planned to be reopen and the estimated timeline for the reopening?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, this is the 10th time that I am repeating that answer. I said that we will reopen it in a phased approach and that the Rose Hall Estate will be the first. If you listened to the disaggregation that I gave just now, it would show that the Rose Hall Estate got more than \$290 million and the other two estates got \$40 million each. So, which one will we open first? It is the Rose Hall Estate, followed by the other estates.

Mr. Jordan: When will it be reopened?

Mr. Mustapha: We are now doing the preparatory work and we are trying to open it as soon as possible. The three estates, Rose Hall, Skeldon and Enmore, we have reemployed close to 12,000 workers who the APNU/AFC fired.

Mr. Jordan: Over the past nine months, we have been hearing the same tune, what is the estimated time for the reopening and how many persons do you expect to employ?

Mr. Mustapha: I think the Hon. Member would probably have to go and see what are the activities involved in sugar. We cannot sit here and say when we are opening a factory, when they destroyed the factory. They closed the factory down, destroyed all the supporting equipment and fired the workers. Mr. Chairman, I am now saying what we have to do before the factory is reopened. I am saying now, and I will tell you when the factory will reopen. They destroyed the factory and we now have to rehabilitate the factory; they destroyed the cultivation, so we have to redo planting. We have to get tools to do new plants; we have to do tillage; we have to do the mill dock, so there are a whole lot of activities and our targeted time is sometime next year in the second crop.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Jordan, again, I just want to draw your attention to the sum before us and the questions relating to, as the Hon. Minister said, and she quoted the Standing Order, the issue of the policy with respect to this allocation. Some of the questions are now bordering into other generalities which have another avenue for which you could ask a question.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Could the Hon. Member state what percentage of work was completed in the restructuring of the sugar industry thus far?

Mr. Chairman: All right, this is the whole sugar industry that you are talking about now.

Mr. Jordan: That is what it states, 'provision for the restructuring'.

Mr. Mustapha: I have been saying that it is a work-in-progress. We are continuing to do work to ensure that we make the necessary preparations to reopen the estates. If the Hon. Member could direct me to which part in the line item he is talking about, I would be so willing to answer him. Tell me where and which estate.

Mr. Jordan: 'Provision of additional resources to support the restructuring of the sugar industry', I am kindly asking what percentage of works was completed, thus far, in the restructuring of the sugar industry?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, if I could answer the Hon. Member, we are at about 40% in the entire GuySuCo. Because of the destruction that they have done, we have to do a lot of critical works and we would need more money to rehabilitate GuySuCo.

Ms. Ferguson: On this very line item, in less than one year, GuySuCo has been given in excess of \$10 billion. Could the Hon. Minister say to this Committee whether they will return to this National Assembly for further moneys for GuySuCo, and when do they intend to put a stop to the funding of GuySuCo, wasting taxpayers' money down a blackhole?

Mr. Mustapha: If we as a Government has to employ and provide support first of all to give people employment, to rehabilitate and rebuild the village economy and rebuild our country's economy, then this is no wastage for us as a PPP/C Government. We will continue to waste money.

Ms. Ferguson: I am happy to hear from the Hon. Member that the Government is interested in rebuilding a failed industry. I would like to point the Hon. Member and his Colleagues to what is happening to the workers at not only the Guyana Water Inc. (GWI), but the bauxite workers. What arrangement does the Government have in place to assist those people in the bauxite industry who are still yet on the breadline.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you would agree that you would be putting that question to the wrong Minister.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I just have one question. Hon Member, could you please indicate to this Committee, what percentage of the money would be used to restructure the La Bonne Intention (LBI) Estate and the Diamond Estate that the PPP/C closed in 2003 and 2011?

8.01 p.m.

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I do not think I should answer that question because, probably, people do not comprehend in this House and they are asking the wrong questions. The LBI and Diamond Estates are not in this. I am talking about the estates that we have to employ.

Mr. Jordan: I am happy to note that 40% of the works in the restructuring of the sugar industry was completed, thus far. I want to ask the Hon. Member, how much of the 60% that is remaining will be completed by the \$1.5 billion that is to be spent?

Mr. Mustapha: That will be a work-in-progress. This \$1.5 billion will help to fit critical parts and also prepare the estates. As I said, this will be a continuous work to fix the estates. I want to make it very clear that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance would have said that GuySuCo and National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL) have a bond. For these bonds, the money is being utilised, also, to rehabilitate and recapitalise GuySuCo.

Mr. Ramjattan: In relation to so much money being spent, could you give us a deadline as to when the Board will come up with this plan for sugar as you had earlier stated? We need to know when that plan will be completed.

Mr. Mustapha: There is a plan, and it is being fine-tuned now. The Board is looking at that. Very shortly they should give me a copy and then I will have it.

Mr. Jordan: Again, I want to ask because the question was not answered. What percentage of the 60% that is remaining would the \$1.5 billion cover, since it is taxpayers' hard-earned dollars that is being invested in GuySuCo year after year; and whether the restructuring of GuySuCo would be completed by 2025?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I just highlighted all the works that will be done with the \$1.5 billion. I said that there will be more to be done. I disaggregated it and put cost so that the \$1.5 billion could be used here. I promised to lay it over to the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, and his Colleague and they will see. This will be a continuous process. I want to reiterate the point that the money that GuySuCo is collecting is coming out of the bond too, that the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance mentioned.

Mr. Jordan: Finally, while I do understand what the Hon. Member is saying, if there is a proper plan, he must know the percentage of work that is estimated to be completed with the \$1.5 billion.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Mr. Jordan, you asked that question twice. The Minister proffered and answered twice.

Mr. Holder: My simple question to the Minister is: If his Government will return to this National Assembly for more moneys, again, after we approve these moneys, because, in 2020, we had, I believe \$4 billion, then there was a supplementary just after *Budget 2020*...

Mr. Chairman: Mr. Holder, I think somebody summarised how much money earlier in their question.

Mr. Holder: Okay, Mr. Chairman. The question is...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, are you going to return for more money?

Mr. Mustapha: Mr. Chairman, I cannot say that now. As I said, we will have to wait and see.

Item 2: 21-212 Ministry of Agriculture – Agriculture Development and Support Services - \$1,500,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 3: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works - Public Works – \$623,209,015, \$947,000,000 & \$1,053,000,000

Demerara Harbour Bridge

Mr. Patterson: There is an allocation for the Demerara Harbour Bridge (DHB). Could the Hon. Minister disaggregate this \$623,209,015?

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman and thank the Hon. Member for the question. Mr. Chairman, you may recall that I made a public disclosure and I wish to do so now again in the National Assembly. When we were sworn into Office, one of the first discoveries that we made was that the Demerara Harbour Bridge was in a state of disrepair, and this demanded an emergency intervention. Added to that, evidence was provided by way of correspondence that the then Minister was written to, making him aware of what needed to be done, but nothing was done.

The moneys that are sought here is to effect the much needed repairs on span 9 and span 10 of the Demerara Harbour Bridge. Span 9 and span 10 are the two retractor spans. These two spans have a number of damage and breakages. The whole country is aware that we have made a policy decision that we are not allowing trucks or vehicles weighing or carrying more than 18 tonnes to cross the Demerara Harbour Bridge. The interventions that we have had to make have actually narrowed the span because we have had to insert a pontoon to prop up span 9. The moneys sought

here are the additional sums that will be added to the \$850 million that was allocated during the national Budget process. Six hundred and fifty million of that went towards repairs to span 9 and span 10. When we went out to bid, the contract came in at approximately just over \$1.2 billion. The \$623 million is to make up for the shortfall for a contract that has been awarded so we could save the bridge while we bring in the new high span four-lane concrete bridge that is to be built. Thank you very much.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you for that long explanation. Could the Hon. Minister say what amount was attributed? I heard all that the Hon. Minister talked about span 9 and span 10, but the bridge was never broken under our Administration – never. However, Mr. Chairman, the reduction of weight on the Bridge was due to an accident under this Hon. Member's stewardship. Could the Hon. Member say what additional sums were required due to that accident that happened under his stewardship?

Bishop Edghill: I cannot take responsibility for the lack of knowledge on the part of the Hon. Member asking the question, neither can I take responsibility for an unwillingness to embrace truth on the part of the Hon. Member asking the question. What I could take responsibility for is what are the facts.

There was an accident on the bridge at the high span where the barges pass underneath at the high span. That damage was repaired and the company that caused the damage paid in full for the repairs, thanks to the intervention of the Minister of Public Works, unlike what happened under the Gentleman's, who is asking the questions, watch. Damage occurred and there is litigation that is ongoing and is, up until now, not settled.

These moneys have nothing to do with the damage of the high span. That is already paid for – the repairs effected were paid for by the company that caused the damage. This is for the neglect and the state of disrepair that span 9 and span 10 were left in. Even though the General Manager wrote to the Hon. Member who was the then Minister and he neglected to act. We inherited the situation, and we are fixing it. Thank you very much.

Mr. Patterson: Obviously, if you accept reduced cost for the damage, you would always settle. That is the reason, under our Administration, the full cost had to be borne by the damagers. Could

I ask the Hon. Minister, who said that it is not \$1.2 billion, how did they so grossly underestimate the cost of works by almost 100%, if they have no bills or those things like that?

Bishop Edghill: For the first part, I would like to indicate to the Hon. Member, since this is going on public record, that no cost for damages was underestimated or underpaid. The full amount for the repairs of the high span that was caused by the barge that was moving bauxite from first bauxite, was paid in full - the cost of the repairs, including what it cost the bridge during the period of time when we were opened for free-flowing traffic when nobody paid tolls to ease the congestion because of that incident that afternoon. All of that was factored into and all of that was paid. There was no under-hand settlement. It was a straightforward negotiated position with all the facts and figures on the table. That is the way the PPP/C always do business.

Secondly, we did not underestimate the cost of the repairs of span 9 and span 10. The intent was that we wanted this to be a multi-year project, so \$850 million was provided in *Budget 2021* and \$650 million was for phase 1 of the repairs. We were hoping to have phase 2 in 2022, but because of the erosion and the rate of damage, we cannot wait for that whole period. What we have to do, Mr. Chairman, at a time, we will have to take out the entire span and replace it. The span is being fabricated offsite. We then have to bring it to site. We will have to close the bridge for a particular period and install segment by segment.

Mr. Chairman, if you think this is bad, I have just received a report from the Demerara Harbour Bridge where the second aspect of the neglect had to do with the anchorage. We have sent down the divers and they have brought us the report. Since about 2009, there were some issues that had to be fixed and they were fixed. Over the last period, 2015 to 2020, again, information went to the then Government that interventions needed to be made again to the anchorage system, but they did nothing. The report that we are getting is that we might need another \$412 million to fix that state of neglect.

8.16 p.m.

I spoke during the Budget debate and said that, while we advance the nation's infrastructure and are doing new things, we are burdened with having to fix as a result of neglect. It does not only have to do with the bridge, I will expect, just now, for them to talk about the roads and I will be able to bring to the knowledge of the National Assembly those issues as well. It is not a case of

underestimating. It is a case of planning, as we now have to fast track it and bring it forward. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you very much. 'Blight' is the word.

Miscellaneous Roads/Drainage

Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member mentioned roads, so I will go quickly to 'Miscellaneous Roads'.

Mr. Chairman: I am just checking back. You said, 'Thank you very much, Hon. Chairman. 'Blight' is the word'. Is that referring to me?

Mr. Patterson: No, of course not. I would never call you a 'blight', Sir. I would use more colourful language.

Mr. Chairman: Would you like to withdraw that blighted comment?

Mr. Patterson: Pardon me, Sir?

Mr. Chairman: Would you like to withdraw the word 'blight'?

Mr. Patterson: I would not address you as such, Sir. It was not addressed to you.

Mr. Chairman: I thought that once the Speaker is on the floor, one speaks to the Speaker. If 'blight' is introduced just after the name of the Speaker one would expect... Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Patterson: I would never refer to you as 'blight'. Maybe other words beginning with the letter 'b', but not blight.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Sir.

An Hon. Member: [Blessed]

Mr. Patterson: Blessed. Should I withdraw that as well, Sir?

Mr. Chairman, I will be moving to 'Miscellaneous Roads'. As of 1st June, 2021, the Ministry of Public Works has only expended 24% of the \$77.9 billion. Which means that they have a balance

of \$6 billion. At this rate of disbursement why is the Ministry of Public Works coming for these additional sums? They have only expended 24%, which is \$1.9 billion as of 1st June, 2021.

Bishop Edghill: The Hon. Member is being selective in how he quotes figures. Number one, the total budget for the Ministry of Public Works is not \$77 billion. [**Mr. Patterson:** *[Inaudible]* \$7.9 billion.] Oh, well I do not understand. I have to try to decipher your mumblings. [**An Hon. Member:** *[Inaudible]*] Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, would you like to repeat for the Hon. Minister?

Mr. Patterson: Yes, Mr. Chairman. As I was saying, I went on to ‘Miscellaneous Roads’ which is project code 1404100 on this supplementary paper and I stated that, as of 1st June, 2021, under this project code for the 2021 Budget – which is \$7.94 billion – the Ministry of Public Works has only expended 24% which equates to \$1.906 billion and leaves a balance of \$6 billion. At this rate of disbursement, why is the Ministry of Public Works coming for these additional sums?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Public Works, as it approached its implementation programme as it relates to roads in 2021, took considerable time and care engaging all the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs), Regional Democratic Councils (RDCs), their engineers, as well as overseers and superintendents of work. They had gone through the entire country, village by village, region by region and have developed what is now known as the ‘road bible’. Hundreds of roads that could indicate to you: status, condition and cost, based upon the allocations that were made in *Budget 2021*. The criteria that were used to determine what one fixes first, what one fixes second and what one fixes third in a non-discriminatory manner, were applied. As of 1st June, more than 105 roads were advertised, awarded and some are at evaluation stage to be awarded. The approximately more than 23%, which is referred to as 24% by my Colleague, was largely spent on payments for rollover projects. One may know that we had a late Budget in 2020, and in that Budget we went out with 176 roads: urban, miscellaneous, hinterland and main access roads. In this current construct, we are going out with another 105 roads. By 12th July, that 23% or 24% will significantly change because the mobilisation advances, plus first interim payment certificates will be paid.

The moneys that are being sought here for ‘Miscellaneous Roads’ are to tend to some of the matters that we wanted to wait, until these were finished, but due to what transpired and the phenomena

that we are having where flooding and the damage are concerned, every Guyanese wants their roads fixed. I am sure that the Hon. Member and other Members of the Opposition are hearing that if they go out into the communities: the potholes, the roads, the drainage that is there. I am not responsible for your understanding of what is waste and what is not.

Mr. Chairman: Sir, I never accused you of anything.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I apologise.

Mr. Chairman: You said that you are not responsible for my misunderstanding of...

Bishop Edghill: My apologies, Sir. I was not referring to you.

What we are seeking to do here is that we have a main programme of which we are implementing. May I say, even the moneys that are being sought here are not enough to answer the needs of the people of Guyana where their roads are concerned. Let me tell you what we are basically doing at this time. We are trying to ensure that every road that is a main access road in a village is fixed. Roads that lead to schools, temples, health centres, community grounds and places where multitudes of people use as the first priority.

Secondly, we are seeking to ensure that roads that were never fixed, roads that were neglected and were not maintained are addressed. That is where we are. Even with what we are asking for here, I can guarantee you that, should there be fiscal space and additional sums become available, with the implementation programme of the Ministry of Public Works and to satisfy the demands of the citizens of Guyana, we may very well ask this National Assembly to make provisions for more moneys, to fix more roads, in more communities to satisfy the needs of the Guyanese people. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Patterson: After that long explanation you never answered the question. I am sure you noticed, Sir. Twenty-three percent or 24% implementation... I will ask another question but before I do: as of 1st June, 2021, 38% of the procurement has been completed. Therefore, what new measures are going to be employed by the Ministry to disburse this additional sum? If this is approved – obviously it will be because they have their numbers – more than \$6 billion, plus this additional sum of \$900,000, a total of almost \$7 billion and they are at a... Well, the percentages are there.

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I think that the Hon. Member is engaging in hearsay gathering of information. As the Minister of Public Works, I can tell you that our procurement process is way beyond 53%. Just to give notice to this House, last year the implementation of the Ministry of Public Works, at the end of the year, without having to offer contracts on 31st December, as was the practice before, our implementation was more than 97% in a short budget. Where we are right now, there was some delay because of that assessment that was being done countrywide. The Hon. Member should know that it takes time to design, cost and all the rest of it. We would have seen the advertisements in the newspapers for dozens of roads at a time and that process is advancing. Contracts are going to be signed; contractors are being engaged.

While I am on this, in case they are concerned about the implementation, one of the reasons our implementation rate was 97% is because we broke the practice of giving work to selected people. We opened up the avenue for new and other young contractors to come in and to grow. Hence, we have greater capacity on the ground, more people working, more people getting involved and we are getting development at a faster rate. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Patterson: Sir, he has some catching up to do because the Ministry of Public Infrastructure as it was then, was at 98%, 99% in two thousand... [**Bishop Edghill:** Where? When?] The records will show, Sir. You can challenge me whenever, but that was... and that was completed. We never had to resort to what he had to do.

Coming back to the supplementary: \$947 million... [**An Hon. Member:** *[Inaudible]*] Sir, I hope that you are listening, but it does not matter. Could the Minister disaggregate this sum and we will start there?

Bishop Edghill: I guess when he said to disaggregate the sum, the Hon. Member would like to know where roads will be built and at what cost and all the rest of it? Is that the question the Hon. Member is asking? [**Mr. Patterson:** *[Inaudible]*] I can disaggregate by telling him that roads will be built in Region 2 and these will be primary roads, coming up to \$80 million. In Region 3, we will be expending \$457 million. In Region 4, we will be expending \$360 million. I need to say this is just on 'Miscellaneous Roads' because in Region 4 we will be doing all the connector roads along the corridor where the new highway has just been completed, with the savings that we are getting from that loan and with additional moneys that have been put in from the Government of

Guyana. In case you want to question the disparity of Region 3 and Region 4, it is not because there are less roads being done but it is because it is being funded from another area. In Region 6, \$50 million. So, that is the breakdown – Regions 2, 3, 4 and 6.

8.31 p.m.

Mr. Patterson: Thank you for the big shout about the road projects having savings which you could now utilise. It shows prudent management, as opposed to what is happening here. Could the Hon. Member give us the total for Regions 3, 4 and 6? Could he lay it over or, if he prefers, call it out?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, do you prefer to lay it over?

Bishop Edghill: Mr. Chairman, I am aware that it is a late hour and that is why I have been trying to move along my answers. We have a lot of business to take of tonight. I will lay it over.

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

Rehabilitation of Public and Main Access Roads

Mr. Patterson: Moving on to public and main roads, on 1st June, 2021, the disbursement was 14% of what was budgeted. So, the same question that I had asked before: at this rate of disbursement, why is the Ministry coming for these additional sums?

Bishop Edghill: Again, I do not know where the Hon. Member is getting his figures from. I do not know what the source of his information is, but you cannot just come here and call numbers. Everybody in Guyana knows that the roads in Black Bush Polder are in bad shape. In 2020, we did \$80 million. That was only to allow for sectional repairs. In 2021, we did \$60 million. Those contracts have been executed. With this flooding and the damage that has been done to the Black Bush Polder road, we are attempting to do 4,000 metres; not even the entire road. The Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, knows that it takes about \$60 million to do a kilometre of asphalted concrete. He knows that. In Black Bush Polder, we are proposing to do 4,000 kilometres, which will be about \$360 million.

The Burma road – everybody knows from the news that the Burma road is in bad shape. As a matter of fact, some of the Hon. Members on the Opposition would prefer that road to remain in a

bad state so that they could show it on videos to agitate. We prefer to fix it. So, for the Burma road, we will be doing about 4,000 metres. We will be spending about \$333 million, which is estimated to do that. That is in Region 5.

We were talking about miscellaneous roads. We are now dealing with main access roads. They do not know the difference. In Canal No. 1 and Canal No. 2, every Hon. Member of this House knows what is going on in there. We will be doing 3,000 metres in Canal No. 1 – \$180 million and another 3,000 metres in Canal No. 2 – \$180 million. A total of \$1,530,000,000 is estimated for main access roads and that is what we are asking for.

Mr. Patterson: I noticed that the Hon. Member omitted to enlighten this Committee, at 14% implementation, how is it...and we are midway in the year. How is it that the Hon. Member is going to spend three times that amount, as requested in this supplementary? That is the question that he omitted to respond to.

Bishop Edghill: I think I already indicated that I cannot accept Mr. Patterson's numbers because they are not coming from the source they should be coming from. He is being misled. I am indicating to you that we have a \$60 million project for Black Bush Polder, which was already rewarded and almost is completed. We had to go with emergency works to do extra works. The implementation on that road is way advanced. The Burma project is ongoing, but the money is not sufficient to deal with the issues that are there. So, to decry implementation rate as it relates to this programme, it is unfortunate that someone whose implementation rate was questioned yearly in this Parliament, with a Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) of about 60%, is coming here to blame us for 14%, when we have gone way beyond that, and we are getting goods and services to the people of Guyana.

I would just like to say to the Hon. Member, watch and see how the work will be done because contractors know they have to deliver. Every contractor who is engaged with the Ministry of Public Works already understands the script. If they do not finish one, they cannot get a next one; if they cannot deliver, do not even attempt because we are not parking up work for people and we are not lining up work for people. The field is open or, Mr. Patterson might want to think about it, *the sky is too big for two birds to collide*. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Patterson: The Hon. Member said that he would not accept my numbers. You are the source. Could the Hon. Member inform this Committee what are the correct numbers for the miscellaneous roads, urban roads and main access roads? What is the correct implementation rate?

Bishop Edghill: I would ensure that I send that document to the Parliament, and I will publish it, within a matter of 72 hours, for all Guyana to see.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

[Mr. Seeraj, Presiding Member, assumed the Chair.]

Presiding Member: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Patterson: Congratulations, Mr. Chairman. I reckon that I would have a bit more flexibility from an eminent Chair such as yourself.

Presiding Member: Time is limited, Hon. Member. Get on with it.

Mr. Patterson: In relation to miscellaneous roads and drainage, the legend states upgrade of roads and drainage in various communities and the Hon. Member listed only roads. We are talking about miscellaneous roads and drainage. Could the Hon. Member indicate what drainage works is catered for in this project code – 1404100?

Bishop Edghill: I am aware that the Hon. Member who is asking the question functioned, at one time, as a Minister who was responsible for this sector. The issue of drains that accompany roads is factored in the design, and in every contract, based upon what are needs to facilitate the roads and to drain the roads, drainage is a part of that component. Thank you, Sir.

Item 3: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – \$947,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 4: 44-444 Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports – Sports – \$75,600,000

Mr. Figueira: Thank you for recognising me, Cde. Chairman. I am confident that we are going to have some form of partiality. Could the Hon. Minister inform the Committee what percentage of the voted sum of \$185,400,000 has already been expended as of date?

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports [Mr. Ramson]: On this particular item, which is for ground enhancement which and I am here to answer for, all of the sums have been allocated for the various regions. You would have heard an extensive explanation, a few days ago, for an aggressive ground assessment and community assessment, which has been led by His Excellency the President and also my Cabinet Colleagues who are going into communities on an almost daily basis. As a result of that community ground assessment, many times where those meetings are held, our opinion is there was total neglect of those community grounds by the APNU/AFC. It is as a result of that determination that the President and the Cabinet have decided that we would allocate a larger sum for community ground enhancement, which this specific allocation is for. As it relates to the entire PSIP and capital programme, that information I do not have at the moment, but I could provide it at the appropriate time.

Mr. Figueira: Could the Hon. Minister, by region and more specifically Region 10, name for the Committee the grounds in the region that have been identified for upgrading purposes? I do not mind if you want to layover the others.

Mr. Ramson: For Region 10, the sum of \$10 million has been allocated. The ground has not been identified as yet. The ground will be identified with the regional representatives, who include the regional representatives on the Regional Democratic Council (RDC).

Mr. Figueira: I just asked the Hon. Minister what percentage of the allocation was expended, and he said all. Now, we are hearing that \$10 million is supposed to be allocated to a phantom ground in Region 10 and we do not know which ground it is. So, if you are awarding or you intend to make an allocation of \$10 million to the region, one would hope, Mr. Minister, that you have an idea of which ground is supposed to get this \$10 million.

8.46 p.m.

I say so, Mr. Chairman, because I asked the Minister, in the last sitting, how is it that he determined \$10 million was to be allocated to a specific ground and he did not have in his head what were the need for these grounds to be upgraded.

Mr. Ramson: As a result of the decision made by the President and the Cabinet about allocating larger sums for community grounds, that sum which had been originally allocated as part of our budget has been exhausted. Hence, the reason we have come for additional money. Because we had to get to every region, this is the reason we have come for this sum. If you ask me specifically for Region 10, it is this sum for Region 10. As I said, the specific ground has to be identified. When we send the warrant with the sum, once it is approved, it is sent with the details.

Having said all of that, we have visited a number of grounds on many of the outreaches that we have had in Region 10. In fact, one was a Cabinet outreach. There are grounds there that we have already assisted because the bush...this is the ground which is opposite the school. What is the name of the ground opposite the school? The bottom line is, because there are options there, when we go to on our next visit to Region 10, when we meet with the regional officers there, we would be able to identify the ground where we would spend the money. You could make recommendations as well.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Chairman, it is evident that the Minister is unclear about which ground in Region 10 he intends to spend \$10 million. Since he would have done some form of upgrading utilising \$10 million for the other regions, could he indicate to this Committee what are some of the upgrading features that complemented the works on any of the grounds on which \$10 million was spent?

Mr. Ramson: That work is going to be done through the region. It is not the Ministry that does it. When we send the money over to the region, the region does the assessment for the works to be done and it provides the bills of quantities as well as go through the procurement process within the region. That is how the process works.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Minister, you said to this House that you visited the grounds and from your observation, based on your visitation, one would assume that you would be *au fait* with some of the developmental works that the grounds should have in order to upgrade them. Inform this

Committee, after you would have visited, what are some of the developmental works to upgrade these facilities that require \$10 million unilaterally?

Mr. Ramson: All of the grounds will require different things. However, every single region has an assessment of all of the grounds within their region and every ground will have different needs. Some grounds are faced with flooding, drainage, fence issues, their pavilions need to be redone, their external washrooms need to be done, their driveway, lights. A number of those things form part of their assessment which is collected within the Regional Democratic Council. As a result of their own assessment, we sent the money based on that. From their internal procurement process and their bills of quantities, which are provided by their technical officers, that is how the money is allocated and the works are being done.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Minister, am I to conclude that, as the Minister with responsibility for the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, you do not have a vision of what you would like to see for the development and the upgrading of these grounds? Have you left it independently for the regions to do it? That is what I would like to know.

Presiding Member: Thank you, Hon. Member, I think it is a good time to put the question.

Mr. Figueira: No, Sir. I have a lot of other questions, respectfully, Sir.

Presiding Member: Move on with it, Hon. Member.

Mr. Figueira: The Minister has not yet answered the question I asked.

Mr. Ramson: This is a very strange situation when the Hon. Member, who is asking a question, is allowed to make a determination based on vision. What I could answer by saying is that the Guyanese people determined that the APNU/AFC did not have a vision and that is why they voted them out of power, and they voted us in.

Presiding Member: Hon. Member, could we move it along? If you have a question, could you put it so that we could get going?

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Chairman, respectfully, I would appreciate if the Minister answers the question so I could move on.

Presiding Member: Would you care to repeat the question, please?

Mr. Figueira: I am asking the Minister, based on what he told the Committee that the region comes up with a plan for the upgrading of these facilities, whether these regional inputs in the grounds are guided by a national vision for the development of youth, sports and culture from the Minister of this Ministry. Is it guided specifically by you or your team at the Ministry?

Mr. Ramson: The Ministry has a vision for the entire Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. Ground enhancement is just an element of the overall programme that falls into the allocation of resources. However, ground enhancement – the line item is called ground enhancement – forms part of what communities do for their community grounds, which include playing of sports. But it is not only for the playing of sports. It is a community ground on which all kinds of activities occur; social activities, it is used for training, all of the pavilions, *et cetera*, are all used for different purposes; some of them are used for medical purposes at times. It is a community ground enhancement programme.

Mr. Figueira: I am flabbergasted that the Minister has a jaundiced view for the national development of his Ministry on a regional platform. How does your vision coincide with the RDCs, the Mayor and Town Councils or the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) across this country that have community grounds? What is the holistic developmental plan that augments your vision as the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports?

Mr. Ramson: I am answering on community enhancement grounds. I am not answering on the overall vision for the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports. I explained that during my budget presentation and during the questioning. I would continue to do that through the media. I would do that again next year.

Mr. Figueira: I ask these questions because one, the Minister has never debated anything with respect to his Ministry since he became Minister and after two budgets. He has politicised every aspect of what his responsibility is for the Ministry so as to evade answering pertinent questions for his Ministry. Could the Minister state, therefore, with this \$10 million that is to be allocated for the upgrading of all grounds, whether there will be public consultations with the residents of communities of the identified grounds whether he makes the determination then the residents have

this part of the consultation to say what it is that they would like to see featured in the enhancement of community grounds?

Mr. Ramson: The Ministry of Culture Youth and Sports is just a Ministry within the Government of Guyana, as an example. But across all of the Ministries of this country we have had the most consultative process that this country has ever seen. In fact, that process is ongoing at all times. In fact, every single time that the Minister is going to a specific location for the purpose of community grounds, he makes a public notice and invites everyone to that location so that they could have their say. The answer is we have been the most consultative Government this country has ever seen, and we will continue the most consultative Government this country will ever see.

Presiding Member: Hon. Members, I think Mr. Jones is trying to get our attention. We will afford him that opportunity now.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. Could the Hon. Minister inform this Committee what is the role of the National Sports Commission (NSC) in ground enhancement?

Mr. Ramson: The National Sports Commission does not have a role in ground enhancement.

Mr. Jones: I have a follow-up question. Could the Hon. Minister inform this Committee under which agency, entity or department the line item ground enhancement comes?

Mr. Ramson: Yes. It comes under our Sport Programme, as separate and apart from the National Sports Commission.

Mr. Jones: Is the Hon. Minister saying that this money being sought does not go to the allocations which were made in the 2021 Budget for ground enhancement, which falls under the National Sports Commission's lump sum?

Mr. Ramson: I have answered the question already that the National Sports Commission has no involvement in our ground enhancement programme. It falls under the Programme of Sport. I do not know why I have to teach you this. Go and read your budget. The National Sports Commission is a subvention agency. I do not know what occurred before, but it is a subvention agency. We have a programme called Sport for which there are current and capital programmes. Ground enhancement falls under the capital part of the Sport Programme.

Mr. Figueira: I crave your indulgence for one more question.

Presiding Member: Go ahead.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. Could the Minister inform this Committee: of the \$10 million for each respective ground that would be the beneficiary of this allocation, would those moneys be warranted to the NDCs where these grounds are located, would it be allocated to the Mayor and Town Councils, if it falls within the remit of the township or would it be warranted to the RDCs of some respective regions?

Mr. Ramson: The RDCs.

Presiding Member: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Members, I now put the question that the sum of...

[Ms. Fernandes stood]

Presiding Member: Hon. Members, we cannot continue like this for the whole night. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. The Minister spoke, last Thursday, about equity. Could the Minister tell us what mechanism was used to determine that \$10 million satisfied the criteria for equitable distribution of resources per ground?

Mr. Ramson: I answered that question last week and I do not intend to revisit it.

Item 4: 44-444 Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports – Sports – \$75,600,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

9.01 p.m.

Presiding Member: Hon. Members, under the previous item for the Minister of Public Works, there were three Project Codes and I put one. So, I crave your indulgence to put Project Code 1101100, which represents the sum of \$623,209,015.

Item 3: 31-312 Ministry of Public Works - Public Works – Demerara Harbour Bridge - \$623,209,015 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Secondly, I put, under Project Code 140900, that the sum of \$1,053,000,000 stands part of the Schedule.

31-312 Ministry of Public Works – Public Works – Rehabilitation of Public and Main Access Roads - \$1,053,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

Item 5: 45-452 Ministry of Housing and Water – Housing Development – \$2,838,000,000

Presiding Member: Hon. Members, I would like to propose that we follow the format that the Speaker had outlined before. There are three Chart of Accounts under...I am sorry. We will proceed as it is with this one here.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Chairman. Could the Hon. Member state for this Committee what percentage of works have been completed thus far from the previously voted provision of \$6 billion?

Mr. Croal: There are various contracts that are ongoing. I will give the percentage of each. These are all ongoing and in progress: the four-lane access road, that is from Eccles to the Mandela Avenue – 5%; Cornelia Ida, Edinburgh, Anna Catherina – 5% and some of the lot is at 15%; Met-en-Meerzorg – 15%; Mon Repos – 50%; Annandale – 15%; La Bonne Intention (LBI) – 15%; Cummings Lodge is ongoing and varies among 20%, 15% and 10%; Great Diamond varies among 15%, 20%, 25% and 5%; Little Diamond – 25%; Prospect – 10% and 15%; Providence – 90%; Experiment – 15%; Williamsburg and Hampshire – 10% and 35%, respectively; Number 75 Village – 30%; and Ordnance Fort Lands – 10%.

Ms. Ferguson: Under this very project code, could the Hon. Member state whether the sum now being proposed, which is \$2 billion and change, will be used for the very areas that he not so long ago called out?

Mr. Croal: Yes, Chairman.

Presiding Member: Hon. Member, do you have another question?

Ms. Ferguson: Pardon me?

Presiding Member: Do you have another question?

Ms. Philadelphia: Mr. Chairman...

Ms. Ferguson: Somebody is trying to...

Presiding Member: Go ahead, you have the floor.

Ms. Ferguson: I do not mind yielding to whomever is trying to come in.

Presiding Member: I do not see anyone trying to come in.

Ms. Philadelphia: Mr. Chairman...

Ms. Ferguson: I think that it is someone online, one of my Colleagues.

Presiding Member: If you have a question, go ahead please.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Cde. Chairman. In the remarks in the Legend, Hon. Member, you referred to new and existing housing schemes. Could you identify for the Committee the new housing schemes and give a disaggregated percentage of the \$2 billion that will go towards them?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, the \$2.8 billion being asked for at this time is part of the cost that will go towards the ongoing contracts that we have signed to the tune of \$14.3 billion. All the areas are for new openings. Some would have commenced last year, under the last emergency budget, and continued into this year. The others are for the opening of new lands for allocations that have been made, including allocations that were made during the APNU/AFC period.

Ms. Philadelphia: Mr. Chairman...

Presiding Member: I am hearing someone saying, "Mr. Chairman". Do we have somebody online who is trying to ask a question?

Ms. Philadelphia: Yes, thank you. Am I recognised?

Presiding Member: Yes, go ahead.

Ms. Philadelphia: I recognise that the Minister related to areas of Regions 3 and 4. My question is: for the sum now requested, if I may place specific emphasis on Cummings Lodge, Strathspey, Vigilance and other areas on the East Bank, what percentage will be used to further develop those housing areas in Region 4?

Presiding Member: Before I ask the Minister to answer, could you identify yourself, please?

Ms. Philadelphia: I am Member of Parliament (MP), Ms. Philadelphia. Thank you.

Presiding Member: Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Croal: The moneys that are requested are for all those 18 areas that the Hon. Member's Colleague asked about. In the last question that we responded to, we provided a list of all those areas, and it is for all those areas. I could go through them again if you would like but it would be repetitive.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Chairman...

Presiding Member: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Holder: Mr. Chairman, this Government boasted about...

Presiding Member: Sir, do you have a question? Could you put it please?

Mr. Holder: Yes, it is a question.

Presiding Member: Go ahead.

Mr. Holder: I want the Minister to understand where I am coming from. They have boasted about giving out 350 house lots in Region 2, some in Onderneeming and some in Charity. It is my understanding that persons have paid an initial sum and were given by the year's end to pay the final amount. However, the lands were not developed. It is my understanding that, in the Onderneeming phase, those lands are under heavy forest cover, and in Charity, it is a different story. My question is: Is there any provision in this amount to deal with the preparation of those lands or the infrastructure, as this Financial Paper claims?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, it is interesting that the Hon. Member is asking a question like that. All he needs to do is to consult the former Hon. Minister right in front of him and he will understand how it works. All these areas, for which we have ongoing works, are for allocations that have been done in order to maintain and consistently meet our manifesto's target of a minimum of 10,000 house lots per year. In relation to Region 2, by the way, it is not 350 house lots. It is 350 house lots in Onderneeming. We will be in Region 2 next week on the 25th to allocate 350 house lots in Charity, an area that would be familiar to you. It was where you had your funeral service.

Item 5: 45-452 Ministry of Housing and Water – Housing Development – \$2,838,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Capital Expenditure

45-453 Ministry of Housing and Water – Water Service Expansion and Management – \$683,500,000 & \$273,000,000

Coastal Water Supply

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Chairman, under the very same project code, the remarks column states:

“Provision of additional resources to facilitate the upgrading and expansion of water supply systems in underserved and unserved areas.”

Could the Hon. Member state the nature of the upgrades and expansion works that are to be done to the water supply systems in these underserved and unserved areas?

[Mr. Chairman assumed the Chair.]

Mr. Croal: There will be the installation of four-inch distribution mains at Yarrowkabra and Grant Sand Road, Soesdyke; extension of distribution networks at La Harmonie, Nismes, Sea View and Belle West; installation of four and six-inch distribution mains at Vryheids Lust, Success, Montrose, Felicity and Bachelors Adventure; installation of four-inch distribution mains in Region 6 at Alness, Crabwood Creek, Number 65 and Number 59 Villages; drilling of wells and construction of distribution networks with photovoltaic systems at Swan, Dora, Kuru-Kuru, Kairuni, Long Creek, Loo Creek and Moblissa. For St. Cuthbert's Mission, we will be expanding the distribution network there. There will be the installation of four-inch distribution mains at Big

Baibu, Huntley, Good Faith, Number 2, Number 3, Number 4, Number 8, Number 11, Number 28, Number 29 and Number 30 Villages. There will be the upgrade of water supply infrastructure projects at Moraikobai in Region 5 and Coomacka Mines in Region 10. These are the broad outlines.

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Member state how many first-time customers will be served from the expansion and upgrade projects?

Mr. Croal: The number of persons to be served: Yarrowkabra and Grant Sand Road – 2000; La Harmonie, Nismes, Sea View and Belle West – 2000; Vryheids Lust, Success, Montrose, Felicity and Bachelors Adventure – 2000; Alness, Crabwood Creek, Number 65 and Number 59 Villages – another 2000; Swan, Dora, Kuru-Kuru, Kairuni, Long Creek, Loo Creek and Moblissa another 1800.

9.16 p.m.

Big Baibu, Huntley, Good Faith, Number 2, Number 3, Number 4, Number 8, Number 11, Number 28, Number 29 and Number 30 – another 2000; and Maraikobai – 6000. It is over 18,800.

Mr. Jordan: While I do not want to say to the Hon. Minister that he is being untruthful in whatever is being said, I want to ask this question: Is Maraikobai's population more than 2000?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, do you have that answer?

Mr. Croal: Mr. Chairman, when you combine Maraikobai with the Coomacka Mines, that is 6000. If you ask all your questions, I can give you your answers in a package, but if you are asking me piece by piece then I will just repeat the areas for you.

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Member state the method by which these upgrades and expansion works would be done since Guyana Water Inc. (GWI) just, recently, fired 300 workers?

Mr. Croal: Some of the works will be done through internal method and the rest will be done through procurement.

Mr. Jordan: I did not get the last part.

Mr. Croal: It will be done through procurement and some through internal staffing.

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Member state whether GWI now has the capacity to execute these works since it is burdened with shortage of staff, as I would want to put it?

Mr. Croal: This is the only time I will go outside the line of questioning. The GWI does not have shortage of staff. In fact, the matter is very simple. In five years, there was an addition of 700 new staff; 600-1300. The amount of staff within the next two months for whom severance benefits will be paid is 185 staff and not 300. The others to which you refer are persons whose contracts were not renewed or by attrition.

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Member state whether GWI would be able to service the various expansion distribution networks at present?

Mr. Croal: Yes, it has the ability.

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Member say whether provision is made in the 'upgrade of water supplies' sum for the improvement of water quality, and what are the measures to be taken to improve the water quality to customers across the country?

Mr. Croal: The requested \$683 million, in addition to all that I had mentioned a few minutes ago, also includes another \$35 million for the connection materials for over 5,200 customers. These would include galvanised pipes, stop corks, male and female adopters, poly hose, and I can go on and on.

It also includes an additional \$30 million for the well at Parika Back. You want to know about the water quality. It also includes a new well for Lusignan and an additional \$10 million for completion of the Sophia and Eccles water treatment plants, which includes the reactivation of two tanks which were left idle at the back of Sophia for five years. Those are the huge storage tanks. It also caters for the reactivation of the well at Sophia.

Including in this \$683 million, would be another \$29 million for the current expansion on the East Bank for the Covent Garden, Grove, Friendship areas, and over on the West Cost for Vergenoegen. That would complete, by and large, the \$683 million.

Since the Hon. Member is asking about treatment, we will implement the water sector enhancement project. This is a project that lingered for over five years. It will include, first of all,

catering for Walton Hall to Charity, in Region 2; Leguan and Wakenaam, Region 3; Tain to Number 50, in Region 6; and Region 5 will be from Number 7 to Brahan, which will include Weldaad, Onverwagt, Number 7 and Bush Lot. These are catered to ensure that we start the process of achieving our target of ‘treated water to the entire coastland’, within this first five years, to a minimum of 90% on the coast land. As it is now, it is only about 52%-55%.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Hon. Member. Could you clarify what you said. You said, in Region 5, it is from Number 7 to what village?

Mr. Croal: From Number 7 to Brahan.

Mr. Jordan: Could you please repeat that?

Mr. Croal: Brahan.

Mr. Jordan: Brahan.

Mr. Croal: That is correct.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you very much. For clarity’s sake, did you mention that Weldaad will also be served in that district or from those upgraded works?

Mr. Croal: That is correct.

Mr. Jordan: If I know Region 5 well, Weldaad cannot be served from that district because Weldaad is way off from that location you just mentioned.

Nevertheless, could the Hon. Member state the reasons for the reduction of water service – that is, pumping hours – in sections of Georgetown, East Coast Demerara and other parts of the country which are now receiving 12 hours or less of water supply against the 24-hour service prior to 2nd August, 2020?

Mr. Croal: Could the Hon. Member relate the question to a line item?

Mr. Jordan: Underserved and Unserved.

Mr. Croal: I have already identified the requested expenditure for what it is intended.

Mr. Holder: During the course of the weekend, I had the pleasure of visiting Angoy's Avenue. [Mr. Hamilton: Ask a question.] The question is coming. This is serious. One of the main complaints is that they are not getting proper water supply. The residents there said that, during the last five years, they were receiving good water pressure in their homes. Now, suddenly, the water is dripping. I am speaking, honestly, about what I heard. I am asking if there is any provision in the sums here to rectify that situation for the people of Angoy's Avenue.

Mr. Croal: The areas for which we will be expending this allocation has already been mentioned.

Urban Sewerage and Water

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Member state where the upgrade works to the transmission network is to be completed?

Mr. Croal: First of all, there is an additional \$53 million for the ongoing Vlissingen Road project, that is from Shelterbelt to Lamaha Street, and an additional \$174 million for Church Street to Cummings Street. This is strictly for the procurement of the pipes.

There is an additional \$12 million for Cemetery Road to Mandela Avenue, \$35 million for works done in collaboration with Public Works on Mandela Avenue itself because, with GWI, you would recognise that we had to relocate some of the pipes. We had to get new connections. There is an additional \$28 million for electro-mechanical equipment to replace a number of motors in the system – to provide new motors. These are in terms of the submersible pumps as well as the well masters. There is an additional \$10 million for the completion of the new water treatment plant, the raw water intake at the Bartica end. That will be to complete the work there. It is an ongoing contract. That will represent the \$273 million that is now being sought.

Mr. Jordan: Could the Hon. Member state what is the approximate length or the distance for the various transmission networks and which contractor will be conducting these works?

Mr. Croal: The Vlissingen Road project, from Shelterbelt to Lamaha Street, is ongoing. The Hon. Member can, probably, calculate the distance from how far Shelterbelt is to Lamaha Street.

The Bartica Project has a contractor who is working. For the Church Street to Cummings Street project, for the procurement of pipes, that has no contractor because the procurement process has

to take place [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] On Church Street from Shelterbelt to Cummings Street. That is the first phase.

9.31 p.m.

The Cemetery Road to Mandela Avenue project is similar to the Church Street project. All the others that I mentioned have to have the procurement for the tendering. Only two of those that I mentioned have ongoing contracts.

Mr. Jordan: Am I to conclude that these projects were conceptualised and are at the point of being executed, and that the engineer's estimate or documents, the procurement process, has no record as to the length of the project to be completed in order to come up with a cost?

Mr. Croal: If the Hon. Member would like, he could simply use the process his Colleague has been using by asking the questions and submit a number of written questions, for which I can give you details – every dimension, every five-dimension and every kilometre, I can give you the details. That is not an issue.

45-453 Ministry of Housing and Water – Water Service Expansion and Management – \$683,500,000 & \$273,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Current Expenditure

Item 6: 47-473 Ministry of Health – Family and Primary Health Care - \$619,292,862

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, you have the floor.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is a two-part question. I know, regarding the vaccine, that we would have spoken *ad nauseum* earlier in the day, but I just want to do line item 6221, drugs and medical supplies, other than vaccines. Could the Hon. Minister tell us, apart from the vaccines... We know that the COVID-19 is still with us, and that is the reality. Our ports are still opened and we have porous borders. Woe to God if we would have gotten variants of interest, let alone variants of concern. Be that as it may, would we have enough ventilators or oxygen, not only in the urban areas, but also in the other regions, to adequately assist persons who may be in the state of oxygen depletion and dyspnea. I do not want to go into the medical terms. Would we have adequate supplies of ventilators or oxygen to adequately treat our patients?

Dr. Anthony: This specific line item actually deals with procurement. This is another area where we have set aside moneys to buy vaccines. You would have heard me mention, earlier, that we are also procuring vaccines through the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the African Union Commission (AUC) mechanism. We have allocated \$341 million under this head to be able to procure these vaccines. We have also allocated, approximately, \$278 million to buy an additional 58,000 doses of Sputnik V vaccines. If you add the two sums, you will get \$619 million, and that is what this allocation is for.

The Member also asked, particularly, about ventilators. I want to assure the Member that, at the ocean view hospital, we have ventilators for, at least, 25 patients, and we have set in motion to procure an additional 10 ventilators and 20 continuous positive airway pressure (CPAP) machines. Those should be arriving within the next two weeks to augment what we have at the ocean view hospital.

In addition to that, we have been able to add ventilators to every regional hospital, and so every one of the regional hospitals have, at least one, and, in many cases, have more than one ventilator.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister, for giving us that information.

In addition to what you have mentioned, we know that chronic diseases take up about 70% of our budget in health. Even though COVID-19 is on the front burner, we do not want the gains we have had in chronic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and so forth, to go *down the drain*. We have heard of drug shortages across the regions. Would you say we have adequate drugs for those chronic diseases and other non-COVID-19 related diseases? Do we have adequate amounts to last us for the remaining of 2021?

Dr. Anthony: Unfortunately, the Hon. Member is referring to a totally different programme. Under the Ministry, we have seven different programmes. The Member is asking, specifically, about the chronic diseases programme, which is not one of those under consideration here.

However, I want to assure the Member that we have procured adequate supplies of medicines. We did a four-month emergency supply; we have recently concluded another eight-month supply; and we had put out a tender, which is going to be evaluated by the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB), for an additional 14-month supply of medicines. As you would

recall, we had a shortage of medicines. We had a lot of medicines that expired, and we are now replenishing that. The supply, by the end of this month, will be stabilised. For every chronic disease that you can think about, we would have, at least, those that are on the formulary to make sure that everyone can come to anyone of the health centres and be able to get medicines.

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, just a supplemental question. I am assuming that the...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, could you just let me recognise you first before you engage in cross talk?

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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

Dr. Cummings: I was just wondering, as a caution, if the contractors or suppliers are being paid up front before the medicine arrives.

Dr. Anthony: We do have contracts with the suppliers. They are paid upon delivery, based on the contract terms.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: This provision is for the purchase of additional COVID-19 vaccines. The Hon. Minister stated that these were for Sputnik V again. Could the Hon. Minister say how many doses of Sputnik V we are buying here and whether he can name the supplier of this vaccine?

Dr. Anthony: Again, let me reinstate what I just said. We are buying 58,000 doses of Sputnik V, and the supplier is the same. In addition to that, we are procuring 148,000 doses from the CARICOM and the African Union Commission initiative, and that would cost us approximately \$341 million.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: I did not get the name of the supplier.

Dr. Anthony: It is the same one that we had before.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: I did not hear you.

Dr. Anthony: It is the same supplier, and that is Mr. Ahmed Dalmook Al Maktoum.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: One last question, Sir. Could the Hon. Minister state what, if any, role was played in this transaction by Per Morten Hansen? I am asking if he is aware of that name and whether that person has any role to play in the acquisition of vaccines for Guyana?

Dr. Anthony: I do not know who that is.

Item 6: 47-473 Ministry of Health – Family and Primary Health Care Services - \$619,292,862 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

47-474 Ministry of Health – Regional and Clinical Services – \$1,325,000,000, \$220,000,000, \$53,000,000 & \$418,904,000

Current Expenditure

Drugs and Medical Supplies

Mr. Holder: Mr. Chairman, I am just confirming that we are dealing with item 47-474.

Mr. Chairman: We are at item 6: 47-474, line item 6221.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I have a question. From 2nd August to now, there has been a chronic drug shortage problem across this country, and it is no secret. My question is: Will this, sum that is here, be adequate enough to deal with that drug shortage that we are facing? The \$1.3 billion, have you exhausted that sum?

Dr. Anthony: I just want to refresh the Hon. Member's memory that, as far as we have on record, since 2017, drugs and medical supplies were not procured. Therefore, that would have led to a shortage. The shortage predates our arrival into Government. What compounded it, also, was that there were billions of dollars in expired drugs. Therefore, what we inherited was... I will not say chronic, but most of the items that people require were not there.

To move on, this sum that is being sought is for the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). It has exhausted, as far as I am aware, the voted provision that was made. It is going to be using \$355 million of this sum to procure Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); haemodialysis supplies; X-ray plates, and ophthalmology supplies. The sum of \$570 million of this sum is projected to be used for the purchase of oncology drugs, especially for women with breast cancer

and for persons who are suffering from non-Hodgkin disease and so on. We also have, within this projection, sums to buy pharmaceuticals for those transplant patients who would require immune suppression. Seventy million dollars of this sum is also projected for emergency laboratory supplies and another \$330 million has been allocated for medical gas.

9.46 p.m.

Capital Expenditure

Ministry of Health - Buildings

Dr. Cummings: When looking at the description of the project, they would have included payment of retention, completion of the Polyclinic at Festival City, the upgrading of the electrical system at the Linden Hospital Complex and the Kwakwani Hospital, provisions at the Port Kaituma Hospital, the theatres at the Skeldon Hospital and Aishalton Public Hospital, x-ray rooms and laboratory rooms at the Aishalton Public Hospital, extension of the North East La Penitence Health Centre and No.1 Dispensary Charlestown Health Centre, provision of shed, building of handle unit and water distribution system and waste at the Linden Hospital Complex, hot water distribution, and the provision for accident and emergency department at the Kwakwani Hospital. Could you tell us the various percentages of the work that has been completed? The remark states:

“Provision of additional resources to facilitate the upgrading and expansion of health facilities.”

Dr. Anthony: I would have to get a list of those places that you have mentioned in order to give you what percentage we are at. In addition to those places, we have also been working on the Diamond Hospital which has just been completed. An expenditure of close to US\$1 million was expended there. We are also currently working on the Leonora Cottage Hospital. That should be completed within the next two months. We are doing works at the Mabaruma Hospital. Again, an expenditure of close to US\$ 1 million has been expended. That is expected to be completed in the next three months. We are also doing works on the Lethem Regional Hospital and, again, approximately US\$1 million has been expended there. That should be completed within the next two months. We are also doing works on the Paramakatoi Health Centre.

In addition to that, we just concluded arrangements with the Government of India. We will be starting, shortly, the putting up of a facility, the design and then the construction of the facility at the West Demerara Regional Hospital. That would be a project worth approximately US\$6 million, inclusive of the design. Also, approximately US\$6 million will be expended on the Anna Regina Hospital or the Suddie Hospital, and another US\$6 million will be expended for the Bartica Hospital. For the specific ones that you asked about, I can get the percentages for you.

Land and Water Transport

Dr. Cummings: Project code 2405600 – Land and Water Transport: We are looking at the provision of additional resources to facilitate the purchase of vehicle and ambulances. Could you give us the specifications of this vehicle and the ambulances?

Dr. Anthony: The \$53 million being sought is for the provision of three additional ambulances at \$15 million each, and a pick-up that we estimate to be about \$8 million.

Dr. Cummings: Could you give us the cost of each? Did you give us the cost just now?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, He did.

Dr. Cummings: Could you give us the specifications?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, could you give the specifications?

Dr. Anthony: I could provide the specifications to the Hon. Member; I do not have those details here with me.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Minister be kind enough to tell us where the three ambulances will be located and where the one other vehicle will be located?

Dr. Anthony: All three ambulances are going to be sent to Region 6, and the pick-up will be used in the Black Bush Polder area.

Equipment – Medical

Dr. Cummings: Could the Hon. Minister tell us what type of medical equipment would be purchased to warrant the amount of \$418,904,000?

Dr. Anthony: The items we will be buying includes: four digital x-rays, one portable x-ray, one ultrasound machine, three portable ultrasound machines, 12 cardiac monitors, 20 foetal dopplers, seven blood pressure apparatus, three laryngoscopes, 10 otoscopes, 10 ophthalmoscopes, four electrocardiogram (ECG) machines with paediatric lead, six defibrillators, 12 warmers for birthing room, three paediatric ventilators, 24 pulse oximeters, 20 suction machines, six examination lamps, four emergency crash cards, laparoscopic surgical equipment and there is a whole series of them. It is one complete suite that we will be using. There are seven refrigerators, three bio-safety cabinets, seven sterilisers, one laboratory freezer, eight dental chairs, 40 water dispensers, an industrial washer, an industrial dryer, 12 cots for maternity wards, fans, generators, bedside cupboards, three aesthetic machines, 12 trollies with cover for the mortuary, 15 infusion stands, three sleeping couches, blood gas analyser, one biochemistry analyser, one haematology analyser, two Intensive Care Units (ICU) beds, three delivery beds and so forth.

Dr. Cummings: I just want to know if all this medical equipment will be going to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation or to the other outlying regional hospitals like the West Demerara Regional Hospital or New Amsterdam Hospital, because we have medical students, and rather than everyone being concentrated in the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, we want to bring the others up to the standard where we can have university hospitals.

Dr. Anthony: They will be distributed to several hospitals.

Mr. Mahipaul: I heard the Hon. Minister answer and said several hospitals. Could you confirm for us please that these hospitals include the West Demerara Regional Hospital, the Leonora Cottage Hospital, the Wakenaam Cottage Hospital and the Leguan Hospital?

Dr. Anthony: Those would be funded by another project. As I mentioned, we have US\$6 million that we will be spending at the West Demerara Regional Hospital. The US\$1 million that we are currently utilising to fix the Leonora Cottage Hospital also includes equipment.

47-474 Ministry of Health – Regional and Clinical Services – \$1,325,000,000, \$220,000,000, \$53,000,000 & \$418,904,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: This completes the consideration of all the items.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Chairman, we have another page.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry, Hon. Members.

Capital Expenditure

Item 7: 51-517 Ministry of Home Affairs – Customs Anti-Narcotics – \$17,825,000

Mr. Chairman: I will give the Hon. Minister a few minutes.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Through you, Mr. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister provide a detail breakdown of how this amount of \$17 million will be spent?

Mr. Benn: It is contemplated that this amount will be spent for handguns, submachine guns, 9mm ammunition and 7.62 mm ammunition.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Could the Hon. Minister state what is unforeseen about this expense and why was it not included in the budget that was passed a few weeks ago? Is it a case that you are ill-prepared?

Additionally, is it a case that this request is premise on the fact that there is a rise in narcotics trafficking?

Mr. Benn: I thank the Hon. Member for her question. It is not simply a matter of being unprepared. The weapons which are held by the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU) are old. They have been malfunctioning in operational activities and we do not want to continue to run that risk. Even now as we speak, they are operational out there and we want the officers to have the effectiveness of the weapons so that they would not get hurt and that they could complete their mission.

Regarding the question about the rise in narcotic activities, I would not say there is a rise. There is better interdiction at this time.

10.01 p.m.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. Minister, you said that these guns are old. When did you discover or realise that these weapons are old?

Mr. Benn: These weapons were inherited from the previous Administration at the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU). As I said, the reliability of these weapons was not satisfactory, and we do not want to pose any risk to our operations and people out there.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: I am trying to establish that this could not have been an unforeseen expenditure. We have had the passage, in this Dome, of two Budgets, and this could have been included. Hon. Minister, could you indicate your plans for these weapons that are old or that would be condemned? Are you also saying that there is no rise in narcotics trafficking and, if that is the case, could you provide me with the statistics on which you ground your claim or statement?

Mr. Benn: I am not sure that there is a question of rise or fall. I said that there is a question of better interdiction at this time. With respect to the question of the use of weapons, which you said would be condemned... I do not think there is the thought, at the moment, of condemning. I think they might more be used in training activities.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: I have a final question for the Minister. Could the Hon. Minister state how these additional guns would help to solve these narcotics trafficking, because we are witnessing frequent drug busts? We have witnessed some of the largest drug busts in this nation's history.

Mr. Benn: Indeed, we have some increases in drug and marijuana busts in Guyana. The CANU has been much more active and successful than recently, not only in Guyana but in relation to partnership activities with neighbouring countries. That is what we have.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. Minister, are you prepared to provide me with those statistics? Also, could you state what assessment or study was done to determine that there was a need for additional guns, besides the statement that you made in relation to them being old?

Mr. Benn: I am prepared to provide figures on the interdictions that we have been associated with recently, both in Guyana and neighbouring countries.

The question of the guns is their functioning while in use. I do not think that there is a big issue with that other than my saying that we need to ensure that our people have a proper response with good working equipment.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Minister tell this House what procurement measure would be used to procure the weapons?

Mr. Benn: There are a limited number of people who are in the business of firearms in this country, and they would be licence firearm dealers.

Mr. Mahipaul: Is the Hon. Minister confirming that there would be no sole sourcing?

Mr. Benn: I would like to clarify and to repeat that there are a limited number of persons who are firearm dealers in Guyana. We would reach out to those persons for bids in order to have a successful procurement.

Item 7: 51-517 Ministry of Home Affairs – Customs Anti-Narcotics – \$17,825,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Item 8: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – \$249,967,523, \$2,100,000, \$2,000,000, \$55,966,000, \$84,358,400, \$39,144,535, \$174,302,160 & \$105,215,556

Current Expenditure

Field Materials and Supplies

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Could the Hon. Minister give some clarity to this allocation. It states:

“Provision of additional resources to the regional joint support team”

Is there a regional joint support team in the Guyana defence Force (GDF)? I have never heard about it, and I do not know if the Minister could give some clarity to that because, if we are providing additional resources, that suggests to me that there is a team already in existence and we are giving additional resources to it.

Ms. Teixeira: The regional joint support team is a new initiative that was decided upon by the Defence Board around April, 2021. It would be an initiative involving the GDF and the Guyana Police Force (GPF) to develop operational capacity in crime fighting.

This is a brand new initiative to be implemented and the budgetary allocation under line item 6222 is to be able to provide resources that it would need in order to be established and to function.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Minister provide a list of the field materials and supplies to the cost of \$249,967,52, which are requested for this regional joint support team.

Ms. Teixeira: I regret to announce to the Hon. Member that it would not be possible since it is a security issue. These are the regional joint support teams that would be in the ten regions of Guyana.

Mr. Mahipaul: For confirmation, would there be ten regional joint support teams, if I am hearing correctly?

Ms. Teixeira: They would be based in the regions of Guyana.

Rental of Buildings

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Hon. Minister say where the buildings are located, if there is more than one, and if there is, could she disaggregate the \$2,100,000?

Ms. Teixeira: These are for the rental of buildings that would be used in various regions in order to have an operational base for the regional support team.

Mr. Mahipaul: Is it not possible for us to know where the buildings would be located? I mean, we are having an operation with the Guyana Defence Force. People would see this in their communities and, of course, they would want to know what it is about. So, could we have the location of the building?

Ms. Teixeira: Whenever that happens the communities would, probably, know.

Mr. Ramjattan: This, obviously, is crime fighting. This is not national security. Are you saying that we cannot scrutinise and interrogate crime fighting? *[Interjection]* Oh, come on! *[Inaudible]*.

Ms. Teixeira: I am not aware that was a question Mr. Chairman. **[Mr. Ramjattan:** Yes, it is.] I think the Hon. Member heard me very clearly. This is a new initiative that is now beginning. How could one say where buildings are when we are now beginning?

Mr. Chairman Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, you know that the Minister was on her feet, and you continued to stand. Now you could stand, Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan.

Mr. Ramjattan: Once again I ask the question: Is it, exclusively, crime fighting? Notwithstanding that the GDF is involved, this House, Mdm. Minister, ought to know where these constructions and rentals are going on. Please answer the question.

Ms. Teixeira: I did not remember to ask the Hon. Member, where his dogs and horses were placed when he came up with that crime fighting initiative in 2016. However, I guess horses and dogs blend in better than humans. I have made it clear that this is a new initiative that started in April of this year, and it is now being set up. The budgetary allocation cannot accommodate the new initiative. Therefore, the funds being requested is to cover and allow it to set up. We cannot name the places and where it is because we do not have a list of those places.

Mr. Mahipaul: What initiative was used to arrive at the figures \$2,100,000?

Ms. Teixeira: It is an estimate that the joint teams may possibly need six or seven locations from which to operate. Six or seven places at 300,000 rental would come up with the figure that you are looking for.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I think this is a good time to put the Question.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Chairman.

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

Mr. Figueira: Thank you for recognising me, Sir. Minister, with regards to this new initiative, *[Interjection]* Ms. Teixeira, Hon. Member...

Ms. Teixeira: I am an Hon. Minister by the way. Yes, thank you.

Mr. Figueira: Most Hon. Minister, with respect to this initiative, was there any thought with respect to the building that would be used? Would they be Government facilities, or would they be privately owned facilities?

Ms. Teixeira: Wherever there are Government-owned buildings, those would be used. Where there are not, we may have to find other facilities. Those are the ones that would be rented.

Mr. Figueira: The fact that you have indicated that wherever Government buildings are...

Mr. Chairman Hon. Member, I have not indicated anything.

Mr. Figueira: I beg your pardon, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman I have not indicated anything. You have to speak to the Chairman and not to the Minister; and I have to put your question to the Minister. I think we are doing this...

Mr. Figueira: That is all right. Thank you for your guidance. Honourable Member...

Mr. Chairman Mr. Chairman...

Mr. Figueira: Hon. Member, since you would have indicated... Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: It is Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Chairman, the Minister would have indicated that wherever Government facilities are, those said buildings would be used. Since it is a regional operation and it is known where the regional buildings are located, could you say which of those said buildings would be identified in the respective regions to facilitate this programme to fight crime?

Ms. Teixeira: Hon. Member, the buildings that would be used are based on the requirements of the regional joint support team and based on their operational needs. At this point, no building, Government or otherwise, could be listed or named.

10.16 p.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: We have established that the new regional joint support team would be renting buildings, private buildings or Government buildings, whichever one is available at whichever time they come up. Is it a fair conclusion that the maintenance of these buildings will fall under the respective owners from whom we would be renting them or, if it is Government-owned, the said government agency from which we are renting it and not under this new team?

Ms. Teixeira: This is just *kerfuffling*. The rental of the buildings as per normal... If we rent a private building, it is obviously based on the contract and what it would entail. And, that would be determined by the contract. With Government buildings, once they are available and are appropriate for the use of the team, it would be used. The Government, I assume, would not be charging them rates as is per normal. We are dealing with line item 6241 – Rental of Buildings.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am aware that we are dealing with line item 6241, Rental of Buildings. I am trying to establish whether the Minister envisions that this new organisation will be responsible for the maintenance of these buildings that they are renting, or not.

Ms. Teixeira: I think I made myself clear, Hon. Member, that it depends on the contract and whether it would be renting private places. With regard to Government buildings, which they wish to use and upgrade, that would come under the next head, line item 6242.

Mr. Figueira: Could the Minister inform the House if these joint service teams that will be set up in the respective regions will be permanently placed in the regions? Additionally, will they have a different form of identification, or will it just be the police and the army going out to do the operation?

Ms. Teixeira: I am afraid I cannot answer those questions except that the regional joint support team will be functioning in areas and be mobile. Therefore, it may not always be statutory or static. If needed in any areas, it could change to another area.

Mr. Figueira: If it is going to be mobile, why is there a need to rent facilities?

Ms. Teixeira: I believe that most operational bodies need a base, a home to come home to. That is my answer.

Ms. Ferguson: Could the Hon. Minister state, for the various regions, what would be the number per team?

Ms. Teixeira: I think I made it clear. This is a new initiative by the Defence Board of Guyana and, therefore, there are certain issues relating to it that are of security interests.

Maintenance of Buildings

Mr. Chairman: For line item 6242, I propose the question that the sum stated stands part of the Schedule. I now propose the question that the sum stated for line item 6242 stands part of the Schedule. Those in favour say "Aye". Those against say ...

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, you said that you were proposing the question there.

Mr. Chairman: Yes. I looked around and no one answered, so I put the question.

Mr. Mahipaul: No, I did not hear you. You never said “put”, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: The “Ayes” have it.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, you never said that you will put the question just now. The *Hansard* could reflect that.

Mr. Chairman: We could always go back to the *Hansard* after.

Mr. Mahipaul: I would appreciate because I, definitely, heard “propose”.

Mr. Chairman: I proposed then I put.

Mr. Mahipaul: You did not put...

Mr. Chairman: If you are arguing, again, ...

Mr. Mahipaul: He did not put it.

Mr. Chairman: Line item 6292... and I proposed the question that the sum stated for this line item stands part of the Schedule. I now put the question that the sum stated for this line item stands part of the Schedule. Those in favour say “Aye”. Those against say “No”. The “Ayes” have it. The sum stated now stands part of the Schedule.

Dietary

[There was no discussion under this head]

Other

Lt. Col. (Ret’d) Harmon: Could the Hon. Minister state what would the sum of \$84,358,000 be spent on, under Other?

Ms. Teixeira: The sum of \$84,358,000 will be spent on uniforms and other things, such as operational issues, that the team will need in setting themselves up.

Mr. Ramjattan: This is a little egregious here. Will this be for uniforms that will be under the Police Act or the Guyana Defence Force? I want to know, if it is crime-fighting, why are we shifting this on to the GDF? This is unconstitutional.

Ms. Teixeira: I believe that the Hon. Member is using the word uniform rather literally. We are talking about a new regional support team that will need additional support in terms of office equipment or other things they may need to be able to function. Uniform may include clothing, but it could include other aspects in relation to what would be considered their uniform.

Lt. Col (Ret'd) Harmon: This is \$84 million that we are talking about and, by now, the Hon. Minister ought to have a very clear idea, in coming to the House, what this money will be spent on. We are asking on what will you be spending \$84 million, in addition to all the other sums you have here, Hon. Minister?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, I hope that you would not allow that. The issue of the \$84 million has a number of aspects to it, including uniforms. Obviously, this is a crime-fighting body. It has to acquire information, it has to be able to work to be able to fight crime, which means they have to know things that are going on in the communities. Mr. Harmon is well aware of what that means, and I do not have to spell it out.

The \$84 million can put that team in different regions to have the capacity to know what is going on and to be able to fight crime. It is not just running around with uniform and a gun. It is also about being able to work in the communities and have information. I am sure you and I know, Mr. Harmon, what that means.

Mr. Mahipaul: I hear the Hon. Minister alluding to the fact that this unit is, specifically, to fight crime. May I ask what types of crime will this body be fighting and if it will be usurping the authority of the Guyana Police Force?

Ms. Teixeira: There is nobody usurping anybody's powers. The GDF and the Police are covered by statutes and are under the Constitution. This is about enhancing the capacity of the law enforcement agencies with the support of the GDF in being able to fight crime. Whether it is narcotics or other forms of crimes, it is there to work and support each other. Therefore, this is not to become a hysterical thing. These are two properly functioning bodies that will work in collaboration with each other in a newer and different structure. It will not denigrate so do not get excited and get hot air under your ears, Mr. Ramjattan. Do not get all hot and sweaty, Mr. Ramjattan.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member...

Ms. Teixeira: I am not saying anything bad, Mr. Chairman. I am just telling him not to get hot and sweaty. The issue is that these two bodies are covered by statutes and there will be no interference in their functions in terms of usurping any body's powers or usurping any body that has a role to play in crime fighting. This is about enhancing our capabilities as a nation and being able to have a better coordination and collaboration between the different disciplined forces in our country. That is it. It is nothing to get conspiratorial about. There is nothing conspiratorial about it.

Mr. Mahipaul: As I said earlier, the Hon. Minister continues to allude to the fact that this body is for crime fighting.

Mr. Chairman: You are imputing now. What is she alluding...

Mr. Mahipaul: She continues to say that this body will be responsible for crime fighting.

Mr. Chairman: That is right.

Mr. Mahipaul: To the Hon. Minister, with deepest of regards and respect to her, would the composition of these teams be Members from the Guyana Defence Force, exclusively, or the Guyana Police Force, exclusively, or jointly with Guyana Police Force and the Guyana Defence Force?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, clearly what I am hearing and what you are hearing are two different things. From the first line item we heard about 'joint'. Hon. Minister, I give you the chance if you want to repeat yourself.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, Hon. Member, 'Joint', I believe is joint, which means that they are working together in a regional support group. I leave the 'joint' such as *ganja* to Mr. Duncan. The issue that we are talking about is "joint" meaning collaboration and cooperation between the GDF and the police working in one regional support team in the locations that they are assigned to fight crime, and to have a quick response when necessary to work together. That is using our resources more efficiently and better.

Mr. Henry: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. In this ‘joint’ coming together, is there place for the Community Policing Groups in the regions? These are the persons who have been holding the law together in those communities. Even during Covid-19, they were assisting. There are big sums of moneys. Is some part of the money for a joint involvement of the Community Policing Groups in the communities?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Henry, I would totally support you that the Community Policing Groups are critical, particularly in the interior areas. In fact, the Government has announced that it would be setting up some new initiatives and giving support to the Community Policing Groups, particularly in relation to our borders. That would be a completely separate arrangement than this one. Obviously, the importance of the Community Policing Groups and Neighbourhood Policing are critical components of the crime fighting machinery of Guyana and not just for the army and the police. You are correct to bring that out.

10.31 p.m.

Mr. Ramjattan: Since the taxpayers would be spending money on this regional task force, could the taxpayers get the structure, the hierarchy and the reporting relationships of this new force that they would be regionalising?

Ms. Teixeira: Which line item are we on? Are we on line item 6294 – Other?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Hon. Minister.

Ms. Teixeira: What has that got to do with the structure?

Mr. Chairman: It is the policy of the...

Mr. Ramjattan: Could we know what...

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

Mr. Ramjattan: Just to bring it to your attention and focus, when we come here with the police, we have a certain Police Act that governs. The Guyana Defence Force (GDF) has a certain Defence Act that governs it. You have created, now, a regional task force without an Act. We have to spend

so much money and we do not know the reporting structures, relationships, the hierarchies and the structure of this task force. Could you say if you can relay it to the Parliament?

Ms. Teixeira: I seem to be getting the Member *hot under the collar*. The issue is that the two bodies will work operationally together. It is an operational issue. Therefore, I believe you and I, both former Ministers of Home Affairs, know exactly what we mean when we speak about operational joint support teams. You know exactly what we are talking about, Sir. The structure is clear; the Commissioner of Police, the Chief of Staff, the Defence Board, the Commander-in-Chief. You know the structure. Why are you asking this as if it is something new?

Ms. Ferguson: Through the Chairman, concerning the population of this new unit, could the Hon. Member state whether you will be recruiting new persons from the public, or will you be utilising what you already have within the GDF and the Guyana Police Force?

Ms. Teixeira: I have said that it is the army and the police. If the army and the police so desire to have additional people, they will recruit. If the police desire additional people, they will recruit. At this point, I am saying that the entities that are working in the joint regional support team are the GDF and the Guyana Police Force.

Ms. Ferguson: Follow-up: Could the Hon. Member state what level within the Guyana Police Force and the GDF will comprise this regional crimefighting unit?

Ms. Teixeira: I assume that you are asking me to state rank? Is that what you are asking for? All I would say, Mr. Chairman and Mdm. Ferguson...

Ms. Ferguson: I am referring to rank, Madam...

Ms. Teixeira: I thought that was what you were referring to. I will say to you that, Madam, is not in the Standing Orders either. I will say to the Hon. Member that these are high-level regional support teams. They obviously would include persons at the rank of the Officer level.

Capital Expenditure

Buildings

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Speaker, is this \$39,144,535 for the construction of a new building?

Ms. Teixeira: Hon. Member, the allowance is to rehabilitate a number of buildings. One – where the base would be at Eve Leary; two – the rehabilitation of a building at Eteringbang; and three – the construction of a multiagency building in Eteringbang. I am sure everyone knows the location of Eteringbang and the importance that border area plays in the movement of crime.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could the Minister disaggregate the sum to say what amount is allocated to the construction at Eteringbang and the rehabilitation at the Eve Leary area?

Ms. Teixeira: The \$39 million has \$2.5 million for the rehabilitation at Eve Leary, \$13.6 million for the rehabilitation of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) building at Eteringbang and \$22.9 million for the new office building at Eteringbang.

Air, Land and Water Transport

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister say what type of vehicles will be purchased for air, land and water transport? Could the Hon. Minister also give us the number of vehicles to be purchased?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, I guess there are 32 vehicles to be acquired based on the tenders and the procurement. They would consist of working vehicles such as pickups and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs). It is in that line of vehicle.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Leader of the Opposition, did I see you pressing your microphone?

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: No, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: My apologies, Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I am trying to ascertain, through you, if the \$39 million is specifically for pickups and ATVs, only, and no other vehicles. Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to say what is the engineer's estimate for the pickups and ATVs, if it is solely for them?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, I believe that the Hon. Member is looking at Project Code 1200100 – Buildings, whereas we are looking at Project Code 2404600 – Air, Land and Water Transport – \$174 million.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir. That is my mistake, I must apologise.

I am asking if the \$174,302,160 is solely for pickups and ATVs, and what is the estimate for the pickups and the estimate for the ATVs?

Ms. Teixeira: There is a projection in the budget for the number of vehicles it would like to purchase. Those are ATVs, pickups and one vehicle. However, that will depend on the process of procurement and what prices they will get and whether they will get more or less vehicles. They have projected for 32 vehicles, which include pickups, ATVs and one car.

Furniture and Equipment

Mr. Mahipaul: Cde. Chairman, could the Hon. Minister specify the type of furniture and equipment to be purchased with this \$105,215,556?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, there are several different types of equipment, including equipment for telecommunications, things like washing machines, dryers, refrigerators, freezers – those kind of furniture. There are equipment that will be used in office in order to establish the different centres.

Mr. Mahipaul: Are these furniture and equipment for the new building that will be constructed at Eteringbang and the operation that is going to happen there?

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Chairman, the equipment here would be used in the various operational bases that will be set up throughout the country as required.

Item 8: 53-531 Guyana Defence Force – Defence and Security Support – \$249,967,523, \$2,100,000, \$2,000,000, \$55,966,000, \$84,358,400, \$39,144,535, \$174,302,160 & \$105,215,556 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Schedule.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, this completes consideration of all items.

Question

“That this Committee of Supply approves of the proposals set in Financial Paper No. 2 of 2021 – Schedule of Supplementary Provision on the Current and Capital Estimates totalling \$21,360,385,051, for the period ending 31st December, 2021.”

put and agreed to.

Assembly resumed.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I wish to report that the Committee of Supply has approved of the proposals set out in Financial Paper No. 2 of 2021 and I now move that the Assembly doth agree with the Committee in the said Resolution.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: This completes consideration of Financial Paper No. 2 of 2021. We now move to the consideration of the Supplementary Appropriation Bill.

Suspension of Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Appropriation Bill 2010, Bill No. 15/2010 to be introduced at this stage.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I move that Standing Orders Nos. 13(n) and 54 be suspended to enable the Supplementary Appropriation Bill No. 1 of 2021, Bill No. 13 of 2021 to be introduced at this stage.

10.46 p.m.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with article 171 of the Constitution, I signify that Cabinet has recommended the Supplementary Appropriation Bill (No.1/2021), Bill No.13 of 2021, for consideration by the National Assembly. I now present the Bill to the Assembly and move that it be read the first time.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READINGS

The following Bill was introduced and read the first time:

Supplementary Appropriation Bill (No. 1 for 2021) –Bill No.13 of 2021

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2021, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for the specified purposes, in conformity with the Constitution.”

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

Question put and carried.

Bill read the first time.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Supplementary Appropriation Bill No. 1/2021, Bill No.13 of 2021 be read a second time.

BILLS – Second and Third Reading

Supplementary Appropriation Bill (No. 1/2021) –Bill No.13 of 2021

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to provide for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure (not otherwise lawfully charged on the Consolidated Fund) of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the fiscal year ending 31st December, 2021, estimates whereof have been approved by the National Assembly, and for the appropriation of those sums for the specified purposes, in conformity with the Constitution.”

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

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I think this is a good time for us to take half of an hour suspension and we will come back for the next item on the Order Paper.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Speaker, can I ask a question?

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead Hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: The COVID-19 guidelines that have been established state that we should be here up to 8 o'clock. We have extended it beyond 8.00 p.m. to finish the financial papers. We are now at quarter to 11.00 p.m. I am suggesting that what we are doing here now is putting all of these Members at serious risk. We have made that situation very clear that we will go up to 8 o'clock. Now, we have gone to minutes to 11.00 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Leader of the Opposition. There was a motion to suspend the Standing Orders to conclude the business of today and it was approved by the National Assembly. There was an appropriate time to make that intervention. Thank you very much.

Lt. Col. (Ret'd) Harmon: Mr. Speaker, well, we should go *man*.

Sitting suspended at 10.49 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 11.30 p.m.

MOTION

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will now proceed with the motion in the name of the Hon. Minister, Ms. Gail Teixeira.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, go ahead.

Mr Ramjattan: Hon. Speaker, I rise to make an invitation to you that, in being consistent with a ruling in relation to the flaring, this motion ought to be disqualified on the ground of *sub judice*. If I am just given three or four minutes, I am going to make the case as to why I so state and why it should be considered. It is an important point.

Of course, we know rule 26(g) states:

“it shall not relate to any matter which is under adjudication by a court of law”

It makes it *sub judice*. The principle underlining that rule, which we went through, is to ensure that trials are not prejudiced by parliamentary comments. As you had even mentioned on the last occasion, even magistrates and judges listen to this institution when we speak. It is important to understand, and I am certain that you are aware, that this no confidence motion goes towards the character of Mr. David Patterson. In the Magistrate’s Court, as we speak, there are criminal charges against him, suffice it to say conspiracy to defraud. So we do have litigation that is going on.

It is clear from the Whereas Clauses in the motion that the Government speakers will be condemnatory of the character of the Member, Mr. David Patterson. We could see already bullyism and all of that in there. I want to make this very important point that there is a substantial risk of prejudice to those proceedings by virtue of what is going to transpire here. It is important, moreover, that this rule, in relation to criminal matters, is almost absolute.

On page 383 of the 25th Edition of the *Erskine May: Parliamentary Practice*, I read a passage which stated that the rule was set out some time in 1962 or 1963. The resolution that they made in connection with the *sub judice* rule bars references and debates, including motions for leave to bring in Bills and questions, including supplementary questions, to matters awaiting or under adjudication in all courts excising a criminal jurisdiction from the moment the law is set in motion by a charge being made to the time when the verdict and sentence have been announced, and even again, when an appeal is filed until the appeal is decided. There could be no clearer statement of the law in relation to *sub judice* in criminal proceedings. We have that to apply when we are dealing with these matters.

In view of the criminal litigation that is going on, it is important then that, consistent with what you had ruled in relation to civil proceedings, which have even greater space, I feel that this must

be considered to the extent of ensuring that we do not have comments or anything from this motion that is going to substantially risk prejudicing the proceedings against the Hon. Member.

Criminal proceedings are extraordinarily sensitive issues. These are very sensitive issues to the extent that there have been courts of law which have ruled that, by virtue of the publicity given in relation to matters, even pre and during the trial, they could squash a conviction. So it is important then that the *sub judice* rule here is applied to the extent that this motion is disqualified. Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I note your observation. I allowed this motion on the Order Paper because it calls into consideration the Hon. Member's conduct as the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). As far as I know and having read this motion, it deals with the removal of the Hon. Member as Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee.

Hon. Attorney General, I see you are *chomping at the bit*. Would you like to make a contribution?

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: Sir, under the Constitution of our country, which is the supreme law, the Parliament has the authority to regulate its own procedure and business. What this motion seeks to do is to bring some measure of censure against a Member whose conduct has been impugned in a component of this Assembly, in the Public Accounts Committee. This National Assembly - the outer Assembly - has a duty to ensure that there is order, decorum, and rectitude in the behaviour of Members in all the organs of this House. The Constitution has given the Parliament that autonomy to regulate its own business and procedure. Judges over the years have always drawn a distinction and have refrained, deliberately, as a matter of law and as a matter of judicial comity from interfering with the business of the Parliament, once it is conducting its intramural affairs. One decision of the court describes the process as that.

This motion mentions nothing about whatever the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, is charged with. Whatever charge he is facing, this motion has absolutely no relevance, no connection, no nexus and makes no reference, whatsoever. My learned Friend, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, correctly pointed out to us on the last occasion that we must not use the *sub judice* principle to subvert, preclude and prevent this House from conducting its business.

11.40 p.m.

That principle applies here. It did not apply in the case in which Mr. Ramjattan wanted it to apply, because, in that case, the issue that was before this House was the identical issue that was before the High Court. Mr. Patterson's criminal culpability is not the subject of this motion. Mr. Patterson's criminal culpability is the subject of the criminal proceedings. There are disparate and different issues. We cannot contaminate them for the very reason that Mr. Ramjattan advocated on the last occasion, less Parliament will not be able to conduct its affairs by the mere plea of the *sub judice* principle. This is a very appropriate case where Mr. Ramjattan's arguments last Thursday is applicable. I invoke those arguments and I persuade Your Honour that there is nothing in this motion that collides, intersects or interferes with Mr. Patterson's criminal charge. Therefore, this motion Your Honour, as Your Honour had properly placed it on the Order Paper, should proceed to be debated. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Attorney General. Before we proceed with the contributions to this motion, let me just remind Hon. Members that we are still live all over the world and we are still under the COVID-19 protocols. I see on all sides of the House the masks are below the noses, as if we are thumbing our noses at the same regulations we have put in place for other people. Please, if we want to speak with our masks off, we have the podiums. Hon. Minister Teixeira, you may begin.

REMOVAL OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

WHEREAS the Public Accounts Committee met on December 28, 2020, under the Chairmanship of the Honourable Speaker of the National Assembly where Mr. David Patterson, M.P., was nominated and declared the Chairperson;

AND WHEREAS at the Sixth Meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, on February 1, 2021, following certain exposures during the examination of the 2016 Auditor General's Report, a motion was moved by Minister Gail Teixeira calling for Mr. David Patterson to resign as Chairperson while remaining as a member of the Committee and that another member of the Opposition be elected as the Chairperson; the motion was put in accordance with Standing Orders 26 (Admissibility of Motions) and 30 (h) Exemption from Notice;

AND WHEREAS the Chairperson having not agreed to resign, the motion was then moved and supported by the majority of the members for the removal of the Chairperson;

AND WHEREAS the Chairperson having not “put” the motion to a vote as required by the Standing Orders, the Clerk of the National Assembly was invited into the meeting to provide guidance;

AND WHEREAS the Clerk advised the Committee that the Regional Group of Clerks in the Caribbean had agreed that any member could move a motion for the Chairperson to step aside and that “no notice was required for a motion to be brought in a committee and the motion should be “put”, and if a division was called, it should be voted on;”

AND WHEREAS on the departure of the Clerk, the Chairperson did not “put” the motion but instead vacated the chair while remaining in the room and invited other members of the Opposition to take the chair whereby they declined; resulting in their being no Chair and the meeting being aborted;

AND WHEREAS the Seventh Meeting was summoned by the Chairperson on March 15, 2021, with the “Motion for the removal of the Chairperson” not listed as an item on the Agenda;

AND WHEREAS at the said Meeting, a motion was moved to amend the agenda to include, as the first item, “the Motion for the removal of Mr. David Patterson as Chairperson of the PAC”; this motion to amend the agenda was put to a vote and carried; and again, the Chairperson did not put the motion for his removal;

AND WHEREAS the Clerk of the National Assembly was again invited to the meeting and advised that the Clerk of the Committee could conduct an election for a temporary Chair for the day’s meeting; it was also noted that the Chairperson, according to SO 102(3), has “no original vote but in the event of an equality of votes shall have a casting vote”; therefore, the Chairperson although personally involved could occupy the Chair and “put” the motion; the Chairperson did not comply and again vacated the Chair; there was no Chairperson in place to “put” the motion to a vote once again; it was then agreed that the

Clerk of the National Assembly would seek legal advice from a lawyer who was “not politically aligned” on the interpretation of the Standing Orders;

AND WHEREAS the Clerk of the National Assembly formally circulated the legal advice he received dated March 23, 2021 “on whether SO 95(4) overrides SO 82(2)” to the Chairperson and Members of the Committee and called for a meeting to be held on March 31, 2021, no meeting was held, however, until April 12;

AND WHEREAS at the April 12th Meeting, the legal opinion was listed as Item #1 and ‘Motion for the removal of the Chairperson’ as Item # 2 on the Agenda;

AND WHEREAS the Chairperson refused to allow a motion for the adoption of the legal opinion circulated by the Clerk and repeatedly ignored and refused to allow motions to go to Item 2 on the agenda and “put” the “Motion for the removal of the Chairperson” instead he overrode every effort to do so and moved to other items on the Agenda;

AND WHEREAS a Committee Meeting was convened for April 19, at which Item # 1 “Motion for the removal of Mr. David Patterson as Chairperson” was asterisked by the Chairperson on the Agenda; the meeting was subsequently cancelled;

AND WHEREAS on May 3, 2021, the Speaker of the National Assembly wrote the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee, copied to all members of the Public Accounts Committee, in which he stated that i) as Speaker he could intervene in a committee related issue in ‘very serious and special circumstances;’ (ii) the Chairperson of a Committee does not have the authority to place an asterisk against a Member’s motion, only the mover could; (iii) this action by the Chairperson was a ‘gross violation of the Standing Orders and tantamount to bullying,’ and, iv) he compelled the Chairperson to ‘put’ the motion; 15.

AND WHEREAS to date Mr. David Patterson has demonstrated that he has no respect for the Speaker of the National Assembly and, it would appear, in the absence of a response to the Speaker’s letter he is unprepared to obey the Speaker’s instruction; he has disregarded the advice of the Clerk of the National Assembly on several occasions with regard to the

Standing Orders and is resolute in his refusal, using all forms of subterfuge, to allow the motion for his removal to be “put” to the vote;

AND WHEREAS Mr. David Patterson has consistently and openly violated the Standing Orders and has introduced a level of bullyism unbefitting of a Member of Parliament, and, in doing so, bringing the image of the National Assembly into disrepute,

BE IT RESOLVED:

That as a result of Mr. David Patterson’s conduct as Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee with respect to his open violation of the Standing Orders, among other things, in particular since February 1, the majority of the members of the Public Accounts Committee have lost confidence in him as the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the removal of Mr. David Patterson as the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee.

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

Ms. Teixeira: I know the night is late, but this is an important issue that this House will be debating. It is whether it would tolerate and accept a Member of Parliament who violates the Standing Orders, does not listen to the Speaker or the Clerk of the National Assembly and continues to believe that he or she is impervious to the rules of this House.

Why is this motion even here? Why did it reach this level? I think that is what we have to start off with. Why did this motion have to come here? Motions are brought in Parliament, in Standing Committees, and it is always normal that a motion is brought. Sometimes it is not controversial, sometimes it is, and the Chairman has to put it to a vote, whether it involves him or anybody else. That is his duty as the Chairperson. The Standing Orders make it very clear. In fact, the Standing Orders in our Parliament does not give the Speaker nor a chairman of a committee a vote, except for a chairperson in a case where there are equal votes. Otherwise, the chairperson does not have a vote either.

How did we get to this point? It is a long story. It is a saga that we should not be proud of in our National Assembly that an issue is brought up in a committee... [**Ms. Fernandes:** What is the issue?] I will come to that. Patience my dear. I have 30 minutes plus 10, you do not.

We have a saga, a story to tell in this House that we should all feel ashamed of as Members of Parliament (MPs). Ultimately, we have disagreeing views. We have sharp views. We disagree on many issues. The one thing we are supposed to uphold, two things actually, are the Constitution and the Standing Orders. The point is that some of us were Members of Parliament under the former Speaker and some of us had sharp differences with him. When he gave the orders, whether one liked it or not, one complied because that is the rule.

The issue is that the Public Accounts Committee is named in the Constitution as one of the Standing Committees of the Parliament. It names the Committee on Appointments, the Public Accounts Committee, the Standing Committee – Parliamentary Oversight Committee on the Security Sector, *et cetera*. It gives powers to the Auditor General; it gives powers to the Public Accounts Committee. In all democratic countries and in all democratic parliaments, the public accounts committee is a very powerful organisation that oversees Government and oversees former Governments, as well as present or existing Governments. That is what it is supposed to do. There must be a situation where people have confidence, including committee members, in the persons who are members of that committee.

The motion gives details, so that, those of you who are not Members of the Public Accounts Committee would have some sense of how things progressed. This is not a rash move on my part to bring a motion here to the House. This story started before 1st February, when the motion was put by me.

The issue was that, from the time the Public Accounts Committee was formed, each Chairman has their own style. The issue is, we began to see a behaviour in the Public Accounts Committee from the very beginning that led us to believe that the Gentleman who was chairing was not being fair, was not being balanced and was not giving us a hearing...[*Interruption*] Mr. Speaker, I ask you for protection. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I revert to a ruling by a Speaker in this House with respect to the ‘cry of shame’. It is there in *Rulings of the Speaker*. Hon. Minister, just bear with me one minute.

I hear challenges with respect to the observation and the decision of the Speaker. I trust that we do not have to invoke more Standing Orders to this effect.

Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, please.

Hon. Minister just bear with me I am just referring to that ruling on interruptions. It was a ruling made under Standing Order No. 40 ‘Interruptions’. This is what it states, the *21st Edition of Erskine May: Parliamentary Practice* has the following, among other things to say about Members not speaking:

“Members must not disturb a Member who is speaking, by hissing, chanting, clapping, booing, exclamations or other interruptions.”

We go back to over 300 years. It states:

“On 22nd January, 1693, it was resolved that Mr. Speaker do call upon the Member by name, making such disturbance, and that every such person shall incur the displeasure and censure of the House.”

I highlighted the words that were put in bold. It states:

“Cry of ‘Shame’

A gross form of interruption by loud cries of ‘shame’, has been strongly condemned by the Speaker...”

Hon. Members, while we are going to say about 300 years and certain principles, there are certain time-tested principles for order and conduct in Houses all around the world. Please, I once again ask that we allow the Hon. Minister to make her presentation. Thank you. Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, the issue of a motion like this, whilst it is rare, it is allowed and it happens in other Parliaments. The issue of the Parliament coming to this National Assembly with a motion, basically of censure. It is a motion that is calling to censure a Member who has not upheld the Standing Orders and, in fact, refused to follow the Standing Orders, as guided by the Speaker and the Clerk. Certainly, that cannot bode well for this National Assembly, where people

believe that they could do what they want outside of this House, inside of this House and in committees and get away with it. Otherwise, we will descend into chaos and total lawlessness in this Parliament, as we saw on the last day of Budget on 4th March.

There are number of cases of committee chairpersons who have been removed in various Commonwealth Parliaments on a number of grounds. What is interesting is that one cannot find many cases of them reaching the National Assembly or the legislator. The reason that is the case is because these matters of removing a chairman of a Standing Committee or even a Member is handled within the Committee themselves, in accordance with the Standing Orders. This did not happen and over a period from 1st February to now, there has been no movement to abide by the Standing Orders. What is the crux of this issue is that our Friends on the other side have tried to say that this is one ... a matter. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** You are wicked.] As someone said, I am 'wicked'. Well, I am 'wicked' if I stand up for the Standing Orders. I accept that accusation. If I am the one who believes I should stand up for the Standing Orders, so call me 'wicked' all you want. I am 'wicked'. I stand for the Standing Orders of this House. Go ahead Mr. Duncan, have your fun.

The issue is that, when the Public Accounts Committee began, we have had... It is my right to speak by the way. We had discussions on a number of matters. We went into the 2016 Auditor General's Report and, I wish to remind the Members of this House that the Auditor General's Report is a public document, posted on a public website, brought into this House and certainly not *sub judice*. In that, when we were going through the Auditor General's Report, there were issues raised by various Members, including those on our side, which were soundly and frequently put down by the Chairperson. There was a lack of tolerance to allow for certain things to be dealt with. Therefore, on 1st February, I am the one who called on the Chairperson to resign as it was not appropriate that he continue as the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. He refused to resign, and I further then put into motion what I said I was going to do. I was calling for his resignation as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee and that another Member of the Opposition take the seat of the Chairman. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** On what grounds?] I do not need to have a ground.

11.55 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the problem with our Friends on that side is that they do not read the Standing Orders. Therefore, they are unfamiliar with it. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I do not have to. I wish to state that the problem for the Opposition is that they have four Members, one of whom is the Chairman who does not have a vote. The Government has five Members. That has been the case throughout.

I have heard comments from the other side that they did not do this when the former Chairperson was there. Why did you not? You had the majority; you could have done it. I cannot answer for you, but I think you know that the former Chairperson was not guilty of any charges as the courts proved when they dismissed the charges against him. You knew at that time that those were fake and constructed charges.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, just keep the address to the Speaker rather than using, ‘you’.

Ms. Teixeira: I am answering [*inaudible*] and in the Committee. [**Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I had already answered that issue. The issue is that a Member of a Committee can move a motion to have a Member or a chairperson removed. The chairperson must then put the motion to the vote. The problem was that in this Committee, under this Chairman, what vindicated my move to bring a motion against the Chairperson was his behaviour after the attempt to bring the motion. It was clearly one as captured later in the letter of the Speaker to the Member.

We brought the Clerk of the National Assembly in, and he advised us. On the Clerk leaving the room, the Member left the Chair and did not put the motion. This was 1st February. The meeting was aborted. We then went to the next meeting – one was not called for over one month – and the motion was not on the Notice Paper. This issue was again one that called the Clerk of the National Assembly back in. The Clerk advised that the motion had not been addressed on the 1st February and that it needed to be put and dealt with in the Committee. We had to move a motion to amend the Notice Paper to bring in the motion. As soon as the Clerk left, again, the Chairperson moved from the Chair and the Members of the Opposition refused to take the seat. Therefore, again, we were in confusion. There are witnesses and the Minutes of the Public Accounts Committee. There are witnesses who are Members of the Public Accounts Committee, both elected and non-elected, as well as the Clerk of the National Assembly who is the custodian and advisor to us on the Standing Orders.

Worst yet, having not been satisfied that he had not put the motion, we had to bring a motion to put the motion on the agenda. Having done that, the Chairperson then deliberately refused to deal with the motion and went to all the other issues, even though we kept trying to move that the motion be put to the vote. Again, that was 15th March. Probably one of the worst things that happened was that the Member then summoned a meeting – there were several that were cancelled – in April, when the meeting was supposed to happen, when he did call a meeting in April, the Hon. Member then asterisked my motion for his removal. He was advised by the Clerk of the National Assembly and the Speaker that he could not do that. The Standing Orders make it very clear that it is only the mover of the motion or someone acting on their behalf who can ask for the motion to be asterisked, or, it is done so by other means such as one which requires the motion to be asterisked.

Mr. Speaker, you wrote a letter to the Hon. Member pointing out precedents in the Parliament of Canada and the House of Commons. In addition to that, you also advised the Member that he did not have the authority one, to asterisk the motion and two, to prevent it from going forward, being put and finally decided on. When I said this in the Public Accounts Committee, the Members of the Opposition were delighted and giggled with delight. I have been around, and I have never seen this behaviour in any committee of any legislative assembly that I have been in over the years. They found this deliciously upsetting. I am going on record to say that I have been called old and told that I should be out of this Parliament because there is no place for me in these meetings. I am old, yes and I accept it because seniority, expertise and wisdom sometimes come with age.

The Chairperson was advised that he had no right to put an asterisk on my motion. In fact, the Speaker wrote that this act was:

“a gross violation of the Standing Orders and is tantamount to bullying.”

The Speaker went on to state:

“...I will not sit idly by and allow Members of Parliamentary Committees to be bullied by Chairpersons. I will intervene.”

The Speaker went on to state:

“I remind you that the Parliamentary Committee is a microcosm of the National Assembly.”

Further Standing Order No. 48 (1) states that:

“Save as otherwise provided in the Constitution or in these Standing Orders all questions proposed for decision in the National Assembly or in Committee shall be determined by a majority of the votes of the elected Members thereof present and voting.”

The Speaker goes on to state to the Hon. Member:

“Therefore, in accordance with the Standing Order No. 48 (1) and per precedence in the Canadian Parliament, cited earlier, you are compelled to put the motion.”

That letter is dated 3rd May.

I may have thought several times between 1st February and the period before I brought this motion here, which was in the early part of June, that, maybe, the Hon. Member, who I have known for quite a while and, who over the years, I have even had a reasonably cordial relationship with, would think again and realise that, to keep his dignity and integrity intact as the Chairperson, it may be wiser for him to resign. Unfortunately, wisdom has not been upheld.

As a result of waiting from the 1st February through March, April and May, I decided, after seeing no movement, an acknowledgement or an attempt from the Member to call a meeting of the Committee to put the motion on the table, that it was a hopeless cause with no possibility of retrieving the situation and, therefore, the motion should be brought.

I want people to understand that it is not with delight that I bring this motion. It is one that I am bringing because it is serious. It is a serious matter when the Clerk of the National Assembly gets legal advice to help us make a decision in relation to the matters before the Committee. That legal opinion was acquired as requested by us from a person who is not politically aligned. That lawyer sent a document which was shared by us and was, of course, spoken of with great derision by the Members on the Opposition's side. In fact, just as an aside, when Mr. Sanjeev Datadin, Member of Parliament, was asked by the Clerk of the National Assembly for some guidance on the Meeting

of 15th March, he was shouted down as being a politically interested person. That was when the decision was taken to bring someone who was not politically aligned.

Ironically, after that, the Opposition brought a legal opinion from guess who? It was Mr. Ramjattan, who is an interested and politically aligned person. That nuance did not influence the Members on the other side. The Standing Orders allow for the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee to be a Member of the Opposition. I wish to remind us here that the Opposition is made up of two sets of political parties – the APNU/AFC Coalition and the Liberty and Justice Party (LJP) which represents the joinder groups. Therefore, the Opposition does not necessarily mean one party over another or *vice versa*. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] You cannot have it both ways, my dear.

In addition to that, the legal opinions of the lawyers were that, should the Committee be unable to meet because the Chairman was not in the seat nor was he calling the motion to be put, where such situations occurred, in fact, the Public Accounts Committee could elect a Chairperson for each day until the matter is resolved. Standing Order 95 (4) was a clause that was put in by the Standing Orders Committee several years ago, to ensure that, if for any reason, a Chairperson was not in place – sick, overseas – a temporary Chairperson could be elected for the day.

We have gone through many interpretations of the Standing Orders and one of the things that has to be held is that the Public Accounts Committee is an important body that needs to meet. I have heard the Members of the Opposition on the APNU/AFC's ticket say that this is an attempt to not deal with the Report of the Auditor General. How absurd and bizarre a comment that is? We are dealing with the 2016 Report of the Auditor General and the 2017, 2018 and 2019 reports are waiting. Later this year, the Auditor General (AG) will bring the 2020 Report of the Auditor General.

These are the years of the APNU/AFC Coalition and, therefore, we are not being allowed in the Public Accounts Committee to review the Reports of the Auditor General and his findings. We still have most of Report of the Auditor General on the Public Accounts of Guyana for 2016 to deal with. So, when my Hon. Member over there blithely says that we are trying to stymie the examination of the public accounts, who is trying to do that? Is it the Members of the Opposition who do not want to follow and obey the Standing Orders and have a meeting of the Public Accounts

Committee because the motion would have to be put and they were terrified of what would happen? Is that the way in which you defend the public accounts of this country? You do not.

12.10 a.m.

The Members of this House have been advised and the Members of the Public Accounts Committee have received all sorts of documents from the Clerk about the issue and that the decisions of the Committee...they do not have to have a notice to move a motion in the Committee. They know that. The Standing Orders make it clear.

If I had any doubts in March or April, I no longer have doubts. The Hon. Member has disobeyed the Speaker of the House. He has showed total disrespect for the Speaker, the Clerk, and this National Assembly. The fact that he has used every subterfuge to ensure that the motion is not put. If we were in another environment, I would have probably said that the person does not have courage. We face many adversities at times and sometimes it is the leader who has the courage. This leader has no courage. There is a motion against him, and he has used every single attempt to avoid it being put, including removing from the seat – going away from the Chair – sitting in the room and not being part of the Committee. Everything that has happened from 1st February to now, including today, has made me very clear...As the Speaker said, this is a level of *bullyism* in in our National Assembly and we are not going to accept it and tolerate it.

“BE IT RESOLVED:

That as a result of Mr. David Patterson’s conduct as Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee with respect to his open violation of the Standing Orders, among other things, in particular since February 1, the majority of the members of the Public Accounts Committee have lost confidence in him as the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the removal of Mr. David Patterson as the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee.”

This motion is very serious. I want to ask you, particularly the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, to recognise that he will never, ever be able to be Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee once this motion passes. This is a very serious form of censure and, therefore, you can laugh, smirk and giggle, but a resolution of the House is binding until it is changed or amended by another motion or by another resolution. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Speaker, everyone knows a bluff when we hear one. We were all just subjected to listening to an argument that can only be viewed as a desperate attempt to make sense out of something that is inexplicable, an argument that tried to justify the unjustifiable. The Hon. Ms. Gail Teixeira stood here, before us, and spoke for half of an hour and every listening ear knows that she attempted to bluff this nation into believing there is a justifiable reason for the motion that she brought before this House today.

The Members in this House from the Public Accounts Committee were in utter shock, a few minutes ago, when the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, attempted to justify her motion by saying that Mr. David Patterson was not being fair. I say this to the people of Guyana, the Hon. Member is a stranger to the truth.

From day one of this Twelfth Parliament, the People Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Members have been coming to this House and speaking for hours without having any logic to their arguments. Earlier today, in this very House, this nation was subjected to listening to sitting Ministers of the Government, stand one by one and reluctantly respond to questions in the most vague and condescending manner about taxpayers' dollars that they are spending. This is what we are subjected to. It is not their moneys; it is the people's moneys.

The PPP/C is spending taxpayers' dollars as if they are taking it out of their own bank accounts. No wonder I am standing here, right now, to debate a motion that seeks to remove the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. It is a fact that the PPP/C will try everything in its power to stymie the work of the Public Accounts Committee, a Committee that is set up to scrutinise the way in which government spends taxpayers' dollars. This is because the PPP/C detests scrutiny, and this is a fact.

Tonight, I stand before the people of Guyana to make this presentation. [**An Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*] What time is it now? It is 12.15 a.m. Today, we listened to the PPP/C and tonight, I

stand before you to make this presentation – before you, the people of Guyana; not before the PPP/C – for this is a fight that will not be won in this House. Today, Guyanese will see the results of the PPP/C in power. Today, you will see an act of tyranny against the people of Guyana. Today, the PPP/C representatives in this House will cast a vote, one which will remove any doubt that may be lingering in minds of Guyanese of their brutal vendetta to rule our country with an iron fist.

The Hon. Ms. Gail Teixeira brought a motion to this floor with 16 clauses of utter nonsense. Not one of the 16 clauses give a valid reason or any reason at all the PPP/C believes that Mr. Patterson should not chair the Public Accounts Committee. I can tell you this. Clause two states:

“... following certain exposures during the examination of the 2016 Auditor General’s Report...”

This reminds me of a photo that is being circulated on *Facebook* with the police officer in uniform with the words “Police Crest” written on the back. The same way we are to imagine what the police crest looks like, the same way the Hon. Member wants us to imagine what these exposures are that she is referring to in this motion. This motion lacks substance. If we are to use our imagination, given the fact that this motion did not specify any particular issue raised at the level of the PAC while examining the Ministry of Public Infrastructure’s report for 2016 – I want you to hear me on this, Mr. Speaker, and I also want the Guyanese people to hear me on this one – and given the fact that the Accounting Officer at that time, the person responsible for the spending at that Ministry, was none other than the Permanent Secretary (PS) the APNU/AFC inherited from the PPP/C Government, are we to interpret this motion to be saying that, as a Minister of Government, once your Ministry has had an audit query, regardless of the nature of the query, then you should not sit as the chairperson of the PAC?

That is what is being implied here and it is as ludicrous as it sounds, because it will immediately disqualify every former Minister from ever chairing that committee. Do you know why? It is because every Ministry has audit queries; not one is exempted from audit queries. With this motion before the House, are we now to look at every current Chairman of the various Standing Committees and do a check for all those who were Ministers before and once their Ministry had

an audit query under their stewardship, they should be disqualified from chairing that Standing Committee? I have never heard of such madness before in any other Parliament.

Today, amidst the shouting across the floor, there will be a deafening silence when the Members of the PPP/C will spinelessly vote to remove the Chairman of the PAC with absolutely no merit, except to fulfill their mission to misuse and abuse the privilege of their fraudulent majority in this House.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you would have to withdraw the word “fraudulent”; you would have to provide me with some proof.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I am so guided. They misused and abused their privilege given to this installed Government. The main purpose of the Public Accounts Committee is to scrutinise Government’s spending. How then is it conceivable for the Government to control who sits as the Chairman of that Committee? The very fact that this motion is being debated on this floor today is a dangerous precedence, moving forward, for every Parliament in the Commonwealth.

The fifth Whereas Clause of this motion speaks of the Clerk of the National Assembly consulting with the regional group of Clerks for advice on how to proceed with the motion that was tabled at the level of the PAC. The Clerk of the National Assembly did indeed report that he consulted with other Clerks of the various Parliaments within the Commonwealth. What was most astonishing was the fact that there was not a single other instance in which any sitting Government, installed or otherwise, brought a motion of no confidence to remove the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Not once! Not once! Nowhere else has there ever been a cabal that is so bold in its pursuit of greed. Every other Parliament in the Commonwealth respects the principles of oversight by the PAC but, today, the PPP/C dragged us to a new low, when they came to this House and to the listening people of this country with a vindictive and sanctimonious motion to remove the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

12.25 a.m.

What more do we need to see, as a people, to understand that we are living in dangerous times? This is a time for national scrutiny. This is a time for all public servants to become the gatekeepers of our democracy. Today, we will see the blatant strong-arming in this House to avoid oversight.

This is the PPP/C. As a matter of fact, we see this motion. This motion is *thin ice on a dark lake* and another step by the PPP/C to make Guyana sink into unknown waters.

The PPP/C comes to this House and stands before us in a desperate attempt to justify an act of maliciousness, an act of destruction and an act that is tantamount to *bullyism* against this House and the people of Guyana. This motion lacks integrity. It is unjustifiable for any sitting government, anywhere in the Commonwealth, to abuse its privileged majority to achieve ultimate control at the expense of taxpayers' dollars. This is an act of dictatorship. This is a height of madness that we are subjected to under the PPP/C. This is not about the Government and the Opposition. This is about the people of Guyana. This is an act against the people of Guyana. This is an act against taxpayers. This is the level of vindictiveness that the PPP/C, each and every last one of you, is willing come here tonight and do. Political vindictiveness has taken a new form in the shape of this motion. Today, we see a cabal that is so blinded by greed that it has little to no concern about the far-reaching implications of such a motion.

The installed Government in Guyana is setting a precedence that they should be a forced to face when they are back in the Opposition benches where they belong, because this country deserves better. The PAC is there to guard against any form of corrupt practices. We all know how important this Committee is, especially under the PPP/C regime. May I remind this House that it was under the PPP/C that Transparency International (TI) ranked Guyana among the most corrupt countries in this world? The Coalition worked exceedingly hard to bring this country out of that hole and restore us to a sense of national pride where corruption is concerned. The efforts of that were shown under the Coalition when Guyana received the lowest ranking from Transparency International with regard to corruption. These are the facts. Go look it up. Yet, today, those very people who headed departments and agencies before, were brought back and installed into offices by the PPP/C and its regime. Those persons are now back in offices, managing and being the stewards again in the various departments and ministries. How then do we expect to be ranked again by Transparency International? This is the blueprint of the PPP/C.

In the few short months this regime has been installed, the media do not have to go and look for a story anymore, because every single day the story is coming to us. In 10 months, this country has had the fuel rackets at the Guyana Oil Company (Guyoil). We have seen Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cash grants in the most discriminatory manner. We have seen the Government trying

to justify the mass firing of workers at the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI). There is confusion at the Guyana Power and Light Inc. (GPL Inc.). Regional Tender Boards are being used to fill the pockets of the PPP/C's friends and families. We have had quarry mining rackets, and we cannot forget the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) racket. There is confusion in every sector, and the PPP/C has the gall to come to this House and bring a motion to remove the Chairman of the PAC. We are in dire need of scrutiny in these Ministries, if nothing else. This Parliament should be securing the Chairman of the PAC because his oversight is needed, now more than ever.

The PPP/C ran around this country shouting words of democracy, but that was only because it was convenient to them at the time. That was only because it sounded good to them back then, but there is absolutely no group in this country that detests democracy more than the PPP/C. Why else would they be here, right now, trampling on the very principles that were put there to safeguard democracy?

The Standing Orders state that the Chairman of the PAC must come from the main Opposition. There is no prerequisite for that person to be liked by the Government. That is why the last Chairperson of the PAC had 19 fraud charges. Could you believe that the same set of people who reposed confidence in a man with 19 fraud charges are coming to this House, right now, to remove a man with 18 charges short? This is the hypocrisy of the PPP/C. In the few short months that this regime has been in Office, they have been hunting down all the persons that worked for them prior to 2015. The more charges you have, the better your chances of working with them again. Every sector has rehired a person with charges against their name; and the more charges you have, the higher the position you are being offered. And the PPP/C wants to come here to act self-righteous tonight. Not here, not today; take that somewhere else. Take it somewhere else.

The Hon. Gail Teixeira, the mover of this motion, started her political life 11 years before I was born. The Hon. Member is a career politician, and I find it strange that, after all those years of service, I would be reading a motion with fifteen Whereas Clauses that make absolutely no sense, coming from such an experienced politician. This makes me wonder, at what point do we think of legacy and purpose in our lives? Imagine, after shouting, "democracy, democracy, democracy," this said person submits a motion to this Parliament, a motion that will be left in the records of this House long after she is gone, that tramples on the very concept of democracy. These are indeed the dark days, when we are at a point where people are not the least bit concerned about the legacy

that they will be leaving behind. This is a sad day for this country. This motion gives no reason. This motion gives no reason because there is no reason to give. It is malicious. It is vindictive. It is the definition of the PPP/C.

Today, the State newspaper reported:

“Should Monday’s motion succeed, Patterson could possibly be replaced by Lenox Shuman, Leader of the minority opposition, and Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly.”

[**An Hon. Member:** What kind of minority?] That is what was reported; I am quoting directly. This regime now wants to put their employee, the Hon. Lenox Shuman, to chair the Committee that scrutinises them. Government scrutinising Government. That is the textbook definition of dictatorship.

Having established that the motion is baseless, we must judge for ourselves what the real motive behind it all is. Why is the PPP/C so afraid of David Patterson? After the 2015 Elections, David Patterson was entrusted with the Ministry of Public Infrastructure, and for the first time in the history of Guyana, we saw real transformation within the Ministry. Throughout the length and breadth of Guyana, every region was looked after under the stewardship of David Patterson. Development was so much that the PPP/C’s bottom house slogan was, *Yuh can’t eat road*. Could you believe that? Could you believe that the only criticism they could have brought against David Patterson was that he was building too many roads? The fear of David Patterson is real for the PPP/C. They know that he understands the working of the Public Accounts Committee thoroughly. They know that he is their worst nightmare as Chairman of that Committee. So, they have come here today to abuse the system to force him out. The PPP/C fears David Patterson.

Mr. Speaker and the people of this country, I want to say this to you. We all know what the PPP/C is up to. We all know what steps they are taking and where they want to go. I take no pleasure in announcing to the people of Guyana that kleptocracy is back. Our country is being ran by an installed cabal of *kleptocrats*. The leader of the Alliance For Change (AFC), the Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan, coined the term that he often uses to describe the PPP/C. The term is *control freakism*. This motion is the definition of that term, for the extremity of this act is nothing short of *control freakism*. The PPP/C cannot speak to anyone about democracy while bringing such an

undemocratic motion to this House tonight. This power-hungry regime wants to drag this country into a state of dictatorship, and it has successfully checked off so many boxes to cement its goals and to achieve a dictatorial state. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] The Hon. Member is not wired properly; he is missing a link between his brain and his mouth. Guyana is heading to a state of emergency, as we speak. This country is experiencing a flood like never before. The President declared the flood a national disaster. Public servants are yet to receive a pay increase. Cost of living is skyrocketing. People are starving in this country.

A woman shared her story with me. Her name is Padmini. Padmini is a single mother of two girls, and she was fired by this installed regime. She cried when she was telling me the story about how she spent an entire weekend with absolutely nothing to feed her children. She was at the point where she considered suicide. This is what our country has been dragged to under the PPP/C. Her story is just one of thousands.

12.40 a.m.

With all of this happening in our country, the main concern of the PPP/C is who chairs the Public Accounts Committee. We are here, in the morning hours, because they do not care about these things. Their main concern is they must decide who chairs this Committee because if they can control who chairs this Committee, they can have their own way. This is the PPP/C. This is an insult to all Guyanese and the people of this country must never forget it. May Guyanese never forget tonight that, when the people of this country are struggling to survive under this regime, they have come to this National Assembly to remove the Chairman of the PAC so that they can keep the poor people of this country punishing through mismanagement. This is the nature of the beast; this is the PPP/C.

While the poor people of this country are left to scramble for scraps, the Members of this installed regime are living large off of our labour, making billion-dollar deals and there is nothing to benefit the people of this country. They could not care less about the needs of Guyanese. While the floodwaters are displacing persons from all parts of Guyana, the flood relief hampers are being treated as a personal initiative from the PPP/C. The cruelty displayed in the distribution exercise is enough to crawl your skin. With all of this, the PPP/C has come here, today, to receive an

additional \$10 billion, while simultaneously bringing a motion to remove the Chairman of the PAC. This is a state of anarchy.

Today, I say to the taxpayers of this country, the PPP/C wants to control the Public Accounts Committee because our money is being squandered. This regime will do anything in its power to continue the lawlessness that it practiced prior to 2015 and which it is continuing to practice now. But, today, the people of this country will have access to information like never before. The APNU/AFC Coalition made sure that every region in this country was connected. So, the skullduggery that took place prior to 2015 will never happen again in 2021. Today, the PPP/C seeks to assert control of the PAC, but today, the Public Accounts Committee will be further empowered by the general public...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have one minute to conclude.

Ms. Fernandes: ...and every effort by the PPP/C to rape the coffers of this country will be brought to light. For there is no place for this installed regime to hide.

As we listen to the heckles across the floor by the PPP/C, the misplaced confidence of those hecklers seems to forget the power of the masses. They will be reminded of that power when the oppressed, victimised and marginalised rise up and exercise their constitutional right to remove them. That movement will be so grand that there will be nothing that could help the PPP/C, not even their powerful friends or anything else.

In closing, I say, for regimes, big and small, elected or installed, as history has shown it, the day of reckoning will soon come. This malicious motion and the dictatorial action that will follow from the PPP/C will not be successful in blinding the eyes of the Guyanese people. The APNU/AFC Coalition will continue to expose the corruption of this regime because Guyanese, *we big and we got sense*. [Applause]

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: I rise on a Point of Order. I did give the Hon. Member the benefit of completing her statement. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** What is the Point of Order?] It is Standing Order 41. I would like to bring to your attention (4) and (6), Contents of Speeches:

“(4) It shall be out of order to use offensive and insulting language about Members of the Assembly.”

“(6) No Member shall impute improper motive to any Member of the National Assembly.”

I sat here and I would like... While this debate is a serious one, we should not get into the gutter with the insulting language that my Colleagues were referred to. The use of language like ‘nonsense’ is unparliamentary, it is...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I would not uphold your Point of Order at this time.

Bishop Edghill: All right, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Let us continue to listen. I now invite the Hon. Member, Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo, to make his contribution.

Dr. Mahadeo: I listened to the last 30 minutes, and I found that only about three minutes of the Member’s presentation referred to the motion. The rest of it was all over the place as if there was no target to which the Hon. Member aimed. I will still address a few of the issues that the Hon. Member raised.

I want to remind this honourable House that democracy returned to Guyana in 1992. Again, it was stifled after the no-confidence vote, and it was through hard struggles and because the people of Guyana stood up, we are in a democratic state again. Democracy will prevail and no *bullyism* is going to prevent that from happening; not under our watch.

The Hon. Member said something about the day of reckoning. Well, the day of reckoning was 2nd March, 2020. There was talk about records and setting records. If we do not have confidence in the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, and that should be a committee in which everyone, in and out of Guyana, has confidence, then we need to vote on it and we need to discuss it. If you want to talk about records, what about the record for the number of days after which a no- confidence motion was moved and the date of elections? What about the record for the number of days passed between the day of elections and the final announcement of results? Those are records for which Guyana should bow its head. There was talk about kleptocracy; I do not know what to say about that. Look who is talking about it.

Again, I am saying the PAC should have confidence in the Chairman. The entire Committee should have confidence. We have never said that we want a Chairman from the PPP/C or any other person.

It must come from the main Opposition party. What am I hearing? Am I hearing that there is no one else in the main Opposition who could be a good and eligible chairman or chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee? Then, the people of Guyana are being given a lot of news.

Where is justifiable reason for the motion? Let me quote from a document that was given to us by the Speaker, after the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee decided, by himself, that he would put an asterisk on an item on the agenda. I am quoting from a document that was shared with every Member of the Public Accounts Committee:

“I wish to state that the Chairperson of a Committee does not have the authority to place an asterisk against a Member’s motion. Only the mover of the motion or another Member duly authorised by that Member may move that the consideration of the motion be deferred.”

Yet, the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee took that on himself and made no changes to that.

I continue quoting. This document is addressed to Mr. David Patterson, M.P. and Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. The Speaker is advising:

“I wish to suggest that you familiarise yourself with our Standing Orders and other parliamentary procedures in order to enhance your Chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee.

Your action of placing an asterisk against a Member’s motion is a gross violation of the Standing Orders and is tantamount to bullying.

As Speaker of the National Assembly, I will not sit idly by and allow Members of Parliamentary Committees to be bullied by Chairpersons. I will intervene.

I remind you that a Parliamentary Committee is a microcosm of the National Assembly.”

Mr. Speaker, if my mind was not made up before, it was made up after this piece of advice that we received from you. In addition to that, you had attached documents to support your position.

I have been on several Committees, in and out of Parliament. I have chaired some of them myself. It is the first time that I have encountered something like this. We were advised. The Clerk was called to provide advice to the Committee and then the advice was thrown out. As soon as the Clerk walked out, it seemed as if he walked out with his advice. In addition to that, advice was sought from a politically neutral attorney. The advice came and, maybe it did not meet or was not to the satisfaction of the Chairman of the Committee, it was never discussed. It was never passed and voted on – whether we agreed with it or did not agree with it. Yet, another piece of advice, which was unsolicited by the Committee, was brought in and put in front of Members. That is unacceptable to me.

A motion was brought to the Committee and there are a million reasons this motion should not be put. There were a lot of shenanigans. Maybe, the Chairman knew that the Clerk of the Committee knew her Mathematics and knew how to count, and she knew what half of a number was. That is why he was afraid to out it. Thirty-three is bigger than 32.

The motion was put on the agenda, and an asterisk was also put, then it disappeared from the agenda. It was like our Chairman was Houdini, making things appear and disappear. What I gleamed from all that went on over the last few months was that, if something does not suit the Chairman of the Committee, it has no place in the Public Accounts Committee. Such a Chairman I do not need, have no confidence in and will not support.

12.55 a.m.

Plain and simply put, why was this motion not being put? What was the Chairman afraid of? What is this desperate need to hold on to the position of Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee? It seems as if it is a life and death matter. I do not know what motive is there, sinister or otherwise, to hold on to this position at all costs and not even entertain a discussion on it. We had to take this path and come here to put it to the entire House, to put it to the nation of Guyana and we would decide. My constituents have been asking me why we have the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, as the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, and I will listen to my constituents.

We have listened to the people and, like I said, democracy has returned to Guyana. Once again, we would see democracy prevail. I support the motion by my Hon. Colleague, Ms. Gail Teixeira,

and I call for the removal of Mr. Patterson as the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Figueira: I rise, in an unhappy state, to partake in this debate, even as I enjoin the many residents of Region 10, as we mourn the loss of our young Vice Chairman, Mr. Douglas Gittens – a young man whose desire was to serve in this House. Mr. Speaker, if I may crave your indulgence, could I ask that we observe a minute of silence for this fallen comrade, whose desire was to serve in this House?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, you may take your seats. We will observe a moment of silence, not only for the Hon. Member, but for those who have passed during this COVID-19 period.

[The National Assembly observed one minute of silence for persons who had passed away as a result of COVID-19.]

Mr. Figueira: Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Speaker.

Many Guyanese are experiencing the unrelenting onslaught of maladministration of this Government. One just has to look at the wanton dismissal of thousands of hardworking public servants, many of whom are victims of this deadly pandemic that the world has ever seen in over 100 years and many whom are still waiting in vain, two budgets and a supplemental budget later, for this phantom increase promised to public servants by this Administration. The daily increase in COVID-19 deaths, the discriminatory distribution of COVID-19 grants, the astronomical rise in food prices and gas, the ill management of the flooding response across this country, which has and still is affecting thousands of our people, are all complemented by the increasing degeneration of our society and key institutions. While this motion speaks to the latter, it epitomizes and makes very pellucid an explicit pattern of *control freakism* at any cost by this Government.

Today, all constitutional agencies have been made puppets of the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, lacking real independence and all are unable to exercise financial autonomy they held one year ago.

It is in this light that I wish to buttress this debate in which the PPP/C is expressing its obsession as to who should chair the PAC. A similar imposition of procedural thuggery was unleashed on

the Chairman and selected members of the Police Service Commission (PSC), all aimed at weakening and puppeteering yet another State institution.

We are all aware, and it cannot be denied, that this motion is a blatant attempt to erode trust in the Public Accounts Committee, the chairmanship of which comes from the decision of the main Opposition and not that of the Government. The principle of the chairman having the full confidence of the main Opposition to exercise oversight of Government's spending must not be sanctioned by the PPP/C and by the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.

It is the PPP/C and, more specifically, the mover of this motion who have an issue with the Opposition using its prerogative of choosing its choice of chairmanship. Hence, the PPP/C's number game approach to have its way, by removing the guardrails of our democracy, ignores the principle of why the Opposition chairs this committee. They want no one to keep a close eye on Government's spending of taxpayers' money. This is worrisome and most concerning, given the evidence with regard to the COVID-19 relief funds and now the flood relief funds.

The PPP/C Members of the PAC have made an argument that the Chairman is unfit because of allegations of impropriety levelled at him, but their Government wants the Chairman of the Police Service Commission to promote rogue police officers with pending charges, which include sexual misconduct allegations. This is the nature of these people, these *sanctimonious gangsters*, who are, today, seeking to prosecute the PAC Chairman using this motion and using the tyranny of numbers. Hypocrisy at its best; sanctimony.

The charade in this motion about violating the Standing Orders is political propaganda to achieve the PPP/C's goal – the underlining aim of engineering the elevation of the Deputy Speaker to become the PAC chairman, so that the PPP/C could police itself as it spends the people's money. The Government wants its mannequin to chair the PAC, so that GuyOil deals and the discrimination associated with the issuance of COVID-19 relief pink slips would *not see the light of day*; but we are watching.

As all of Guyana know, the former Chairman of the PAC had charges of allegations of impropriety against him. There were 19 charges, but he was not hunted down by the Coalition Government, as is evident in the details of this motion. We had respected the principle of the Opposition's right to choose and repose confidence in its candidate for chairmanship.

Today, we have the PPP/C acting as the prosecution, thus begging the question of how independent the judiciary is. The aim of the Government is to undermine and decimate as many State agencies as possible and, simultaneously, discredit as many APNU/AFC leaders. This motion simply represents another phase of the PPP/C's quest, as it seeks first blood, even before its judiciary is ready to adjudicate. This motion brings to bear an unnecessary contestation, only because of the PPP/C's dictatorial approach of indirectly trying to choose for the Opposition.

It is embarrassing when Members, such as the mover of this motion, are prepared to use the tyranny of numbers to say what you, Mr. Speaker, popularised in this House, in your former life, "you can have your say, we will have our way". Just note, numbers would not always be able to defy logic. I repeat numbers would not always be able to defy logic.

Mr. Speaker, I put to this House that the PPP/C would use the tyranny of its majority to pass this obnoxious and despicable motion that sets a new precedent in this Assembly; in this Assembly that you chair, in this Assembly that would form part of your legacy.

What is important to note is that the National Assembly operates on procedures, as outlined in this motion, but it also operates on precedents it sets. Whatever is the outcome of this motion, others would follow the standard set here today. Make no mistake, this is no simple manoeuvre by our Friends on the other side, for it allows for insider trading in the National Assembly, because whoever has a majority could manipulate the process using propaganda, similar to those carried out in this motion, to get their mannequins to be the chair of any committee.

This would be a mockery to oversight and accountability, since, if one starts asking pointed questions, exposing and finding facts, or pointing investigations in a certain way, he or she could fall victim to a motion like this. The PPP/C could decide it wants someone else to be the chairman and use this same process to remove that person from any committee. Where does this stop and who is safe? What is true is that we, on this side, would not be protected by you, Mr. Speaker. We see how the Deputy Speaker was made, even as that...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are imputing a lot unto the Speaker – "would not be protected"; "We, on this side, would not be...". I invite you now to do the right thing.

Mr. Figueira: Mr. Speaker, we feel...

Mr. Speaker: I invite you now to do the right thing with respect to your words. I quoted you as *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Figueira: I would refrain from using that word, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I did not ask you to refrain; I asked you to do the right thing.

Mr. Figueira: I withdraw the use of my words.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Please proceed.

Mr. Figueira: Forcing the APNU/AFC to change its nominee, by using this motion, is a dangerous precedent that shall haunt the PPP/C in time to come; soon to come.

It is no secret that the APNU/AFC is most uncomfortable with lots of the PPP/C's nominees, including you, Mr. Speaker, respectfully so. I shall confess here, today, we may not have the numbers to force a change, but a change would come, and it is coming soon.

It is most nefarious to try to influence who the APNU/AFC nominates to serve, using manoeuvres as this motion here today. The same thing was done recently with nominating agencies for the Police Service Commission nominees, all to the continued degeneration of those State institutions.

1.10 a.m.

The deception of this motion exemplifies to sponsors political dogma, to use the cover of the Standing Orders violation, rather than the explicit allegations as contained in numerous Public Accounts Committee (PAC) minutes. The real aim is to reduce political contestation in the PAC, given the present Chairman's aggressive disposition on PPP/C propaganda.

The use of the pretext of a no-confidence motion against the PAC Chairman is a PPP/C history lesson for Guyana, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Commonwealth. This is a ploy to get the Chairman's blood and to set into motion a precedent of things to come. Hence, these shenanigans will have a bearing on the procedural architecture of this National Assembly in the future.

The Government feels empowered to go after the Chairman of the PAC, when nine out of our 10 administrative regions are badly affected by flooding, when they would have essentially prorogued

the Parliament for almost three months – 98 days – and when beef is \$1,000 per pound in June, 2021, but was \$400 per pound in August, 2020. This is so pathetic.

The same mover of this motion will refuse for the PAC to meet three times per week, after this sitting, to get its work completed. That is the nature of the beast. For the principals of this motion, it is progressive as it inflates the ego of the Minister of Public Works and the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, to think that they have gotten their wish to destroy the Chairman. Just be aware that you are both standing on a ladder.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, it would be most remiss of me not to emphatically state that it is most regrettable that you have chosen to preside over the tyrannical action of the Government here today. Sir, history is made each day. Few cares which side of history they are absolved. I cannot, in good sense and I cannot, in good conscience, support this motion because it is demeaning to our political architecture as a nation and as a Parliament. Anyone who supports this motion will knowingly perjure their God-given conscience. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Seeraj: This motion is in the name of the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, Ms. Teixeira. It is here before us because of the actions of the Opposition. Members of the PAC on the Government side tried their best, at the PAC's level, to ensure that the work of the PAC was conducted in a way that is proper and not bring the work of the Committee into disrepute. The fact that this motion is crafted in this particular manner takes into consideration some of the very concerns that were raised by the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan.

The lack of specificity that was highlighted by one of the speakers before me is deliberate because there is not a shortage of specifics that one could have attached to this particular motion. I think it is out of consideration of the consequences of those specifics and implications for action outside of the jurisdiction of this House, that the motion was crafted in this particular manner.

Members spoke about a lot of things except the motion. I want to make reference to a few of them.

Installed Government – the People's Progressive Party/Civic was properly voted into power in March, 2020, and so there is nothing about being an installed government. The count proved that, and the recount proved that. The fact that the APNU/AFC continues to make allegation about an installed government, without even providing their Statements of Poll (SOPs), is testimony that

the People's Progressive Party/Civic won the elections *fair and square*. It is a totally legitimate government that was voted in by the people. The APNU/AFC are in the benches of the Opposition because they were voted out.

There is nothing about *bullyism* by this Government. The *bullyism* actually started since December, 2018, when, by virtue of a legitimate passage of a no-confidence motion, following the respect for the rule of law and following the Constitution itself, the then Government accepted that it had fallen and started making provision to take the necessary action that follows the successful passage of a no-confidence motion. Then, they were advised by the back-office boys as to what steps to take. Then came about the notoriety of 32 being greater than 33. Then came about the story of 32 ½, roundup and all those sorts of things. The *bullyism* started there.

Then, it continued. One would recall that there is a particular provision for the nomination and then appointment of the Chairman of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM). The proper things were done by the submission of one list, two lists, and then the third. Numerous upstanding Guyanese were deemed not fit and proper. In the continuation of that *bullyism*, the then President unilaterally nominated and also appointed a Chairman of GECOM. Ironically, it was another Patterson. They failed to listen to legal advice here and failed to respect the ruling of our court. It took the People's Progressive Party/Civic and the people of Guyana on a journey all the way to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) to stop that *bullyism*. After over a year and three months, we had elections and that was the end of the *bullyism* of one type and the continuation of *bullyism* from March to August. Eventually, democracy prevailed, and we had that change in August.

When we talk about all these things, we must put them in perspective. What the Members of the PAC were merely trying to do is ensure that Guyana is not further ridiculed, as we were while going through this issue of recount, Statements of Poll not showing up, illegal appointment of a Chairman of GECOM, and all of that. To try to bring other issues into the equation, at this point in time, is merely to divert from the real issue which is, of course, the confidence of Members of the Public Accounts Committee in the Chairman of that Committee.

Tyranny of numbers is another phrase I just heard. It was also stated, by the last speaker, that whoever has the majority can manipulate the process. In politics, majorly it is about numbers. When you go to the elections, it is about numbers – who wins. When you play a game of cricket,

it is about numbers. You can win by one run or you could win by an innings and 50 runs. When you have the numbers, you could also influence what happens.

The APNU/AFC did not have the numbers and they still wanted to manipulate the process. They wanted to manipulate numbers and majority. It is not surprising that when you have the numbers you could win the game. In the game of politics, you do not make runs, but you have to ensure that you go to the electorate and win over the confidence of the electorate. Winning over of confidence is reflected in the ballots. When those ballots are counted and the Statements of Poll are added, a winner is declared. That is what the process is. It is not the manipulation of the process by a majority.

The People's Progressive Party/Civic was properly placed into Government and the Members of the Public Account Committee are properly placed. The Members of the Public Accounts Committee have a responsibility to ensure that the Public Accounts Committee operates in such a manner that it enjoys the confidence of all.

I heard words like kleptocracy. This Government is being accused of that. You know about bangles, beds, bedsheets, braces, and all of that. I can easily conclude that was the beginning of that. When speakers try to divert from the real issue and introduce matters that are not addressed in the motion, it is basically to hide from the real issue. The real issue here is that majority of the Members of the Public Accounts Committee do not enjoy the confidence of the Chairman. It is important not only for the majority of the Members of the Public Accounts Committee, but it is important for this country, our electorate and our people, to enjoy the confidence of the Public Accounts Committee, as we seek to provide oversight and scrutiny of the spending of the taxpayers' dollars. That is all we are trying to do.

There are things out there in the public domain, in the media, on television and all of that. We have to be careful because in the game of politics where a perception, by and large, could dictate how an opinion go, we have to ensure that people, especially the people of our country and then further afield, perceive the operation of the Public Accounts Committee to be one above board, where Members could make their contribution and provide oversight and scrutiny for the spending of our taxpayers' dollars.

In keeping with the motion, as presented by the Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, I want to take this opportunity to say that I support this motion in totality. It is unfortunate that it had to come here, but I lay that blame squarely at the feet of the Opposition because this matter could have been settled at the level of the Public Accounts Committee. When there is some degree of *bullyism* and when Members fail to obey the rules of engagement – the Standing Orders and the Constitution – then we have a responsibility to take it to the next level to ensure that the rule of law prevails and to ensure that all of us follow those rules of engagement. Here, especially, we follow our Standing Orders, and we have respect for all the rules of engagement.

1.25 a.m.

With those few words, I want to thank you for availing me this opportunity to let my views be known. I do support this motion for us to move on with another Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. *[Applause]*

Ms. Hughes: What a sad day today is. These last days in this Parliament have been very sad because here we are wasting time debating this most egregious motion, when thousands of Guyanese are living under flood waters, in these the most challenging times. These past few weeks thousands have lost their livestock, crops, fridge, stove, clothes. Worse yet, in these times of the COVID-19 pandemic when more than 426 persons have lost a precious member of their family. Some 426 lives lost and here we are discussing this most perverse motion.

It is even more horrific in these difficult times of economic decline. We are already getting information that there is close to 30% of young people who are unemployed. Suggestions are that, in the next couple of days, we are going to discover a 6% drop in income. We know of the massive increases in the prices for basic food items, thousands of Guyanese fired indiscriminately, drug busts – the largest in the world – shootouts on Main Street close to the Prime Minister's and President's official residences and garbage everywhere. All in nine short months.

Understand that the discovery of oil makes no difference with all that we are seeing and talking about today. It is clear that the ancestors on whose shoulders we stand, and the Gods have been angered. Imagine, it is against this background of crisis in our dear land of Guyana that we are wasting time debating this motion. Let me apologise to the staff of the Arthur Chung Conference

Centre and also the staff of the Parliament Office, who have to be here, up to this hour, debating what really is not worth debating.

The preamble to this motion is devoid of any substance that provides a basis for the removal of the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Fifteen whereas clauses only testify to this Government's intention to do just one thing, that is, as the name of the motion testifies, remove the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee. There is no information in this motion on the alleged crime because that is not the issue here. Just remove this Chairman by any means necessary.

We have been reminded of the purpose, role and work of the Public Accounts Committee. We all know that, according to the Standing Orders, it must be chaired by a Member of the main Opposition. This is convention and precedent that this National Assembly has maintained and held dear for decades, up until now. A loss of confidence they say but let me take you back a few years. In the Eleventh Parliament, the then Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee had 19 serious criminal charges pending against him, and it was considered appropriate and acceptable to allow him to continue to chair the PAC. What were those charges? Let me quote some of them from the public documents from the Georgetown Magisterial District:

“Mohamed Irfaan Ali on Thursday 2nd September, 2010... conspired with other persons unknown to defraud the Government of Guyana...”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I will have to stop you there with respect to the Standing Orders. The Standing Order refers to the use of the President to influence a debate.

Ms. Hughes: Getting back to the public records, the former Chairman of the Committee, as we all know, had 19 charges. Those charges included being charged for \$8,365,455, for selling a plot of land to – guess who? It was the current Vice-President. He paid \$2,301,000 for a piece of land that was valued at \$10,666,000. Guess what? The charges continued. On this occasion, one of the Ministers of Housing and Water paid \$1,500,000 for a piece of land that was worth over \$7 million. These are the charges that were put to the former Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Let us go on, quickly, to one of our Ministers in this most honourable House, the Hon. Minister, Ms. Priya Manickchand. Paid in the name of Mr. David Narine...and spent \$1,515,000 for a piece

of land that was valued at \$9,621,000. It gets worse. A person who does not sit in this House – but this is public record – Mr. Ramesh Dookhoo, who paid \$1.5 million for a piece of land...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you know the Standing Orders. You cannot cite persons' names who are not here to defend themselves. I do not want to interrupt you again with another Standing Order, but I think that you are *pressing the buttons* now. [**Mr. McCoy:** (*Inaudible*)] Hon. Member, please proceed.

Ms. Hughes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My Friends, I think I have made my point. The Public Accounts Committee, charged with the responsibility of scrutinising the public accounts of this nation, established a precedent that pending criminal charges was not an obstacle to occupying the position of, and discharging the responsibility of the Public Accounts Committee. This precedent, having been established by none other than our current sitting President of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana, why would they now want to deviate from this norm? There was no basis for deviating...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, again, “established by the current President of Guyana”. You are, once again, using the name of the President and the President himself to influence this debate, which is not permitted in the Standing Orders. You will have to remove those remarks.

Ms. Hughes: I remove them, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Please proceed.

Ms. Hughes: This was no basis for deviation from this norm by the Hon. Members on that side of the House when they were in Opposition. It is noteworthy that the former charged Chairman was identified by my Colleagues on that side as their presidential candidate. No arguments have been advanced as to why this precedent, established by the PPP/C, ought to be departed from with this motion.

It surely cannot be that the mere filing of a motion for the removal of a Chairperson would create a difference in principle between what are, legally and morally, identical circumstances. It is clear that the ability of the previous Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee to scrutinise Government's handling of the people's money was not impaired by the fact that he was charged

with 19 criminal offences. There was no moral disquiet expressed then by my Colleagues on the other side or within the PPP/C. There was no pause for reconsidering the impact of the charges on the responsibility of the Chairman. There was no issue about whether the Government accounts could be properly scrutinised. As a matter of fact, such was the confidence of the Members of the then PPP/C Opposition, they thought that the Chairman, with 17 separate charges so to speak, could be selected as their presidential candidate. Most importantly, I would like to remind all of us and the people of Guyana that these 19 charges of fraud were instituted by the same Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) who holds the same position today. What an indictment. Those charges were not instituted by some vindictive person on this side of the House.

Since the institution of charges against the former Chairman did not impugn his ability to scrutinise these accounts, I am unaware...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I am standing on a Point of Order. Under Standing Order 41(8), there was imputing on a judicial officer when the Hon. Member referred to the DPP.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may continue. I do not recognise that Point of Order.

Ms. Hughes: Given all that I have said, I am aware that any basis on which the same party, in good faith and with a *straight face*, can allege that today's situation is any different when *the shoe is on another foot*... let us look at that. It is absolutely clear that the filing of this motion is a mere political act without any principal basis being established for the removal of the Chairman. What is absolutely clear is that this PPP/C Government, by all its actions – all the mass firings over the last nine months – does not want scrutiny. The PPP/C does not want scrutiny, transparency and accountability – the founding principles of any democracy. The question is, if you have nothing to hide, why is this necessary?

The motion, therefore, is a political act. Let us talk politics. The politics of the PPP/C of today is to take us back to the elections screaming and shouting and we hear that all the time. That is because you cannot stand on any other leg, and you cannot stand on the leg of good governance.

Speaking of governance, I noticed that the Hon. Vice-President is now the 'OP' – the 'Over President. I am very sorry that he is not here today, and I know that...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not know what you mean by ‘OP’, but it is, in my view, imputing.

Ms. Hughes: It was not intended to.

Mr. Speaker: Kindly continue, Hon. Member.

Ms. Hughes: On a serious note, we all know the madness, corruption and challenges in which Guyanese have been drowning. The disasters around us highlight that the PPP/C has angered the heavens and the Gods above. To my PPP/C Colleagues in this most honourable House, I say to you, you may come here today with your scorn and ridicule – we expect no better of you. In fact, you know no other way. That is what Guyana has come to expect of you – but who do you really think you are speaking to?

I am glad that the most Hon. Member Seeraj spoke about the importance of numbers. According to the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), 49% of the Guyanese population did not vote for you. You cannot ignore 49% of this population. Add the small parties and it goes to 51%.

1.40 a.m.

I know you think that we do not know numbers. According to the Elections Commission (GECOM) numbers, 51% did not vote for you. We do not have any confidence in you. Guyana has no confidence in you and 51% of the people in Guyana have no confidence in you.

Let us examine what the real criteria might be. Both the former and present Chair attended the same alma mater, both previously served as Ministers in their respective governments, both enjoyed unwavering support from the political parties that they represented, both are males, both have a long membership in the National Assembly, both are charged with serious criminal offences, both charges were recommended by you know who, and both cases were considered political by their respective parties. So, what is the difference between them that has led to the laying of this motion in this National Assembly?

In the current highly toxic, deeply-divided racially and polarised country we call Guyana, the obvious and, perhaps, only criteria that separates the former Chair and current Chair is what has

divided this country from times prior to independence up to contemporary times. I leave you all to consider what that is.

I asked myself: Who is being put on the breadline? Who is being fired? Who does not get the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) cash grant? Who does not get the hamper when they come sharing it in the streets? I leave this all here, too, for you and all Guyana to consider.

In closing, if the divided nation of South Africa, prior to 1992, elected no less a person than Mr. Nelson Mandela as their President and, if on his release from Robben Island, he had thought that it would be appropriate, and in the best interest of South Africa, to go against, persecute and prosecute every political enemy, real or imaginary, the country of South Africa would not have survived. The tenuous relationship between justice and peace should not be strained with politically driven vendettas and the settling of old scores. I quote the most honourable Nelson Mandela:

“The time for the healing of the wounds has come.”

I have no more to say. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Member, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, to make his contribution.

Mr. Ramjattan: Could I ask the Hon. Member, Mr. Kwame McCoy, to just give me an opportunity to speak on this motion without interruption.

It is an important thing for us to know the history of how this entire chairmanship was granted to the Opposition in almost all commonwealth countries. If we have a precedent like that in so many countries, it obviously means something. I want to quote from a book that was given to us by Sir Michael Davies. I do not know if he gave you a copy, Hon. Member, but I recalled that you were in Parliament when, indeed, the reforms of our Standing Orders were being done. The history and role of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is well put in the book called *THE OVERSEERS: Public Accounts Committees and Public Spending* by Mr. David McGee, Queens Counsel (QC). In that book he wrote:

“The first PAC, and the prototype for very many other PACs that have been established throughout the commonwealth since was established by resolution of the House of Commons at Westminster in 1861 to be a permanent piece of the Commons’ financial machinery for exercising effective control over the appropriation of public moneys.”

“The PAC helps Parliament hold the government to account for its use of public funds and resources by examining the public accounts.

The PAC has an independent audit oversight on Parliament’s behalf of the government and the public service.”

He then goes on to talk about the premiere institution as a committee called the Public Accounts Committee. Concerning the chairmanship of that singular special distinctly different committee, it must go the Opposition which chairs it. Then he goes on at page 66:

“In two-thirds of the cases PACs are chaired by an opposition member.”

“In some countries, such as Indian and the United Kingdom, this is a very strong convention.”

Now, we never had the convention written into our Standing Orders until that period of 2006 when we had that very robust parliamentary reform. In 2006, an explicit formulation was made in Standing Order 82(2) in which it states, clearly, that the chairperson must come from the main Opposition party. There were certain specific purposes and reasoning behind why it was so elaborated and formulated. It is important we understand that, in Guyana, as against a majority of the commonwealth countries, that specific articulation and formulation means something.

I recall, in the Committee of Selection, when the nine Members were named; five from the Government side and four from the Opposition. Mr. David Patterson’s name was included in that four. There were no objections as to whether the Government did not have any confidence in him because it is clearly a case where the Opposition will name its four. When the second meeting was held in relation to this matter, it was asked: who will be the chairperson from among the four Members? The chairperson from the four Members was named Mr. David Patterson. There was absolutely no objection from the other and there could not have been because, indeed, it is the

function of, exclusively, the Opposition to name the chairperson. That is what is meant by Standing Orders 82(2).

The whole purpose of it, as it must be understood, when we wrote this into our Standing Orders, which is like the Constitution of this Parliament, is that it must come from the Opposition. Even if they do not have any confidence in Mr. David Patterson, they cannot change that. [**Mr. Hamilton:** No, the Parliament will change that.] I will come to that, please understand. So, he became the chairperson and the chairperson he was. He conducted about five or six meetings until, I think, 1st February when something was brought by the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, for purposes in that Committee. It stated that there is a no-confidence motion against him for certain reasons that we cannot see in this motion that we have, neither, I think, could we have seen in the minutes of that sixth meeting as to what it is that they have against him and what is causing them to have no-confidence in him.

Whatever reason they had, one cannot knock off or dismiss – you cannot do that – because it is the Opposition that calls the chairmanship. That is exactly what happened in the last Parliament when the former Chairperson, notwithstanding the various offences mentioned just now, we could have done anything about it. Here it is that the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, is asking why we did not do it then. There must be self-restraint in relation to governance and as to how one goes about doing things. There was that self-restraint. We know that a lot of offences was alleged and an indictment was written up by the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) and all of that, but we could not touch that because there was self-restraint. One could not bring a no confidence motion against that person, the former Chairman, because it was, inherently, the action of the then Opposition, the People Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C), which called the chairperson. If, in their opinion, he was the best person to deal with this issue of scrutinising the account and leading his four-Member team there, then so be it. One could not have said that one wanted to shift that person because one felt that he was a bully.

By the acclamation of calling him a bully or whatever the assertion being made that he is a bully, one could not have done anything in that Committee. It is wrong. As chairperson, they are giving the impression that he did a number of things. But, I come back to the point that whatever he did was very honourable. When the motion was first brought, he recused himself. He asked that the other Members deal with this issue. What could have been more honourable? You are bringing a

no confidence motion against a chairperson. The chairperson then goes outside and said to the committee that it should deal with it, and that he will come back and deal with whatever it is, depending on the outcome of the motion. That was honourable. They could not, knowing very well the rules... I understand that the other three Members did not want to take up the chairmanship. So, there was, what is called, a stalemate. It happened, again, and all of that, and he recused himself again.

Again, it is important to understand that was an honourable behaviour. As I said before, the no confidence by the Government in the chairperson is no basis of getting rid of him because, by the very nature of it and to produce the balance as a fundamental principle of public accounts committees, it is always that the chairmanship will go to the Opposition. That is the underlying principle.

1.55 p.m.

That principle is so fundamental that even Mr. Kevon Bess, the Attorney who addressed the issue for, I think, the Clerk of the National Assembly, had indicated as much. He indicated, quite clearly, that it is a balancing act. The exceptional attribute of this singular committee's chairmanship going to the Opposition has, as its purpose, the ensuring of impartiality and balance of political power in the functioning of the committee. That is what it is.

When there are people who want to knock him off by a no confidence motion – and the Chairperson, after realising that nobody else could Chair, stating that he is going to, as he said, discontinue this motion – we must understand that the discontinuance, which is a disqualification of the motion, is totally in order, too, because the Committee is a microcosm of this National Assembly. If you, Mr. Speaker, in your determination, rule that a certain motion is disqualified then that is the end of the matter. When a chairperson does that in a committee, how is that wrong? There is where I have tremendous difference with what is being brought here.

The no confidence motion was then, effectively, disqualified by the Chairperson of the Committee who has all the powers like a Speaker in that Committee. As a matter of fact, myself; yourself; and the Hon. Member, Mdm. Gail Teixeira, were all there when we created the manual and the procedures within committees. We stated there in the procedural manual that these committees are largely a microcosm of the larger Parliament. If the committee has a certain power, what is the

power of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC)? The PAC's power is to deal with the public accounts. Why are we coming here to deal with a no confidence motion, especially when the main Opposition has appointed David Patterson? You just cannot bring, in that Committee, anything of that nature. I say that and I humbly submit that is the position because of Standing Order 82 (2), which states that the Chairmanship must come from the main Opposition.

Additionally, it is important to realise that, in committees... because I understand that a legal opinion was sought as to what the Standing Orders of England would state on these issues, and a whole host of other things went on there. It was said that, since we have a Standing Order that did not cater for the situation, we must go to the *Erskine May: Parliamentary Practice*. They went to *Erskine May: Parliamentary Practice* which indicates that chairpersons could be removed in England, which does not have Standing Order 82 (2) like we have it. England does not have it, but it could be done.

When they do it, they must ensure that, at least, one Member of the Opposition supports the no confidence motion. When they realise that was the case, they then brought it here. It is the *control freakism* that came into play. They knew that based on the Standing Order that is now adopted from afar in England, and as a result of our very last Standing Order which states that when we do not cater for it in our Standing Orders, we must go to the *Erskine May: Parliamentary Practice*. When you go to the *Erskine May: Parliamentary Practice* you see Standing Order of England, 122 (c), making it very clear that you have to get one Member of the Opposition who had voted for him as Chairperson. They could not get that.

The whole thing also, coming to that point, is that our Standing Orders did not cater for that. No confidence motions are such important things. They must be explicitly stated. We had it in article 106 of our Constitution when it was brought by Mr. Moses Nagamootoo. Then it was brought by Mr. Bharrat Jagdeo and it was successful then. It was stated therein. No confidence against the chairperson is not stated anywhere. How could you now, knowing that you will fail in the Committee because you cannot get one person from the Opposition to support the motion, bring it here because of majoritarian tyranny? I am saying, because of the nature of our Standing Orders, even here, it cannot be brought.

Even if you want to water down the main Opposition's power on this matter, it could be easily watered down. Assuming that you put Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul, all that they have to do is to come with is a no confidence motion, and with the 33 votes they could knock him down. Then they are going to knock down whosoever else we put. That is the danger here. [**Mr. Duncan:** The guardrails.] Yes, the guardrails of our financial architecture could then go to zero as a result of that proposition. You knock Mr. David Patterson. You then get Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul and then you say that Mr. Mahipaul is such a bully. You then bring another motion here, you change him, and we put whosoever else; let us say Ms. Juretha Fernandes. You then say Ms. Fernandes shouts too much against the Government and that she is a bully. What do we have? It will become an unruly horse. That is what we must be afraid of in this particular scenario.

I am arguing that there is nothing in our Standing Orders that states that we could do what we are doing here. It is against every grain of interpretation that one can put. It cannot be done. Our parliamentary democracy stands strong because of these conventions now put into the Standing Orders. It is important that, within the halls of this National Assembly, we not come with what the Hon. Member, Mdm. Gail Teixeira – and I think it was seconded by Bishop Edghill – came with. They will say that be it resolve, now, by his open violation... What was his open violation? Let us get back to that core issue.

The open violation, apparently, was some Auditor General report in which they found certain allegations against him. Before they could have dealt with these allegations, a no confidence motion came. What they have tried to do was to say that, because he was not addressing that which he addressed by saying that it is disqualified, he is a bully. That is what they are doing now. The transgressions of Mr. David Patterson, in not putting it, is what they now rely on. The original thing had to do with some exposures, they say, inside of an Auditor General's report. Well, I cannot believe that. What kind of balance of power you are doing in relation to a formulation that states it is the main Opposition that must call the chairman? You now want to take it away. That will be the erosion of that guardrail. That would be the *bruiking* up, the dismantling, of it. I notice that is happening all the time with constitutional entities – with interference with the Police Service Commissioners, and all manner of things happening in Guyana. We must take pause to ensure that does not further slide.

We must make it quite clear that the chairmanship of the PAC is based on who the main Opposition sees as fit and proper, especially at that nomination stage. It is not based on how unfit and improper the Government Members see him or, logically, whether they have confidence in him; they do not. What they are now doing is to ensure that, by their majority, they are going to slam this thing down on its face and they will get who they want. Those are, especially, important so that we do not slide into a dictatorship.

We have confidence in him because of his experience, because of him being a long-standing Member of that Committee, and because we know that he has a capacity. That is why we selected him as the captain for the PAC. What they want is to have who they feel should not be there, come out.

This is a sad day for the financial architecture of our country. It is a sad day for the democracy and, especially, a Standing Order that was hard fought for. We had Sir Michael Davies coming, not to instruct but to device. We had Mr. Pinda, another fella, who came here from England. Then we had Mr. Bradford in the fiduciary relation. Three of the experts came here, they indicated, and we then wrote that. Mr. Speaker, I remember the three surviving Members: Yourself, Mr. Speaker; Ms. Teixeira; and myself. We were there. It must mean something because we had problems before.

I am urging that this cannot be supported because of the constitution of our Parliament. It cannot be supported because of the legality of the Opposition being the sole source for the chairmanship. It is also because you do not need the confidence of any of the Government Members or the Government as a whole. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Datadin: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Good morning.

Mr. Datadin: It is important that it be made clear that all of the arguments that the PPP/C would like to take control of the PAC have no merit. This motion is about a chairman. This motion is not to take the chairmanship away from the Opposition. It is to take it away from one man who would not do what he is supposed to do.

The Public Accounts Committee is for the scrutiny of Government expenditure. What happens is the Auditor General's reports are put before the committee. It is then scrutinised by the committee. This is how Parliament is able to question the expenditure that it approved in budgets.

2.10 a.m.

The Chairman of that Committee guides the conduct of it. Simple things such as the agenda, putting of motions and saying what the conduct of proceedings is or what takes place, are what the Chairman does.

On 1st February, 2021, a motion was raised in the PAC by the Hon. Member, Minister Ms. Teixeira. It asked that the Chairman resign as Chairman and remain a Member of the PAC. If anyone would look at it, it was a simple motion. If a motion is raised, the Chairman of the committee ought to put it to the floor. If it is not unanimous, he then takes a vote, as with any other motion. That is what should happen, but, from 1st February, that has not happened. From the 1st February, there has been no meeting of the PAC that has done any of the work that it is required to do. It was all because the Chairman would not put the motion to the floor. The motion was for Mr. Patterson to step aside as Chairman.

Now, Mr. Speaker, there is a background to everything. In the examination of the *Report of the Auditor General on The Public Accounts of Guyana and on the Accounts of Ministries/ Departments/Regions For the Fiscal Year ended 31 December 2016*, there were some startling revelations. There were scales that were paid for and never received. There were gifts of bangles, bedsheets and beds that were given. These had been denied, initially, and then accepted and explained. It included other things. I know that we do not talk about criminal charges, but it includes that.

The public deserves a Public Accounts Committee in which it must have confidence. The Chairman, who is responsible for the conduct of business, cannot be one for whom there are such questions. It is said that the Chairman excused himself. To say that was a farce would be an understatement. The Chairman, in fact, 'excused himself' three times at three separate meetings. Twice, the Clerk of the National Assembly came to the Committee to give guidance. The Speaker intervened to, again, give guidance. An independent legal opinion was obtained by the Clerk of the National Assembly, provided to Members of the Committee, and it was ignored. Incidentally,

the advice of the Clerk and the Speaker were ignored. The motion that had been raised on the 1st February has still, to this day, not been put to the floor of the PAC by the Chairman.

How can the PAC function? The Chairman must do his job. If it is that he wishes to recuse himself, he cannot, on the other hand, stymie the work of the Committee when no other Member of the Opposition is prepared to act as the Chairman, even for that day. You cannot do it without putting the question. The Chairman can put the question to the floor and recuse himself. Incidentally, unless the votes are even, he would not have a vote anyway.

What is, exactly, the problem? If a motion is raised, it is his obligation to put it to the floor. His refusal has meant that, since 1st February, with three of four Meetings since, nothing has happened. We kept going around in circles. It was *like Groundhog Day*. We got started, got to the motion, he recused himself and then the meeting broke up. We got called back another day, we got started, the motion was put, he recused himself and then the Meeting broke up. It is *like Groundhog Day*. We cannot continue like that.

To those who say that they do not understand the motion because it has too many whereas clauses, maybe they should read it. It is very explicit. It states that the motion was brought on 1st February. It states what happened since. It states that the legal opinions were being disregarded. It states that the Speaker's advice was being disregarded. It states that the independent legal advice was being disregarded. Incidentally, with the legal advice, the Chairman took it upon himself to obtain the advice of the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan. Surprise! Surprise! That advice coincided with what his wishes were. The PAC did not ask for it. If he wanted personal advice, of course, he was entitled to it. He then imposed it on the PAC and said that the advice was what the PAC must consider. We never asked for it. Why did we have to consider it? We cannot have the PAC under the chairmanship of a person who is insistent on doing what he selectively chooses to do. He must follow the rules.

Now, his refusal to put the motion has meant that, from 1st of February to now, the motion was still not put and disposed of. For some of the speakers who have spoken on the Opposition's side before me, although I do not want to say that it was difficult to comprehend them, it was almost mental gymnastics of Olympic proportions to even begin to understand what was said. You say that you are for democracy, and you spent five months trying to steal an election. You say that the

PAC is important, but you would not have a Chairman who would simply do his job. You mentioned a Parvati who lost her job, but you fired 7000 sugar workers. These things are contradictory. You cannot stand for them both. They are mutually exclusive. [**Mr. Duncan:** Big guts shallow...] The *Guyana Chronicle* is calling, did you answer yet?

The speakers before me made reference to a PAC Chairman for whom there were charges against. They did not say that it happened when they were in Government. It was the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU) with charges in relation to matters which they never moved a motion. Why did they not move a motion? They did not because they know when they fixed the game, trumped it up and when it has no merit. That is why they never moved the motion. The alternative is that they are incompetent.

There was nothing that those charges were related to that were contained in a Report of the Auditor General. There was nothing that was related to gifts. There was nothing that was related to beds, bangles and bedsheets. We know that there are cases in the courts about officials who are still to account for giving away lands for which there are no records and giving away land that did not belong to them and that the agencies have no control over. Those are different things. I am reliably informed by one of my Colleagues that there is a village called *Riggersville* on the East Bank.

We must cover what the previous speaker said about the PAC and the Chairmanship being with the Opposition. It is true that we have Standing Orders that so dictate. This is Standing Order 82 (2). What happens when the Chairman would not do his job? What happens when the other Members of the Opposition, who are on that Committee, would not take the chair? They all declined to take the chair. What happens then? Parliamentary and constitutional necessities dictate that it cannot stymie the work of the PAC. Something must happen. This has happened: We have come to this House because the people of Guyana deserve to have a PAC to scrutinise expenditure.

For the Members of the Opposition to say that, somehow, this side of the House does not want to scrutinise the expenditure before the PAC is mind boggling, because we are scrutinising 2016 when that side of the House was in Government and in charge of the expenditure. Why would it be in the interest of this side of the House not to scrutinise the reports? It makes no sense but, as usual, it relates to ‘say anything’; say it even if it makes no sense in an effort to explain your behaviour and your conduct. There is nothing that states, in our rules, that a Member of the

Opposition must vote with a motion of no confidence in the PAC, as what was termed by the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan. Nothing states that but, again, we have strung together all these phrases and concepts which do not exist. It is the definition of *sanctimonious gangsterism*. You do not have an argument, you invented an argument that is irrelevant, and then you supported and researched that which ought not to be an argument.

2.25 a.m.

The Public Accounts Committee must move forward, and if the current Chairman will not do what he is obliged to do then the work of this House is stymied, because the PAC is an extension of this House.

We cannot continue in this *spinning wheels in the mud* and getting nothing done. That is why we have come to this House. We need to clear it up, we need to move on from it, and we need to support this motion. We see that the motion itemises the meetings, itemises the Chairman putting an asterisk to an agenda item, and the Chairman removing the agenda item. No chairman is entitled to do that. Despite advice being given in the instance when it was asterisked, the Chairman wanted to do what he wanted to do. At the next Meeting we attended, it was not on the agenda. It had to be moved on to the agenda and it had to be voted on to the agenda, again. Then, exactly what would be the function of the Chairman? He cannot do only what he pleases. He cannot only put the motions on the agenda that he wishes. He must put the motions on the agenda that every Member raise.

This is not about taking the chairmanship away from the Opposition. This is about a Chairman who is not doing his job and who is acting in bad faith. Even though he is saying that he is recusing himself, his actions are, as such, to stymie the work or any furtherance of work by the PAC. In these circumstances, I would support that the resolution, as proposed, be carried.

I wish to say, briefly, that the first time the motion was raised, there was a whole argument on whether it had to be put to the floor. Then when the Clerk had advised that every motion raised must be put to the floor, then the recusal patters started. It demonstrates a clear intention that this motion that was tabled by the Hon. Minister Teixeira, the Chairman had no intention of ever addressing it within the rules, within the confines of civility or as he is duty-bound to do as Chairman of the PAC.

Respectfully, I support this motion. [*Applause*]

Mr. Duncan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Good to see Member of Parliament (MP) Benn awake.

In the *Erskine May: Parliamentary Practice 25th Edition*, it talks about a motion having no more than 250 words. Certainly, this motion goes over that, as an aside. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] We talk about rules and obeying rules *eh*.

Let us talk about the motion. It is 2 o' clock in the morning, MP Benn is tired, MP Campbell-Sukhai is sleeping, and so forth. Let us talk about the motion that was brought.

The first paragraph of this what is called a motion, this whereas clause, talks about 'certain exposures'. It is an interesting phrase; a very interesting phrase – certain exposures. It is as though it was a charge or an indictment. After 'certain exposures', in what is considered a motion, everything else after that phrase is really and truly the minutes of the Public Accounts Committee; everything after that. 'Certain exposures', that is the term which is used. And, one gets the impression that, perhaps, instead of going to the Public Accounts Committee to ratify the minutes, because everything else is almost verbatim minutes, they have come to the National Assembly.

The motion is brought, chiefly, on 'certain exposures'. The motion is moved on those, 'certain exposures'. As I said, it is quite an interesting phrase. Again, everything that proceeds that seems to be extraneous matters. These exposures are so certain that none of them are listed in the motion. They are so certain of the exposures that none of them are listed.

For instance, in the last nine months, we have seen 'certain exposures' at Guyana Oil Company (GuyOil) Limited where high ranking officials at GuyOil are implicated in running a racket. But, we do not see this Government going with a no confidence motion against the Chairman of the Board at GuyOil. We have seen certain exposures with the Covid-19 cash grant, so much so that the President has asked for an audit. We are yet to see the audit. Those were 'certain exposures', as well, for these folks who are so concerned about certain exposures. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I am coming to *Dalrymple*; I am coming there.

Regional Tender Boards – We heard a PPP/C member of Regional Democratic Council (RDC), Region 7, talking about illegalities in which a fellow member is involved. Those were certain

exposures and they are still serving at the behest of the region. What happened to those ‘certain exposures’?

GuySuCo – A former President made ‘certain exposures’ about the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo), recently, and he said that he was lobbying for a new type of management at GuySuCo. Listen to the kind of management that he wants based on the ‘certain exposures’. He said that GuySuCo needs to democratise the management. He, too, is subscribing to this whole notion of, perhaps, *control freakism*. He says that the management of GuySuCo needs to be democratised. This is a PPP/C former President.

Police Force – There have been ‘certain exposures’ in a report, recently, about high-ranking officials in the police force. This is the title of the report: *Alleged Breaches of Discipline*. Hear what was one of the conclusions of the report – certain exposures from the report:

“While from the information presented there is not enough prima facie evidence to support a criminal charge of sexual harassment, it is recommended based on the circumstances and the sensitive nature of this matter that the Senior Superintendent be charged for acting in a manner likely to bring discredit to the reputation of the force.”

That is ‘certain exposures’. We have been considering this whole doctrine of *control freakism* and we have had certain exposures on this. We have seen the financial independence of constitutional agencies rolled back. Liberally, the David Granger/APNU/AFC-Administration give up authority and power and now we are seeing *control freakism*. The State Asset Recovery Unit (SARU) has been disbanded – certain exposures. The firing of hundreds of Guyanese, the latest at Guyana Water Inc. (GWI)... You went in and you think that a Permanent Secretary (PS) is politically aligned... professional – certain exposures. That kind of *control freakism* is what has now crept into the attempted removal of the Chairman of the PAC.

Standing Order 26, under which the very motion is brought, Admissibility of Motions, states this:

“In order that a motion may be admissible, it shall satisfy the following conditions, namely:

“(a) It shall raise substantially one definite issue.”

But, with this motion, the definite issue is ‘certain exposures’.

“(a) It shall raise substantially one definite issue.”

These minutes of the PAC that is masquerading as a motion is nebulous, vacuous, vapid and insipid. Again, that phrase haunts us – ‘certain exposure’. These certain exposures, again, are so certain, and they are omitted from the motion.

There were certain exposures at the Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB). Pre 2015, there were certain exposures where one pre-2015 Advisor to the President on Governance had extravagant bills related to telephone – over \$1 million per month. These were certain exposures. There were certain exposures about tremendously expensive dental work for one Member of the Government – certain exposures. Law books were coveted. These exposures have not seen the light of day at court but were dismissed. No reasons were given. One former Minister of Finance had his hands shackled because of certain exposures. One former member of – what is the name of that place that divests land and so on? – National Industrial and Commercial Investments Limited (NICIL)... certain exposures.

I am looking at some newspapers clippings from 26th September: *Julius sex tapes* – certain exposures. On September 26th, 2009:

“President Jagdeo gets copy of...”

Somebody.

“... -Julius sex tape”.

‘Certain exposures’. At the beginning of the tenure of this House saw ‘certain exposures’. There was a particular Member of this House who put ‘their’ hands on the Bible knowing that ‘they’ were a dual citizen – certain exposures. All these people should not serve on one Committee in this House if we are going on certain exposures.

2.40 a.m.

The former Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee had 19 fraud charges – certain exposures. Recently, the Chief Justice, the honourable Roxanne George-Wiltshire, gave a ‘certain exposure’ concerning one person named Mr. Ramkissoon and one named Ms. Browne, speaking of their illegality of sitting in the National Assembly. Those were certain exposures. [**Mr. McCoy:** Going

good.] Thank you very much, Mr. McCoy. At least, I have one fan. I want to go back to another exposure that we often overlook. There is the Amaila Falls Hydropower project exposure and there is GuySuCo. Listen to what was stated in the *Stabroek News*, recently. I want to quote what was stated in the *Stabroek News* about these exposures.

“If it becomes a reality, the proposed gas-to-shore project will be the single largest publicly financed venture in the history of the country. For that reason alone, but amid many others, it requires the most rigorous examination and importantly, full transparency.

When it was last in government, the PPP/C tried aggressively during the Ramotar administration to have the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project (AFHP) executed. The 165-megawatt plant with a price tag of US\$858m would have been the single largest project in the history of the country. It, however, failed to win approval. Had the project been approved and been successful Guyana would have been well on the way to meeting ambitious renewable energy targets and reducing carbon emissions. It was not to be mainly because the PPP/C had held a minority in Parliament and was unable to secure cross-party support for the AFHP. The investors simply couldn’t tolerate the risk entailed and pulled out.

That wasn’t the only reason for its failure.”

I am still quoting the *Stabroek News*.

“That wasn’t the only reason for its failure. The then PPP/C government had had a tendency to violations of good governance...”

Certain exposures.

“...particularly as it related to tendering procedures and transparency. So, the contract for the AFHP access road was scandalously awarded to a Mr Fip Motilall who had had no experience building roads.”

‘Certain exposures’. It goes on to state:

“The best evidence that PPP/C governments on their own cannot be expected to successfully manage big-ticket projects is the Skeldon Sugar Modernisation Programme (SSMP)”

‘Certain Exposures’. Centrally, coming back to the motion, the question can be asked, in this context: Could a motion, any motion, duly limit a Member of Parliament (MP) from enjoying all of the benefits of a Member of the National Assembly? According to Standing Order 80:

“Unless otherwise provided for in these Standing Orders, any Member of the Assembly, whether elected or non-elected, shall be eligible for membership of any Standing Committee and shall have the right to vote therein.”

As long as you are qualified to be a Member of the National Assembly and a Member of the Opposition, you have a right to be elected as chair of the PAC by the Opposition. Again, according to Standing Order 82:

“The Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee must be a Member of the main Opposition...”

Ipsa facto, the main Opposition Member on the PAC is qualified to be Chairman. Within that context and the current Standing Order, that is a right given to the Opposition and a right of the membership of that Member of the Opposition. How can a motion now limit that right of membership? One has to ask the question if it is an amendment to the Standing Order that is being brought through the back door in the form of this motion. If this was a coherent and sound motion, how could it then seek to remove him as Chairperson because of integrity, while the same integrity issues that they have with him does not disqualify him from being a Member of Parliament and they want to keep him on the Committee? All of these heavy burdensome issues and the ‘certain exposures’ that keep him from becoming the Chairman, will keep him on the Committee as a Member. It is madness; that is what it is.

By the end of the motion, the mover or the composer of the minutes of the Committee, which is masquerading as the motion, is on a frolic. By the end of the resolve clauses, there is no mention here about the exposures. That is where they have started and every other thing – from dislodging him because of certain exposures that have become extraneous matters to ‘certain exposures’ –

have now become the reason for removing him as the current Chairman. And so, if this motion was properly constructed with any structure... One would know that the be it resolved clause has a policy statement in it. It asks for something. It does not tell us something; it demands something. That is what the be it resolved clause is. Be it resolved: X, we want. Be it resolved: Y, we want. The first be it resolved clause asks for nothing. It tells us that they do not have any confidence. That could have been a whereas clause. I am surprised that the composer of these minutes would have missed all of that.

Why I am struck is because when you are growing up, you tend to look up at people as your heroes; the people you read about in the newspapers and see on television. When the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, came to the National Assembly, first, I was 13 years old. I did not even learn the structure of compositions as yet. But, now, having the wisdom of my years and looking at the structure... And I am surprised that, for a House that loves to go to Erskine May and the Standing Orders, knowing that there is no definite thing this motion attacks in the beginning, it was allowed to be passed. That is why I am even more surprised with the experience put behind this motion, with the current mover of the motion, and with the composer of the minutes. I would hazard to think that this person did not compose this thing. I do not want to attach it to them. I have this person in such high esteem, honestly. I think this slipped past. But, my parents would say a thing: *You see some people, yuh think they is people, but yuh ain't really know.*

Why I am going so much into this is because it will be there for posterity and future generations, that are going to come and read this stuff – law students and people who are generally interested in governance and all of that – would be so ashamed of us to know that we have put this down on paper. Pass your motion if you want, but pass a properly constructed motion.

We have a problem with English Language, spelling and structure, and so on in this country. we have some serious issues in this country, serious spelling issues. I saw a post with some grammar mistakes from the Public Relations Officer (PRO) attached to a high office in this country, and I am shocked that these people are enjoying taxpayers' money. When they put those posts out on social media, they are representing our country. This is not a corner shop where one does not budget properly and then comes back to say they need a *lil* quarter pound oil and a *lil* half pound sugar because *we ain't* budget. It is shocking when 'you' hear someone who has been convicted in the courts, in the National Assembly, speaking louder than 'you'. It is shocking because it is as

if we are letting in the any and the all sorts now. But, that is for the Standing Orders, I guess, the Speaker would say.

I am shocked, not that a motion of this nature was brought but because it is so deficient in the structure. Even on that basis, the Speaker should have told them to go and come again and that it could not be put in written form. Even if it is not on the veracity of the arguments, which are poor because of certain exposures without even naming these certain exposures... Are we talking secrets now? Are you asking me to pass a secret? I do not know what these certain exposures are. I do not even have the benefits of the minutes. Was the minutes of the Committee ratified? Were there corrections and all of that to the minutes? But, certain exposures have come here.

Merit aside, and they have a right to feel how they feel, but, My Lord! This is what 'no child left behind' produces and, even on that basis, I cannot support it.

Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to you and good morning Colleagues.

In my capacity as a former member of the Bench, a current member of the Bar, and a Member of the highest decision-making forum in the land, I take no pleasure in saying, clearly, that this morning's activity represents a dark chapter in the nation's history. On this day, rather, on this morning, right here and right now, the ship of justice and due process has sailed. In this Dome, at this forum, the Members of that side of the House have declared to the world that they have caused Guyana to forfeit its claim of being a society of laws. But rather, it has degenerated into an arena of petty politics. By bringing this motion, my honourable Colleagues have said to every boy, every girl, every man, and every woman that, if someone points a finger at you and makes an allegation, they will be convicted without any consideration of due process and evidence.

Sir, this unfortunate action, in the form of a parliamentary motion, has had a profound effect on our people. When I received this motion and I subsequently reviewed it, I thought of my country and what cultures and principles, as a nation, we are leaving for our children. In a parliamentary democracy, parliament broadly has two functions, which are law-making and oversight of the Executive Branch of the Government. We all know that Parliament is the embodiment of the

people's will. Committees are an instrument of Parliament for its own effective functioning. So, Sir, we must recognise that the PAC has clear unambiguous roles and responsibilities. It is also given the task of holding the Executive to account and ensuring that taxpayers' moneys is wisely and prudently spent, and that it is spent for its allocated purpose and in accordance with all laws and procedures required. The PAC is also tasked with ensuring that, within the agencies of the State, there are proper decision-making processes and that projects are supported by documentation related to appraisals, analyses and implementation plans.

2.55 a.m.

The task of the PAC is to probe the managerial efficiency and financial discipline of the Government, its Ministries and Departments to ensure accountability to the Parliament of Guyana, and, by extension, to the citizens of this country. It is important to note that one of the most important characteristics of this Committee is that the chairmanship goes to the main Opposition party in Parliament, for the purpose of ensuring balance and unbiased analysis in relation to the spending of the people's money. In relation to the chairmanship of this important Committee, countries of the Commonwealth have placed this important function in the hands of an Opposition. This convention remains strong throughout the Commonwealth countries. In many countries, the PAC is the sole exception to the practice of government-members sharing committees which is a clear demonstration of the fact that the PAC's unique role is appreciated. Guyana is one such country in the Commonwealth which has had strong tradition in the adoption and the application of this convention.

My Colleague, Mr. Ramjattan, mentioned that Guyana, in 2006, in an explicit formulation, made provisions for this in Standing Order 82 (2). The main Opposition Member chairs the PAC. Like he said, this was hard fought for, and its written formulation certainly reflects its importance and significance. It was deliberately formulated in this manner because the framers wanted a mandatory entrenched quality about it established and maintained in the PAC. They wanted a character of non-viability and, in clear terms, indicated that there should be no effort to change this approach.

We respect this, Sir. We respect the Standing Orders. We respected the Standing Orders in 2015 and that is why we did not attempt to tinker with the spirit and intent of the Standing Orders, albeit

the immediate past Chairman had 19 fraud charges levelled against him. We believe in the presumption of innocence. We believe that the confidence of the Chairman of this Committee has to be reposed in the confidence of the Opposition Members and not the Government Members on this Committee. It is for these reasons that we did not attempt this naked and blatant act which we are witnessing right here in this honourable House. To the Members on the other side of the House, do not come here and lecture to us about *sanctimonious gangsterism*, and pretend as if you are living or sitting on some pedestal of decency and integrity.

I need to reiterate that the Public Accounts Committee must never be tinkered with, and every attempt, overt or covert, to diminish its letter and spirit must be countenance. The Members of that side of the House, from day one, have harassed, harangued, and harried not only the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Members of the PAC but, more specifically, the Chairman of that Committee – the most Hon. David Patterson. The harassment we are seeing today cannot outdo that which he was subjected to while he was the Minister of Public Infrastructure. Forget all the lofty and high academic language, this is a vendetta which seeks to vilify the Hon. Member who has chosen to work for the people of Guyana and in a Committee that deals with significant financial issues of critical relevance to all stakeholders. What ought to be the concern of every right-thinking Guyanese is the fact that the highest decision-making body of the land is now a vehicle for political vendetta. The question is, what is next or who is next? We no longer live in a society of laws. We are now in a society of petty political retribution, and all should be concerned.

The central complaints in this motion would have been laughable if they were not being erroneously registered in the context of this serious forum. Paragraph 2 points to the issue that first sparked the need to table this motion. It states:

“...following certain exposures during the examination of the 2016 Auditor General’s Report...”

The intellectual authors of this unacceptable motion did not even have the decency to show respect to this House by stating what these exposures are all about. In any case, the Report of the Auditor General examines the performance of the accounting officer who is the Permanent Secretary, and the report addresses the issues related to the performance of the Permanent Secretary and not the

Minister. In other words, it is the PS who has to answer for what is in the Report. This is what is provided for under the Financial Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) 2003. We are forced to assume. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that this reference alludes to the general fiduciary documentation of the Auditor General between pages 127 to 155.

It has dawned upon me that this motion is an affront to the purpose of the no confidence motion. It is an attack on the purpose of a legislative body. It is a dishonour to any Member of this House to expend any amount of energy on this baseless motion. The principle, which is being advanced by this unsubstantiated exercise is that, once the Audit Office of Guyana conducts the basic exercise which is required by article 223 (3) of the Constitution and the Ministry, which was previously held by the sitting Chairman of the PAC, there can be no confidence in him chairing that Committee. By this fabricated standard, it is not only baseless but it is also a dangerous precedent.

Indeed, by using this approach, any future chair of this Committee could face a no confidence motion. Indeed, this precedent leads one to believe that, tomorrow, any other chairperson who comes from the APNU/AFC Opposition could be targeted for similar baseless claims of unbecoming Members by Members on the other side of the House. There is nothing in the Standing Orders empowering anyone in the PAC to table or to proceed with a no confidence motion against any Member. There is nothing about the business of this Committee which implicitly or expressly empowers the Government PAC Members to venture into that un contemplated absurdity, that is, this no confidence motion. What they should do is get on with the core function of the business of the PAC rather than malingering around the jurisdiction to which they have no authority.

The role of the chairperson of the PAC, as in all other committees, is delineated in Standing Order 95, but there is also a broader elaboration done in the manuals that were provided to us. We can question this approach while our Guyanese brothers and sisters suffer across the regions in this country under the feet of this installed Government. The Members of that side of the House seem to be using any possible means to further their witch-hunt. Sir, we must consider what is before us.

It must not be lost in any Member of this honourable House what the Public Accounts Committee represents. The Committee was created to ensure transparency and accountability. Added to this,

the framers never intended for there to be any form of Government control. They certainly never anticipated for any consideration for the Government's confidence or lack of confidence in the chair. This blatant attempt to remove the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, as Chairman, is an attempt by the Government to ensure that there is no accountability. This attempt smacks of wanting total control and can lead to the introduction of authoritarian mechanisms being established in this noble House. There is a hunger for total control by this Government and this is the reason this motion was tabled. Sir, the Standing Orders stipulate that the chairman must come from the main Opposition. The lawmakers never intended to ensure that no small party which, or Government Advisor who, does not represent the will of the majority of the Opposition ever occupy that seat. Therefore, any attempt to do that or seek to amend any Standing Order should be seen as counterproductive, anti-democratic and an attempt at domination and control. This must be outrightly rejected.

The Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, has not violated any law or Standing Order. It is clear that the PPP/C is being vindictive and malicious in their actions. It tells us that they are afraid of Hon. Member Patterson's ability to unearth the unethical practices that have characterised successive PPP/C Governments. There is no evidence that Mr. Patterson has breached any regulation, and this has raised the obvious question. Why are they after the Hon. Member Patterson? The Hon. Member has served the Ministry of Infrastructure and is familiar with the operations of that Ministry. The PPP/C fears his ability to scrutinise their projects, which are generally characterised by the historic questionable practices of them in the past. It is clear that the PPP/C does not believe in democracy because, if it did, this motion would not have been tabled. This motion is a naked attempt to undermine democracy. This motion of a no confidence is a first for any Parliament in the Caribbean but it is not a first to be admired. This is a very regressive step.

If for argument's sake we want to take this complaint seriously, it still cannot withstand basic scrutiny. Even if you want to argue that the concerns registered in the audit report are the basis for sweeping parliamentary action, it is also a dangerous course to take. Indeed, if we follow the FMAA, we would observe that errors or wrongdoings discovered in the Report of the Auditor General are placed in a report. It is then sent to the Minister of Finance and he has the authority to instruct changes. Thus, there is recourse to any issue contained in the Report of the Auditor General.

Sir, this motion is dabbling in very grave business. It is flirting with the concept of allegations to conviction. It violates the most basic principles of natural justice. As a former member of the Bench, I am nauseated to be engaging in this exercise. I say to the Members on that side of the House, who hold glossy certificates, that it is a day of infamy when a government installed or elected begins to promote the idea of going from allegations to convictions, without any regard for due process and the consideration of the evidence. It is the beginning of the end for any given society. Those on the other side of the House who have paid attention in their law classes ought to know how ridiculous this is. It is accepted and it is known that anyone accused is presumed innocent until proven guilty.

This motion, for all its intents and purposes, is seeking to strike at the heart of established principles that keep civilised societies on even knees. This motion must be totally rejected. Parliamentary procedures such as no confidence motions ought to be made of much sterner stuff. In recent times, we have seen a dangerous trend. Across the public sector, this installed Government is promoting the idea that allegations must be automatically followed by a conviction. We have seen this happening in the cases of the Elections Commission's (GECOM) officials and members of the Police Service Commission (PSC). It is clear that, once a person is not prepared to do the biddings of this Government, this Government is prepared to target them.

3.10 a.m.

We cannot run an orderly society by having someone point a finger or pen a report and it automatically translates into a conviction, a perception of guilt or a guilty verdict. When this culture encloses, tribunals and courts are diminished in their worth. This is a perilous time for this nation and this motion is a stark reminder.

We have seen that there have been claims made publicly with respect to the COVID-19 cash grant and its distribution, with allegations of misuse and abuse. With these allegations, we must ensure that the Hon. David Patterson continues to chair this Committee and to unearth any misuse of public funds. This is the reason they do not want the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, to chair the Committee, simply because he will find where all the financial bones are buried. What other reason could there be for this unmeritorious motion to be tabled, other than fear of the answers to questions on expenditure?

When I look across I see – well I do not see a lot, but I see scared faces. I see that the Members on that side of the House are worried about what will be unearthed by Hon. David Patterson. They are worried, and that is the reason this vindictive motion was tabled. I state for the record that this no-confidence motion is one of the most mis-conceived and ill-timed motions ever presented to this honourable House.

I now turn my attention to the second central complaint of this baseless motion. All of the ‘Whereas Clauses’ point to the conduct of the Hon. Member in his capacity as Chairman. It further alleges disrespect towards the Speaker and disregard for advice from the Clerk of the National Assembly. The Members on that side of the House, by bringing this motion, are saying that they will do whatever they please because they have a slim majority. This is what it is. It cannot be anything else. It is an insult to the intelligence of all Guyanese to suggest that the issues raised in this motion are the basis for expressing a lack of confidence in the Chairman.

We have witnessed the deteriorating quality of life among Guyanese. Farmers, security guards, teachers, nurses and other ordinary workers are reeling under these harsh conditions which we are now experiencing. As the Public Accounts Committee seeks to provide oversight of the activities relating to the spending of the people’s resources, we are witnessing the tabling of a motion to displace the sitting Chairman.

We are currently facing the worst times in this nation’s history. We are going from crisis to crisis every day. We have lost in excess of 400 plus Guyanese to the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. This public health crisis has sparked an economic crisis, coupled with this, we are now in the middle of unprecedented flooding. About 3000 public servants have been pushed onto the breadline due to political persecution. The private sector has laid off numerous workers, prices have skyrocketed and people can barely get by. For those reasons listed, among several others, the only no-confidence motion that should be before this House is one against this installed Government, in particular, the Minister of Home Affairs, who has long lost the confidence of the people of Guyana. We have crime escalating; we have seen prison breaks, which are taking place with monotonous regularity; we have seen the return of extra-judicial killings; the demoralised state of the Guyana Police Force; and the many unsolved homicides. This is your record; this is your legacy. I do not know what all the noise and chatter is about. Giving out a bag of rice is not a hamper. Is that your record? Is that what you are proud of and boasting about?

Instead of focusing on addressing the priority issues facing our nation and working with all the stakeholders to confront these ongoing crises, the Government has brought a motion, which has failed to provide any iota of evidence that the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, has been incompetent. Instead, they have cobbled together flimsy reasons to stop any checks on how the people's moneys are being spent.

We have heard lots of chatter today coming from the other side. However, the Members on the other side have failed to provide any evidence or to lay out or make a case that Mr. Patterson is or has been incompetent, immoral or unethical in his actions. They have failed to lay out their case to this honourable House.

The economic pandemic being experienced by this nation is having a devastating effect on families and communities. Everybody is punishing and struggling to make ends meet, except the Members of the installed Regime and, maybe, more so, the one who is loudest in his heckling. This explains why, in the middle of this economic catastrophe, the Government finds the time to pursue a political witch hunt. They do not have to worry about getting food on the table; they do not pay for gas; they do not have to face the rising cost of living. They remain heavily fortified behind their tinted vehicles with bodyguards and their illegal sirens and flashing lights. They are far removed from reality.

If they were interested in helping the people, we would have been here passing some sort of relief to the people. If they cared, we would have been here at 3.15 am debating on how we could ease the pressure on the people and set about to establish a structured programme with inputs from all the stakeholders, after consultation with the major political parties in Parliament. Instead, we have this baseless motion designed to pursue a political agenda and constrain the work of a very important Committee.

We know what will happen. My Colleagues and I, we will strain our vocal cords and we will register our justified concerns, but the Members on that side of the House will use their party-line vote, which was procured based on numbers that are being questioned before this court, to pass this motion. I am quoting the line from my Colleague, Ms. Fernandes, I say: 'like all regimes, powerful and small, elected and installed, your day of reckoning shall come'.

The Chairmanship of the PAC is based on who the main Opposition sees fit and proper at the nomination stage. It is not based on how unfit and improper the Government Members of the PAC see him, nor, logically, whether they have to have confidence in him.

This motion must be rejected. We, on this side of the House, have every confidence in Mr. Patterson. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Bishop Edghill: Honour belongs to those who never forsake the truth, even when things look dark and grim. There is honour in humility.

Mr. Speaker, whenever you see people attacking the messenger, they know that they have lost the debate. Leadership is about taking responsibility and not making excuses. The fact that we are here this morning is an indictment on the political leadership of the Opposition. This matter should have been resolved by the political leadership of the Opposition. The fact that this Government has to bring a motion to bring some semblance of order to the functioning of a Standing Committee, clearly says to the people of Guyana that leadership is in crisis in the political Opposition.

It was said by one wise man: ‘If you want to direct the orchestra, you have to turn your back to the crowd’. To provide leadership often means that you have to turn your back to the crowd so that you could direct the orchestra. Leadership is the problem here this morning.

I stand to support the motion moved by my Hon. Colleague, Mdm. Gail Teixeira, Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance. Let me use my time wisely. Members of the Opposition said that there was no justification and we merely said that certain issues arose, and that we were making flimsy spurious, vindictive, unmeritorious claims of why this motion is necessary.

I admit that this motion is grave, it is extreme, but it is very necessary. Yes, it is grave; yes, it is an extreme measure, maybe unprecedented, but it is necessary.

The Auditor General, at page 143 of the Audit Report of 2016, paragraph 310 wrote:

“Including in the sum of \$77.383M is a contract awarded by NPTAB in December 2016 to the sole bidder in the sum of \$72.264M to an overseas supplier for the supply and delivery of three motion scales with a delivery period of ninety days. The contract provided for an advance payment of 50% of the contracted sum within thirty days of the signing of the

contract and the balance on delivery. An audit examination revealed that the contract had no signature of witnesses, the contract was not dated, and the NPTAB number was not stated. As of the 31st December 2016, the full contracted sum was paid. It was also observed that a performance bond was not presented for audit examination. Further, at the time of the audit in September 2017, the scales have not been delivered. There was no evidence to show that an addendum to this contract was prepared.”

So, this was a matter of the missing scale.

The Ministry’s response to the Public Accounts Committee stated the following: ‘November 2015/2016, bids were invited through the national competitive bidding process, but no bids were received’. On the 13th December, 2016, the Ministry wrote the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board (NPTAB) requesting sole sourcing to Nevpro Realization Limited. The quotation had no date nor company stamp. So, there was a contract without date and no signature of witnesses.

Now we have the sole sourcing of a contract, the quotation had no date, the company stamp was not there. In December, 2016, the Minister of Finance submitted a Cabinet paper requesting no-objection to procure a scale *via* sole sourcing, citing the following: ‘No bids were submitted through the National Competitive Bidding; urgent need for the scales’.

3.25 a.m.

The supplier, Nevpro Realization Limited, is a reputable company that has been in operation for over 15 years. On 30th December, 2016, Cabinet’s no-objection was issued; on 30th December, 2016, NPTAB letter of award was issued; and on 6th December, 2016, the contract was signed. Notice – Cabinet offered no-objection on 30th December, NPTAB letter of award was issued on 30th December, but the contract was signed on 6th December, 2016. Who was the Minister responsible for this sector? It was the Hon. David Patterson, Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee.

There was an arrangement for the purchase of scales from a company called Nevpro Realization Limited. The entire contract sum was paid, the scales were not delivered and, as I speak tonight, they are still not in the possession of the Ministry that paid the money for them. It was paid to a

company called NevPro Realization Limited. The Directors of Nevpro Realization Limited are Kayode Stewart and Alston Stewart.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I do not think those people are here to defend themselves. Could you change the line of your presentation?

Bishop Edghill: Thank you very much, Sir. I am so guided. Nevpro Realization Limited is a company out of Jamaica that is owned by someone who was engaged in an incident in Trinidad and Tobago, where ammunition was found in his luggage. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Ammunitions.

A statement was issued blaming the PPP/C of attempting to twist an unfortunate but innocent incident, to give the impression that there was a sinister plot to smuggle ammunition, as he was on my way to Guyana for prearranged meetings as an Alliance For Change (AFC) election strategist.

This is the issue here. We abide by the General Secretary of a party who is the Minister in a government, who bought scales that have not yet been delivered and where there are irregular transactions as it relates to the award of the contract, the date of the contract, the witnesses to the contract and the full contract sum paid and that person who is being paid is telling the world: ‘I am the election strategist for that party’.

The Public Accounts Committee is a Committee where public officers have to come and answer for their stewardship. When public officers come to answer for their stewardship, we who sit in that Committee must not be the *laughingstock* of the public. That is why we are demanding decency, integrity and the upholding of good governance. That is why this motion is necessary. The gentleman who we are buying the scales from said that he is an AFC election strategist. The then leader of the AFC, visiting Jamaica at the time of cricket, gave an interview with the newspaper.

I am quoting from *The Jamaica Observer e-paper* of Sunday, 19th July, 2015, and this is what he said:

“Among the benefits of the close association with the PNP, Trotman insists, was the ‘loan’ to Guyana of senior PNP election strategist, media owner ...”

I left out the name to comply with the rules.

“... who was the driving force behind the Coalition’s narrow 5,360-vote win over the long-standing People’s Progressive Party/Civic, which had ruled Guyana for 23 years prior to the May General Elections.”

The Auditor General is citing an irregular transaction. Public moneys that have been given, the word used is ‘loan’, The scales are not here, and the personalities involved is the General Secretary of the Party, where the Leader of the Party has said that the vendor is a political strategist and the man himself said he is a political strategist for that political party. Up until now, we do not have the scales. The question could be asked: Was this a facilitating of payment for services rendered in the name of buying a scale? [**An Hon. Member:** Have these scales arrived as yet?] They have not. They are not in the possession of the Ministry.

My support of this motion is not based on the disclosures that I made earlier. It has nothing to do with court cases. In this envelope, every one of these are vouchers. [*The Hon. Minister displayed copies of vouchers.*] Vouchers that show Ministers, including the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, while he served as a Minister, using statutory bodies to finance activities that the national budget, through appropriations, catered for. For example, upgrade of tickets for travel - \$3 million; the purchase of furniture for Ministers’ offices, which is catered for in the Appropriation Act, and which is also paid for by statutory bodies; gifts of jewellery in excess of millions of dollars, paid for by statutory bodies. Ministers and Members of Parliament received laptops and cellular phones through the Parliament, bought for by statutory bodies. The person who presided over that regime is the person who is sitting as the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, where statutory officers have to come and account for their stewardship, and where we will be asking them questions and they will be giggling and saying, ‘Look at these hypocrites and look at these people’. We are all compromised. We are all made into a position where we are brought into disrepute. All that we are saying is: You cannot pontificate on the high altar of morality and lecture us, when your record is what I hold in my hands tonight.

These matters are already known in the public. When the disclosure was made about these excessive gift-buying and presentation of gifts from agencies that fall under the Hon. Member at the time when he was Minister, what was the first thing he said? He said nothing of the sort. He

said that he does not even like gold; that he did not wear jewellery, until he was photographed in the very Parliament, when he was speaking, with jewellery on his hands. He then engaged the services of a public relations firm to do what they know best – spin narratives, insulting the collective wisdom and intelligence of the Guyanese people who see through these things, but will never admit. What we have is a situation where we are all under question.

I want to address the issue of the 19 fraud charges. The Hon. Member, Ms. Chandan-Edmond, should have been here to hear this. She said she is a former member of the Bench. I never sat on the Bench, and I am not qualified as a lawyer, but I can tell you this, Mr. Speaker, I am a matured person of reasonable understanding. None of the issues raised against the last Chairman of the PAC derived its substance from an Auditor General's Report. The issues that we are raising with the Chairman of this PAC is not political *gyaff*, it is coming from the Auditor General's Report that is being examined.

Let me also nail this lie. Let us also...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, thank you very much. Will you withdraw that?

Bishop Edghill: Let me also nail this misinformation, that we are trying to stymie the work of the Public Accounts Committee and that we are trying to hide from scrutiny. Mr. Speaker, I know that you are a very learned and experienced man in public accounts. We are examining the Public Accounts of 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, all the years that the APNU/AFC was in Government. We are examining their stewardship; we are examining queries that came as a result of policy direction given to public officers to act that resulted in audit queries. We are examining violations of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act and queries that were raised in the Audit Report, not of the PPP/C, Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, but of the APNU/AFC.

Mr. Speaker, the issue here is that we cannot see a *jumbie behind every bush*. From day one, we said to the Hon. Member 'recuse yourself, resign as the Chairman, you could remain on the Committee and act with honour'. There is honour with humility, Sir.

I want to record for the *Hansard* that the Committee became a place where Members of the Opposition used it to personally insult, used invectives, inappropriate language and make accusations against Government Members, including myself and Mdm. Gail Teixeira.

3.40 a.m.

Shameless display of desperation when they realised that they were caught in a vortex. Rather than face the reality that we had a challenge to deal with, they attacked the messengers. The record of the Committee will show, no less than 15 times, I had to say to the Chairman, Mr. Patterson, ‘I will not be bullied by you’. When he realised that he was caught in a very precarious situation, his tactic, aided and abetted by Mr. Mahipaul, Ms. Juretha Fernandes and Mr. Jermaine Figueira [**An Hon. Member:** The Hon. Members.] The Hon. Members. Aided and abetted by them, they sought to get into things extraneous to the work of the Committee, to hurl insults and to bully their way. This matter could have been resolved at the level of the Committee. After we were bullied and insulted [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** Could anyone bully you?] After we were insulted. But like a rhinoceros, we took our burns and abuses with good stead. We remained on a principled path and said there is a procedural way, there is a parliamentary way, and there is a principled way to deal with this matter. The way that we chose was the way of a motion.

It is not correct for me to drag public officers or even the Speaker into a debate, as I saw Hon. Members doing here tonight. I hung my head in shame, even when the Clerk of the National Assembly was summoned to lend some advice and he got advice from an independent legal expert, Mr. Patterson – the interested party, the Chairman of the Committee – accused the Clerk of getting what we did not ask for. He accused the Clerk of going into an excursion in a manner the Committee did not request and almost imputed that the Clerk said specific things to the lawyer in order to get a certain outcome in the opinion. That was the nature of the debate at the level of the Committee. Desperation! The Hon. Clerk, as he always does, indicated that he was only there to offer advice and in a very humble, polite and professional way, departed after that. We had a delay of meetings for a few weeks, aided and abetted with an opinion from Mr. Ramjattan requested...

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan.

Bishop Edghill: ...the Hon. Member, by Members of the Opposition. They now summoned the Public Accounts Committee. Do you know what they intended to do? To behave as if there was no motion before the Committee. It was not on the agenda. We had to fight to get it back on the agenda, and when we got it on the agenda it was asterisked. The Gentleman was chairing the meetings and while we are saying, ‘when we broke, we broke at a particular point and we need to

start from that point'. He used his position as the Chairman to direct what he was doing. Forget about everything else that I have said before: the audit report, the concerns, the betrayal of the public trust, the disclosures that were made, the denials, the public opinion, the way we were brought into disrepute, the comments that were made publicly about us – because as a Committee, we function as a Committee – the conduct of the Chairman after those events alone warrants this grave, extreme and necessary action tonight.

What we are seeking to do by way of this motion, is to simply say to the Opposition, including the Leader of the Opposition, we cannot choose your Members that sit on any Committee. That is your prerogative through a process that comes through the Committee of Selection, but we have a problem. The person who is currently serving as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee is putting us, and, as a subset of this National Assembly, is putting the entire National Assembly *under a cloud* question and could bring our work into disrepute and cause us to be looked upon as dishonourable in the eyes of the public. We need to preserve the integrity of this august Assembly. This action is to ensure that we preserve that, Sir.

Mr. Speaker, I noted your correspondence which you sent to the Hon. Member, which gave guidance that the motion must be put. We could have settled this matter without this 4 o'clock in the morning discourse and vote, but we have a people who believe that they could continually spin narratives to a section of the population who, somehow, they believe, believes them. There is a group that believes that *might is right*. Tonight, is not about settling scores. It is about bringing order to a committee and restoring the high standards and principles of a Standing Committee, to ensure good governance, the rule of law, transparency and accountability.

Thank you very much, Sir. [*Applause*]

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Speaker, I am fighting myself to agree that it is necessary to go to church. I am reminded that not everyone who goes to church knows God and I believe it was very much demonstrated in the previous speaker. I will attempt with the limited time available to me, to clarify some of the misinformation that was brought to this honourable House by the speakers on the other side, as I stand before you to make my contributions to this vexatious, ill conceived, malevolent and wicked motion.

It is extremely sad that the people of Guyana will wake up this morning and the headlines will read: *PPP/C demolishes the guardrails of parliamentary democracy*. We as a people, have come very far. One would have expected that the guardrails of parliamentary democracy would have been protected and not abused by a mere two-seat majority. It is very unfortunate that it is being done against the backdrop of questionable votes.

I would like to start with the Hon. Gail Teixeira, the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance. As a senior Member – the Hon. Member is a senior Member in the House – we, young people, oftentimes look to these senior Members for guidance and we look to them for that guidance because we believe that they possess it. Too many times, we have found that these senior Members present a series of bluffs, and we oftentimes draw the conclusion that it is ‘bluff coming from a fluff’. The first time this motion was introduced to the Public Accounts Committee was on 1st February, 2021. The second Whereas Clause in the motion for the Removal of the Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee states:

“AND WHEREAS at the Sixth Meeting of the Public Accounts Committee, on February 1, 2021, following certain exposures during the examination of the 2016 Auditor General’s Report, a motion was moved by Minister Gail Teixeira...”

This is the *Hansard* of the National Assembly of the First Session of the Twelfth Parliament of Guyana 2020-2021, Record of the Proceedings of the Public Accounts Committee held on 1st February, 2021, 6th Meeting, 10.08 a.m. The motion is stating that, following exposures during the 2016 Auditor General’s report, a motion was moved by Minister Gail Teixeira. The first action on this record here is the motion to remove the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. Where was the exposure in this meeting? Where was the exposure in the 2016 Auditor General’s Report that is mentioned in the second Whereas Clause, where the Hon. Minister said, in her document, that, after those exposures at the 6th Meeting, she then filed the motion. We have the evidence here. The evidence shows that after ‘Circulation of Documents’, we had ‘Correction and Confirmation of Minutes of the Meeting’ that was held in January and, immediately, as we were about to go into examination of the agencies, the Hon. Minister stood and moved a motion. The motion that she moved was simply saying: ‘we have no confidence in the Hon. Chairman and he should be removed’. That was all. That was all that it said. We kept insisting that one needed to present, at least, some amount of reasoning behind one’s motion. This is because if we are going to accept

just the fact that you are saying that you do not have confidence, then you can very well do that to any other person. How can the highest decision-making body move to accept a two-line motion that says we do not have confidence in the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson and then decide to say that he should resign? Should we accept that? Are we in nursery school here? Are we in primary school? Are we bringing those mistakes here?

3.55 a.m.

We are supposed to have some amount of ability to justify our actions, movements and what we stand strong for, but we did not get that from the Hon. Member. So, we kept asking the Hon. Member which Standing Order she was bringing this motion on to remove the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. We kept asking that question: Which Standing Order? There was an answer from the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira. She said, could she suggest to the Hon. Members that they could look at Standing Order 30(h). So, she is bringing the motion to remove the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, as Chairman under Standing Order 30(h). Well, let us see what Standing Order 30(h) states:

“Exception from Notice”

We were questioning how the Hon. Member could just bring a motion like that. She said that she brought it under Standing Order 30(h). The Standing Order 30(h) states:

“Unless the Standing Orders otherwise provide, notice shall be given of any motion which is proposed to be made, with the exception of the following:-”

There are a number of orders here, but I will go specifically to Standing Order 30(h):

“a motion for the suspension of a Member;”

Now, tell me Hon. Member, Ms. Priya Manickchand, Minister of Education, is a motion for the removal of a chairperson from a committee the same as a motion for the suspension of a member? This is strict and standard English. The motion that the Hon. Member brought was a motion saying that they have no confidence in the Hon. Member, and they would like him to be removed as Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. How could you mislead the Hon. Members of this honourable House, especially, the young Members who are here not for a full year as yet, who are

looking to you for guidance and who you are expected to provide that level of guidance for so that we could continue to do what is right and follow the teachings of our documents? Standing Order 30(h) speaks to the suspension of a member.

So, if you are bringing that motion, under Standing Order 30(h), then it is for what you are seeking and that is removing Mr. David Patterson, completely. Or if it is, as you claimed, for the removal of the Chairman, then it has to have some merit and justification, and it must fall within the Standing Orders. Nowhere under Standing Order 30 'Exception from Notice' does it state that you have that authority to bring a motion to remove the chairman of a standing committee, more so, the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee. I want to put that, first of all, at rest.

There is another Whereas Clause that states:

“AND WHEREAS the Chairperson having not agreed to resign, the motion was then moved and supported by the majority of the members for the removal of the Chairperson;”

That is another inaccuracy. We cannot continue to mislead the Members of this House and the nation at large. That is why I am very happy that there is a Hansard Division in the National Assembly where it records word for word.

When the motion was put, because we wanted clarity on the admissibility of the motion, and we wanted to ensure that it fell within the confines of the Standing Orders, there was a back-and-forth discourse. The People's Progressive Party/Civic's side held its position, which was one that was clearly misleading because, from the outset, the motion was brought under the wrong Standing Order, even though senior Members held out that the motion was in the correct order. We maintained that it was not fitting to come to the Committee with such a motion. We stuck to that position and, to this date, because we are guided by the English language which is what is written in this Standing Order, which is the bible of this National Assembly, and which is what we have to practice in this National Assembly to guide us, that is what we are guided by. I still hold to the view, and I am sure sensible and firm Members who believe in these Standing Order, will hold to the same principle and that is that the motion is ill-conceived, vexatious, malevolent and wicked.

Sir, the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, also said that from the time the PAC was formed, the Chairman was doing what he wanted against the Standing Orders. Sir, if you examine all the

records of the PAC, you would see that the Hon. Member who spoke the most in those meetings was the Hon. Teixeira, followed by the Hon. Bishop Edghill. I remember, at one time, and the Hon. Members, Mr. Jermaine Figueira and Ms. Juretha Fernandes, are my witnesses, and if the other Hon. Members on that side of the House want to be honest, I had to tell the Chairman that he was not recognising me to speak because he constantly had the Hon. Ms. Teixeira speaking and was not giving us the chance to. Almost every time the Hon. Teixeira puts on her microphone to speak, she gets the opportunity to do so. So, how could she say that the Hon. Member was doing what he was not supposed to do?

The Hon. Teixeira said that Members called her 'old' and they were disrespectful. I heard the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill also say that personal insults and language were used to bring their reputation into disrepute. Sir, I do not know if I am in order, but I want to tell you what transpired at the Public Accounts Committee. I stand here this morning at 4 o'clock and the Hon. Bishop Edghill told me at that meeting that my bones shall rot and ants shall eat it. He is accepting that he did that. The Hon. Teixeira showed me the 'middle finger' two times after I was questioning the legality and admissibility of this motion. At one time, when the Hon. Teixeira got up and I asked her where she was going and told her we were not finished. She said that *She don't tell she husband whey she does go, wha she got to tell me for, carry yo suh and suh*. And you are talking about insults and hurdling remarks that bring your image and name into disrepute. Sir, we have to be honest. We cannot be making up stories. When we speak, we must always remember that there are others to speak too. Sir, if I am misleading you here, then they are free to stand and object on a Point of Order because, like I said, the record is available. I believe that there was a video along the line too.

The Hon. Gail Teixeira said that Mr. Patterson disrespected the Speaker and the Clerk of the National Assembly. The Clerk of the National Assembly is here. Sir, at no time was the Hon. David Patterson disrespectful to the Clerk and more so to you. I want to put on record that the APNU/AFC Coalition, in this House, has the utmost respect for you and your Chair and the Clerk of the National Assembly. We will continue to have that respect for your Office, for you as an individual, the Clerk's Office, and the Clerk as an individual.

Sir, I want to say to you that, when the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, communicated with you concerning the asterisk which seems to draw all the attention, you did write. I received your

communication *via* email, and I received, subsequently, a hardcopy. I believe the Hon. Members, Mr. Jermaine Figueira and Ms. Juretha Fernandes also received it. Sir, the Hon. David Patterson did not fail to call a PAC meeting after you wrote. You would recall that it was you who said, in a document, that because of the COVID-19 pandemic and because a number of staff members were tested positive for COVID-19, we would have a suspension of meetings of Standing Committees and Select Committees until it became stable or returned to some level of normalcy. That is what caused that gap or space from us reaching as a Public Accounts Committee so that your letter could be formally tabled at the PAC and be dealt with. So, to assume that there was disrespect and disregard to your high Office and your learned guidance, is misleading. Let me assure you that it is not the truth.

The Hon. Member, Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo, said that democracy will prevail and no bullyism will derail it. Sir, democracy is dead in Guyana. This motion is merely us casting the tome to ensure that democracy does not come out. When the election is called again and people goes to the polls, they will break out of that tome. They will return the APNU/AFC to Office and democracy will rise again and rise stronger than ever because the people of this country will be the ultimate judge and recognise who really is responsible for the hardship they are currently facing in this country.

Imagine at 10 minutes past four in the morning of Tuesday the 15th June, 2021, we have to be standing here debating a motion that is *null* and *void* and cannot hold water, instead of dealing with the situation that is on the ground. There are hundreds of people suffering from flooding. The cost of living is going up every day. The sugar that is produced in this country, we now have to pay \$200 a pound, when it was \$80 a pound back in August. [**An Hon. Member:** Toilet paper.] The price for toilet paper gone up; the price for eddo gone up; the price for potatoes gone up; the price for bora gone up; the price for everything has gone up. Do you know what has not gone up? It is the people's salaries - taxpayers' salaries?

4.10 a.m.

There seems to be no cause for worry on that side of the honourable House. The poor people of this country are suffering. They are crying to us. Day and night they are communicating with us. They are visiting our office and they are making their voices heard to us.

There are many people who want a change, and they will get it. It is unfortunate because they did vote for us. I keep saying that. We keep walking this country, we keep hearing what they are saying, and we keep getting their support. It is very shocking that there were 49 ballot boxes with no statutory documentation to verify the votes in those boxes at the last Elections we had. It is very shocking, also, that there were persons, whose names are known, to no longer be in existence. They are dead, but their names were ticked off and they were registered as having voted. There are also persons who migrated from this country and did not return on or before 2nd March, 2021, but their names are also recorded as voted. There were missing poll books. There were missing oaths of identity. There were unsigned oaths of identity. Elections 2020 was riddled with anomalies, abnormalities and irregularities. It was basically systemic fraud. That is why we keep harping.

Mr. Speaker: I would have to ask you to withdraw those two words.

Mr. Mahipaul: I withdraw, Sir and I say invalid votes.

The Hon. Dharamkumar Seeraj, who I know having interacted with him at the PAC, does not really and truly in his heart want to support this motion. I know that he genuinely understands that Mr. David Patterson, the Hon. Member, is the right man for the job. I know that his religious conviction and teaching is guiding him, but I am not sure if he would be able to do the honourable thing or if he would be able to stand as a man and represent his belief because he is guided by his political party. Maybe he is fearful that if he does go against their standing, he may lose the advisory position he holds at the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development.

The Hon. Sanjeev Datadin, I listened to him very well. I want to assure the Hon. Attorney General, Mr. Anil Nandlall that he needs not fear. Hon. Sanjeev Datadin said that this motion is about taking away the Chairmanship from one man because he does not want to do what he is supposed to do. What is it that the Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson is supposed to do? Mr. David Patterson, the Hon. Member, comes to the PAC, sits in the Chair and awaits a quorum. In fact, if we do recall, Mr. David Patterson always awaits the arrival of the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira; the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill; the Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamkumar Seeraj; the Hon. Member, Mr. Sanjeev Datadin; and the Hon. Member, Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo. He always awaits them. Why do you think all our meetings start very late? The seventh meeting started at 10.34 am and we were there from since 9.30 am. All of us are there from 9.30 am, awaiting the start of PAC. We know it

starts at 10.00 am. The quorum for a PAC meeting is three Members; the Chairman and two Members could start the meeting. The honourable thing that man does, the Hon. David Patterson, he waits on the arrival of the membership of the People's Progressive Party/Civic and you are coming to say that he is doing what he is not supposed to do. What is he not supposed to do, not wait on you?

The Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, comes, he takes his seat, and the Clerk of Committees sits next to him, and the other staff are there. The people who sit there are right in this honourable House and they could testify to what I am saying. Maybe they are fearful to do so, but they could pray over it for forgiveness. When he sits there, he is guided by the Clerk of Committee. Every action he took, was in keeping with the guidance that was provided by the Clerk of Committee. What caused us to ask the Clerk of the National Assembly to come and provide guidance was because we did not find satisfaction with the admissibility of the motion. When the Clerk came, the Clerk did provide the guidance. What the Clerk said and I have to complete my presentation because... I should not say that. What the Clerk said is that one cannot bring a no confidence motion in a Standing Committee. He said an ordinary motion could come, but one cannot bring a motion of no confidence. That is in the record.

Further to that, what the Clerk said was that it has to go – the motion. It was the Hon. Bishop Edghill who said in the PAC that Mr. David Patterson, the Hon. Member, should not participate, and he should recuse himself. That is why he recused himself. When he recused himself, no Member from our side took the Chair, so we were without a Chairman. The Clerk said that he had to seek advice on how we would proceed with the matter. We asked him to seek the advice on whether Standing Order 95 (4) overrides Standing Order 82 (2). The Clerk came back with the guidance. What was the guidance? Standing Order 95 (4) does not override Standing Order 82 (2). That was the guidance that was provided.

The Hon. Bishop Edghill keeps referencing the Auditor General's Report. The Auditor General questions the accounting officer, the permanent secretary, not the Minister. It is the accounting officer. The same way, as I wrap up, how they talk about the scales that did not come, we examined the 2013 and 2014 Reports, when we saw millions of dollars that were paid to the contractor to deal with the East Coast Highway road. More than 50% was paid when the road did not even start. The Hon. Robson Benn was the Minister at that time. If we want to talk about scales, let us talk

about the 2013 and 2014 Auditor General's Reports where millions of dollars were given to the contractor and no proper work was done. When you want to take shades out of people's eyes, look into your own one. Thank you very much. [Applause]

Deputy Speaker [Mr. Shuman]: Mr. Speaker, good morning. Colleagues in the House, good morning. Mr. Speaker, before I start to address the matter on order, I...Can you hear me, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Shuman: I wish first to express sincere condolences to the families who have lost loved ones through COVID-19. I also take this opportunity to plea with everyone listening to think of their loved ones, their neighbours, their families and friends and of what COVID-19 has done to the world and to get vaccinated. It may not be the perfect solution, but it is better than having nothing. I say a very sincere thank you to all of the hard-working and dedicated medical staff and family members caring for those affected.

Secondly, I wish to express my support for and solidarity with all those who have been affected by the floods; all the families who have lost their homes. My Indigenous sisters and brothers; the farmers who have lost their crops and livestock, the miners, the businesspeople, the times are difficult, but *this too shall pass* and support is on its way. To the hard-working staff of the CDC, community leaders, and you my Colleagues, on both sides of the House, thank you for reaching out to the communities affected.

Mr. Speaker, here is where I wish to make my entry into this very relevant and serious discussion. This motion represents the precise reason I had asked the Hon. Raphael Trotman to be a Member of the PAC, because events like these were foreseen. We just finished debating a supplementary Budget of \$23.267 billion to support flood relief efforts, among other things. We have a responsibility to ensure that the public's purse is not misused or mismanaged.

Yesterday, I reacquainted myself with the functions of the PAC and its mandate. Sometimes we tend to forget these things. One part of it stated: 'to reduce Government being frivolous and ensure moneys are not spent outside of the budget', to paraphrase, 'not spent outside of the budgeted items'. One word that is not mentioned there is integrity, but it is implied in several ways. Just by being part of this honourable House, we are expected to be of the highest integrity. By speaking

of public's purse and its uses, one could only hold the Government accountable if they themselves are accountable and have integrity. Take for example, when moneys are set aside for COVID-19 relief and that money is spent, the Government must be held accountable. When over \$1 billion was spent on Durban Park, \$1.3 trillion in the Government's four-year tenure in Office and next to nothing to show for it, they must be held accountable. Is it that the Chairman is afraid that scrutinising the numbers would show that addition and math problems extend far beyond determining simple majorities? When a Government spends tax dollars to fight cases all the way to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) to try to subvert the rule of law, the public needs to know. It is the taxpayers' moneys. When the Government comes to the Parliament and asks for additional billions in supplementary budget, the Government must be held accountable. We cannot hold the Government accountable when we are on our heels. In accountability and integrity, we must have a forward footing. These must come from a place of integrity. If we lose our integrity in the process, we reduce this House to a farce.

I sat and listened to some of my Colleagues go on frolics about Parliamentary procedures. I wish to bring to this House's attention every single Order Paper presented in Parliament. It is a matter of record. Stapled on every Order Paper are reports from committees. This by itself implies that committees have a responsibility for this House. This House is the highest in the land and committees are instruments of this House. By these virtues, this House has a responsibility to ensure its instruments do not go rogue and hold up the country's business.

I have said on many occasions, if we want the best from society, we must give the best of ourselves to society and to this country. That starts with good leadership and that must be present in this House. If we disobey the very rules that were meant to keep our structures up, then what role models are we to the children of this nation who look up to us? What do we in turn expect from society when our behaviour is so offensive to the rules as laid out?

4.25 a.m.

This House was meant to have the highest calibre of persons with good morals, sound aptitude and judgement. In this House is meant to reside the role models and leaders of our country who should lead with respect for the rule of law and respect for the policies and procedures as laid out by our very own parliamentary documents. One person should not hold up the country's business because

they do not want the public to know what transpired under their tenure. Whether it is \$1 or \$1.3 trillion, the public must know how their moneys were spent.

We have records from 2016, all the way up to the soon to be concluded 2021, that would have to be brought to this House. We have to ensure that the public's moneys are accounted for, and that the Public Accounts Committee continues to be the first accountable mechanism for doing so. This is not a motion to replace the Opposition as Chair of the Committee. It is a motion to remove 'a' Member of the Opposition to ensure that the PAC functions per the rules laid out for us. The rules laid out states that the Chairman must come from the main Opposition.

This accusation that seems to emanate from my Colleagues in the Opposition, that I would want to replace any Member on that side, is unfounded and false, and it needs to be dispatched immediately. Once again, I plead with my Colleagues on this side of the House, to let us up our game. It is the only way to hold the Government accountable and the people expect it of us.

I support this motion to have the Hon. David Patterson replaced as the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee and for a new Chair to be elected. This position of holding the nation hostage *via* the PAC, reminds me of what transpired through the five arduous months following the Elections of 2020. I say this to my Colleagues, it is unsustainable and untenable. It is time we change how we move forward in doing the country's business. Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Forde: Good morning, Mr. Speaker and Colleagues. It is now 4.27 a.m. and despite the number of hours we have been debating this motion, my task as the last speaker on this side of the House has been made quite easy. It has been made quite easy because of the nature of the presentations made by my Colleagues. It is clear that there is no substance to the allegations which form the basis of this motion.

Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul did a phenomenal job of demonstrating clearly for the nation, this House and for every person around the world who would want to follow such a travesty, that there is absolutely no basis – in fact – for the motion. It is also proper, perhaps by coincidence, that this is the hour this motion is being debated – in the dark of the night because it is unfit to see the light of day. This motion represents another manifestation of the installed Government's intention to control and bully every institution – and I mean every institution – and office in Guyana so as to create an autocratic, ethnocratic and dictatorial state. This is another manifestation of the installed

Government's intention to seek domination over every institution and office which is meant to secure oversight over Government's actions and to provide transparency.

The installed Government by this motion, is yet again seeking to demolish or compromise every system of check and balance, which was established by the Constitution and/or convention, by which a Government of this country is to be held accountable. I have already adverted to the fact that there is no factual basis which has been laid out. Mr. Mahipaul explained to every person present here and listening that firstly, Hon. Member Mr. David Patterson could not have been guilty of the matter set out in the motion. Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, did not stand here and speak out off his head or out of a hat. It appears as if the Hon. Member, the mover of the motion, Ms. Teixeira, forgot that there were minutes and records which would detail what happened in those meetings.

Mr. Speaker, when I reflected on your letter, I wondered what would have caused the Hon. Speaker to write a letter of the language that it bored and at the time of the process that was unfolding. Having listened to Hon. Mr. Mahipaul, I am convinced Mr. Speaker that you must have been misled. The revelations are so far from the context in which your letter would have appeared.

Let me turn to the motion now. I respectfully submit on this side of the House, with the overwhelming support of all of my Colleagues, that the motion is misconceived and downright silly. The Standing Orders do not provide for the removal of the chair of a committee. That was why they encountered a number of problems over a number of meetings that my learned Friends, Mr. Ramjattan and Mr. Mahipaul referred to. They were asked to produce and point to the source of the motion. It could not have been identified.

Mr. Speaker, you would know that when our Standing Orders are silent, we rely on those used by the House of Commons of the United Kingdom. Mr. Ramjattan referred to Standing Order 122C of the United Kingdom (UK). It relates that a Committee may resolve that it has no confidence in a chair but, a motion to that effect must be agreed without a decision of the majority of the membership of the Committee, including at least two members from the largest committee or the party from the largest party, and at least one member from another party in favour of the Opposition.

We cannot cherry-pick on what we want to accept as our inheritance as a parliamentary system. The British tradition recognised and included such a provision to prevent the same type of situation like this from occurring. Even though a party may have the majority in the House, in the context of the operation of a committee, they wanted to ensure that there is no tyranny of the majority in the committee. That is why the first place for the moving of a motion is in the committee. Now, this rule has not been applied and complied with. It has not even been attempted to be brought before the Committee.

I observe, Mr. Speaker, in your letter to the Chair, there was no mention to what rule under which the Chair should have entertained the motion. *Standing Orders of the House of Commons* 122C states that, after the motion is passed in the committee, a resolution of no confidence is presented to the House, where upon the Speaker declares the Chair vacant and announces the date for the election of a replacement. That is the context of the operation, convention, and tradition in the British parliamentary system that we seek to copy and mimic in many respects.

As I said before, there is no rule, Standing Order, convention or precedent before this National Assembly. We are transiting to deep, far and troubled waters. Despite the years of experience of the mover of this motion, and despite the fact that there were many references to the fact that this happened in different parts of the Commonwealth, at 4.35 a.m. we still have not heard of a single situation where this happened.

Mr. Speaker, you will be told probably by the mover of the motion that Standing Order 122C has no application to this situation because it deals only with circumstances where the House itself elects a chairman. Mr. Speaker, I know that you are an avid reader and a follower of parliamentary affairs, and I invite you, in your time, to consider the operations of the Liaison Committee of the House of the Commons. It is not one of the committees that falls directly to be governed under 122C. There are articles which indicate that, even in relation to the operation of those committees, they must comply with Standing Order 122C of the *Standing Orders of the House of Commons*.

We have succeeded in turning this motion on its head. It was a very easy task. We have, in fact, demonstrated that the bullyism is, in fact, on the part of the installed Government. This is where it lies. The Chair of the Public Accounts Committee was not elected or appointed by this National Assembly. As a matter of common sense, the National Assembly's resolution that it has no

confidence in the Chair, cannot result in the removal of the Chair. There is no precedent for this dubious and concerning development.

As you are aware, the principal purpose of the Public Accounts Committee is to hold the Executive to account for its use of the public's money. The Public Accounts Committee is to keep watch and provide oversight on the spending and performance of the Government, to bring to the public's attention, inefficiencies, wasteful expenditure and poor implementation and execution of policies and programmes approved by the National Assembly. The Public Accounts Committee is also empowered to make recommendations for the effective and efficient implementation of policies and programmes. The Executive is seeking to use its majority in this House to remove the Chair of the Committee that exercises important oversight functions on the Executive's spending, without complying with the safeguard and without the support of a Member of the Opposition. The plan of the installed Government is obvious.

4.40 a.m.

When they look over at the Opposition, at least at 31 of the 32 Members of the Opposition, they see people who would expose them day and night, Sunday to Sunday, from January to December. But that 32nd Member is the *apple of their eyes*. He is their Opposition Member – the Hon. Mr. Lenox Shuman, a Member of the Executive and Government, who happens to sit on the Opposition.

For the past hours, since midnight, we have listened [**An Hon. Member:** (Inaudible)] No, you left them home. You have them home by you. We have listened to all the speakers of the Government, and it is very interesting. We could listen to them carefully. This is just the first wave. What they are planning to do is ultimately amend the Standing Orders to remove the fact that the chairman must come from the main Opposition. Tonight, we want them to know that we are on to them. This is not about moving the chairmanship from the Opposition to the Government. You would have heard them say repeatedly that all they are trying to do is keep the chair in the Opposition, but none of them have said that they are trying to keep the chair with the main Opposition.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Shuman, despite what he said a few minutes ago, as far as I recall – I could be incorrect, but I have quite a good memory; unlike my learned Friend who is there sleeping away

– has already expressed an interest in being on and being the chair of the Public Accounts Committee. He has said that before.

You cannot have a proxy, a puppet and an instrumentality of an installed Government occupying the chair of the Public Accounts Committee. You are putting *a cat to watch milk*. To achieve this, the installed Government would have to change the Standing Orders which will provide that the chairperson must come from the Opposition and not from the main Opposition. Let me remind this Assembly, Mr. Speaker, and you would recall as an experienced parliamentarian, that it was the same People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) that insisted that the chairperson must come from the main Opposition and not the Opposition when they wanted to shut out the minor Opposition parties at that time, the Alliance For Change (AFC) and the Working People's Alliance (WPA), from assuming the chair of the Public Accounts Committee.

The charges against the Hon. Member, Mr. Patterson, are completely trumped up. As I said before, the minutes demonstrate that there was no substance to the allegation that he has no respect for the Speaker. The motion alleges that he is prepared to disobey the letter of the Speaker. My Friend and the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, *put that out to sea*. The Hon. Ms. Teixeira must have forgotten that it was the Speaker who, on the 17th day of April, 2021, suspended all sittings of the Committee and on 3rd May, 2021, by letter, you wrote Mr. Patterson informing him to put this matter before the Committee to the motion. When was he to put the motion? How could that constitute an allegation against him when there has been no opportunity, up to now, for him to put the motion before the House? I am disappointed, Mr. Speaker, that this motion has gotten past you. It ought not to have, with the greatest respect. I mean no personal attack on you, Mr. Speaker, but it seems that it should not have. It alleges that he refused to follow the advice of the Clerk of the National Assembly and that the basis for his removal is that he failed to follow the advice of the Clerk of the National Assembly.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin, expressed the charge that he failed to do what he was told to do. The essence of that statement by the Hon. Member, Mr. Datadin, indicates why they would want someone like the Hon. Member, Mr. Shuman; they want someone who is docile. Docility is not a characteristic for a chairman of the Public Accounts Committee...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I have to rise. The comments about the Hon. Member, Mr. Shuman, are distasteful, and you should...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, that is not a Point of Order. Hon. Member, you may continue.

Mr. Forde: How she rises and rushes to protect Mr. Shuman confirms. I am saying, how the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, stood up just now to rise to the defence of her Colleague, her Member of Government, part of her Executive, it is clear.

Let us discuss the acts of *bullyism* that are really running across this country and causing problems in this country. The first act of *bullyism* is the firing of thousands of public servants. That is an act of *bullyism*. Do you want to talk about *bullyism*? This morning, we are ready to deal with it. Another act of *bullyism* is the shameless assumption and apresion of power to this Executive to take control over the constitutional agencies, to corrupt the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) to subjugate constitutional agencies to the will of the concerned Minister under Section 14 of the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act. To respond to that sort of *bullyism*, we have gone to court to stand up against that sort of *bullyism*. That is *bullyism*.

The attempts to influence the functioning of the Police Service Commission to ensure appointments are made for senior policemen who should not have even been in the police force much less to be promoted... Did you hear the Hon. Member, Mr. Benn, come to this House and say that the Police Service Commission is too slow to remove persons should not be there? But those are the persons that they want to have there. The persecution and the prosecution of the Chairman and members of the Police Service Commission is *bullyism*.

The attempt to unlawfully remove the Chairman and members of the Police Service Commission is a significant and unconstitutional act of *bullyism*. Let us talk about *bullyism*. *Bullyism* is the inequitable, unfair...Despite what the Hon. Prime Minister said tonight about his Government being fair, people are not fooled. People know what is going on and people are being deprived and discriminated against. That is *bullyism*. In relation to the COVID-19 grant and in relation to the distribution of flood relief...

Mr. Speaker, I know that you are the Speaker, and, on the next occasion, I would ask you to personally accompany me when the APNU/AFC is going into the regions and communities. We

have just completed an entire weekend of outreaches in Region 5 and you have to be there to hear the people cry. Not one person, not one Civil Defence Force (CDC) representative or Member of the Government has gone to visit these people. They have lost everything, and these are the people, the 33 of them, who want to tell you that they are fair and equitable. No one believes them; no one has confidence in them. Their days are numbered.

Bypassing the Opposition and the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act, which requires and mandates that the budget and the Auditor General's budget be submitted to the Assembly by the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, is an act of *bullyism*. This Twelfth Parliament will go down in shame and infamy in the history of the parliamentary context and history of this county. Do you know why? On the first day of the Sitting of this Parliament, 1st September, 2020, the first day the attack was launched against the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee when this installed Government refused to comply with the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act to ensure that Committee exercises its oversight functions to present those reports to this House. In the face of a challenge, they passed, unlawfully nevertheless, the Fiscal Management and Accountability (Amendment) Act of 2021. From the first day, this Parliament went off track, and we will bring it back on track. The Constitution provides this Opposition with tools to bring it back. We did it before and we will do it again. It is not much longer before we do it again.

The persecution and prosecution, without basis and merit, in relation to the members of the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) and officers of the Guyana Elections Commission constitute what is *bullyism*. When we stand here from midnight to this ungodly hour to debate an issue lacking in merit and substance, when so much time that could have been spent looking after the interest of our people...I am prepared every night to come here if we would be spending time passing laws and provisions for the betterment of the ordinary people of this country, for the betterment of the business community, for the betterment of the workers and the farmers and the single mothers. Those are the people that we sacrifice for.

The importance of the Public Accounts Committee cannot be lost on any one of us. [**An. Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*] You do not think, you know. We do not fall for the *gaff* that right now the accounts that are being considered are the accounts during the period of the APNU/AFC Government. With a pliable chairman, we have no confidence that the Public Accounts Committee

will fulfil its mandate and not become another instrumentality of the PPP/C that will skew outcomes, skew reports and manufacture and malign Members of the Opposition.

Nevertheless, I want to point out that, right now, at this stage, whilst a Government is supposed to be paying attention to the issues of COVID-19 and, despite all the interest that that they are supposed to be paying to vaccination, as usual, under a PPP/C Administration, Guyana must suffer shame and embarrassment. Once again, we are at the forefront of shame and embarrassment. After the massive cocaine exportation, we are in front again.

4.55 a.m.

In a newspaper publication out of Norway, *Verdens Gang*, an investigative examination was done in relation to the acquisition of COVID-19 vaccines, in particular the Sputnik V. I quote a few aspects of it. The article states this, Your Honour:

“If I were to tell you how many people made money from it, you would... you wouldn’t believe it was true.

WHILE THE WORLD’S RICHEST countries have ordered three-four-five – up to ten – times as many vaccines as they have residents, the world’s poorest countries are at the back of the queue.

The World Health Organization (WHO) describes this situation as a ‘catastrophic moral failure’. A failure that increases the risk of new virus mutations and which will be paid with ‘lives and livelihoods’...”

We are doing that here.

“...according to the WHO.

In the vacuum left by the international community, some have eyed an opportunity to earn big money.

Through investigations in countries including Ghana, Russia, Pakistan, Guyana and Iraq, VG has been able to document how the Russian vaccines have travelled via a sheik in the Emirates and round the world.”

In the reference in particular to Guyana, this is what it stated:

“ON 19 NOVEMBER LAST YEAR a private plane lands in Guyana, one of South America’s poorest countries.

Out steps Sheik Al-Maktoum, dressed in traditional white garbs. Right behind the Sheik is Umar Farooq Zahoor with a wheeled suitcase and sweatsuit.”

Oh, sorry.

“At a press conference in May this year, at VG’s request, a local journalist asked the Vice President from whom the country had purchased vaccines what they had paid.

The Russians state that they sell the vaccine for approximately 10 dollars per dose, internationally.”

This is what the report that the Vice President, Hon. Member Mr. Jagdeo, said.

“‘The first set of Sputnik vaccines cost 20 dollars per dose. We shopped around, in the United States, but were unable to obtain any vaccine, just as in Europe. We tried via Covax, to no avail. Then, a company associated with the Prince of Dubai came here...’

The sellers stated that they had a limited vaccine inventory, according to the Vice President.

‘At the time, we would probably have paid whatever it took just to obtain vaccines for our people, because we were unable to obtain them from anyone else...’

Initially, Guyana purchased 200,000 doses.

What was the name of the company affiliated with the Sheik that sold the vaccine?

‘I do not know the exact name of the company, but I know they supplied Africa and some other countries’, says the Vice President.”

This is the sort of questionable transaction that must come under the scrutiny of an Opposition Member of Parliament, who is the Chairman of the main Opposition party.

The motion is without merit and we reject it completely. *[Applause]*

Ms. Teixeira (replying): Mr. Speaker, I have heard many things today, some of which have made me smile and some have made me just feel despair, despair about the future of this Parliament. I want to say this: I have listened to lessons about structures and how to write a motion, which seemed to be the only thing that one of those Members could speak about. I have listened to extraneous matters that have nothing to do with the motion at all, and what I call *smoke and mirrors*. It was to deflect attention from the real matter. I have listened to all sorts of matters, like the recent one by the last speaker, which had to do with vaccines and nothing to do with the motion. I know that people were trying to fill in the time and deflect from what the issues were. I have listened to levels of *sanctimoniousness*. It was just unbelievable.

I want to remind you why I am so surprised. To the bleeding hearts among us, you are good actors, I must say. The problem is that you have no substance. Bleeding hearts – people talking about thousands of public servants being fired. You have asked questions in this House and answers have been given. You cannot find the thousands. They are mystic; they do not exist. What I can say is that you fired 1,972 Amerindian Community Service Officers (CSOs). Those are the facts. You fired 7,000 sugar workers. Those are the facts. You fired 2,000 public servants—those are the facts—because they happened to be the wrong colour or in the wrong political party. And you come here with bleeding hearts. Oh, you are good actors, but with very bad substance.

I have heard *crocodile tears* about Gods being angry. The Gods were so angry with you that, in 2020, you lost the elections. The Gods decided that, after five years of mismanagement and ineptitude, you did not deserve to stay in this government anymore. The people gave you up, and that is a reality you have to come to terms with, but you have never been able to. We have heard, again, *sanctimoniousness*.

We heard the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, give us a lecture on the Public Accounts Committee, but the Public Accounts Committee, from the 1966 Constitution, was always headed by the Opposition. The word “main” came in after the Constitution was amended in 2001, in the review of the Constitution, because the then Opposition, which was the People’s National Congress (PNC) alone, did not want to be sharing with the Alliance For Change, which was the other member of the Opposition. And so, “main” was brought in around 2003. But from 1966 onwards, the Opposition always chaired the Public Accounts Committee. It was not in the constitutional reform

where that was stated. In fact, the Constitution does not even state that the Opposition must chair. What it does state is the Standing Orders, custom and practice.

We heard *sanctimoniousness*, and we heard about all sorts of accusations. But let me remind this House that in 2012, when the PPP/C was in government and the APNU/AFC had one seat more, they hurriedly moved to amend the Standing Orders to change what was a Government: five and Opposition: four, ratio in committees and reversed it. And so, it was reversed. The Opposition got the majority and the Government got the minority. However, in 2015, when the APNU/AFC won government, they rapidly moved to reverse the Standing Orders back. And so, the Standing Orders remain as they are. This shows a level of opportunism. It stinks of opportunism, actually. Whenever you get in Government, you will upside-down the Standing Orders, and when you are not in Government, well, you have to live with it.

But the thing is that the Opposition in front of us, the APNU/AFC, we have seen the level of *bullyism* during the five years of the Parliament in which they controlled. Not one motion of the PPP/C was passed; all our motions were defeated. Not one was amended to allow for any compromise. Questions were amended so they became less offensive to the Government. We had very few sittings of the House. *Bullyism*? Even when we came to the no-confidence motion, you made us wait from the beginning of November to the end of December to have the no confidence motion heard when, in fact, the same *Erskine May* that you are quoting from states that the Government should, rapidly and with alacrity, hold a no-confidence motion to, in other words, shore up themselves.

The issue of the motion before us. It is very clear from the minutes of the PAC, which were approved, that there has never been an intention in the motion—and it is there in the minutes, appointed and adopted on 15th March of the 1st February Meeting—for the Opposition to not chair the PAC. The contention is the person who is presently the Chair, unless the APNU/AFC is saying to us that the only person fit and proper on their side to be the Chair is Mr. Patterson? Then, obviously, you seem to be devoid of fit and proper people. But there is no entitlement to the chair. There is no entitlement by any individual to a chair. This is not entitlement of an individual. What has occurred is that the Committee has been held to ransom, as the APNU/AFC tried, after the 2nd March elections, to hold on to power desperately. They defied the Constitution and took us all the way to the apex court of this country to prove that 33 was the majority. They took us all the way

to the court to show that the appointment of Mr. Patterson as the chair of GECOM was unconstitutional and unlawful. They took us to the Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) to be told that there was a caretaker government that had to run this country and it had restricted legitimate and legislative powers. We had to be embarrassed and ashamed as a nation and made a mockery of.

You can stand here *sanctimoniously* and say what you want to say. History has written you down in it and you cannot erase it. The courts of the Caribbean Court of Justice and the courts of Guyana have all the records of your behaviour and your attempt to hijack the elections of March, 2020. You know that you did not succeed, despite your *bullyism*, despite your high-handedness, despite your efforts to prevent an election being held for 14 months, despite having the elections and then holding it back for five months and putting people through torture in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. And you come here today with *crocodile tears* to talk about people dying of COVID-19 when you did nothing for the first nine months of COVID-19. You did nothing to protect our people. Not even a mask you did not give the people to wear, and you come here with *crocodile tears* today. Shame on you.

Mr. Speaker, since you have given such levity to my Colleagues on the other side, I hope that you will give me the same opportunity to respond to accusations that have been made that are terribly wrong.

I have heard the comments made about Mr. Shuman. The denigration of him as a Member of Parliament (MP), as the Deputy Speaker of this House, is reprehensible and should not be allowed. No Member of this House should be spoken to like that, but it seems to be the habit in this House that you can say what you want to people and you get away with it. Do you know what? This is part of the *bullyism*, and I am beginning to wonder if *bullyism* is part of the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) of the PNC/APNU/AFC in this House.

5.10 a.m.

No chairman of any committee has the licence to offend, so repeatedly, the Standing Orders. I heard the Hon. Members say that the motion did not have about... trying to make fiddles, fiddling information. The English is clear. The Committee met on 28th December, in January several times, and on 1st February. What transpired in the meetings in January – the exposures in the Auditor General's account in 2016, the answers to the questions that were given, and the additional

information that was provided by the Ministry – led to the decision that this person was not a fit and proper person as the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee of Guyana.

I heard Mr. Forde talk about no disrespect being given to the Speaker and the Clerk of the National Assembly and that there was no violation of the Standing Orders. Mr. Speaker, when they say no disrespect to you as the Speaker, please. You are just using words and you mean nothing.

The Speaker wrote a letter on 3rd May. There was no acknowledgement and no information to the Public Accounts Committee from the Chair, by email, or by any electronic means that he received the letter and would take action and comply as soon as the Speaker raised the issue of the Coronavirus disease (COVID- 19). There was nothing but just silence, and you are telling me that there was no disrespect to the Speaker of this House? Who do you think you are talking to, a five-year-old?

You also said that there was no disrespect to the Clerk of the National Assembly. The Clerk of the National Assembly came three times to the Committee. It is in the minutes of the Committee. He advised the Chairman what to do. He advised the Chairman that the motion was in order and that he should put the motion. The minutes described what happened.

Mr. Forde said that the matter should be voted on in the Committee before it goes... [**Mr Mahipaul:** Hon. Member, Mr. Forde.] The Hon. Member, Mr. Forde. Yes, you are all honourable. Mr. Forde said that the matter should be voted on in the Committee before it goes to the House. I think Mr. Forde is mixed up with the... [**Mr. Mahipaul:** Hon. Member, Mr. Forde] At 5.00 a.m. in the morning, who is honourable? The gentleman who spoke last – that is the easiest thing to say – talked about the manner in which the motion came to this House. The Hon. Member, Mr. Forde has gotten the procedure wrong. What he was quoting from was the procedure for the chair of the House and not for a committee. The matter regarding the chairman was dealt with at the first meeting of the PAC, which the Speaker chaired. The Members of the Opposition proposed Mr. Patterson and there was no opposition towards him. The issue of having to go through a torturous procedure that Mr. Forde spoke about is totally irrelevant.

I noticed that the Hon. Members of the Opposition talked about an installed Government. [**Ms. Ferguson:** Yes, the installed Government.] We were not an installed government. We were elected by the people in a free and fair election, and we are the legitimate Government of this country. Go

home and *suck your thumbs*. Go sit in a corner and *suck your thumbs*. The reality hurts, does it not? We are a legitimate Government. By the way, if you have a problem with what we say, why do you not tell the United Nations (UN), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Commonwealth, the Organisation of American States (OAS) and the Carter Center, and the hundred countries who supported the struggle of the Guyanese people to have their votes counted and recounted so that the Government of their choice could be appointed? You would not do that.

I heard another Member talk about the FMAA and the making of *the prophet of doom*, and Parliament going in a bad direction and that democracy, *et cetera*, is at stake. Using the FMAA Act, article 222 (a) of the Constitution makes it very clear that constitutional bodies, as all other bodies which receive taxpayers' money, must be reviewed by the House in the National Assembly. They, again, seem to have problems with this.

How can a chair of any committee, found to be violating the Standing Orders openly and repeatedly, be allowed to continue in that position? The Parliament of Guyana cannot allow the level of any chairperson in any committee to believe that they are somehow impervious to democratic rule and to a majority rule. Otherwise, what are we doing, setting up dictators? You have repeatedly and serially undermined the Standing Orders.

You come here and lecture us about democracy. Yet, you are the greatest violators of the democracy of Guyana. From the very first elections they rigged in 1968, in 1973, the referendum in 1978, in the elections of 1980, and 1985. You are serial election riggers. You tried again in 2020 to steal the votes of the Guyanese people and hijack the election, and you come here sanctimoniously and talk to us about democracy. Please, it is too late in the morning for that nonsense.

The honourable thing for the Member to have done was to have resigned, and he was given that option. If the Opposition does not feel that it wishes to take up the position, then the Committee will function, and it will elect a chair day by day, as required by the Standing Orders. You cannot have it both ways. You want the Standing Orders when it is in their favour, and you do not want it when it is not. The level of *bullyism* in this Parliament and in that Committee is unacceptable and that is what we should be afraid of. There is no chairperson so entrenched and entitled to the position that he or she cannot be removed. It is just like a government can be removed. If a

government can be removed, then why not a chairperson of a committee? It is logical, is it not? Is it because the seat of the chair of the Public Accounts Committee has the name 'Mr. Patterson' written on it, his entitlement, or whatever deals the APNU and AFC made and who gets what, he cannot be removed? If that is so, then he should perform. We are not interested in your deals. What we are interested in is the chair of the Public Accounts Committee carrying out the job of this Committee and that he or she is not a serial violator of the Standing Orders of this country.

The Hon. Member repeatedly refused to do as advised, and that is, put the motion to a vote. He refused over and over again. We live by our decisions and the things we do. Mr. Patterson had a chance to reprieve himself, but he did not. Therefore, the consequence now is a motion calling for his removal from the Public Accounts Committee, which is totally in order according to the Standing Orders.

I have avoided talking about the Report of the Auditor General or the Report of the Public Procurement Commission (PPC) on the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation feasibility study or the other study about the usage of money from the Asphalt Plant to pay the same company that was not appointed or hired by contract or by tender, but by the most inappropriate means of the Minister going directly to Cabinet to get approval for a matter that never went to tender. Then, paying not only the contract, but over the next two years, that same company continued to get almost \$200 million more and were paid through the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation. So, please, do not come to us as if you are angels. Mr. Patterson knows his vulnerability and there was a chance between 1st February and 3rd May for him to reprieve...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, I just want to caution the Hon. Minister of Labour about calling people crooks. Hon. Minister, you may continue.

Ms. Teixeira: I have been called things in this Parliament today that I find reprehensible. I heard the description of this Government in words that are reprehensible, such as ethnocentric and kleptomaniacs. That is all unacceptable language. It is not acceptable language, whether it is on that side or this side of the House. It cannot be one side only being corrected.

As I said in the beginning, I hoped that the Hon. Member would have done the right thing after receiving your letter. In fact, Mr. Speaker, your letter was dated 3rd May. My motion was submitted a month later on 3rd June and there was every possibility for Mr. Patterson... [**Mr. Mahipaul:**

There was no meeting.] Please, Mr. Ganesh Mahipaul, you are really an annoying noise in the background. Mr. Patterson had every opportunity... You know, it is 5.00 a.m. in the morning, and I have had enough of you all day. Mr. Speaker, I think the Members of the Opposition are pretending...

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

...we are living in the dark ages. There is WhatsApp, email, or telephone calls where the Hon. Member, as Chair, could have said that he would obey the Speaker's ruling, and as soon as the COVID-19 issue suspends, he would call a meeting and resign or whatever else. He did not do that. It is all about *bullyism* and showing your strength. So, at this point, we will have to show this House whether we are willing to be bullied or we are going to stand up for the Constitution and the Standing Orders of our Parliament to make sure that there is rule of law...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister...

Ms. Teixeira: ...transparency and accountability. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, thank you very much. Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, your shouting is directly in my left ear. Hon. Members, this concludes the debate on the motion. I now put the question.

Question put.

Mr. Speaker: Those in favour say, aye.

Members of the Government: Aye.

Mr. Speaker: Those against say, no.

Members of the Opposition: No.

Mr. Speaker: The ayes have it.

Mr. Mahipaul: A division, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Clerk, please take the division. We have to ring the bell and wait the customary five minutes.

Division bell was rung.

5.25 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: For the technicians who are monitoring the persons that are online, please ensure that you are in touch with them because we still have about two minutes to go.

Mr. Clerk, could we take the division?

Division: Noes 31, Ayes 34, as follows:

Noes

Mr. Sears

Mr. Figueira

Mr. Jaiprashad

Mr. Jordan

Mr. Sinclair

Mr. Ramsaroop

Ms. Philadelphia

Ms. Flue-Bess

Mr. Mahipaul

Mr. Holder

Mr. Cox

Mr. Henry

Ms. Fernandes

Mr. Duncan

Ms. Singh-Lewis

Ms. Walton-Desir

Mr. Rajkumar (Participated Virtually)

Ms. Hughes

Ms. McDonald

Mr. Patterson

Ms. Ferguson

Mr. Jones

Ms. Chandan-Edmond

Ms. Sarabo-Halley

Dr. Cummings

Dr. Henry

Ms. Hastings-Williams

Mr. Trotman

Mr. Forde

Mr. Ramjattan

Mr. Harmon

Ayes

Mr. Shuman

Ms. Veerasammy

Mr. Williams

Dr. Smith

Mr. Jaffarally

Dr. Westford

Dr. Ramsaran

Ms. Pearson-Fredericks

Mr. Narine

Mr. Datadin

Dr. Mahadeo

Mr. Charlie

Mr. Seeraj

Mr. McCoy

Mr. Persaud

Mr. Indar

Ms. Rodrigues

Ms. Parag

Mr. Ramson

Dr. Persaud

Mr. Croal

Mr. Dharamlall

Ms. Walrond

Mr. Bharrat

Mr. Hamilton

Ms. Sukhai

Mr. Mustapha

Ms. Manickchand

Dr. Anthony

Bishop Edghill

Mr. Todd

Ms. Teixeira

Mr. Nandlall

Mr. Jagdeo

Mr. Phillips

Mr. Speaker: The Clerk would announce the results of the division.

Clerk of the National Assembly [Mr. Isaacs]: Mr. Speaker, 34 Members voted for the motion with 31 against.

Mr. Speaker: The ayes have it. The motion is carried.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, you may move the motion.

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to a date to be determined.”

[Prime Minister]

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I move the adjournment of the National Assembly to a date that would be determined.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the National Assembly stands adjourned to a date to be determined.

Adjourned accordingly at 5.35 a.m.