



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

100TH Sitting

Wednesday, 5TH February, 2025

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.19 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

*Hon. Manzoor Nadir, M.P.,
*Speaker of the National Assembly,
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Brickdam,
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MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

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

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+ Hon. Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Anthony Phillips, M.S.S., M.P.,
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Vice-President (1)

+ Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P.,
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+ Hon. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, M.P.,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

Senior Ministers (16)

+ Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,
*(Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni),
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,
Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.
Government Chief Whip,
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New Garden Street,
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+ Hon. Hugh H. Todd, M.P.,
*(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation,
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*Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance
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*Minister of Health,
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+ Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P.,
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Ministry of Education,
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+ *Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P.,
*Minister of Home Affairs,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

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+ Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P.,
Minister of Labour,
Ministry of Labour,
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+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
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+ Cabinet Member

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Hon. Deodat Indar, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight's Lane,
Kingston,
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Hon. Anand Persaud, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
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Hon. Mr. Faizal M. Jaffarally, M.P.,
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* Hon. Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,
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[Virtual Participation]

Hon. Mr. Deonarine Ramsaroop, M.P.,
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Craig Milne,
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[Virtual Participation]

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South Central,
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(Culvert City Lethem)

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Hon. Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P.,
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(Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).

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Hon. Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,
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Church Street Mahdia.
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Stewartville,
West Coast Demerara.

Hon. Mr. Devin L. Sears, M.P.,
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(ii) A New and United Guyana, Liberty and Justice Party and The New Movement (ANUG, LJP & TNM) (1)

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Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

Ms. Hermina Gilgeours,
Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Hundredth Sitting of the Twelfth Parliament

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this Twelfth Parliament sees its 100th Sitting today. While there is nothing extremely special about the 100th Sitting, hitting a milestone like that is something to recognise.

Final Day of Sixth Budget Presented to Twelfth Parliament

Today is the final day of the sixth budget presented to the Twelfth Parliament.

Welcome to Students and Teachers of St. Joseph's High School

Hon. Members, let us welcome the students and teachers of St. Joseph's High School who are here with us this morning. Welcome to the National Assembly and budget consideration.

MOTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OR SITTINGS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND MOVED BY A MINISTER

Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service [Dr. Singh]: I move that, at the appropriate time in today's proceedings, Standing Order 54 (1)(a) and (b) be suspended to enable this honourable House to proceed at today's sitting, that is to say the sitting on Wednesday, 5th February, 2025, with the second reading and the remaining stages of the Income Tax (Amendment) Bill 2005 – Bill No. 2 of 2025. It is a Bill that you and Hon. Members would recall and would be aware is intended to enact certain measures proposed in *Budget 2025*. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

MOTION

BUDGET SPEECH 2025 – MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2025

WHEREAS the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana requires that Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for any financial year should be laid before the National Assembly and that, when the Estimates of Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly, an Appropriation Bill shall be

introduced in the Assembly providing for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet the expenditure;

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

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

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

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

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

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

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

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

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

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

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

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we will resolve ourselves into the Committee of Supply to continue consideration of the Budget Estimates for the fiscal year 2025.

Assembly resolved itself into the Committee of Supply.

In Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: This morning, we begin with the Hon. Minister of Health, Dr. Anthony. We invite him and his team.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, yesterday, during the consideration of Estimates, when we were looking at the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, Programme: 134, I asked a question concerning the swearing-in of the Local Government Commission. The Hon. Minister indicated that the process was kick-started by a letter from the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and that there had been no response from the Leader of the Opposition as yet. I remember I said, in response to that, that the Leader of the Opposition had responded. The Minister maintained that that response did not come. She further said that there may be a disconnect between the Leader of the Opposition and the Opposition Members. I present to this House exhibit 1, which is the letter from the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance requesting the Leader of the Opposition to make nominations. This letter was received by the Leader of the Opposition on 16th January, 2025. I further present exhibit 2,

which is the response from the Leader of the Opposition, nominating the three persons for the Local Government Commission.

Sir, I further present to you that there was a telephone conversation, after this letter from the Leader of the Opposition was sent to Hon. Minister, Ms. Teixeira, with someone named Ms. Singh from the Office of the President, who reached out to the Leader of the Opposition, accepting the letter of nominations and requesting the curricula vitae of the three people. I would therefore like to ask you to request the Minister to withdraw the answer that she presented to this House and apologise for the statement, which I think was very misleading. It is clear, Sir, that the disconnect was on that side of the House and not this side of the House. Thank you very much, Cde. Chairman. I will circulate for the necessary information.

10.27 a.m.

[Mr. Chairman hit gavel.]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members. Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul, I received your communication along with the copy of the letter, however it... Would the Hon. Members, Mr. Jordon and McCoy, step out for a few moments to settle that matter then come back in here?

Ms. Ferguson: Especially *[inaudible]*.

Mr. Chairman: You can join them too Member of Parliament (MP) Ms. Ferguson. I cannot pronounce on the movement of documents intra and inter.

An Hon. Member: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Chairman: Yes. Let me give you an example of my own experience in government. I was the Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce and we were working on the *Small Business Act*. I sent that via *snail mail* to the Attorney General, the late Mr. Doodnauth Singh. The matter was raised in Cabinet and I said I sent it to the Attorney General. He vehemently denied that he had ever received it. I promised to check. I did the trace. The letter left the Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce and handed to an Office Assistant. When asked the Office Assistant said, he had it in his bag because he did not have another mail going in that direction. For two weeks, he had it in his bag. I cannot pronounce on the movement of the documents; however a very competent person is online and will offer some more explanation. The Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance, Ms. Gail Teixeira, proceed.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance [Ms. Teixeira]:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to come online to respond. I did write the Leader of the Opposition on behalf of His Excellency, the President, as requested by him. I was advised on Friday afternoon that the letter has been responded to by Mr. Norton to the President. Mr. Norton has a habit of not recognising me as the person who writes him on behalf of His Excellency, the President. Any correspondence sent to him, in regard to constitution appointments or other matters such as Local Government Commission, he would respond directly to the President and/or through an emissary such as Mr. Roysdale Forde in the past. I did not know there was a response. I was advised on Monday that the letter had come in to the President. I advised the Secretary, Ms Singh, who is one of the secretaries to the President, to please ask the Leader of the Opposition to provide us with the Curricula Vita (CV) of his nominees. Regrettably, I did not anticipate that the question would be asked to the Minister, Ms. Parag, who was on the floor dealing with Budget. If I had anticipated that on Monday, I would have told her that so she would have responded. The Minister did not misinform the House; she did not have the information. Therefore, I do not think that Minister Ms. Parag in anyway misinformed the House and should not have to offer an apology.

However, I would like to ask the Hon. Member, as I am asked by the President to write Mr. Norton as Leader of the Opposition, that he also provides me with his responses or correspondences; instead of always disregarding my correspondence and treating me as if I am too much beneath him for him to respond to a correspondence. Nevertheless, the matter of the Local Government Commission is being addressed. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for allowing me to respond.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, very much, Minister Ms. Teixeira. I trust that this now puts this matter to bed. For our distinguish students here today, teachers, students, we are in a process of approving the Budget for 2025, which the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, Dr. Ashni Singh, presented to us on 17th January, 2025. The process is the House has to approve every single item of the Budget. The process we are in right now allows any Member to raise a question on how the money is spent and what it is spent for of the Minister responsible. We are starting this morning with the Hon. Minister of Health, Dr. Frank Anthony, who is sitting immediately opposite you. He is joined by his senior staff. The person on his right is the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Health and the other staff. The agency will

have two hours from the time I say begin in order to ask questions and for the Minister to respond. We just do not see a budget being laid but representatives have an opportunity to scrutinise the expenditure to raise questions. Then, we have to pass a law to what is call a procreating the matter, so that the moneys can now be available for the ministries and agencies to spend. This is the process. Dr. Anthony, your time will start at 10.34 a.m.

Agency: 47 Ministry of Health**Current Expenditure**

Programme: 471 – Policy Development and Administration – \$5,368,290,000

Dr. Cummings, before you start, let me let our students also know that the Hon. Member who is going to be asking the question is former Minister of Health and former Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Dr. Karen Cummings.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, should I sit or could I stand?

Mr. Chairman: [*Inaudible*]

Dr. Cummings: Okay. Hon. Minister, I am looking at the Staffing Details considering chart of accounts 6111 to 6117. I have noticed that there is a decrease of 32 employees. In 2024, there were 333 whereas now for 2025 there are projecting 301 employees. My question to you is, at the same time according to Volume 2 in programme performance statement, you would like to have 75% of your departments with full staff compliment... In 2024, there was 66% and 2025 you are hoping for 75%, so which departments are we talking about here to be filled? This is in knowing that you are going to have 32 persons less of your employees.

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Before I come to her question, I want to also join in welcoming the students from St. Josphe High School who are here with us this morning and I do hope that the discussions we have here on the Budget will inspire some of you to come and join the Ministry of Health. Back to Hon. Member Dr. Cummings' question, indeed there is a decrease overall for all those lines for 6111 to 6117 of 32 employees. For us to understand the decrease, we probably would have to disaggregate it by the different lines. I can go into that if you like. Maybe just to give you an example, in line item 6111, there is a decrease of two persons and some of these persons have been transferred to other parts of the Ministry. In this instance, while it is

showing a decrease here, they have been placed under a different programme. It is actually people who resigned and people who moved to other programmes in the Ministry. There are some cases that are promotion and other things such as that.

Pertaining to the indicator that you spoke of in Volume 2 where we want to move to at least 75%, we feel very confident that this year we will be able to achieve that, because we have been doing a lot of training. You would see us adding a lot of new staff in the clinical areas. For example, we currently have in our training programmes about 3000 persons. This year, we will be graduating at least 805 persons from the Nursing Assistants Programme who will come on staff. The nurses who been in training for the last two years, we expect them to graduate next and that is about 1,000 persons. This year also, in terms of people who will be training for jobs in the Ministry, we have another 3,000 or so persons marked for training. We are very confident that we will achieve that 75%, but it will not just be under this heading but across the Ministry.

Dr. Cummings: Very well, thank you. One of the key strategic actions coming out of the Nation Health Strategy – I am indicating that I am talking about number three of the indicators – percentage of key strategic actions of the Nation Health Strategy implemented. I know recently you commissioned a pathology laboratory and made it available to, not only Guyanese, but to the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) nationals. What are some of the tests that were sent overseas that we will no longer be able to send overseas because we are doing it here because it can be accessed in Guyana in a timely manner?

Dr. Anthony: In terms of the Nation Health Strategy, as you can see, we have achieved 30% and we would be working to get to 45%. Again, I think we might be able to surpass this target because of the speed in which we are implementing some of the things that are in this strategy. However, to come to the specific laboratory tests, the new pathology laboratory, yesterday we got the laboratory accredited by the accreditation agency. I think, it is International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 170 that we got the accreditation from. We have been able to, by opening that laboratory, we have at least 14 histo-chemistry tests that we can now do at the laboratory among the other things that we are able to do. For example, if somebody had a biopsy for breast cancer, in the past, just about a year ago, if that biopsy came to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC), it took sometimes three months to turn that sample around.

10.42 a.m.

We are now able to do that within three to seven days. That is a faster turnaround and we are able to give the person a diagnosis of what is happening with pathology sample. More importantly, in the past, we were doing breast cancer diagnosis in a very crude way. We would say that this is cancerous but we did not have the ability to differentiate the different types of breast cancer. This current laboratory allows us to do those differentiations. Now, when somebody is diagnosed with breast cancer, we can actually tell the person what type of breast cancer. That also would inform the doctors on the treatment and what types of treatment. As you know, the treatment varies. That is one of the services that we are able to offer using this new laboratory. The other thing is that if we have a patient on the operating table who has a cancer and we are trying to determine the borders of the cancer so that we can remove it, if we are uncertain where those borders are, then the Doctor can take, in the operating theatre, a sample and send that immediately to the laboratory. Within 20 minutes, the Doctor will get back a response about whether the border is a good tissue, a cancerous tissue and if the doctor needs to excise more of that tissue. That is another very important thing which is helping our surgeons to remove cancerous tissue from patients with these cancers. It is a significant development. As I keep saying, I think this is one of the most advanced laboratories in the Caribbean. I do not think there is a parallel in any part of the Caribbean.

In addition to these capabilities of the National Pathology Laboratory, we also have telepathology, where we now do the slides. We can digitalise those slides and we can share them with pathologists in other parts of the world. Our current partner would be Mount Sinai, whom we share our slides with and when we need a second opinion, Mount Sinai is able to provide us with the second opinion. That is how we can help our patients in a more qualitative way. Apart from this laboratory, we are also in the process of setting up a laboratory that would do Human Leukocyte Antigen (HLA) testing. At that laboratory, as you know, we have been doing transplants since 2011 but when we need to do the matching, we have to send those samples to the United States of America (USA). For each time we send a sample, it costs us about US\$3,500 per sample. Now, we are building this capability where we will be able to do HLA testing for our patients here and also for patients in the Caribbean. More importantly, because we want to move from live donors to a process where we can use organs from deceased donors, we would need to make sure that we have a registry. To do that registry, we would need HLA testing. By this year, we will

get closer to setting up that HLA laboratory, where we can do HLA testing in Guyana.

Another big advancement that we are making in terms of laboratory services would be at the National Public Health Reference Laboratory. At the end of last year, we got accredited by the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO). Our National Public Health Reference Laboratory is now one of those laboratories in the South American region that is responsible now for influenza surveillance and that is a big step. This year, the vaccines that are made for influenza, some of the samples came from our laboratory. As you know, every influenza season, the samples are taken from the previous season to try to predict what type of vaccines one will need in the New Year. We have been able to supply WHO with samples last year and the design of the vaccine for this year would be using some of the samples that we sent. We previously have not been giving influenza vaccinations in Guyana but, this year, we will start by giving influenza vaccinations. We would give them first to the healthcare workers and older people in our population. There are lots of new things that we are doing with our laboratories.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you, Hon. Minister. It is good to know that we are moving in the right direction when it comes to our laboratories. [Mr. Mahipaul: Do we have panadol?] I am coming to that. The last question under the indicators is indicator number two, which states:

“Percentage of requests for drugs that were filled by MMU...”

I know, in your bid to create a more efficient, effective service delivery to the Guyanese populace, you are planning to reduce emergency drugs. In 2024, 76% of the requests made for drugs were filled by the Materials Management Unit (MMU) and you anticipate an increase to 85%. What prevents MMU from delivering close to 100% of requests for drugs? That is my first question. My second question is, are there regional bonds in the different regions? Do you have persons trained in the Electronic Logistics Management Information System (eLMIS) that will access and help to facilitate an increase close to 100% distribution?

Dr. Anthony: I think it is a very important question. This year, we did a very comprehensive analysis of the whole drug distribution system. In fact, we had, working at the Materials Management Unit (MMU), a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) consultant with us who helped us to map the system and see maybe some of the challenges that we face. I personally believe that

this year, the percentage would be much higher. It is for this reason, because when we go through the budget, you will see that among the things that we have put into this year's budget is to buy trucks that would enable distribution. We have, in different parts of the budget, maybe about four to five trucks that would help to take things out quicker. Therefore, when people come and we pack stuff, they do not have to wait until transport is available. This would then be picked up and taken out. We also have in this year's budget a number of... We do have regional distribution bonds but we feel that we need to upgrade them, have bigger storage and better storage. One of the things that you will see in this year's budget is that a number of regional bonds will be constructed. The distribution point, when things come to MMU, we will send them to the regional bonds, so they do not have to come to MMU to be able to receive these things. They will get it right in the region. We feel by implementing these measures, we will see faster pick-up and that we will maintain a higher level of drug supplies in all of our facilities.

Dr. Cummings: Okay. Let me turn my attention to the details of current expenditure. I will go to line item 6116 – Contracted Employees. I have noticed the revised budget was \$338,388,000 and there is an... Well, the revised for 2024 actually was \$405,410,000. Now, you are seeking an allocation of \$498,135,000. This is an increase of \$93 million. Could you tell me about these contracted employees? Maybe, you can give me the top five, the remunerations and the designations.

Dr. Anthony: As you can see, we have increased the number of persons who are contracted employees. It moved from 143 to 161. There is a change of 18 additional persons. The new employment would be Bond Clerks. We are also having some Clerk II. We have some Data Entry Clerks. We have two Facility Managers. We have two Operational Managers. We have three Procurement Officers. That would account for the additional 18 persons. In this category of contracted workers would include the Permanent Secretary, Administrative Assistants and all the people who would be on the administrative side of the Ministry.

Dr. Cummings: ...the Directors?

Dr. Anthony: That is right. They will fall under this heading.

Dr. Cummings: Okay. All right. I was about to ask about the remuneration which you did not give but it is okay. Line item 6272 – Electricity Charges: The revised budget here was \$136,120,000. Now, for 2025, it is \$159,698,000 – an increase of \$23 million. Why is there an increase in

electricity charges, with all that is happening now with the generator and so forth?

Dr. Anthony: The increase here is because, as you would know, Hon. Member, the Ministry would be completing this year, an additional building within its compound which would be operational in another few months and the electricity that we have budgeted for here is for that particular building.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6281 – Security Services: The revised budget was \$186,340,000. The revised in 2024 was \$219,289,000. Now, for 2025, it is \$250 million – more or less an increase of \$30 million. For Security service, which security service?

Dr. Anthony: Again, here, it is catering for the minimum wage increases so that \$30 million would take care of those increases. The line itself covers security for the different places where the Ministry operates – the head office. We have staff for the old Citizens Bank building, MMU, Food Policy and so forth.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: There is an increase of about \$27 million. We are moving from the revised allocation of \$48,980,000 to \$76,674,000 – an increase of \$27 million. At the same time, the Minister is going to give me the response, this comes from subsidies, subvention, you give to organisation such as the Central Board of Health, Red Cross and so forth. I noticed most of the moneys there, the subvention increased in some cases. For example, the Central Board of Health moved from \$7,952,000 to the revised, I think, \$8 million and so forth. Also, the Guyana Human Organ and Tissue Transplant Agency moved from \$12 million to double – \$24 million, which is an increase of 100%. For these agencies, some of these subventions, either remained the same, such as the Red Cross but they have increased remarkably in terms of the Guyana Human Organ and Tissue Transplant Agency. It bothered me that the Nurses & Midwives Council has decreased. Why would you want to decrease the Nurses & Midwives Council's subvention? It has moved from \$9 million to about \$8 million.

10.57 a.m.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, again, for that question, Hon. Member. The provision here is for \$76.7 million. The sum of \$24.9 million goes to the Human, Organ and Tissue Transplant Agency, \$12 million for the Radiation Security and Safety Board, \$8.2 million for the Presidential Commission on Non-communicable Diseases, \$8 million for

the Nurses and Midwives Council, \$7.9 million for the Central Board of Health, \$7.4 million for the Red Cross, \$6.3 million for the Guyana Responsible Parenthood Association (GRPA), \$1.7 million to the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Advisory Board, and \$0.2 million for the St. John's Ambulance Brigade. Many of these organisations have been in existence for some time and basically, this is the same amount that they have been requesting every year. The new ones are basically two pieces of legislation that we have passed in this House. There is one which deals with tissue transplant. In that piece of legislation, it made provision for the establishment of the Human, Organ and Tissue Transplant Agency and among its functions are to develop policies to govern transplantation in Guyana; have two accredit hospitals and institutions to be able to do transplants; monitor whether we go into stem cell therapy and a whole host of other functions. They have been building out this agency and they would need the resources – the \$24.9 million – to be able to do that.

This is just a small part of what they would need for the year. Last year, for example, they were able to work with the assistance from PAHO/WHO. The PAHO was able to contract the Donation Transplant Institute (DTI) out of Barcelona to provide additional support to this particular agency. We are going to pick up some of the slacks that have been left by PAHO, which is why we have increased the subvention for them this year. The Radiation Security and Safety Board comes out of the new Act that we passed on radiation.

Dr. Cummings: Yes, but you have not answered why you have decreased the Nurses and Midwives Council subvention. They play a pivotal role in the nurses oversight and ensure that they are in the communities, apart from the exams, licensure and so forth. I trust that you...

Dr. Anthony: I do not think that this small decrease would really be anything that changes the function of the particular council. When we were doing the budget, we requested that all these bodies submit to us their budgets and what they will be requesting. This is what they provided.

Dr. Cummings: Okay. I respect your opinion even though I do not agree with you but it is okay. That is it, Mr. Chairman.

Programme: 471 – Policy Development and Administration – \$5,368,290,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 472 – Disease Control – Communicable Diseases – \$7,650,289,000

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, I am looking again once more at the Programme Performance Statement, Volume 2. We are looking at more or less the communicable diseases. I want to ask the Minister, while it is good to set targets to reduce incidence and prevalence of the communicable diseases, – of course, Tuberculosis (TB), malaria, Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and the neglected diseases such as leprosy, dengue, chagas and so on – it is imperative that efforts be made to continue to look at the emerging and re-emerging infectious disease. How prepared are we to respond to outbreaks? How is Guyana's surveillance system, if we have? We had Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and we learned lessons from that. How are we prepared if we have an outbreak of dengue, Influenza A virus (H1N1), severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) or whatever?

Dr. Anthony: I think that is an extremely important question. Right now, our system, I would say, we are quite prepared to be able to respond to any outbreaks or any epidemics. We have over the last couple of years made substantial investments in our laboratories. In the public sector, we have close to 24 laboratories and we have equipped most of them to be able to do Polymerase Chain Reactions (PCRs) test and not just to do rapid tests, and so forth. Each region has its own capacity. When samples are sent to us, at the National Public Health Reference Laboratory, we will be able to run those samples in a very timely manner. Now, one of the capabilities that is very important in a modern surveillance setting is to be able to do molecular surveillance. We have started over the last two years to be able to do that and, over the next three years, we will be building out this system to be able to do molecular surveillance for almost any infectious disease. We currently have, I do not think this is well-known, the capabilities of doing sequencing for COVID-19 viruses. When they circulate, we can actually sequence and tell you what subtype or strain...

Dr. Cummings: That is the genomic sequence you are talking about.

Dr. Anthony: Right. We are able to do that now. That is a capacity that we did not have and we had to send to other laboratories to be able to understand that. Now we are able to do that on our own. Last year, we put in a request for funding for the pandemic fund and we were successful. We received US\$15 million as grant funding to help Guyana prepare for future pandemics. A sum of \$15 million would

be spent on upgrading our current laboratories, putting in a system for transport and have an interconnected laboratory system – an electronic system – that we will be putting in place. We also have another US\$5 million, approximately, that would be spent on getting people trained and getting additional human resources for our laboratories. We have also put US\$5 million of that grant fund to be able to build a more robust surveillance system and moving from one that is paper based to one that is going to be electronic. We are not only going to survey the human population for diseases, but we are also building a system in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture to do surveillance in the animal population because when viruses jump from animals to human beings, we must be able to have the capability to detect these viruses. We are also building in this component an environmental surveillance system, so when one combines human health, animal health environmental health and one surveillance system; this is what is referred to as a One-Health approach. That is what we will be building in the next three years. You will see this being built out with the pandemic fund resources and with additional resources, another US\$7 million that we will be getting from the World Bank.

Dr. Cummings: I am happy to hear that you integrated the One-Health concept. Before I leave this page with the indicators, I have noticed that the number of malaria cases per 1,000 population and the outcome for 2024 is 31. Why would you want to increase the number of malaria cases? What is it here? There is the number of malaria cases per 1,000. The outcome here, are you looking at wanting to have an increase or is it supposed to be a decrease? It is page 211 on the disease control communicable diseases. You would want to have the malaria cases decrease, rather than increase. I know we are having mining and all these things are happening, but still.

Dr. Anthony: I think that is a very good observation. Now, malaria is endemic in Regions 1, 7, 8, and 9. Our intention is to have a more robust programme, in terms of doing more case detection. We have changed the policy of the Ministry of trying to control malaria to where we want to move towards the elimination of malaria. We anticipate that with intensive screening in all of these regions, we will probably see a slight increase before we see the decrease. That is why they were being cautious in putting this as a target, but you would understand that it is a little technicality there.

Dr. Cummings: All right. I hear you, Hon. Minister. Once again, you seem to have an increase in your contracted employees. Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: The

revised allocation in 2024 is \$245,599,000. What is budgeted for 2025 is \$268,619,000, which is an increase of \$13 million. What accounts for that increase?

Dr. Anthony: The increase in contracted employees is 12 additional persons and the persons who we are hiring here would include administrative Assistants, Handymen, Medical Technologists, a Veterinary Health Inspector, Microbiologists and Pharmacists. Basically, this is the category of people.

Dr. Cummings: All right. Line item 6223 – Office Materials and Supplies: There is a \$6 million increase here, moving from \$9,561,000 to \$15 million now. Which offices are we talking about that these materials will be located? What are they?

Dr. Anthony: We would actually be using the \$5.4 million to buy laboratory labels. That is where the increase is going. We are going to use these barcoding and that sort of stuff. For each specimen one has to label it and then do the barcoding. That is where the increase would go.

Dr. Cummings: Okay. Very well. Line item 6265 – Other Transport, Travel and Postage: I noticed an increase of \$17 million here. The revised allocation was \$31,537,000 in 2024 and now it increased to \$48 million, which is an increase of \$17 million. Could you tell us about that?

Dr. Anthony: Under this line item, the \$16.4 million that we have here for the increase would be used to do chartering of aircraft to transport fogging chemicals to Regions 1, 7 and 8. You would also see that we added additional fogging equipment in this year's budget. One of the things that we did late last year, with a supplementary budget that we had, was to procure for the first time more than 100 different types of fogging machines. Every region now has adequate equipment and we have been working to train the people in those regions to mix the chemicals and to be able to do the fogging. We have given them protective gears and all that. This is to make sure that we transport the chemicals in a safe manner to those locations and then we use them at the locations.

Dr. Cummings: Very well. This is my last question under this. Line item 6302 – Training (including scholarships): The revised allocation is \$84,850,000 in 2024 and now it has jumped to \$125,000,000. Who are you targeting here for training and what kind of training? Who are the beneficiaries?

11.12 a.m.

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, here we would be doing a lot more training. Last year we did training in terms of... Let me just break it down for you: \$28 million will be spent on doing Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) training across the region. So, this would be for management of HIV comorbidities and things such as that. We will be spending about \$15 million to train persons on Malaria and the management of Malaria cases, especially going into logging communities and be able to train them. One of the approaches of the Ministry is that we have been working very closely with the Ministry of Natural Resources. We have been working with miners and loggers, training their people to make the diagnosis, do the treatment on site, and supply us with the data. In terms of Malaria, we have budgeted \$15 million to do that type of training. We have allocated here as well \$12.5 million for training on Tuberculosis (TB). We still have to maintain some amount of vigilance in terms of managing TB cases. We have seen our cases come down from about 500 to now less than 300 or so, but we still must maintain that vigilance. That is why we are training workers across the system to be able to do TB management. We also budgeted here \$10 million dollars or so to keep training our healthcare workers on Dengue and the use of Dengue Rapid Kits. So, that is here as well. For the increase of \$40 million, we are using that to do a couple of things; one is to train Community Health Workers (CHW) to do fogging – how to mix the chemicals and so forth. We will be using another \$10 million to do some training in Expanded Program on Immunization (EPI) surveillance. These are the types of things that we will be doing with the Community Health Workers and other categories of staff in the different regions.

Dr. Cummings: That is it, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Members, I now put the question...

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman...?

Mr. Chairman: I am sorry. Go ahead, Ms. Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. A pleasant morning to the students from the St. Joseph High (SJH) School – welcome. A pleasant morning to the Minister and his support staff from the Ministry of Health (MoH). Mr. Chairman, if I can briefly turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6281, Security Services. I note, Minister, that we have a decrease of some \$40 million for 2025 as against what was approved for 2024. Could you explain the reason for the decrease and whether this amount is adequate for the remaining of the year? Thank you.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much for that question. One of the sites that we were budgeting for in the previous budgets was the Liliendaal hospital. We have transferred that hospital now under the management of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). So, the Ministry no longer would have to take care of security and other amenities.

Programme: 472 – Disease Control – Communicable Diseases – \$7,650,289,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 473 – Family and Primary Health Care Services – \$4,437,950,000

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, I am looking at the Indicator here, “percentage of infants... who are exclusively fed with breastmilk”. The baseline is showing 21%. We want to have that increased, in a sense. My question to the Minister is one of policy. If we are asking the mothers to do exclusive breastfeeding for six months, should we give them six months leave rather than the three months?

Dr. Anthony: Where is the breastfeeding matter?

Dr. Cummings: It is basically the Indicators. We are looking at children, apart from the vaccination of infants and...

Dr. Anthony: All right.

Dr. Cummings: We know it is a policy. Your Director will tell you that we promote exclusive breastfeeding, although we have partial and intensive, but...

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, this has been a long-standing policy of the Ministry of Health. I recall that I actually did a lot of work in this area too. We developed materials and had a very catchy campaign. Some of you might remember the song whereby we were promoting exclusive breastfeeding. It is desirable but our challenge has always been that a lot of women have not been able to do the six months of exclusive breastfeeding; they actually start introducing complementary foods earlier. So, we will keep working on this to make sure that we can do breastfeeding. In some other jurisdictions, what we also find very helpful is that workplaces can designate sites where a mother can breastfeed or in some cases where breastmilk can be extracted and provided to the infants. We will have to explore other options to make sure that we are getting closer to those numbers that are more desirable.

Dr. Cummings: Yes. Of course, you know that there are a lot of benefits from breastfeeding –more intelligent, less infections and all that.

Dr. Anthony: Yes.

Dr. Cummings: Through you, Mr. Chairman, Indicator 7 states:

“Number of preventative and curative procedures done...”

In 2024 you did 494,038. Now, you want to scale it up to 500,000. These preventative and curative procedures, are they just done in the city, in Region 4, or across the regions?

Dr. Anthony: Just to be clear, the procedures that we are talking about here are more dental procedures.

Dr. Cummings: All right.

Dr. Anthony: What we have been able to do over the last couple of years is to increase the amount of dental chairs that we have. Every region now has the capacity to do dental care. We have improved the facilities that we now have at the Cheddi Jagan Dental Centre. We have been able to do a lot more procedures. We are now doing things such as root canals and so forth at some of the facilities. We have recently added computed tomography (CT) scan and electromagnetic radiation (X-rays) at quite a number of our facilities. So, when people need to get these things, they are actually able to get them right at the facilities.

Dr. Cummings: Are these the mobile X-rays?

Dr. Anthony: These are fixed X-rays and CTs at the different dental sites that we have.

Dr. Cummings: All right.

Dr. Anthony: In addition to that, we are working to be able to do crowns. At the Cheddi Jagan Dental Centre, very soon we will be able to do crowns. We are moving into digital dentistry; when someone comes in and needs a crown, it will be designed on the screen. Once that is designed, it is sent to a mill and milled right in the facility, and within an hour they will be able to put in that crown for that person. We have bought the equipment and this year we should get it up and running.

Dr. Cummings: Very well. Let us go to the Staffing Details under Current Expenditure. Line item 6116, Contracted Employees: there is an increase of about four there. Who are

these four persons to give us a whopping increase, moving from \$440,921,000 to \$609,239,000. This is close to \$200 million, and that is a lot.

Dr. Anthony: The four people who we are talking about here, the four new employment, would be a Nutritionist, a Periodontist, an Environmental Health Officer and a Senior Health Education Officer.

Dr. Cummings: Could you give me the remunerations?

Dr. Anthony: For the Nutritionist it is \$292,875; for the Periodontist it is \$527,175 per month; the Environmental Health Officer is \$170,400; and for the Senior Health Education Officer it is \$208,289.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6222 – Field Materials and Supplies: there is an increase of \$16 million there, moving from \$40,640,000, a revised allocation in 2024, to \$56 million at this time in 2025. It is an increase of \$16 million.

Dr. Anthony: This here is a very important programme for us. As you know, one of the things we have started to do about two years ago is the School Health Programme. This is where we are screening nursery school and primary school children; last year we started doing that. For children in nursery schools, we are close to 20,000 who were screened. For children in primary schools, last year, I think we did about 18,000. That programme is going to continue. The provision here is to buy some of the materials that are needed. When we screen, we check their hearing, their eyes and mouths. We do a general comprehensive screening. What we screen for at the nursery differs slightly from what we do at the primary. When we get to the secondary, the screening tool is a little bit different. That is where this expenditure is going.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6282 – Equipment Maintenance: there was an allotted sum of \$45,359,000 in 2024, which was revised. Now, you are having an allocation of \$65 million, an increase of \$20 million. What equipment being maintained requires an increase of \$20 million?

Dr. Anthony: The equipment that we are talking about here are mainly refrigerators. As you know, we have expanded the amount of refrigerators that we have across the country. Almost every health centre now would have new refrigerators. This expenditure is to make sure that we keep them operational.

Dr. Cummings: Is it cold storage?

Dr. Anthony: Yes. It is cold storage. This is primarily for vaccines.

Dr. Cummings: Line item 6284 – Other: this is moving from \$86,693,000. It is a small increase, but could you tell us about Other? This is moving to \$92,950,000 – line item 6284.

Dr. Anthony: Again, the main thing here is school health and the vaccination programme. I think you would also be very pleased to note that for the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines we are seeing a bigger up take. We now have about 58% coverage for the nine to 15 age group. This year, we are hoping to take that even further. So, that is moving it from where it was really low to now getting it up to 58%. Some of these resources will be spent there.

Dr. Cummings: That is very good. For line item 6294, Other, it moved from \$74,296,000 to \$107,600,000. This is an increase of \$33 million. What constitutes the Other here?

11.27 a.m.

Dr. Anthony: One of things that we been doing here is to help persons who do not have access to hygiene products, especially teen girls in different locations across the country. We have been providing these products to them and that is why we have expanded this programme.

Dr. Cummings: Have we supplemented the First Lady's programme or have we taken it up?

Dr. Anthony: It is an addition.

Dr. Cummings: My last question under this heading is regarding line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships). The figure is moving from \$106,948,000 in 2024 to \$135 million, which is an increase of \$29 million. Who will be the beneficiaries of this training and what type of training are we talking about here?

Dr. Anthony: There are quite a number of different things that we are doing. We are doing training in women's health, elderly health, vaccination, some amount of dental health and also school health. It is a whole range of different programmes.

Dr. Cummings: This is to cover the entire gamut of family health. That is all, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members...

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, if I may?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead. Hon. Member of Parliament (MP) Ferguson.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, if I can I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6271, Telephone and Internet Charges. I note that we have moved from \$3.7 million to \$8 million. Could the Hon. Member explain the reason for the increase and whether it is in connection with an increase by the service provider? I do not know what caused the increase. Perhaps the Hon. Member could guide us. Thank you.

Dr. Anthony: The increase is about is \$4.2 million. This has to do with our vaccination programme, where we want to meet the children – what we call a last smile – to make sure they are getting their vaccines and so forth. Very often we empower the community health workers or nurses with credit so they can go out, call these people, make sure that they are at home and reach out to them so that we can find them, bring them into the programme and give the kids the vaccine.

Dr. Cummings: It is like a mop-up exercise, I guess.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Do you want a follow-up, Hon. Member Ms. Ferguson?

Ms. Ferguson: No. It is not a follow-up. I am moving to another line item.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Line item 6281, Security Services: Hon. Minister, I note that we have an increase from \$10 million to about \$19 million. Could you provide an explanation as to whether it is a result of the increase in rates per hour by the security services? Could you be kind enough to share with the House which security company is providing the services and at which locations? Thank you.

Dr. Anthony: The security service here is basically for the Cheddi Jagan Dental Centre. There has been an increase in the rates, so that is what we are paying now. In terms of the security company that we have on site, the company is Hoosein's Security Service Incorporated, and they have been providing this service for quite some time now.

Ms. Ferguson: A follow-up, Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member. You stated that there has since been an increase in the rates per hour. Could you say what was the rate as at 31st

December, 2024, and what is the new rate for 2025? Thank you.

Dr. Anthony: They do not have the other one for last year, but the rates that we are currently paying is \$576 per hour.

Programme: 473 – Family and Primary Health Care Services – \$4,437,950,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 474 – Regional and Clinical Services – \$41,932,257,000

Dr. Cummings: Hon. Member, I noticed in the Programme Performance Statements and under Indicators 3 and 4:

“Percentage of coastland communities with access to at least a level 2 health facility.”

Your goal for 2024: what you achieved was 88% in the coastland region and 70% in the hinterland region. Your target in 2025 is to have a coverage of 92% of persons accessing level two health facility in the coastland and 72% in the hinterland. What is the package of services? If I go to a level two facility, what could I expect in the coastland? Is there a difference between the coastland and the hinterland?

Dr. Anthony: We have a defined package of service that includes 115 different interventions. These range from Maternal and Child Health (MCH) vaccinations, interventions to assist children. We also have a number of interventions dealing with infectious diseases as well as chronic non-communicable diseases. We have been working to make sure that this package of service that we have defined would be available at all of these facilities. So that is what...

Dr. Cummings: Yes. We want to know because it is like a different state in the United States of America (USA). If I go to Lethem or Mahdia Hospital, I should be able to have the same standard that I will have at a health centre on the East Coast, or Campbellville, or elsewhere.

Dr. Anthony: That is pretty much what you will have, because among the things we are implementing would include... Let us take chronic diseases. For hypertensive patients, they would receive the Hypertension Evaluation and Risk Treatment System (HEARTS) programme, so they will get more efficient medication and they will be monitored. For diabetic patients, we are working to make sure that across the system they will have access to Haemoglobin A1c (HbA1c) and so forth. We are not fully

there as yet because we only have HbA1c in 89 centres, but we are working to get more of these centres so people can have access to these things. This is some of the more common things people would come to the facilities for and we want to make sure that for the more prevalent chronic diseases that they are effectively managed.

Dr. Cummings: Very well. Mr. Chairman, through you...

Dr. Anthony: I just want to say though, in addition to level two we would also see a significant increase at, I would say, level four. That is because, on the coastland, we will have the opening of the six new hospitals. Before the year comes to an end, Lima Hospital, De Kinderen Hospital, Diamond Hospital, Enmore Hospital, Bath Hospital and Skeldon Hospital would be opened.

Dr. Cummings: We are happy for that, but we just want to make sure that the service would not be watered down and to make sure that we have adequate human resource, staff, to facilitate what is being done at the health facilities.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, would the service be “watered down”?

Dr. Anthony: I do not know what is meant by “watered down”, but I can assure the Hon. Member that at each of these new hospitals, when you go there, for those who need to access the Accident and Emergency (A&E), there will be a 24-hour service. If you have to get an image done, a CT done, you will have CT scans available at every one of these facilities. You will have a 24-hour laboratory service at every one of these facilities. We have three operating theatres in them – one is located in the Accident and Emergency and two upstairs. We will have a lot of surgical services that will be available. We will also have a birthing suite so that obstetric patients would have care. We will have an Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and a Neonatal Care Unit in each one of these facilities. I think what the patients would really appreciate, for those who would have to use these facilities, is that for each room there will be no more than five beds per room, and it will be self-contained, and you will have your own toilet and bath in that room. I think when you experience what would be there, it would be superior to what we have right now in the system.

Dr. Cummings: Very well, Hon. Member. Through the Chairman, before I come off the Indicators here, I noticed – it is new now – a number of persons utilising the telemedicine services like teleophthalmology, tele-psychiatry and psychology services, and the telepathology services.

There is no assessment or target for 2024. I guess you are now starting it for 2025. Which regions are we talking about here?

Dr. Anthony: Let us start with telepathology or teleophthalmology. We have put facilities in Regions 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and I think 10. Basically, what this is doing, for diabetic patients is that we have to check their retina. We are able to take that image and it will be sent to a central repository that we have and we store it. The following year, when the patient comes back, we can then pull up that image and check to see whether there have been changes because this is a very important thing. We want to make sure that people will not go blind with their diabetes. Our intent... and I think we have in the capital budget some equipment to expand these services that we have. It might please you to know that we are also using artificial intelligence (AI) to do some of the interpretations, to make sure that the patterns we are seeing... These systems are almost 99% accurate. We are using that to make sure that we can give a better service to our diabetic patients.

In terms of the teleradiology, right now a lot of our regional hospitals are connected to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation's Radiology Department. That is another thing. For all of our X-rays, we have shifted from analogue to digital X-rays. We now have close to 18 or so digital X-rays, and the intention is that we will replace every analogue machine that we have with a digital machine. In this year's budget, you will also see that we have some provisions to change out some of the very old ones and to build the new rooms that will be needed for the digital machines. All of these will be connected to a Picture Archiving and Communication System (PACS), and the people at GPHC will be able to read them. You can take your image to any one of the facilities, but if you need a specialist radiologist, we can send it and they will interpret it.

11.42 a.m.

If they are unable to do that – let us say they do not have enough radiologists – then we can also contract the service to an overseas provider, where they go up in the cloud and pull the images down, and they will be able to read them and send us the information. In terms of telepsychiatry, we have, right now, 84 telemedicine sites in the regions across our country – Regions 1, 7, 8, 9, and 10. Through this system, the Psychiatrist at the Georgetown Hospital can reach out to any one of these facilities, the patient comes to the health centre and then we are able to do that counselling or have that conversation with them. If, during that process, we

determine that this is someone who would need further investigation or help, then, let us say that person is in Region 9, or Region 8, or wherever, we are able to bring that person out and they come to the Georgetown Hospital for further care. That is how we have been utilising telepsychiatry and telepsychology as well. In terms of telepathology, so far we have been using this system to do the consultation with Mount Sinai. Samples come in and we use it more for a second opinion, but we are going to change that because we feel that the other labs now, as they send in samples to us, we will be able to get faster turnaround.

Dr. Cummings: Yes, turning to Current Expenditure, line item 6115, Semi-Skilled Operatives and Unskilled: There is some increase here, about a million dollars. Could you tell us who are these semi-skilled operatives and unskilled?

Dr. Anthony: The persons who are employed under this category would be like pharmacy assistants, staff nurses, health care attendants, cleaners, nursing assistants and so forth.

Dr. Cummings: Yes, I know I have four more programmes here, so I am going to push a little bit. There is a whopping increase again under line item 6284. Moving from \$193,880,000 to \$780,000,000, as we look at Other, is an increase of \$587,000,000. Could you tell us what constitutes Other here?

Dr. Anthony: This is primarily used for the Cuban brigade, the persons who come in and go out. Under this category, we have a number of persons who will be coming in from Cuba – doctors and so forth – and they will be dispersed across our system to continue the good work that they have been doing over the years. We are bringing more doctors now than we previously had so, therefore, this has gone up.

Dr. Cummings: That is it as I move on to the other four programmes

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members...

Ms. Lawrence: Not as yet, Sir, we have...

Ms. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, you have the floor.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning to the Committee. Could I ask the Minister to turn to line item 6321? On page 272, we see an allocation to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation of approximately twenty-plus billion dollars. I would like to ask my questions on page 703

– Materials, Equipment and Supplies. Minister, before I ask specifically on these line items, could you kindly indicate those health facilities which fall within the ambit of the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation?

Dr. Anthony: I think apart from the Hospital itself, it would be Festival City Polyclinic, Campbellville Health Centre, Kitty Health Centre, and Industry Health Centre. They used to have Enmore. I think they still do have some control over Enmore, but that is going to change in another couple of months. Now, they also have the Liliendaal hospital.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Chairman, through you, Materials, Equipment and Supplies: could the Hon. Minister, kindly indicate to the House whether these facilities are now equipped to provide laboratory tests and imaging at this time? Last year, you did say that that was one of the areas that you were focusing on.

Dr. Anthony: In terms of Enmore, we actually had to break down the Polyclinic, and we have them in temporary locations pending the completion of the new hospital. Once the new hospital is up and running – in another two to three months – they will have adequate access to both laboratory and imaging services. In terms of Campbellville Health Centre, we are breaking down that health centre. We are investing there, close to \$800 million, to build a new health facility at Campbellville that would include, in that facility, imaging services that would be done right on-site. Kitty Health Centre: that facility we do not own it, as you know, that is a place that we have been renting. However, we feel that when we complete the Campbellville Health Centre, they will be able to absorb that catchment area. The design that we have for Campbellville Health Centre is a three-storey building with all of the amenities being in there. Festival City Polyclinic: they have completed the installation of the X-ray at Festival City Polyclinic. It is not operational as yet because they are waiting an uninterruptible power supply (UPS). Once that UPS is installed, that becomes operational, and you will be able to do imaging there as well. Liliendaal: we have quite a number of equipment there that we are now using for infectious disease patients. That has been working quite adequately for them.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, I turn the Minister's attention now to Rental and Maintenance of Buildings – same line, same page. We have some three hundred and sixty-five plus million dollars here. Minister, you had a revised figure of \$392.5 million last year, and this year you are just a little above what was budgeted in 2024. My question to you is what caused the increase, and which buildings are you

adding in this year? Who are you housing, apart from the Cuban brigade? Who are you housing in these facilities, because we have the doctors' quarters up and running?

Dr. Anthony: Basically, this is to pay for the rental of a building next to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation, where they are doing training. A lot of the training is now being done out of that building. It is right on New Market Street. That is what they are paying for. In addition to that, I see here they also have... While we are building the new Campbellville Health Centre, we have relocated the functions, the facility, to a temporary location; so we have to rent there as well. That is located in Duncan Street. That is where the increase comes from – the two facilities that we are renting because these are two functions now that we previously were not catering for.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, a follow-up.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you. Hon. Minister, in the hospital compound, the Dr. Yesu Persaud building was supposed to be used for training, so why are we not using those buildings? Could you also say what is the monthly payment for the building that you are renting for the training?

Dr. Anthony: The Dr. Yesu Persaud Clinical Education Centre that we have in the hospital compound is used primarily for undergraduate training. Mostly, the students from the University of Guyana (UG), the undergraduates, that is what they use. This one that we are renting – because we just do not have enough space – in New Market Street, is where they do other training. We have increased training for nursing assistants, nursing aides and a number of categories of people that we are training right now. The rental for that particular facility at New Market Street is \$36.9 million a month. No, 12 months rather. It is \$3.1 million per month.

Ms. Lawrence: Last question, Mr. Chairman. Capital Expenditure: you have moved from \$975 million.

Mr. Chairman: Are you saying capital?

Ms. Lawrence: Yes. It is right under here. It is subsidies. I am looking at GPHC.

Mr. Chairman: Okay, go ahead.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you. You have moved from \$975 million to \$2.980 billion, Hon. Minister. What is it specifically you are going to do, not with... What are the

three high-end programmes in terms of building that you will be doing this year?

Dr. Anthony: For GPHC, as we said before, they will be doing the Campbellville-Kitty Health Centre; so the moneys are coming from here. They will also be doing the Industry Health Centre. We have a facility that they manage at Industry, so they will be doing that health centre. The other thing under this capital is that they are getting a Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) machine for the hospital and they are also getting a Cath Lab and I am told a CT as well.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I have several questions, but I will just put two. Line item 6241, Rental of Buildings: I note for 2024, Hon. Member, the Committee approved \$99.6 million, and you would have utilised \$68.4 million. However, for 2025, you have a whopping figure here of some \$606,600,000. Could you explain to the House the reason for this whopping increase, the buildings you are expected to rent, and the cost associated with each building that the Ministry intends to rent? Thank you.

Dr. Anthony: We just went through that we will be opening six new hospitals. We have, in this year's budget, to develop accommodations for them, but in the absence of that accommodation we will be renting at each of these sites. This increase that you are seeing is to provide for the rental of buildings for medical staff that will be going out to these facilities – doctors, nurses, and other technical people that we will need to decant to these facilities. That is where the increase came from.

Ms. Ferguson: I can do a lot of follow-ups here, but in the interest of time, Mr. Chairman, may I turn our attention to line item 6281, Security Services? To the Hon. Member, last year you expended \$223 million, and I note for 2025, you are requesting some \$560 million. One, could you explain the reason for the increase, whether it is dependent on the rate increase by the security service and could you also name the security service that is providing the services to the Ministry?

11.57 a.m.

Dr. Anthony: The increase from last year's budget would be about \$326 million. That is the increase that we are asking for. That increase is to cater for security services that we will have at the six new hospitals. We have not contracted a security company for those six new hospitals as yet.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. A quick follow-up: could you say to the Committee when exactly these six new hospitals are expected to be completed? Perhaps, you could share with us the current status of these hospitals.

Dr. Anthony: The hospitals will be completed shortly.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, shortly might not be a time, but it is an answer.

Dr. Anthony: Within the next four months, the first hospital will be opened. Thereafter, you would see the others being opened one after the other. Before the year comes to an end, all six hospitals will be fully operational. I can tell you the percentage completion is close to 90%. For the first three hospitals, it is probably between 90% to 95% completed and for the other three, it would be about 85% to 90% completed. The first three would be the Diamond Regional Hospital, Enmore Regional Hospital and Bath Regional Hospital. The other three would be No. 75 Village Regional Hospital, De Kinderen Regional Hospital and Lima Regional Hospital. The latter three would be the ones that are 85% to 90% completed, and the other one, 90% to 95% completed. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)], I will invite you.

Programme: 474 – Regional and Clinical Services – \$41,932,257,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let us turn to pages 238 and 239.

Dr. Cummings: Mr. Chairman, is it page 248 or page 247?

Mr. Chairman: Sorry, it is pages 246 and 267.

Programme: 475 – Health Sciences Education – \$1,737,309,000

Dr. Cummings: I have two questions under this Programme 475. Under line 6221, Drugs and Medical Supplies, I notice a revised amount of \$15,093,000 in 2024, and now there is an allocation of \$44 million. It is an increase of \$29 million for drugs and medical supplies.

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, we are at Programme 475. Is that correct?

Mr. Chairman: We are at Programme 475, pages 246 and 247.

Dr. Anthony: All right.

Dr. Cummings: It is line item 6221.

Dr. Anthony: Under line item 6221, Drugs and Medical Supplies, there has been a very small increase of about \$1 million. Right now, we have nine Simulation Centres. At these Simulation Centres, we are providing them with some items that they need to use in the Simulation Centres.

Dr. Cummings: Sorry, is that line item 6222, Field Materials and Supplies?

Dr. Anthony: Oh, material supplies.

Dr. Cummings: That is what it should be, actually. It is in the case of \$29 million, sorry.

Dr. Anthony: Okay. At line 6222, there is a \$28.9 million increase. Basically, this is to purchase mannequins for the simulation laboratories.

Dr. Cummings: This is my last question on this heading. Line item 6281– Security Services: There is an increase of \$20 million. If my memory serves me correctly, it moved from \$65 million in 2024 to about \$85 million in 2025. Whose security service is it, and where is it located? What is its remuneration power?

Dr. Anthony: The increase here of \$19 million is to cater for the new schools that are going to come into being this year, one being the Essequibo Nursing School. That would be completed this year. We will have to provide security there. The other one is for the New Amsterdam Nursing School. We will have to provide security for that one, as well.

Programme: 475 – Health Sciences Education – \$1,737,309,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 476 – Standards and Technical Services – \$3,473,207,000

Dr. Cummings: I want to compliment the percentage of public laboratories that received mentorship for quality management system, being 100% in 2024 and 100% in 2025. I am happy about that. I am also happy about Indicator number 5, which states:

“Percentage of facilities reported stock out in blood products ...”

There was not any so that is good. I just want to know how many of the health facilities, be it public or private, have a quality control committee or a focal point person. As you know, infection control is very important.

Dr. Anthony: Could you repeat the question?

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

Dr. Cummings: I am wondering how much percentage of health care facilities have an infection control committee. You are moving it from 67% to 75%. Could you name some of the facilities that have complete infection control services, and the committees that would ensure that the products are good? It would be like an oversight body.

Dr. Anthony: We have a national Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) Committee in the Ministry. The AMR Committee has been working with different hospitals to make sure that they are complying with infectious disease control. We have a number of them: the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC), for example, West Demerara Regional Hospital and so forth. What we are aiming to do is to make sure that these things function to the optimum. We still feel that we have a lot more to do to meet those percentages. One of the challenges, as you would know, is that AMR is a significant problem around the globe. We have been able last year and previous years, to detect patients who had pathogens that are very resistant to the current medications that we are using. We want to make sure that we have better use of antibiotics, so that we can prevent this problem from occurring, or at least minimise the problem from occurring. That is why this is extremely important for us. We are working with a number of partners to be able to expand this kind of programme and make sure that we have this quality control in place.

Dr. Cummings: Okay, especially in Tuberculosis (TB). The last question under the Programme Performance Statements is Indicator number seven, which states:

“Percentage of registered manufacturers which are issued with manufacturers’ licences...”

Are these the persons who give us drugs? Who are these manufacturers we are talking about?

Dr. Anthony: We have companies here that do manufacturing. We want to make sure that whatever they are manufacturing meets the required standards. We have at least two of them that are pharmaceuticals. They are in compliance, but there are also food products that people do. As you know, the Food and Drug Agency is responsible for monitoring all these places to make sure they adhere to certain standards. Looking at the food standards, that is what we are trying to do here; move it up to 90%.

Dr. Cummings: Two more questions under this. Line item 6282 – Equipment Maintenance: There was a revised allocation of \$116,091,000 in 2024 and the budget allocation

for 2025 is \$135 million. There is an increase of \$20 million. Could the Minister explain which equipment we are trying to maintain here?

Dr. Anthony: We will use the increase to do maintenance on a lot of equipment that we have in the various regions. These include biochemistry analysers, we have three of those in Region 9; we have some electrolyte analysers, there are 10 of those; we have seven immunology analysers; and one haematology analyser. There is a whole range of laboratory equipment. There is a long list here that we will be maintaining with this sum of money.

Programme: 476 – Standards and Technical Services – \$3,473,207,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 477 – Disability and Rehabilitation Services – \$1,558,050,000

Dr. Cummings: Under Indicator number 2 for the Programme 477, Disability and Rehabilitation Services, there are a number of specialists in this department providing rehabilitative services in Guyana. Are these specialists from Guyana, or are they coming from overseas? I notice there were 76 specialists in 2024, and now, there is a target of 175. Who makes up this large number?

Dr. Anthony: The specialists we are talking about here are Physiotherapists, Occupational Therapists, and Speech and Language Therapists and Audiology. All these programmes are being run by the University of Guyana. We currently have a number of students who are enrolled and will be graduating this year. Upon graduation, they will all be employed by the Ministry.

Dr. Cummings: Maybe one more question under this department. Line item 6294 – Other: What constitutes the other? In 2024, you had \$100,531,000 under this category and now, the allocated sum for 2025 is \$293,065,000, an increase of \$193 million.

12.12 p.m.

Dr. Anthony: Just to alleviate any anxiety that the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, might have, let me explain what we are doing with this sum of money. With the increase, we will be helping a number of persons. We will be purchasing hearing aids for 1,590 persons. We will be buying wheelchairs – this year, we are planning to buy close to 962 wheelchairs. We will be making prostheses free. Prior to this, a person who needed a prosthesis, if he/she had to get the below-the-knee one, it would cost him/her approximately

\$400,000 – this is now going to be free, and that is catered for here. For diabetic patients who have ulcers on their feet and need to stand, we will be giving them these offloading footwear which will help them to stand better. There is a sum that is allocated for that. People who need braces, walkers and so forth... This is going to help a lot of people who need these types of services.

Ms. Lawrence: To the Hon. Minister, line item 6242, Maintenance of Buildings – \$20 million, which building or buildings are you referring to here? Also, given all the health centres and the hospitals that you are building, have you given consideration to having a specific place built for the provision of rehabilitation services?

Dr. Anthony: Good question. I want to thank the Hon. Member for that question. The facilities that we have here, basically, are for the main office – the one on Coral Street – where we will be doing some maintenance; the National Vocational Training Centre, where we will be spending \$5.8 million; Cheshire Home – \$3.3 million; regional physiotherapy services – \$2.7 million and occupational therapy – another \$1.1 million. This is how this money is going to be spent. However, to come to your question, when you look at the Capital Budget, you will see that we made an allocation there, I think of the \$500 million or \$600 million. The overall project is approximately \$1 billion, but this year we have put \$400 million and that is to do a new rehabilitation centre with all the modern facilities to help those who need to be rehabilitated, whether they have a stroke or whatever it is.

Programme: 477 – Disability and Rehabilitation Services – \$1,558,050,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 478 – Disease Control – Non-Communicable Diseases – \$7,228,523,000

Dr. Cummings: On page 223 – Programme Performance Statements, Indicator number five states:

“Incidents of suicide for 100,000 population [Outcome]”

In 2024, you had 6.29, I am not sure... and now you are looking at 13. Do you want an increase in suicides for 2025? Could you explain this indicator, please?

Dr. Anthony: That is actually a very good question. We do not want an increase; we want to decrease. That is something we certainly will work on to make sure that there is a significant decrease.

Dr. Cummings: Indicator number 11 states:

“Number of facilities provide rehabilitation services”

Are we talking about the Lusignan Centre or what rehabilitation service we are talking about here? Earlier, you alluded to the sum of ophthalmology, such as the retina and some other things that you are doing in some areas. Does it include the hinterland as well as the coastland?

Dr. Anthony: The rehabilitation services that we are talking about here are really trying to provide more physiotherapists and physiotherapy in each of the regions. We have started doing that in almost every region now; we have physiotherapists and occupational therapists. That is going to continue.

Programme: 478 – Disease Control – Non-Communicable Diseases – \$7,228,523,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 471 – Policy Development and Administration – \$495,395,000

Dr. Cummings: Project code 2405600 – Land and Water Transport: I notice there is a provision for vehicles, ambulances, boats and engines. Could you tell us the type of vehicles; the specifications, and what type of ambulance and where it will be assigned?

Dr. Anthony: Mr. Chairman, let us just find the right thing. Hon. Member, could you call back the number for me; the programme and then give us...

Mr. Chairman: The Programme is 471.

Dr. Cummings: The programme is 471. It is project code 2405600, Land and Water Transport, sorry. It is:

“Provision for vehicles and equipment.”

Give us the specifications, the number of vehicles and where they will be assigned.

Dr. Anthony: I have now found what the Hon. Member was talking about. This is to buy two things: one would be a forklift and the other, a motor car. The specification for the forklift – there are some things here – a pantograph deep reach truck, in brackets – 450 inches, I really do not know what that means. The mass of this thing should be 287 and there are some other descriptions of what they are looking for.

Ms. Ferguson: A follow-up on that very line item, I note in the project document here the status is new, but knowing the PPP/C, it does bring reconditioned things and call them new things. Could the Hon. Minister state if this will be a brand new or factory-made forklift that will be coming into this country?

Mr. Chairman: Minister, is it a brand new or a new brand?

Dr. Anthony: I am not sure where the Hon. Member would have gotten these perceptions from, but I can assure her that the two vehicles that we will be buying – the forklift and the car – are new.

Mr. Chairman: It is not new to you.

Programme: 471 – Policy Development and Administration – \$495,395,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

We have 11 minutes remaining on the time allocated for this Agency - 47.

Programme: 472 – Disease Control - Communicable Diseases – \$268,388,000

Dr. Cummings: This is Communicable Diseases. Project code 2405600 – Land and Water Transport: Once again, there is:

“Provision for vehicles.”

What is the type of vehicle and what would it be used for, what programme, be it malaria, TB or whatever?

Dr. Anthony: This is going to be a minibus that we will be buying and is for the Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit.

Programme: 472 – Disease Control – Communicable Diseases – \$268,388,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 473 – Family and Primary Health Care Services – \$ 123,500,000

Dr. Cummings: Project code 2509000 – Equipment – Medical:

“Provision for medical equipment.”

Just remind us of the equipment you are talking about here.

Dr. Anthony: This is a very exhaustive list of medical equipment but just to let the Member get the sense, we will be buying 27 manual vacuum aspirators; they are going to different hospitals; two wall mounted dental X-ray units, they are going to two facilities; two patient monitors; nitric

oxide delivery systems for two facilities; dental X-ray digital sensor; *et cetera*. There is a whole range of them.

Dr. Cummings: I have gotten a sense, thank you.

Programme: 473 – Family and Primary Health Care Services – \$123,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 474 – Regional and Clinical Services – \$41,726,136,000

Dr. Cummings: I just want to check in on this rollover project. We have been talking about the completion date for the modernisation of the Primary Health Care System. What is the status of that? It is a rollover project. It is about time it come to completion, no? Project code 4402800, Modernisation of Primary Health Care System. It is from the India project, I think.

12.27 p.m.

Dr. Anthony: We have made some progress on this because we had the facilities design. We are still working with the Indian authorities to have this project... With the funding and the conditions of the funding, we have to tender this project in India so that one of the companies would bid and then come in to do that. We are finalising those documents now because it has to meet both our requirements and those of the Indian Government. Once we conclude on that, we will be able to tender the project.

Programme: 474 – Regional and Clinical Services – \$41,726,136,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 475 – Health Sciences Education – \$1,405,000,000

Programme: 475 – Health Sciences Education – \$1,405,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 476 – Standards and Technical Services – \$792,500,000

Programme: 476 – Standards and Technical Services – \$792,500,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 477 – Disability and Rehabilitation Services – \$459,000,000

Dr. Cummings: Project code 1216200 – Ministry of Health - Buildings: Earlier, you alluded to a new building for the

rehab. Is this what we are talking about here? What is the status at this point in time? Has it started? Where will it be located?

Dr. Anthony: This is a new national rehabilitation centre we are working on. We are now going to do the design and then, in a few months, we should start construction. Right now, depending on the footprint of the building... Our intention is to have that building at the site where we have the Ptolemy Reid Rehabilitation Centre, but if the footprint is much larger, then we will have to put it at a different location.

Ms. Ferguson: The Hon. Member failed to answer the second part of my Colleague's question on that very project code. Could you say where the building will be?

Dr. Anthony: I said the location.

Ms. Ferguson: You must have a location.

Dr. Anthony: I said that.

Ms. Lawrence: He said [*inaudible*]

Ms. Ferguson: Oh, he did?

Dr. Anthony: Ms. Ferguson, what is wrong...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I think there is a proverb about haste and waste, right?

Programme: 477 – Disability and Rehabilitation Services – \$459,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 478 – Disease Control – Non-Communicable Diseases – \$2,307,353,000

Dr. Cummings: Project code 1216200 – The Ministry of Health – Building: Let us go back there. The legend states:

“Provision for building and payment of retention.”

I notice it started in 2024. That is where the Minister within the Ministry of Public Health was... That is where I was, so I want to know if that is the building that is broken down that we are talking about here or if this is another building.

Dr. Anthony: Where there was the old Regional Health Officers (RHS) building, we have constructed a new building there. That is going to be completed in another couple of months. That is what we are talking about.

Dr. Cummings: Okay. Project code 2509000 – Equipment - Medical: This is to the tune of \$270,000,000. What type of medical equipment are we talking about here and where will it be located?

Dr. Anthony: There is a whole range of medical equipment. For example, we are buying 25 thermal ablation devices; 50 gynaecology tools; 11 Loop Electrosurgical Excision Procedure (LEEP) device system (5.36); 25 gooseneck examining lamp; 20 gynaecological examination beds; 100 scales; three portable ultrasounds; 100 pulse sock; 100 digital spirometer, *et cetera*. There is a whole list.

Mr. Chairman: I thought I saw the Hon. Member, Mr. Henry.

Programme: 478 – Disease Control - Non-Communicable Diseases – \$2,307,353,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Let me thank the Hon. Member Dr. Cummings for effectively and efficiently utilising the entire two hours for this examination. Minister of Health and staff, thank you for taking us through your Agency. To our students, you have actually just seen the process of approving tens of billions of dollars for our health sector in 2025. I will say ‘part of’ because many parts for health are also dealt with by the 10 regions and we passed those last night. Thank you all very much.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Let the Assembly resume.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: This is a good time to take a one-hour suspension and we will return with the Ministry of Home Affairs.

Sitting suspended at 12.34 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.56 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: We will go into Committee to continue our consideration of the estimates and invite the Hon. Mr. Robeson Horatio Benn and his team from the Ministry of Home Affairs to join us.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Mr. Chairman: *Brave Horatius in the brave days of old.* Minister, you have to tell Hon. Mr. Mahipaul about the keeping of the bridge. Hon. Members, please let us turn to pages 260 and 261, and see if we can be as efficient and effective as the Hon. Dr. Cummings this morning. We have one hour and 30 minutes allocated for this Agency. However, we have two hours and 11 minutes in savings, so it could still be a very long day today.

Agency: 51 Ministry of Home Affairs**Current Expenditure**

Programme: 511 – Policy Development and Administration – \$1,786,980,000

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, may I turn... Let me take this opportunity to say a pleasant afternoon to the staff of the Ministry.

Mr. Chairman: Not to the Minister?

Ms. Ferguson: Yes, and the Minister. Line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings: Hon. Minister, I note you have a \$4 million increase for 2025 as against what was allocated and spent in 2024. Could you explain to the Committee what or which building or buildings will be maintained under this allocation and where are these buildings located?

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: In response, there are repairs to sections of the first and second floors at the Ministry of Home Affairs Secretariat on Brickdam, repairs to the ceiling, wall and tiles and repainting of internal walls at the Guyana Forensic Science Laboratory; rerouting of the existing AC drains at the Secretariat itself; repairs to living quarters; and routine maintenance work such as electrical, plumbing, carpentry, masonry to the Ministry's main building, the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme (CSSP), the Guyana Forensic Science Laboratory and the Juvenile Holding Centre. Those are the buildings.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Minister. Mr. Chairman, should I proceed?

Mr. Chairman: You may.

Ms. Ferguson: I am thankful that you have provided the buildings that will enjoy allocations from this year's budgetary account, but could you provide a disaggregation? What is going to the main building, what is going to the laboratory and the other areas that you identified?

Mr. Benn: If I may quickly go over, beyond getting a long list of things: the repairs to sections of the first and second floor at the Home Affairs Secretariat – \$3 million; repairs to the Guyana Forensic Science Laboratory's internal walls – \$2 million; rerouting of drain pipes at the Secretariat itself – \$2 million; repairs to living quarters – \$6 million; and routine maintenance works: electrical, plumbing, carpentry and masonry to the Ministry's main building, the CSSP building, the Guyana Forensic Science Laboratory and the Juvenile Holding Centre – \$7 million.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. Minister, I wish to draw your attention to *Volume 2*, page 230. Under impacts, it states:

“A well-functioning Parole Board”

It was published that this board was reconstituted in 2020, and I believe the term of this board came to an end in 2021. Could you advise on the status? Was the term of the board extended or was it reconstituted?

Mr. Benn: The board was reconstituted over a number of years. It will now have to be reconstituted again.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you. Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Sorry, Mr. Chairman. I noticed that you intend to have an increase in policing groups. I am referring here again to *Volume 2*. It states that in 2025, you intend to have an additional 40 policing groups. Could you advise the status of these additional policing groups and the location for these groups?

2.03 p.m.

Mr. Benn: I thank the Hon. Member for her interest in the Community Policing Groups. The Community Policing Groups form an important first line of information and defence in relation to the issues of possible crimes, disorderly behaviour and all of those issues, including paying attention to the questions of surveillance at our borders. We are increasing the number of groups, and some of the groups which you may have an interest in are Port Kaituma, Mabaruma and Moruca in Region 1.

In Region 2, let me say that we have 86 groups there with 1,927 members. In the 'G' Division, Upper-Pomeroon to Bethany Creek, we have 20 groups with 303 members; in Region 3, 'D1' Division Crane to Bonasika Creek, we have 23 groups with 402 members; Division Two 27 groups with 554 members; and Division Three, Leguan to Wakenaam, 19 groups, 391 members, for a total of 1,347 members in Region 3.

In the Region 4, 'A' Division, Industry to Agricola, 22 groups, 385 members; Eccles to Mobliissa Division, 37 groups with 713 members. The 'C1' Division Unity to Good Hope, 22 groups with 390 members; and Division 'C2' Good Hope to Industry Arch, 15 groups with 247 members, for a total of 1,739 persons in Region 4 groups.

For Region 5, 29 groups with 540 members. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] This is a total for all groups. I could layover the details of the number of persons in the

groups, but it is not finalised in respect of the final number of persons who will be in any new groups or added to groups which already exist. If I might just say, there is a grand total of 445 groups, with 65,381 members. Those include women's groups and youth groups, also.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6284 – Other – \$50,000,000. I noticed that a sum of \$45 million was budgeted last year then they had “revised” of \$63 million and change, and now I see that you budgeted \$50 million. I am asking the Minister, are you confident that this will cover the areas that are expected to be covered since we looked at the revised sum for 2024?

Mr. Benn: Last year, we had the Guiana Shield Strategic Dialogue, which we had to host and of course, we had to stand the expenses. We are not catering for those on that dialogue and issues with certain software upgrades in this year; that is why you see a reduction in the amount that we are requesting.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Line item 6292 – Dietary. I noticed that you originally had \$18.5 million in 2024, then it was revised to \$9 million and change, and now it has gone back up to \$18.5 million. Could the Hon. Minister say what areas will be covered here, and if this amount is adequate?

Mr. Benn: There are some rollover projects and expenses which have to be accounted for and are being taken up in this item on the paid accounts and the dietary supplies for the Juvenile Holding Centre and the New Opportunity Corps (NOC) in Essequibo. That takes into account the level of expenditure.

Ms. Flue-Bess: To the Minister, line item 6294, Other. I note there has been an increase. Could the Hon. Minister state what areas will be covered with this allocated sum?

Mr. Benn: Let me thank the Hon. Member for her interest in this matter. There are operational line expenses for the Juvenile Holding Centre, community policing groups, traffic duties on stipend, border patrols, trafficking in persons, the Firearms Licensing Board, and if I may give some details: operational expenses for Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU); intelligence of the Ministerial Task Force on trafficking in persons \$18.3 million; traffic duties and border patrols again \$10.6 million; Stipends related to the Firearms Licensing Board, \$780,000; tender board operations and under the issues for what we are speaking about increasing the peace \$12.6 million; and strategic management department, \$450,000.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, permit me to take the Hon. Minister back to Volume 2, a follow-up from the Hon. Geeta Chandan-Edmond's question, reference Community Policing Group. The Hon. Minister was kind enough to say that the Community Policing Group acts as the first line of information and defence in crime fighting, and we appreciate the involvement of civilians in this duty. Sir, may I ask the Hon. Minister what kind of training these members of the Community Policing Group go through to ensure that they basically execute that function in keeping with the standard operations procedure with reference to how you treat civilians.

Mr. Benn: In the first instance, the Community Policing Groups are trained basically to the level of those who will be considered rural constables. Beyond that, in terms of specific training, there is training in relation to: gathering intelligence, information, arrests, cautioning of persons, all the basic elements of providing basic policing functions in the communities. In relation to issues which are at the moment in the communities, issues related to domestic violence, use of drugs, all of those things, antisocial behavioural issues, and particularly for those out on the borders, there are issues in relation to surveillance, use of drones and tracking – we have a number of them with All-Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), and particularly this year we will be buying a number of horses, so they will be out there as vaqueros, essentially; at areas which are difficult to access in relation to the open border issues which we speak of at many forums.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask the Hon. Minister if there a stipend or any form of remuneration that is offered to these hardworking civilians who are serving in the Community Policing Group to basically assist in the crime fighting of our nation? If not, is there any consideration for such under this programme?

Mr. Benn: I thank the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul for the question. I did say that the total number of persons in the community policing group is 10,659. The Community Policing Groups were set up and are still on a voluntary basis. There may be instances, like at Christmas time, when they are called in support of the police at schools for traffic management and other issues, where they are paid a small stipend. For some on the border with particularly strenuous long-range activities, they are also paid a stipend, but for our budget at the moment, to be paying moneys for voluntary work, that would be a severe call on our budget.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, in terms of equipment, crime-fighting equipment, not necessarily the vehicles and the horses *et cetera*, but maybe guns and baton or whatever is necessary, sometimes to force bad behaviours, are these policing groups issued with that kind of weapon, and is there a criteria that they must meet in order to be given such weapon?

Mr. Benn: It is not our policy to be giving out guns all over the place. It is not our policy to engage with the use of guns. Perhaps, at the very beginning, for small-scale, low-level violence and indiscipline problems, the function of the Community Policing Groups then is to engage the police, the Toshias, the community leaders, or Regional Executive Officers (REOs) in areas with respect to engaging. Of course, there are times when they go on patrol, and if there are three or four of them and someone is behaving disorderly, they could put hands on him or her and take him or her to the police station. It is not the policy to engender – perhaps, for want of better words – an arms race in the communities, because if you arm them, those who would want to behave badly would think of arming themselves too. We prefer to be on the low-down in relation to that. The first level of information with respect to these issues and to provide us with actionable intelligence.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. Outside of guns, do they get from the ministry things like handcuffs, batons and other equipment that can basically curtail and reduce a person from rebelling? Do they get any sort of assistance at that level to provide...?

Mr. Benn: Yes, yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: Could you specify, please?

Mr. Benn: They are provided with uniforms, batons, handcuffs and boots, of course. . Those are the basic things we give to them. They are trained to use those things in a proper manner. Beyond that, we are not really into giving out guns.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you. My final question on this, Sir, in terms of accounting for these equipment, accounting for these batons, handcuffs, *et cetera*. Is there a single person who holds responsibility within these groups, perhaps the Chairman? Does each individual sign for this or is there some agreement to state, should they misuse or lose it, there are accountability measures in place to ensure we get value for our money?

2.18 p.m.

Mr. Benn: There is, indeed, the groups' Chairpersons and Vice Chairpersons, who have the responsibilities of accounting for items which are given. There are also Liaison Officers in each region or sub-region in respect of this type of activity and contacting the groups. So, there are sufficient safeguards – I would say – in relation to the question of accounting for the batons or handcuffs.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you. Sir, I have one follow-up, please. How are group Chairpersons appointed? Are they selected or elected? Are they selected by your Ministry or elected from within the group?

Mr. Benn: It is a purely democratic process of which you may not be familiar with. They hold annual general meetings. I think, last year I went to one at the Leonora Secondary School. All the group members came together, did their canvassing and elected their leaders – Chairpersons, Vice Chairpersons, Secretaries, Treasurers and all those persons.

Mr. Ramjattan: I would like to just come back to the question on the Parole Board of Guyana. How long has that Parole Board of Guyana not been appointed? When did it come to an end?

Mr. Benn: The life of the previous Board came to an end in May.

Mr. Ramjattan: This is May of which year?

Mr. Benn: It was last year.

Mr. Ramjattan: This was 2024. How early would you get...?

Mr. Benn: Well, we are hoping...I am sorry, Mr. Chairman. We are hoping to get it going just now. There were issues of a Chairperson who is available and so on. We will be able to get that going early in this year.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you very much. If I may, just do one follow-up – during the course, do we have any statistics as to how many people were put on parole by the Board in its term up to 2024?

Mr. Benn: I do not have that at hand, but we could lay that over to you.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thanks.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Could I please ask the Minister to go to the Estimates of the Public Sector, Volume 2 under the Indicators. Number 7 states:

“Number of murders recorded”

In 2024, this was 117. Could the Hon. Minister say how many of the 117 murders were recorded from domestic violence?

Mr. Benn: We will get the disaggregated number for you, Hon. Member.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations: we note in the Legend speaks to a budgeted allocation of eighty... I have to get glasses. I am sorry. The allocation requested in 2024 is \$85 million; we see the revised budget is \$85 million; but in 2025, there is a request increasing that amount. Could the Hon. Minister indicate what would have occasioned this increase?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Hon. Member. There was indeed – not unsurprisingly perhaps – an increase which is due to a subvention for the Association of Paroling Authorities International (APAI). The increase in 2025 is due to the increase in the membership fee for this Association of Paroling Authorities International.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, through you to the Hon. Member, could I take him back to line item 6284, Other? We were discussing the Community Policing Group (CPG). I have two questions for you, Hon. Member: one, could you say how many members of the Community Policing Group are actually 10-day workers; secondly, could you state the hours of work for the 10-day workers for the Community Policing Group? Thank you.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chair, I am not aware... We will have to perhaps find out, if it is of such interest to the Hon. Member – the issues with the 10-day workers. I am not aware of it. We are not responsible for 10-day workers. So, I cannot provide the Hon. Member with an answer on that one.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chair, to the Hon. Member, I have a gentle reminder. Thank you for the response to the first part of the question. The second part of the question is – could you state the hours of work for the Community Policing Group members? Thank you.

Mr. Benn: Hon. Member, thank you. These are voluntary groupings. Persons are available during the day so they may patrol – visit schools, kokers, Government building and other places of interest. There are persons who come out in the evenings, also. They come out and they arrange for the area, basic surveillance for private properties, Government buildings, infrastructure and so on. This is not a *hard and*

fast issue with how much time they spend on it. I could say, we have groupings on the WhatsApp and other places and all night we get reports from the various groups and the areas of their patrols. There are night patrols and persons who are out during the day. I would not say that there is strict accounting of the number of hours they go out – as if they are working all night. They might go out on a two, three or four hours patrol and then another group takes over. It is a voluntary thing.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I am in Estimates of the Public Sector, Volume 2, and these are the policy development indicators. It states that in 2024, no national security policy was updated. The target again for 2025 is one; that being the target every year. I am just asking the Hon. Minister if there has been any attempt to create or prepare a national security policy? If so, how far along is it given everything that is happening with the police? Do not let me say all the words.

Mr. Benn: We have national security policies, and they are under constant review in relation to our security issues. They are not simply related to the Ministry, but they are in association with the other agencies relating to the security architecture of the country.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Under Policy Development and Administration, I have received a complaint from a Special Constable. I did some investigation and found that the females who gave birth during a particular period of their employment, are asked to go home. A year after giving birth, they could then go back to work. Is that a policy of the Guyana Polic Force (GPF)?

Mr. Benn: I do not know that level of detail. I would expect that women who give birth would have time for themselves and their newborn children. I am being told – in fact now – that this is in relation to when they are under training. Nowadays, even the men get paternity leave. I am not too bothered about that.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I have a follow-up, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Chairman: All right, before you follow up, let me just let Members, Ms. Hastings-Willaims and Mr. Henry know that I have them down to call upon after you. Go ahead.

Mr. Henry: Thank you. I am sorry.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Thank you, Mr. Chair. The period in which the woman is sent home for one year, is that paid or unpaid leave?

Mr. Benn: I think once they are in training, get pregnant or come in pregnant, then the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and other issues will come in. I am not sure if they will be paid.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Minister, let me take you back to line item 6284, Other, and the Community Policing Group. Out of the 10,000 members under the Community Policing Group, could the Hon. Minister be kind enough to tell us how many groups he has in Region 7? Could you tell us how many groups are in Upper Mazaruni? How many groups are in the Middle Mazaruni? How many groups are in the Lower Mazaruni? Thank you.

Mr. Benn: We can lay this information over to you. In Region 7 there are 18 groups with 169 Members. If there is interest in Region 8, there are 9 groups with 149 Members. I have called out the numbers for the entire Region 7. I am being given the groups in detail. For Region 7 there are: Batavia, Agatash, Dagg Point, Bartica, Riverview, Foulmouth Creek, Karrau, Itaballi, Kartabo, Wineperu, 72 Miles, Kalakun, Paruima, Kamarang, Waramadong, Arau, Mora Camp and Kaikan. There are 18 groups with 269 Members.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Minister. You have none in the Middle Mazaruni.

Mr. Benn: I hope that you will volunteer for the group when you return to the community.

Mr. Henry: Thank you. The Hon. Minister mentioned that the CPG – this is just a follow up – is a voluntary organisation, so to speak. He then mentioned that some amount or remuneration is given when the members are on official duty. On behalf of the hinterland people, I would like to know how much remuneration is given things such as like night services. There are times when there is castle rusting and the CPG members have to night after night be on horseback doing their work. What form of remuneration is given? Is it an allowance? Is it food items? What is it? If it is an allowance, who do they send their account to and how long does it take for them to get their moneys that they worked for. Thank you.

2.33 p.m.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I know we seem to be going back and forth with the CPGs and then with other things. There is a small stipend paid to the CPG members, specifically when they are on traffic or support duties for the police continuously, and also, in designated areas at the borders, where they have to frequently monitor moving back

and forth across the borders and tracking situations coming off the borders. As it is, there is no policy, except when there are extraordinary circumstances, to support CPG members beyond the voluntary arrangements that they have in place. There are times when they have to move from one area to another. There are times when they have to fly over from one community to the next in pursuit of some issue or the other, and those expenses are covered for.

As I intimated before, we do not have a position where we would seemingly create a situation and not be able to fund the voluntary work of persons and communities that have an ongoing community interest and pay some attention to their own security interests in the communities. The sums would be enormous.

Programme: 511 – Policy Development and Administration – \$1,786,980,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 512 – Guyana Police Force – \$27,603,511,000

Mr. Mahipaul: May I turn the Hon. Minister's attention to line item 6115 that speaks directly to our salaries and benefits for our Police Officers. I want to take the opportunity to say a special 'thank you' to the traffic ranks who would normally line the roadways in the morning hours and afternoon hours, especially on the East Bank and East Coast of Demerara. I think they are doing an exceptional job in assisting with the flow of traffic to make it easier for persons who are using the roadways. Whether it is raining or not, they are there and doing a very good job. I happened to have spoken to a couple of them who do not have the stripe. I think they are constables – if that is the lowest rank, I am not certain – and they indicated to me that their salary is \$130,000 standard. With that exceptional function and duty, they are doing on our roadways, may I ask the Hon. Minister if, in this sum, do we have any amount that caters for probably an honorarium or some form of assistance to complement that \$130,000 they get monthly for their exceptional duties on our roadways which basically amount, what I would consider as, some really additional duties? Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Benn: It might have escaped the Hon. Member's notice that the President himself announced that the lowest-ranked person in these forces would have a basic salary of \$170,000. That will be effective this year. So, you may be quoting a number that is – in the flow of matters – now dated.

Mr. Mahipaul: A follow-up, Sir. Yes, I am guided that it is going to be \$130,000. I am asking if there is any consideration for these additional duties or extra duties or hard duties for these ranks that are on the public roads, rain or sun, wind or no wind, directing traffic and focusing heavily on making it easier for people like the Hon. Minister and myself. Is there any addition to this \$130,000 that could compensate them to cope in this hard time with the high cost of living, *et cetera*?

Mr. Benn: That is the job they have signed up for. When we were young and starting in our jobs, we signed up for similar conditions. When there is need for any risk allowances or extraneous things, they are also provided with meals and so on. They are provided with the requisite gear to be out there with the requisite support. Meals, laundry and all those other things, are the basic things which go for that type of job at the entry level.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you for that answer. Mr. Chairman, may I move to...

Mr. Chairman: You may.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you. I move to line item 6302 – Training (including Scholarships): I see in 2024 we expended a sum of \$250 million, and we are scheduled to expend the same amount in 2025. I have taken note from Volume 2 that:

“12. Number of officers trained during the period.”

You are catering for an increase from 1,586 police officers to 2039 police officers. May I ask the Hon. Minister what are the training sessions that will be incorporated this year, given that we are in an election year?

Mr. Benn: I want to thank the Hon. Gentleman for his interest in this matter. There is a long list of all the types of trainings, including retreat training, which is required. The type and quality of training may vary from year to year. I will say, in respect of the footprint of where training is taking place now, we have an upgraded Guyana Police Force Academy. We are building a training complex at Dora, the Richard Faikall Police College in Essequibo, the other one in Georgetown and in Berbice. They all have been upgraded. There were times when they could not be properly used because they were not repaired when we inherited them. I think it might have more to do with the footprint and the selection of the types of training for this year.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, a follow-up please.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Mr. Mahipaul.

Mr. Mahipaul: The sum there is \$250 million, and in 2024, we spent \$250 million to train 2,076 police officers, both as officers and detectives with reference to Volume 2, Indicators 12 and 13. We are asking this year for the same sum to train 2,801 police officers. Is this sum sufficient to execute the training? More precisely, given that it is an election year there may be need for additional training to support the Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM) in conducting free, fair and credible elections. May I ask if this sum is adequate?

Mr. Benn: I thought I gave the answer before that the type, quality and footprint related to the training and the facilities which we now have and are upgraded and are much better. The quality and delivery in terms of numbers *per* training cohort, is more efficient. That is the suggestion I could give to you in respect of the matter. There is a long and large number. You did say that it is an election year. For that very reason the type of training may be significantly different. The amount which is a proportion here is similar to last year but with a different focus, perhaps.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Chairman, line item 6222.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Mr. Ramjattan: I notice a 120% increase in field materials. Could we get some specifics as to what has caused that increase?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and the Hon. Member for your interest in the matter. There is a question of long, outstanding, and unpaid accounts of some vintage, and we are clearing and cleaning the books in relation to these issues. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Jones: Thank you. Mr. Chairman to the Minister, line item 6284 – Others: Could the Hon. Minister indicate what this line will be used for?

Mr. Benn: With regard to line item 6284, there is an issue of services rendered such as rental of tents, chairs, tables, barriers and field toilets. There are issues related to the Guyana Police Force's (GPF) anniversary celebrations. Even as we are here, we are running an expense on the police accounts in relation to the police being here for the Parliament. There are issues related to GECOM. That is what it is related to. We have a long list: recoupment of standing impress; laundering services; of course – rental of chairs and tables for Gymkhana, police sports, the Guyana Police Force's Annual Police Officers Conference; Sergeants and Inspectors Conference along with state activities; advertisement for auction sales; satellite telephones; mobile

phones, rental of bins; rental of food containers for veterinary services; medical checkup for dogs and horses – you might have an interest in this Hon. Member – rental of barricades and tower lights; engraving of trophies; removal unserviceable vehicles and so on.

Mr. Jones: A quick follow-up. Noting the activities the Hon. Minister indicated that this line will be used for, including the hosting of the Guyana Police Force anniversary, it would be expected that the Guyana Police Force would know the year of their anniversary. We note in 2024, the budgeted sum was just \$450 million, and the revised sum ended at \$2 billion plus dollars.

Mr. Benn: They were unpaid accounts. There were issues related to the Canadian Bank Note for the maintenance of the border control system, the passports and so on. Those accounts had to be cleared out and they were in supplemental to the budget.

2.48 p.m.

Mr. Jones: All right. Just as a last note, you said maintenance of the accounts. By virtue of the term ‘maintenance’, it is expected.

Mr. Benn: Sorry. Maintenance of the systems – the computer systems and so on – for the Border Management System (BMS); the software, and the persons who will come to check and repair the machines that make the passports, or if there is a glitch with the machines. We had a big problem last year, which we are still not completely out of. The machines that print the passports, when they were finished, they were malfunctioning. We had four of those, and then it was down to one. One had to be there 24/7 to print the passports. There was all of that.

Mr. Jones: Noted.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. Minister, a follow-up to the question posed to you by my Colleague, Ganesh Mahipaul. In terms of training, there has been an increased allocation and an increase in the number of ranks and officers you intend to train. I did commend you for this in my Budget Presentation, and I did say that an increased allocation underscores prioritisation. My question is very specific: Could you indicate the number of ranks that will be trained in cybersecurity and transnational crime?

Mr. Benn: I could not say specifically, now, the number of ranks who are on to cyber security. We have a number of our people, both at the Ministry and at the Police Force itself, who are attending courses. I think at the Ministry we have

two persons who are doing bachelor's degrees in cybersecurity. I cannot tell you right now for the whole of it just off the cuff the numbers. However, we will get that for you.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. Minister, I wish to draw your attention to Volume 2, page 232, under Indicators: “Proportion of recommendations from the Guyana Complaints Authority that are implemented”. It states “N/A”. Could that be interpreted to mean that the Police Complaints Authority has made absolutely no recommendation, or is it a case in which you have failed to implement those recommendations?

Mr. Benn: At the moment, we are not, getting complaints from the Authority.

Mr. Duncan: Generous Chairman, on the same line item, I am following up on the Police Complaints Authority's report, where, again, a number of recommendations were made, some to do with training. They talked about officers not being *au fait* with the Constitution and Laws of Guyana. I am wondering how many of those recommendations are going to be implemented. Thank you.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I thank the Hon. Member for... The Police Complaints Authority is not under the direct supervision of the Ministry. We do get information, and persons may come to the Authority while coming to the Ministry in respect of problems they encounter in relation to the police. For those, we pass them on to the police for their attention and follow-up. However, in relation to the specific relationship between us and the Authority, that is not what exists at the moment.

Ms. Ferguson: I know my Colleagues before me did not get responses to their questions, but moving on. May I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6283, Cleaning and Extermination Services. Hon. Member, I note that for 2024, you had an approved sum of \$80 million and then a revised amount of \$131 million. For 2025, you are now requesting \$85 million. Could you say whether this request is sufficient for what is to be done? Also, whether we will see you returning late in the year to the House for additional moneys, taking into account what you would have expended in 2024? Thank you.

Mr. Benn: There were a number of unpaid accounts that came over which we had to make good on. Now that we are, more or less, even in relation to that matter, the amount is the same as last year, which was initially requested. Now that we

have many more new and cleaner police stations, we intend to keep them at that level. The police are bound to make sure that the facilities are kept clean and, also, that the public, when necessary, could have the opportunity to use those facilities in a clean manner.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Line item 6114, Clerical and Office Support: This covers Constables, Lance Corporals, and Corporals. For the year 2024, could the Hon. Minister say how many resignations the force would have received?

Mr. Benn: This line item actually relates to the 10% increase for that category of employees. That is what it is for. The question of how many resignations for this category of employees, how many we have had for 2024, I could not give you that immediately. We do still have situations where people resign, looking for other opportunities or being upset with whatever, but usually, they come back to us asking for re-employment.

Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis: Mr. Chairman, a follow-up. The question is the number of staff. I did not ask about their salary or emoluments or anything. It is 4,966. How many resignations among the Clerical and Office Support, which caters to Constables, Lance Corporals, and Corporals, has the force received in 2024?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I think I indicated that the question the Hon. Member asked was not really related to the line item, which speaks to emoluments for this level or category of employment. However, I have no difficulty in getting and laying over – which is an important question too, I think – the number of persons who may have resigned or come back or whatever. We can do that. No problem with that. However, your question is not related to the line item.

Mr. Jones: Line item 6292, Dietary: We note that, in 2024, the request was \$1.4 billion, revised at \$2,276,334,000. We note the request for 2025 is \$2.1 billion. Noting that this is an election year, in which police officers will have to be in line, would this amount be sufficient? Noting that last year, you expended more, and it was not an election year.

Mr. Benn: Yes. Well, thank you, Hon. Member. Based on the information at hand, the issue of this specific dietary item they were unpaid accounts and those were responded to. We have come back to a level where persons who are detained by the police, the officers, and other ranks of the Police Force, have to be taken care of in terms of dietary requirements.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I turn the Minister's attention to line item 6322, Subsidies and Contributions to Intl. Organisations. I am guided by page 477. I see we are making yearly subsidies and contributions to the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police (ACCP). The sum there is \$1,229,000 for this year, as was last year.

“The Buenos Aires Interpol”

But I see that it says here,

“(Merged with Interpol)”

Then, we also have another line that says

“Interpol”

If Buenos Aires is merged with Interpol, why do we have a sum there of \$6,427,000, and for Interpol we have a sum of \$7,527,000?

Mr. Benn: The fees are split. There is the annual contribution and there is a contribution in relation to subscriptions and information that is related to our being in the Interpol structure fully now.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I understand that the fees are split, and they are split between the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police, and I see... My query is, we have Interpol as a line, and then we have a line above as “Buenos Aires Interpol”, in a bracket “(Merged with Interpol)”. I am trying to understand why there are two separate lines when it is indicating here that Interpol is really merged with Buenos Aires Interpol. I am guided by page 477 of Volume 1, the Guyana Police Force Programme, under the Ministry of Home Affairs, Agency 51. I do not know if it is a typo, and it is reflecting two sums, but there are two separate sums, however, they are telling us it is a merge – page 477.

Mr. Benn: Just a moment, we will try to get the details, but it may be more related to...Do not let me say. Just let us wait a minute. Thank you. I am told, maybe, that it was a typo in the rendering of the information.

3.03 p.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: A follow-up, Sir. If it is a typo, is the sum \$15,183,000 the sum that is associated here and does that mean that the 6,427,000 has to be added to the \$7,527,000 or one of those figures is not supposed to be there? Maybe, I should ask how much money ...

Mr. Benn: I am told that it is altogether \$15 million.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes. That is for the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police, which is \$1,229,000. The other sum that is split in two – \$6 million plus and \$7 million plus – are those two numbers supposed to be merged? Are we paying the \$13 million or \$14 million, thereabout, to one organisation or are we paying two separate sums to two separate organisations?

Mr. Benn: Okay.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, do you need some time to ...

Mr. Benn: They are two different things I am told of. One is the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) and the other one is for the International Association of Criminal Policing.

Mr. Chairman: Do they both total \$15,183,000?

Mr. Benn: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Is the total, correct?

Mr. Benn: Yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: The sum is correct.

Mr. Benn: Yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Mr. Mahipaul. Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, if you want to ask a question, I suggest you go back to your seat and ask from there. Go ahead, Hon. Member Nima Flue-Bess.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. I am checking to see if I should ask the question here. I will ask it, and, if not, it will have to go to the other line item heading. I am looking at Volume 2, and the strategy to prevent and investigate crimes, and then the impact is to have a crime-free and safe society. I also looked at the Indicators that deal with vehicular crimes and stuff like that. I note that there is training or scholarships in line item 6302. I would like the Hon. Minister to say if there is any training done in relation to the use of 'social' drugs, like vapes and all these different things that are popping up in our society, currently.

Mr. Benn: There is also what is called a Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) Programme in the schools, through the Guyana Police Force. The Customs Anti-Narcotic Unit (CANU) is also involved in visiting schools and clubs, along with the Ministry of Human Services and

Social Security in relation to what you are calling 'social' drugs.

Ms. Flue-Bess: A follow-up. We are dealing with the schools. Could the Hon. Minister say if the Police normally raid these businesses that are selling the vapes, for example, the Chinese supermarkets? A child could walk in at any age and pick up a vape for as cheap as \$1,800, \$2,000 or less. You would find that those said items would turn up in the schools. Has the Police been doing raids or is there anything out there to say that this should not be sold to children?

Mr. Benn: This is for the very reason that in relation to school children, through the D.A.R.E. Programme, and in relation to CANU, they go and advise these businesses, to warn them that certain categories or certain items should not be sold to underage persons, by law.

Ms. Flue-Bess: A follow-up.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Flue-Bess: If these businesses do not desist or comply with the instruction given and they continue to sell these said 'social drugs', what steps will be taken to have that corrected?

Mr. Benn: I would say, I am now interested that the Hon. Member, perhaps, has the direct and specific information on this because I think she is a teacher. We will be happy to look more into it. The law will take its course. I expect that, in the schools, if the teachers who supervise children are aware they are using drugs of any kind, they should inform their parents and the police. This is so that further interventions, advice and awareness could be given to them, and investigations would be undertaken and we could get to those persons who are the traffickers, who are providing the drugs to them. The law will take its course. I expect the Hon. Member and her Colleagues in the teaching profession will follow her interest and inform the Police, the CANU, the parents and the Parent-Teachers' Association (PTA) of where this is occurring. I think, since she raised it, we will put a particular flag on the item. It is not that we are not doing work in this regard, but we are challenged by issues, now with the vapes, the synthetic drugs and so on. I think CANU recently put out an advertisement on social media in relation to some pink little things. They are called 'candies'. We are working on this. We will be happy to further engage the Ministries and directly, the schools. The teachers in the schools who are supervising these children, and the parents too, of course.

Ms. Flue-Bess: One last follow-up question.

Mr. Chairman: A follow-up?

Ms. Flue-Bess: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Do you think we are drifting a bit away from the ...

Ms. Flue-Bess: No. It is on the same item.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Flue-Bess: I would first like to make a recommendation. I have never seen a list out there, to say that these are the banned items or whatever, from the CANU that I could quickly go and pick up. I would like to suggest that, when these lists are published, they be sent to the schools so that when there are PTA meetings, the lists could be distributed to parents. I would also make myself available, after this budget, to go to some areas. I am very concerned about vaping. I received a call today, that a primary school child got a vape.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Ms. Flue-Bess, we are drifting away. Unless you had framed it in such a way that says, if I volunteer under this line item, would I be paid a stipend or a fee? You are making a political statement, and I will give the Minister an opportunity to so make. Go ahead, Minister.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. We will be happy to review with the Hon. Member the laws and the list of items which are under purview for sanctioning for their use. The Hon. Member, who is at the tip of the spear in relation to this matter in her classroom, we would be happy to work with her in her school and with the PTA there and, also, with the parents associated, to get on top of this challenge.

Mr. Chairman: Before I take Mr. Duncan, Hon. Members, we have one and a half hours for this head. We have two hours and 10 minutes in savings. If I assume that most of this will be applied here, Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, it means that the head will be taken some time after 5 'o' clock. This is just to let your staff know.

Mr. Duncan: Gracious Chairman, line item 6284: There is a \$600 million there, under Other. The question is whether there are allocations here, perhaps, for more investigations under the Special Organised Crime Unit (SOCU), for instance. I was wondering, from the subject Minister, if there are a number of allegations in the public's sphere. Perhaps, if

the Minister of Housing and Water resigns, how does SOCU initiate an investigation? Would that be covered under the line item here, in terms of funding?

Mr. Chairman: We are looking at a nexus and applying your comments with respect to the Estimates here. Minister, you have an opportunity. I will give you as many opportunities. Once a political statement or an opinion is expressed, I could not help but do the same for you.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I do not think the question raised or the perceptions uttered fall under this line item. Wherever there are matters of interest relating to a criminal or other behaviour, SOCU has the responsibility of opening the necessary files. There are a lot of files which are pending and are under investigation.

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

Mr. Ramjattan: It is in connection with the activities under Programme: 512, Guyana Police Force, Immigration. I notice passport processing is part of it. Do you have the statistics for the passports processed for 2024?

Mr. Benn: Which line item are you referring to, Hon. Member?

Mr. Ramjattan: It is indeed the entire Programme: 512, Guyana Police Force. At page 226, one of the activities of the Guyana Police Force is immigration and passport processing. I just want to find out whether you have the statistics.

Mr. Benn: We do not have the specific number here, but we have no difficulty in providing you with the information.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thanks very much.

Mr. Jones: To the Minister, going back to the Indicators, we note here that the number of murders recorded for 2024 stands at 117. I do not know if this is a mistake, but I note that the Guyana Police Force is saying that their target for the number of persons that will be murdered in 2025 is 105. Is this accurate?

Mr. Benn: I have a listing here of serious crimes for the period 2015 to 2024. In relation to murders or homicides, if I go back to 2015, the number of murders were 149. We have reduced the number of murders for last year to 117. This number is still a horrific number, and relates to horrific things, but it is a dramatic reduction, against 2015. If, now, we are putting forth that under Indicators, it would be about

105 because we expect that there will be more effort – there will be less crimes. That we speak in the Ministry of increasing the peace in Guyana, that... There are attempts at making trend analyses based on the amount of effort, the number of resources which are being put into policing and the work of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, the Ministry of Education and other places, to bring these numbers down.

3.18 p.m.

These numbers are coming down and that is the reality. We need your support too to let us work to bring these numbers down. It could not be that you too would celebrate high numbers in relation to these issues. We suggest that we have established a target based on trend analysis on an input that it could be 105, which is less than last year. That is what we want to work towards. We would be extremely happy if it is less than 100, but this is what we should all want and expect. I would lay over these figures for the Parliament to show that the numbers in all categories, except for a couple, are down.

Mr. Jones: Follow-up, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Minister, we have allocations to the Guyana Police Force, increased numbers – manpower, vehicles, ammunition, you name it. One would expect that, as a result of this investment, the target for murders, if any in 2025, would be something like zero because that is what you are striving to achieve, zero. The fact that the Guyana Police Force has a target for murders at 105, and the number of persons killed by vehicle accidents last year was 122, and this year, they are expecting 80 persons to be killed by vehicle accidents, is this a target that the Police Force would actually set? Instead of putting zero because that is what you are striving to achieve – excellence, but to put that number down there is to say, go murder 105 people, go kill by road accident.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, I see you *chomping at the bit*.

Mr. Benn: We have numbers, we have we facts, we have statistics. I spoke of trend analysis. I said I will lay over the details for all the categories of serious crimes, including the homicides. I will not answer the ridiculous assertion that we should put zero. There is no country in the world which has zero murders. I refuse to answer why we should put zero. I have spoken several times about the low level of discussion and consideration which we bring to this Parliament when we come together.

Programme: 512 - Guyana Police Force – \$27,603,511,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 513 - Guyana Prison Service - \$3,945,660,000

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Hon. Minister, I wish to draw your attention to Volume 2, page 234. I have noted that you intend to parole 10 prisoners. Could you indicate the offences these persons were charged and convicted for?

Mr. Benn: Sorry, Mr. Chairman. Could I ask the Hon. Member to repeat the question? I was distracted.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: That means you are easily distracted, Minister. I have noted in Volume 2, page 234, that you intend to parole 10 persons. I am kindly asking the nature of the offences for which these persons were charged and convicted for.

Mr. Benn: These are more likely minor offences. Yes.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Again, I wish to draw the Hon. Minister's attention to Volume 2, page 234, Officers caught in trafficking of contraband. I wish to draw your attention that, only recently, a prison officer at Mazaruni was charged and convicted for the smuggling of marijuana in the prison. My question to you is, can you indicate what specific measures will be implemented to deter other prison officers? Will there be increased screening or random searches? Will there be additional training and more integrity testing to prevent such incidents?

Mr. Benn: I thank the Hon. Member for her interest in this matter. It is indeed very disappointing, in spite of all the training and in spite of integrity testing and so on, we have these occurrences. We intend to keep up the level of scrutiny searches, which we have at the moment increased. We have had them heightened, which the Prison Service was asked to do. The fact that they have had, more recently, I think two occurrences, including those of civilians who would bring food or things to prisoners, speaks to more interdictions in relation to the trafficking. We are just now installing more scanners at the Mazaruni Prison itself, which will take away the human element related to the matter of the smuggling of things.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: A quick follow-up?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Will these measures be implemented across all the prisons or just at the Mazaruni Prison?

Mr. Benn: At all the prisons.

Mr. Mahipaul: I am looking at Volume 2, and I am seeing under Indicators numbers 16 and 17, “Volume of crop production through Prison’s agriculture programme”, moving from 3,955 to an expectation of 58,000, a huge volume increase. I am also looking at number 17, which speaks to the “Volume of livestock production through Prison’s agriculture programme” moving from 4,263 to 26,000 – huge volume increases. However, when I look at Dietary at 6292, it is showing an increase to \$1,087,750,000, with a staff complement of 509, which is just an increase of four staff members. Why is the Dietary line so heavy when you are projecting to increase your volume of production in agriculture and livestock?

Mr. Benn: There are a number of rollover dietary contracts which have to be set aside. Yes, indeed, the allocations for the amount of poultry, for instance, in terms of the production at the prisons, the ambition is great. We think we have an issue in relation to the variety of food, which is to be provided to the prisoners. We are feeding them better than you used to feed them, Mr. former Minister of Public Security. The fundamental issue is that the prisoners support themselves more and be a part of the rehabilitation with farming and other activities, so we are working with the Ministry of Agriculture. We are putting in shade houses. They are helping us with better care for the cows, the pigs, the sheep, and other items or other livestock that we have out there. The prime focus is for rehabilitation and for them to be more in a position to feed themselves. In terms of the amounts, there are some not liquidated as yet or satisfied issues which we have to clear up.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Ramjattan: I have something here; it is in connection with this line item 6243. I do not know if it was a mistake. I noticed that last year, the revised 2024 was \$14 million, after we had \$118 million, and it had gone back to \$118 million. What caused that reduction there? Is that a mistake?

Mr. Chairman: We could not hear you...

Mr. Ramjattan: Line item 6243 – Janitorial and Cleaning Supplies: Last year revised was \$14 million and it has jumped in 2025 to \$118 million.

Mr. Benn: We were unable because of some delays to make payments in relation to last year and so the amount is still basically the same as for last year on an annual basis, as budgeted – \$118 million.

Mr. Jones: I would like to take the Minister to the Indicators number 14, “Number of prison officers caught in trafficking contraband in prisons”. In 2024, it was listed as zero; in 2025 it is listed as zero. But we have two prison officers in 2024 who were charged for smuggling contraband into the prison. Is this a mistake on the part of the Indicators, or is this accurate? This was carried by the *Guyana Times*.

Mr. Benn: The fact is that it was after a revision but in any event, I think that beyond maybe not matching up with the particular statistic at this time, we should celebrate the fact that the movement of drugs into the prison by the trusted officers that we have found it and that we will continue to find it as necessary.

Mr. Jones: Just a quick follow-up: Could the Hon. Minister indicate when these two prison officers were charged?

Mr. Benn: I believe they were charged and are already in prison.

Mr. Jones: What month was it? That is what I am trying to get. We know the year but which month?

Mr. Benn: We had one this month and there was one last month. They are already both in prison.

Programme: 513 – Guyana Prison Service – \$3,945,660,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 515 - Guyana Fire Service - \$3,112,673,000

Mr. Chairman: The Fire Chief and his staff are coming to assist. I have the Hon. Members, Mr. Ramjattan and Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond – Mr. Ramjattan first.

Mr. Ramjattan: Line item 6293, I noticed Refreshments and Meals, a regular \$12 million or \$11 million, but budgeted this year is \$113 million. Is there something exceptional about this year? There is \$100 million more. Line item 6293 – Refreshments and Meals.

3.33 p.m.

Mr. Benn: I think out of the severe stress we had last year and the need to make sure that our people responding to fires are indeed provided with meals, that while on the fire grounds, they have replenishment of electrolytes in their

systems – because we have had situations... [Mr. Mahipaul: Coconut water.] ...coconut water or Gatorade because we have had many instances of fire persons collapsing as a result of their efforts, and the ambulance is always pressed into the service at these fires. There is a response given to the fact that there is an increase in the number of fire persons and an increase in the number of persons who are going to be trained as firemen and women this year.

Mr. Ramjattan: So, are we anticipating, Mr. Chairman, through you, some more fires this year?

Mr. Benn: The responsibility we have is to be prepared. In being prepared, the Hon. Member may have noted that we have acquired for the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) throughout the country 40 or more fire pickup trucks, new pickup trucks, a new tall ladder crane to get to the top of buildings, a telescopic boom crane, another fire boat and all kinds of specialised equipment for fire. We want to be ready and prepared. We have had more people dying as a result of fires. We have had more cars catching fire because people are adding more electric and electronic things to their cars. I think, even this morning, the fire people were out trying to rescue somebody where there was a big smash-up with two trucks and a car. I would say, over the period, there was a need for us to have this response and more effort put into fire prevention. We are having more buildings, and we need to have a response. We want to be ready, and we do not want to leave it to chance.

Ms. Chandan-Edmond: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The Minister has actually answered the question I was going to ask. I was interested in the specific allocation for training in dealing with industrial fires and high-rise building fires.

Mr. Chairman: Industrial fires? I know you addressed high rise. Minister? Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, proceed

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, if I can turn his attention to line item 6242 – Maintenance of Buildings. Regarding the allocations that you are requesting for 2025, Hon. Member, can you say whether some portion of it will go towards the old fire station headquarters down in Stabroek?

Mr. Benn: No. The old fire premises at Stabroek have been converted temporarily into a substation for the Brickdam Police Station. Some patrol officers and others are actually

in occupancy there. The marine unit for the fire service still uses a portion of those buildings.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay. Follow-up to the Hon. Member, Mr. Chairman. Can you say, at the end of the construction of the Brickdam Police Station, whether these officers will be relocated or reassigned to the new structure in Brickdam? For future use of the building, what do you intend to do with the building when it is given up?

Mr. Benn: Well, the fire persons who are related to marine firefighting will still be in the building, and there could continue to be multiple uses of that building by the security persons and others.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. The Hon. Member foresees you staying there for quite some time.

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, let me join in saluting our firefighters for the good job that they are doing to fight fires in our country. They are risking their lives, and we on this side salute them for that. Sir, may I turn the Hon. Minister's attention to line item 6261 – Local Travel and Subsistence? Sir, the Hon. Minister was kind enough to say to us that they are procuring fire tenders for our Neighbourhood Democratic Councils, and they are basically laying the foundation for a first responder to these fires in these far-flung regions, especially. I am also aware of firefighters or civilians being trained in firefighting, and they contribute to firefighting, especially in places like Port Kaituma and so on. I see, Sir, from this line item, there is a whopping increase – if I may use that word – from \$32,601,000, which was spent in 2024 for local travel and subsistence. Mind you, Sir, the budgeted sum was \$31,100,000, and \$32,600,000 was spent. I see this increase to \$135,000,000. If there is this decentralisation, so to speak, and empowering people within communities to fight fires, why do we need to have so much money for local travel and subsistence?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It would appear obvious to me that if we have more firefighting units in the NDCs and the footprint is practically still at a nascent stage, but throughout the country, issues relating to their support, the travel related to it and so on will increase. We did not have the number of units and positions before. We have more now, and they are more far-flung, and they have to have technical support. A number of the firefighters were in contact with our firefighting colleagues in Brazil, Boa Vista, and there was an exchange of visits. There was also a meeting of the Caribbean Association of Firefighters held in

Guyana last year. We hosted it for the first time. We had people from Cayenne, Suriname and several Caribbean countries. Those persons had to make visits and be supported. We can no longer fight fires as if we could set up a bucket brigade to put out fires. The visits, the training, the professional expertise, the exchange of knowledge and so on have to be there and have to be at a high level in relation to this matter.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, may I turn the attention of the Hon. Minister to page 236 of Volume 2? I see that under the number of buildings that will be inspected for the Government, you have 426, which was done in 2024, but you have 'to be determined' for 2025. My concern, Sir, is with the dormitories across the country. We know we had an unfortunate incident at Mahdia, and I am asking if the Hon. Minister intends, through the Guyana Fire Service, to visit all the dormitories that currently exist in our country to assess whether they are in keeping with fire standards and so on. Outside of the dormitories, for buildings that are housing a lot of people, would the fire service be visiting them to do an assessment and make recommendations, hopefully for implementation, to avoid a repeat of the Mahdia inferno?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member. We have done 16 of these buildings already. They are supposed to be visited and checked for maintenance of fire protection standards on a quarterly basis. There should be no doubt that we will be doing and continuing a large number of these inspections and visits this year.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. A follow-up. The Hon. Minister was kind enough to say that 16 buildings had already been visited. Is that 16 dormitories you are telling us about?

Mr. Benn: It is Government buildings, including dormitories.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask how many dormitories were visited?

Mr. Benn: We do not have it at the moment, but we will get it to you.

Mr. Mahipaul: Okay. Thank you for getting it to us. May I ask if all the dormitories that were visited are fully compliant with the standards that the Guyana Fire Service look for, recommends, or would like to see them to be? Are all the dormitories in keeping with those standards?

Mr. Benn: Based on the last visits, yes. There may be instances where they visit a dormitory and they do not have certain things in place or kept properly, and the fire service at that place is supposed to make good on that.

Mr. Mahipaul: I did not get the last part, Sir. The fire service...

Mr. Benn: If we put a fire extinguisher or a couple of fireballs in a dormitory and, on inspection, those things are not there, the fire service has to put those things in place.

Mr. Mahipaul: Has to put it back.

Mr. Benn: Yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: Okay. Thank you very much, Sir.

Programme: 515 – Guyana Fire Service – \$3,112,673,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 516 – General Register Office – \$331,196,000

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. I am looking at the staffing details, and I note that it was 93 for 2024 and the same for 2025. When I look at Volume 2 indicators:

“Number of staff trained”

I noticed that there are 98 listed. My question is: Are there vacancies currently existing in the organisation?

Mr. Benn: I cannot say specifically whether there are vacancies. I know that, from time to time, there are vacancies, and we replace those persons fairly regularly when the need arises, but I cannot immediately say that there are... I am hearing that we lost three staff over the holidays, so we will replace them.

Ms. Flue-Bess: Thank you, Cde. Chairman. I am looking at Volume 2 with the indicators. Number 11:

“Average number of days taken to issue a birth certificate from date of application”

3.48 p.m.

And the same goes for the application for a marriage certificate. It will take about three days. I know there is information here stating that you are computerising records and stuff like that. Is there any plan in the future or in place to issue birth certificates when persons bring in their application forms? The reason for my asking this specific

question is that I know when you go to the Georgetown Hospital, you do the registration of births and deaths... I am wondering why we do not have a computerised system there that could have the certificate prepared, signed and given to the person who took in the application.

Mr. Benn: I know there is a big project for the digitalisation of all Government services. Beyond that, there is the issue at the time of the birth of the child and the need to issue a certificate as to whether there are any apprehensions, questions or willingness of persons to give their names, the males, that is, as to being the father of the child. Some time is accorded to allow that to happen clearly before you have problems later in respect of that. The law says 14 days to allow the fathers to make up their minds.

Mr. Chairman: Not 14 years – 14 days.

Ms. Flue-Bess: A follow-up on this. I have another question in terms of computerising the system: Is there any plan in place, or is there a department where our youths who are technologically savvy can get part-time employment to assist in updating and computerising the system?

Mr. Benn: The Ministry has an Information Technology (IT) technical unit, and there are a number of people who work in that unit who are all young, I might say. In addition, there are statistical clerks in various police stations who are also young and involved in IT support, information architecture, servicing and so on.

Mr. Mahipaul: My first question has to do with the number of staff trained. In 2024, we see that they trained 98 staff in this programme, but the staffing details reflect 93 staff. For 2025, we are also seeing that there is a reflection of 93 staff but an intention to train 98 staff. May we have some clarification on that first, Sir?

Mr. Benn: All persons have to be trained; there is also recurring training, and if you lose some, you might have to add some for fresh training. Of course, if you bring in some fresh hires, they have to be trained too.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I turn my attention to the number of applications processed. It was in the public space where the Minister spoke about several Venezuelans being Guyanese by descent. May I ask the Hon. Minister how many certificates to show that they are citizens by descent were processed in the years 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024?

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

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: Let us best place as a question to the Minister...Remember, we are dealing with the *Budget 2025* and questions pertaining to the allocation of the funds herein.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much for your guidance, as usual, Sir. From the allocated sum for the programme 516, how many certificates to show citizens by descent are expected to be processed in 2025?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, that is a number we cannot determine; it is based on the persons, how they register and how they apply.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, may I have a follow-up?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: Are there applications in the system that are yet to be processed and will they be processed in 2025? May we know that number, Sir?

Mr. Benn: Based on verifications, they will be processed in 2025.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, through you, can you provide a number?

Mr. Benn: Not immediately, but we can.

Mr. Mahipaul: You can. Sir, may I have a further follow-up? In the public space, it was uttered by the Hon. Minister that there are somewhere around 40,000 or thereabout Venezuelans in Guyana. I may be wrong in terms of my figure, but of that number, can the Hon. Minister, whilst providing that information for 2025, tell us the total number?

Mr. Chairman: We are dealing with Venezuelans in Guyana.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, who are being processed as citizens by descent. Could the Hon. Minister provide that information in terms of the total number processed for citizens by descent?

Mr. Chairman: Again, that is another question for questions to the Minister, but if you want to ask him...

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, he said he will provide it.

Mr. Benn: We will provide a number.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Rev, a pleasant afternoon to you.

Mr. Chairman: And to you, too.

Ms. Ferguson: No, I am speaking to Rev; I am just saying good afternoon to him.

Mr. Chairman: You know, I always invite Members who want to speak directly to each other to go outside.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay, Sir. Can I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6241, Rental of Buildings? I note we have an increase from 2024 to 2025. Can the Hon. Minister explain the reason for the increase, and say where exactly these buildings are? Thank you very much.

Mr. Chairman: Minister, where exactly is this building for this whopping increase of a few hundred thousand dollars?

Mr. Benn: This is for the Guyana Post Office (GPO) building, where the General Register Office (GRO) is, and they requested an increase.

Ms. Ferguson: A follow-up. I am so happy that at least the Guyana Post Office Corporation is gaining some revenue, some well-deserved revenue from this allocation.

Mr. Chairman: Looks like \$50,000 more a month. Hon. Minister Benn, we have a lot of time remaining because we saved over two hours and right now, we have exhausted only 30 minutes of 131 minutes; we have another 100 minutes to go. Go ahead, Minister, please. Would you like a break?

Mr. Benn: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Chairman: Sure.

Mr. Benn: Five minutes.

Mr. Chairman: Let the Assembly resume.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: We will take a short suspension of 10 minutes. I am not moving from here.

Sitting suspended at 3.58 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 4.10 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members, please be seated. The House will resolve itself into Committee of Supply to continue the consideration of the estimates. We left at programme 516 - GRO.

Assembly in Committee of Supply.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, a follow-up to my earlier question to the Hon. Member. I just want to ask the Hon. Member whether any consideration is given for a collaboration between the Guyana Post Office Corporation and perhaps the Ministry of Home Affairs to rectify the elevator there. It has been out of commission for years, and you have elderly persons who turn up there on a daily basis to have their birth or death certificate processed. What consideration can be given? I know *Budget 2025* may not allow for that, but has any thought been given to the idea, for the future, of having that lift repaired?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, do you have to consult with the Hon. Bishop Juan Edghill?

Mr. Benn: I want to thank the Hon. Member for what is indeed a valid concern, which we are very much aware of and concerned about too. We have had visits by service providers in terms of the equipment needed to replace the elevator. I think we have to work not simply with Public Works but with the Office of the Prime Minister to get this done and to access the funding to do this. However, it is a pressing issue.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, if I can make this pitch. That lift has been out of commission since I was an employee with the Guyana Post Office Corporation as its Property Manager. The good Bishop can tell you that.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Any derelictions of duty of the former Property Manager will be fixed in this new period.

Mr. Chairman: I have been hearing that familiar cry – you did not maintain.

Programme: 516 – General Register Office – \$331,196,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 517 – Customs Anti Narcotics – \$740,163,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Chairman, I turn your attention to line item 6241, Rental of Buildings. May I ask if this is to rent buildings outside of the primary location here in Georgetown, or is it to pay for rental for that building?

Mr. Benn: These are for buildings in the regions in outlying areas, and a couple of them for intelligence purposes in Georgetown.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask a follow-up? Is the building that is in central Georgetown owned by the agency or the programme that we are considering at this point?

Mr. Benn: It is a Government building, but the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU) has outgrown its space and footprint.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you. I am guessing that in terms of Maintenance of Buildings - 6242, that will be going towards the building that is owned by the Government. For 6255 – Maintenance of Other Infrastructure, may I ask the Hon. Minister what are the other infrastructure for maintenance?

Mr. Benn: There is a small sum at Onderneeming. There are persons there, and the living quarters and fence have to be fixed up.

4.16 p.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: So, that building that we are talking about is owned by the Government – the one in Onderneeming, Region Two.

Mr. Benn: Yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. Line item 6116 – Contracted Employees: I know that there are no staffing details, and for obvious purposes. May I ask the Hon. Minister what the salary is of the lowest-paid employee under this programme and the benefits for that employee?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member. These are the Intelligence Officers at the technical level – \$434,566.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, may I have a follow-up?

Mr. Benn: No. I am sorry. It is indeed for an Intelligence Officer – \$200,620.

Mr. Mahipaul: It is \$200,620. Sir, may I ask the Hon. Minister what the salary is of the highest paid officer under this programme?

Mr. Benn: It is just over \$1 million.

Mr. Mahipaul: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Let me take the opportunity to thank the staff at the Customs and Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU), also, who I believe are doing a very good job.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Minister turn with me to line item 6264, Vehicle Spares and Service? Minister, you have been

spending over \$20 million on vehicle spares and service. Could you kindly say what your fleet is and the oldest vehicle you have? How many old vehicles do you have that are using up this money?

Mr. Benn: The CANU has something in the order of 22 serviceable vehicles. We did get some from the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA), which are older but fulfil the purpose of being used for intelligence purposes. Beyond that, the need for vehicles and other assets has to be matched with the terrain where the operations are underway. These are at the borders, in the forest and in places where no one usually goes.

Ms. Ferguson: Under line item 6302, Training (including Scholarships), the questions to the Hon. Minister are: Is any specialised training programme being provided to improve CANU's intelligence and enforcement capabilities? Also, are there any international partnerships or training programmes for this year?

Mr. Benn: Thank you to the Hon. Member for the question. There is a wide range of training which is undertaken and necessary for CANU's operations. Of course, there are the basic narcotics investigation courses. There is training in intelligence gathering and analysis. There is training in cybercrime investigations. There are issues in relation to public seminars and speaking presentations of the type for intelligence operatives. Naturally, there is also training in relation to the use of weapons. There is in-house training which also deals with CANU and its associates. There is training for emotion management and crisis intervention. There is training in first aid collateral. There is also training in the use of boats and engines, and so on. I think we just finished a drone training at which I gave some remarks a couple of days ago. We work with the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the French, Surinamese, Brazilians, Colombians, the Regional Security System (RSS), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Implementation Agency for Crime and Security (IMPACS) and many more.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Hon. Member, for your response. Mr. Chairman, through you, may I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6294, Other? I note that for this year, 2025, you have an allocation of some \$40.3 million. Could you indicate the amount of funding under this line item that will be used for training in the procurement of surveillance, body cameras and drug detection tools?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Hon. Member. This is for the – and it is not enough – support for additional operations in the regions and the purchase of materials in places which are being rented or used out of town. There are issues of confidential information and conducting special operations. I want to emphasise that we are always looking for support from our international partners in relation to these matters. There are a large number of activities and issues which have to be supported under this ‘Other’ line item.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Sir, I have two more questions under this agency that we are examining at the moment. I turn the Hon. Member’s attention to page 240 of the Estimates of the Public Sector, Volume 2. Under indicators, the question that I want to put to you, Hon. Member, is: Can you confirm that all the officers passed the integrity test? If not all, could you indicate what actions will be taken against those who failed the integrity test?

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Hon. Member. Naturally, if on recruitment, one fails such a test, one is not accepted. During the course of one’s operations, if there is a happenstance, one is out. There is also drug testing, and if one fails at that level or stage, one is out. That is what it is.

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much to the Hon. Minister. On the very page 240 of Volume 2 of the Estimates of the Public Sector, under Impacts, as it relates to strengthening capacity to tackle the narcotic drug trade, could the Hon. Member indicate what measures are being taken to strengthen border security, particularly to prevent the inflow of narcotics, whether at ports or land crossings? Thank you.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Hon. Member. In the first instance, there is a great degree of collaboration being undertaken with our friendly neighbours who have a vested interest in stopping this trade, not necessarily our immediate neighbours, but those who are further afield. We spoke about the collaboration with our Caribbean colleagues and their agencies. We made the point that given the fact that the drug trade, this illegal set of activities, is imposing a lot of stress on the country at large, and the fact that Guyana is an in-transit place...The drugs do not come here; Guyana is not the marketplace. We do not use drugs to that level, Mr. Mahipaul. The drugs are mostly on the way to North America and Europe through West Africa and other places. It is a big challenge, and we need to put more resources into it. This is what we are doing: we are putting in more mobile and other scanners at the ports; we are heightening the

activities and operations of our agents; and we are getting more collaboration with the police officers and persons in the society who do not want this type of trade to be continued. Of course, we have the issue of the radar coverage over southern Guyana, where there is a big gap – a big absence. We work with international partners to get information for transit over Guyana, particularly. We need all the support. We need more support, and that is what we have been impressing on those persons from countries which are the marketplaces for drugs.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I now put the question that the sum stated...

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I have one other question with your permission.

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

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. In Volume 2, the CANU does not deal only with drugs; it deals with contraband items too. May I ask the Hon. Minister what happens to these contraband items when they are seized? What do we do with them? I understand that we get rid of the drugs. I know there was a boat somewhere on Homestretch Avenue where they would destroy these. For contraband chicken, alcohol and other items which come into the country and are seized, what happens to them, Sir?

Mr. Benn: I thank the Hon. Member for his intervention in this matter, Mr. Chairman. It is true to say that the CANU is making a big impact, like the police are doing in relation to the seizure of firearms. That is one important thing – firearms and ammunition. In relation to specific contrabands – whether it is alcohol – those are handed over to the GRA. You mentioned chicken. Now and again, there is a chicken seizure. The GRA would give the chicken to the prisons for use by the prisoners or the hospitals. For the alcohol and so on, I think these are sold at auctions sometime or the other.

Programme: 517 – Customs Anti-Narcotics – \$740,163,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 511 – Policy Development and Administration – \$438,310,000

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I now put the question that the sum stated for Programme 511, Capital...

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, excuse me. I am sorry. Sir, at project code 1216600, Buildings, I see it states here:

“Provision for buildings.”

4.31 p.m.

The Legend takes me to page 241. All I see there is improved facilities for a sum of \$370,310,000. Under this Programme, Policy Development and Administration, there is one building at Brickdam. I am assuming the Hon. Minister would clarify. Could the Hon. Minister tell us what work is expected to be done there under capital project?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman and Hon. Member, these are for works being done directly through the Ministry to the sum of \$370 million. The Brickdam Police Station is not in this sum. That is a much larger sum.

Mr. Mahipaul: No. Of course, that would be under the Guyana Police Force.

Mr. Benn: There is a reconstruction of a juvenile holding centre for \$125 million odd. There is a construction of a transitional centre for persons who would be held by the Trafficking in Persons (TIPs) Unit. We will be putting up a building where they could be kept in transition and this is at Cummings Lodge. Of course, there is the construction of the new administrative building for the Customs Anti-Narcotic Unit (CANU). There is construction of the trade shops at lot one in Onderneeming at the New Opportunity Corps (NOC) and lot two for \$32 million. There would be a vocational training centre, not simply for the few juveniles we have there but also for the persons on the Essequibo Coast, and that will be linked to the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme. There is construction of a guard hut and other ancillaries at the Trafficking in Persons building; there is some work on the rehabilitation of the external walls at the Ministry which are in very poor shape. There is a fire escape and a cargo lift at the Forensic Sciences building. The same thing at the Ministry of Home Affairs itself. There is the rehabilitation of the Citizen Security Strengthening Programme (CSSP) building at Ogle, for the accounts department a small sum will be accorded there to do some fixing up for the accounts people and that will be a rollover.

Mr. Ramjattan: Mr. Chairman, this has to do with a critique that I have constantly made. We do have under the Financial Management and Accountability Act (FMAA) that whenever there are the details of capital expenditure, provision of buildings... Check profile page 241. I want to

know exactly – as the Minister just answered an oral question which was asked – why was that not put in the Legend so that we can see the transparency, rather than the circularity of it, which is contrary to what the Financial Management and Accountability Act states? It does not do us any well for transparency when all those lovely projects he has are not put in the project profile document. I am urging this because this is constantly happening. I do not want to go back to when we used to have it, like putting up a police station in Morawhanna and you have it here in the project profile. All we have here is that the project entails:

“Provision for buildings.”

It does not help. Could you please get your act together in accordance with our Fiscal Management and Accountability Act?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Chairman, I am not sure that this matter is directed to us. The Ministry of Finance could account or answer for it. If there is any adjustment to be made, it can be made. Every building, every reconstruction, every repair and so on, we have designs, we have estimates and we have signing off on them. If you are directing it to me, we have all the management and accountability issues detailed on our site. If it is a question of paperwork and assignment in the documents, that could be fixed up later.

Programme: 511 – Policy Development and Administration – \$438,310,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 512 – Guyana Police Force – \$6,790,000,000

Ms. Ferguson: Through you, Sir, to the Hon. Minister, under project code 1216800, Police Stations and Buildings, I note we have a provision here of some \$4.2 billion for 2025, but when I go to the actual project profile on page 244, the project entails provisions for buildings. Perhaps, the Hon. Member could lay over, if needs be, the list of police stations currently under construction that this \$4 billion will cater for. I do not know if the Minister would like to share that information with us now or if he is willing to lay it over.

Mr. Benn: I want to thank the Hon. Member for drawing our specific attention to the new police stations. I do not know if the Hon. Member would be in a position or if this will cheer or warm the heart of the former Minister of Public Security. We are doing – I am not going to the other issues we have. – reconstruction of a new Bonasika Police Outpost; reconstruction of the Leguan Police Station; renovation of Turkeyen Police Station; reconstruction of Number 10 Police

Outpost; and renovation of Mora Point Police Outpost. We are also doing the stables at Number 27 Police Outpost; we are constructing range houses for the Commander and Deputy Commander at Mahdia; we are doing the kennels, of course, at the Guyana Police Force Mounted Branch; we are reconstructing the Ituni Police Station, also the Kwakwani Police Station and the Mabura Police Station; we are doing a boathouse at Ruimveldt; we are renovating the main administration building at Eve Leary, which practically means redoing the building; and, the rehabilitation of the Commander's living quarters at Leonora.

Ms. Ferguson: I have a follow-up, Sir. I thank the Hon. Minister for providing the information though he did not provide the cost associated with each project. I recall it might have been in the 2023 or 2024 Budget, I did make a request for some attention to be given to the Alberttown Police Station, so that is one. I am really, really unhappy that Alberttown Police Station is not listed to get some much-deserved attention from this \$4 billion allocation here in 2025. Outside of that Hon. Minister, I have noticed, even before *Budget 2025*...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, let us confine ourselves to the allocation. The question you should ask 'Is Alberttown listed here again?'.

Mr. Benn: No. Could I clarify?

Mr. Chairman: We are getting some speeches rather than the questions. While we have time, I do not think we should sit here and listen to these speeches. Let us stick to the question. I am just, once again, reminding the Hon. Member how to ask a question.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Are you asking the Minister if Alberttown is listed here?

Ms. Ferguson: Yes. I will rephrase the question. Could the Hon. Member state whether Alberttown is listed to benefit from the \$4.1 billion allocation for 2025?

Mr. Benn: Indeed, a contract was signed for the reconstruction of the Alberttown Police Station last year and the Fire Station. It is a joint thing there.

Ms. Ferguson: Since the contract was signed for the renovation of the Alberttown Police Station and the Fire Station, could you say what is the contract sum?

Mr. Benn: The contract for the Alberttown Police Station/Fire Station was signed last year to the amount of \$377 million.

Ms. Ferguson: Could you say exactly which day in last year the contract was signed? When will we have a start date of the actual project and that of an end date? Thank you.

Mr. Benn: The start date beyond some ancillary work which has been done should be just now. There is the movement of some ranks from the Kitty Police Station. The Kitty Police Station will be finished and a number of ranks from the Alberttown Police Station will be moved over to the Kitty Police Station. They are a little tight. Then, Alberttown will fully commence in terms of reconstruction.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member did not answer the first part of the question. Earlier, he stated that the contract was signed last year 2024. My question to the Hon. Member again, could he say when that contract was signed?

Mr. Benn: It was signed in December. As I said, work has already started on the ancillary preparations, removals and so on.

Ms. Ferguson: A follow up: could you say to whom the contract has been awarded to?

Mr. Benn: It was awarded through public tendering to Kawal Ramdeen General Construction and Office Furnishing.

Ms. Ferguson: Could the Hon. Member state, in the provision of \$4.1 billion sought here, whether there are provisions here for the East Ruimveldt Police Station? I noticed some work commenced there.

Mr. Benn: I do not know if the Hon. Member meant the East La Penitence Police Station.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes. Sorry. It is the East La Penitence Police Station.

Mr. Benn: That work has already started.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes. Mr. Chairman, just for clarification, I am asking you, Hon. Minister, whether – I note that some of the work have started; the foundation is being done. – from this \$4.1 billion, you have provisions in here for the East La Penitence Police Station? If so, what is the amount going towards that? As the Minister prepares to respond, could he

say if it is an extension? It is a new wing being constructed at the East La Penitence Police Station. Thank you.

4.46 p.m.

Mr. Benn: For the East La Penitence Police Station, the reconstruction work has started and it is \$68.2 million for this year.

Mr. Mahipaul: From this allocation, is there consideration for better buildings for our police officers along the Mandela to Eccles and Eccles to Diamond Highway? We see those police officers being housed in a makeshift – those containers sort of temporary building.

Mr. Benn: There is a new police station at Farm. There are some mobile or movable outpost positions on the highway, which would have to be kept for operational response in relation to traffic and other management.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, may I ask the Hon. Minister for an update on the Brickdam Police Station – the status at which it is? Is it within its time frame to be completed as the date expected?

Mr. Benn: For Brickdam Police Station, the foundation has been completed. The steel erections for the first five floors are right now in place. They have cast up to the third floor and some stairwells, I think, are being put in place. The progress is 20%.

Programme: 512 – Guyana Police Force – \$6,790,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 513 – Guyana Prison Service – \$2,260,938,000

Programme: 513 – Guyana Prison Service – \$2,260,938,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 515 – Guyana Fire Service – \$2,570,305,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Project code 1220400 – \$1,089,905,000: the description states that it caters to:

“fire stations, living quarters, reservoir, fuel storage facilities and bond.”

May I ask the Hon. Minister...

Mr. Benn: I think we are at Guyana Prison Service.

Mr. Mahipaul: No, Guyana Prison Service was just put. You over there are not paying attention. Guyana Prison

Service was put and we are at the Guyana Fire Service. Sir, am I not correct?

Mr. Chairman: We are at Guyana Fire Service.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, very much, Sir. I know I am correct. I always pay attention. Sir, it states here:

“...fire stations, living quarters, reservoir, fuel storage facilities and bond.”

Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to please disaggregate this sum and specify where these fire stations will be constructed?

Mr. Benn: We have rollover projects continuing at Wisroc, Diamond, Campbellville, Charity, Soesdyke, Parika, living quarters at New Amsterdam, Onderneeming, Mahaicony Fire Station and officers living quarters at Wisroc. In respect of new: we have the construction of a fire station at Tarlogie on the Corentyne; the construction of a satellite fire station at the Timehri Aerodrome; the construction of a reservoir at the Lethem Fire Station; and the construction of a reservoir at the Mabaruma Fire Station. Then, there are officers' residences to be put in place at Mahdia and Lethem. There are fuel storage facilities to be put in place. There is the construction of storage bonds for lubes with underground tanks. There is the reconstruction of the Chief Fire Officer's residence. A reconstruction of the West Ruimveldt Fire Station; construction of the equipment bay at La Grange Fire Station; a reconstruction of the officers' quarters at the Linden Fire Station; and an extension and upgrading of the training facility building at Leonora.

Mr. Mahipaul: A Follow up: May I ask the Hon. Minister, all the projects that we have there listed as rollovers, are they 50% or more completed or are they projects that are below 50% completed?

Mr. Benn: Rollovers: at Wisroc, we are 72% completed; at Diamond, we are 10%; on reconstructing the Campbellville Fire Station, we are at 2%; on the reconstruction of the Charity Fire Station, we are at 80%; at Soesdyke, we are 28%; at Parika, we are at 20%; at the living quarters at New Amsterdam, we are 30%; at Onderneeming, we just started and we are just at 1% mobilisation, and at Mahaicony, similarly; and at the officers' living quarters at Wisroc, we are at 23%.

Programme: 515 – Guyana Fire Service – \$2,570,305,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 516 – General Register Office – \$ 14,000,000

Programme: 516 – General Register Office – \$ 14,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 517 – Customs Anti Narcotics – \$300,000,000

Mr. Mahipaul: Project code 2609200 – Customs Anti Narcotics Unit: the sum is \$300 million. The project entails buildings, furniture and equipment. I am seeing “buildings”. I am assuming that there is more than one building that we will be constructing. May I ask the Hon. Minister the sum associated with buildings? Where will these buildings be? Also, for the purchasing of furniture and equipment, is it to complement the buildings when they are completed for operations?

Mr. Benn: There was a rollover extension at Homestretch Avenue. This is in relation to the Customs Anti-Narcotics Unit (CANU) Complex, which we are putting down. The construction of the main building will include an administration building, an investigation and legal processing building, an operations building, and barracks for a total of \$220 million. Those are the building-related items under this activity.

Mr. Mahipaul: The furniture and equipment, Sir – will they be complementing the building to bring it into operation?

Mr. Benn: Of course, yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Hon. Minister and his staff.

Programme: 517 – Customs Anti Narcotics – \$300,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister, Permanent Secretary (PS) and staff for taking us through your agency. Let us invite the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service and the staff of the Ministry of the Public Service to join him. We are going through; we are not taking a break. Hon. Members, let us turn to pages 122 and 123.

Agency: 14 Ministry of Public Service**Current Expenditure****Programme: 141 – Policy Development and Administration – \$189,188,000**

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Good afternoon, to the Hon. Minister and his staff. Let us start with *Volume 2* on page 96. Mr. Chairman, in 2023, the target for policies to be developed in 2024 was four, but the Indicators only stated one policy was developed. Then, we have here again, in 2024, that one policy was developed and there is a target for four in 2025. Could the Hon. Minister please inform this Committee which policy was developed and what policies they intend to develop in 2025?

Dr. Singh: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman, and obviously, thank you very much to the Hon. Member for the question that has been posed. Work has actually been ongoing on developing policies in a number of areas, some of which I suspect the Hon. Member might be familiar with. In relation to the conclusion of specific policies, one, as is indicated, is at a very advanced stage of conclusion. That is the *Public Service Employee Handbook*. We have policies in a number of other areas that work is ongoing on, including in such areas as training and scholarships. The Hon. Member would note, too, that there is ongoing work on the *Public Service Rules* and there are other areas as well, including things such as information technology (IT) and cyber security, *et cetera*.

5.01 p.m.

The short answer is, we have essentially concluded the work on the *Public Service Employee Handbook* and work is ongoing on a number of other areas that we anticipated should see us achieving this fore by the end of 2025.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: The second strategy in *Volume II* speaks to determined emoluments packages for the Public Sector. Given that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Minister of the Public Service is now one person, could the Hon. Minister indicate whether the issue of the length of time Public Servants have to wait to receive their first salary is anywhere resolved?

Dr. Singh: This in fact is a vexing issue. It has been around for some time. I think I have said before or I believe I may have said it here last year, there is no justifiable reason necessity for people to have to wait for extended periods to receive their first pay. If the process of onboarding an employee works the way that it should, the most the employee should have to wait is essentially one pay cycle, which is a month. We have found, in practise, people are told to assume duty, even in advance of approval being granted for their employment. That then results in them having to wait longer than they should. I am aware that we

have used all manner of persuasion to persuade agencies to discontinue this practice of telling people to report for duties before the approvals are issued. If people assume duty when the Government Order (GO) is issued or the contract is executed, then there would not be that problem. As soon as the Government Order is used or the contract is executed, the person would be added to the next month's payroll. I think if we confirm, as I believe we will, that this continues to be a problem, we can certainly issue another circular to spell out the process or to reiterate that staff should not be told, or potential recruits should not be told to assume duties, until the Government Order is issued or until the contract is executed. I think that will help with the problem.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: A follow up: I understand what the Hon. Minister is saying but I am wondering whether the issue is that the agency may need the staff to fulfil its duties but there is an issue in terms of the Order coming through in a timely manner. We do not have to necessarily continue that conversation.

Dr. Singh: You should.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I understand what you are saying. Let us turn to line item 6281. The amount allocated is more than double what was utilised in 2024. Could the Hon. Minister explain this increase?

Dr. Singh: Sure. In fact, I think, Mr. Chairman, this question came up last year too. In addition to the offices we budgeted last year and we are budgeting again this year for two office holders who are entitled to security at their residences but who have waived that requirement. I think the Hon. Member is familiar with this. You will note the under-spent in 2024. We have still budgeted back for it in 2025 in the event that those two office holders decide that they would like to utilise the security that they are entitled to; if they waive that requirement, then we will under-spend on that line item again.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Line item 6321 – Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisation: the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU), the Minister during the Budget presentation spoke to the agreement between the Government and the GPSU as it relates to increases for Public Servants. Could the Hon. Minister state is whether during these discussions any agreement was made to ensure that the GPSU gets the \$2 million that has been budgeted that seems to be going back to the Consolidated Fund every year?

Dr. Singh: Sure. Let me first of all say that we have actually had an excellent engagement with the GPSU during the course of the past year.

[**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] I think we have had an excellent engagement with the GPSU over the past year, which has led to the concluding of negotiations, as Hon. Member would be aware of and the concluding of a multi-year agreement with the GPSU for the first time in as far as I can remember. I want to place on record, the Government's appreciation of the effort that went into this, on both sides – on the part of the team on the Government, including, of course, the Permanent Secretary (PS) and the staff of the Ministry; and in addition, of course, on the part of the GPSU's leadership as well. That having been said, there is the question of the annual subvention. The Hon. Member would be aware that, historically, we have been asking for audited financial statements to be submitted by, not only the GPSU, but by other entities for whom a subvention has been budgeted for. In this instance, I am advised that the GPSU did not submit its audited financial statements, which resulted in us not releasing the subvention. I am perfectly happy to have a conversation with the GPSU on what we can do perhaps, to help remedy that situation and to ensure that the Union gets the resources that we are budgeting to provide.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Continuing on that same line item, could the Hon. Minister indicate whether the Agreement with the GPSU included when the 8% for the Public Servants will be paid? If so, could the Minister be kind enough to let our Public Servants know when they can expect their 8%?

Dr. Singh: Sure. The exact language of the Agreement is 8% salary increase to be paid to Public Servants for 2025, retroactive to 1st January, 2025. Whenever it is paid, it will be retroactive to 1st January. Public Servants will get the full benefit of the increase effective 1st January, 2025.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Hon. Minister Ms. Teixeira indicated during questioning of the high level of interest in her conferences... I am not sure if I am allowed to say the name of the conference pulled off last year and the Minister stated how much work they will try to put in to make it happen this year. I am not trying to be facetious here. I was just wondering, from the level of the Public Service, given all the speculations and all that is going on in the Public Service as it relates to the word we cannot use, are there any plans to work with Public Servants to help them to understand the issue as it relates to this word? What can they do to ensure they do not find themselves entrapped in this particular issue or situation?

Dr. Singh: Sure. I am glad that the Hon. Member actually asked that question. One of the conversations that I have been having, particularly with the leadership of the Training Division, is how we can make sure that the menu of training we offer to Public Servants stays abreast with current developments and current trends. I suspect that it will come up when we look at Programme 2. I have started that conversation with the technical leadership of the Ministry, for precisely the reason we would like to ensure that we... Mr. Chairman, it is because I am speaking to a former Minister of the Public Service, I know that the Hon. Member knows there is a standard menu of training programmes that the Training Division has been offering for a long time. Obviously, overtime the training programmes have been reviewed and so forth but I think it is important that we ensure that what we offer are relevant and adapted to the most current realities, current challenges and so on. The short answer is yes. That question of further refinements to the training courses that are offered by the Training Division to Public Servants are very much on the front burner. As I said, I anticipate it will come up when we discuss Programme 2 shortly.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, may I have a follow up?

Mr. Chairman: Yes, Mr. Mahipaul.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask the Hon. Minister if he can provide an update, as to if there is any with reference to the Guyana Public Service Rules and Regulation? I know that we are functioning under the 1987 Rules and Regulations still. Is there any indication of updating those Rules and Regulations?

Dr. Singh: There is in existence of what I would perhaps call, an early draft of new Public Service Rules. I am advised that early draft is currently with the Ministry of Legal Affairs for review. Needless to say, that draft would also have to be the subject of consultation with the Union. We are not at the point where we have had those consultations. Clearly, this is something that we would like to move forward. The Hon. Member could be assured that we will certainly endeavour to work with our colleagues at the Ministry of Legal Affairs to get it to a point where we can then share it with other stakeholders, in particular the GPSU and then take it from there.

Programme: 141 – Policy Development and Administration – \$189,188,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Programme: 142 – Human Resource Development – \$8,007,713,000

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Line item 6117 – Temporary Employees: There is a reduction in the allocation for this line item but there is an increase in the staff complement. Could the Hon. Minister explain this?

Dr. Singh: There is a net increase of two in the number of people, if I am not mistaken. That in fact, comprise the loss of two persons in that line item and the addition of four persons to the line item. The four persons who were added to the line item have emoluments that are higher than the two that we lost. That is the reason there.

5.16 p.m.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: In Volume 2 page 98, I believe, Indicators 2 and 3 state the number of persons awarded Government of Guyana and Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarships. It also states that they were awarded scholarships in the necessary skill sets for national development. Could the Hon. Minister state how were these necessary skill sets for national development determined?

Dr. Singh: There are a variety of means through which we do this. To begin with, obviously, there is an ongoing engagement with other Ministries in Government and, as the Hon. Member would know, many people who go on scholarships end up working in the public sector or public service. So, there is an ongoing engagement between the Ministries – between the Ministry of Public Service (PSM) and line Ministries on particular areas of need. In many cases we get offers of international scholarships, eternal scholarships with bilateral partners, that might sometimes list potential areas. We would then consult with the respective line Ministries on what the specialisms are, and which should therefore be prioritised. To give a good example, in the medical field the Hon. Member would know that we get a lot of scholarships for medicine from biliteral partners. We would technically engage with the Ministry of Health on what would be the highest ranked postgraduate with specialisms that we should advertise, and we then advertise those. In the first instance, it is the engagement with the respective line Ministries that informs what we would consider priority to be advertised. However, we also, of course, have to keep our fingers on the pulse of what is happening in the private sector, and the economy more broadly, to have a sense of what is happening there too. That too would inform the kind of areas that we would prioritise for scholarships.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Hon. Minister state whether there has been any conversation about persons who have gone and completed their first degree being able to get their master's before serving their full five years? It is that we are trying to upgrade, and to have persons wait for five years before being able to upgrade to their master's or Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) a lot of things could happen in five years that may not allow them to do so after. I was just wondering if there was any conversation happening with allowing persons to continue from first into their second or third level of education.

Dr. Singh: We want to train as many people as we possibly can, and we want to do so as quickly as we possibly can, and of course those two are complimentary and not necessarily conflicting objectives. I am advised that on a routine basis the approach that is taken is that if a person is contracted for five years, they are typically asked to serve at least three years before they are granted a second scholarship. Typically, obviously, it would be a post graduate scholarship. If they are contracted for three years, such as if for example they went on a one-year training programme overseas like a master's degree, and they may have a three-year contract, they are typically asked to serve at least two years before they are given another scholarship. There are obvious reasons why this is necessary.

Ideally there are lots of people who want scholarships, and we would like to award as many of them as possible. I am sure that it would be understood why if one person got two opportunities to get two scholarships and others who are waiting did not get any that would leave someone unhappy. On the other hand, if one person is doing very well and they want to get a second scholarship and they want to go very quickly but they do not get an opportunity, the policy might not necessarily please them, but a balance has to be struck, and we try to be practical. So, I would say the norm is that if you are on a five-year scholarship or contract, you are asked to serve at least three; if you are on a three-year contract you are asked to serve at least two; that is the norm. However, the approach that we adopt is that we try to be as flexible as possible.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: A quick follow-up. I understand that, and the question I should have phrased it a bit differently because I am not really looking at persons who want a second scholarship. Maybe they are out, or they are on a programme and the programme has decided that 'you are doing so well that you can continue, or you can get a scholarship to continue to move to the next level'. The question is whether or not the Ministry would be able to

facilitate that, or would they suggest that the person has to come back before they go on a further training.

Dr. Singh: Again, I think one has to be practical, because I have seen some cases like this. There are routine protocols, as the Hon. Member knows, and the staff would typically deal with the matters along the lines of the routine protocols. However, I think one has to be practical too, because if one sees successive requests to defer contractual obligations, at some point in time the scholarship awardee should be asked to come back and discharge their scholarship obligations. They were granted that scholarship at the expense of other people not getting a scholarship; so you have to be practical. I am sure that the Hon. Member would agree with me that you have to adopt a practical approach; you want to be flexible if someone gets a scholarship to go on to a post graduate degree. You would want to be flexible and give them that opportunity but, beyond a certain point in time, you have to take account of the fact that they got that scholarship at the expense of other people, and they should be asked to come back to serve their obligation. I am glad to hear very clear, very unequivocal acclamation on the Opposition benches of that approach.

Programme: 142 – Human Resource Development – \$8,007,713,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 143 – Human Resource Management & Technology – \$62,412,000

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Over to Indicators, Volume 2. Could the Hon. Minister state under which agencies these new posts were created in Indicator 1 in 2024, and the target for 2025, under which agencies these new posts are likely to be created?

Dr. Singh: Sorry, Mr. Chairman, the question was in which agencies these...

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Yes, I am trying to understand whether or not the public service just created posts, or were they for particular agencies, or particular agencies requested certain posts that were not there before.

Dr. Singh: The posts are created typically in response to representations made by the respective line Ministries and, here again, an appropriate balance has to be struck because on the one hand one expansion in the public service or the public sector has to be done in a sustainable way. So, we are not in a situation where we can approve every single request for creation of posts, but on the other hand we are delivering more as a Government, and that places greater demands on

agencies which has implications for their human resource and their human resource requirements. So, we do consider very carefully representations made by the Ministries in relation to creation of posts, and where the appropriate justification is submitted, and a compelling case is made, approval is granted.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: A follow-up. Could the Hon. Minister state an example of the five most technical post that were created, or they plan to create this year?

Dr. Singh: I can certainly give some examples. I do not know if they will necessarily be the most popular, but I can give some examples of posts that we have created that did not exist before. These would include, for example, an Anti-Money Laundering and Countering Financing of Terrorism Officer (AML/CFT) Officer in the Ministry of Legal Affairs; a Conservation Officer in the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports; a Deputy Director in the Forensic Science Laboratory within the Ministry of Home Affairs again; Director of Mental Health Services in the Ministry of Health; a Documentation and Research Officer at the Parliament Office; Vessel Monitoring System Coordinator in the Ministry of Agriculture – I suspect that is in the Fisheries Department – just to give a sense of some that we have created. In terms of what we will create, that will be in-demand-driven I would say.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Indicator 8: could the Hon. Minister state why there is such a low number of agencies implementing the computerised registry system?

Dr. Singh: This here is a little bit of a pet peeve of mine actually. We continue in every agency – and I am sure the Hon. Member would be able to relate to this – to be inundated with vast volumes of paper. Paper coming in, paper going out, paper moving from agency to agency, huge files, paper files. We would like to get to a point where... and this is not new. I am sure the Hon. Member, when she was in that office, would easily be able to relate to this, and indeed it predated her assumption of that office too. I think we do need to get to a point where we have a functioning, properly indexed, secure, digitised, archival system and records management system. We are far from there in most agencies. Most agencies, as the Hon. Member knows, has vast volumes of legacy paper files, which, frankly speaking, is not where we need to be. To be honest with you, even the number “8” surprises me a little bit because I am not sure that there are “8”. I mean, this is what we have reported to us. However, I rather suspect that even within these “8”, if we were to go to examine whether they have a real

computerised registry and records management system, that they would be at different levels of comprehensiveness of coverage. It is an objective that we need to keep constant and that we need to continue to work towards. So, I think the objective is stated – we would like to get to a point where every agency has a computerised or a digitised records management system and is not dependant on paper-based files.

5.31 p.m.

The Hon. Member knows the Ministry of Public Service very well. She knows of the vast volumes of files, whether they are personnel files or scholarship files. And people often come back and make requests for something that is 30 years old or 40 years old, and you have to go and find those old files. This really requires... It is extremely important. I think, at some point in time, it will require a special project with resources dedicated to a whole-of-Government approach to migrating the paper files that we have to a single, integrated, digitised records management system.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Final question, even though the Minister sort of alluded to it at the end, which is whether or not the Ministry has thought about contracting out or getting a specialised group to deal with the digitisation of the Ministry, so that it is not something that we have to be plagued with much longer, given where we are supposed to be going.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I am convinced, through you, that this... I do not think this can be part of the day job of the staff who are there, simply because of the sheer magnitude of the task. I am convinced that, at some point in time – sooner, preferably, rather than later – a special project has to be dedicated, with personnel, a single digital platform, a single approach. I am myself convinced of the need for that approach, as I said, sooner rather than later.

Programme: 143 – Human Resource Management & Technology – \$62,412,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Capital Expenditure

Programme: 141 – Policy Development and Administration – \$18,045,000

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Project code 1207300 – Buildings: the 2023 actual was \$19 million. In 2024, it went down to \$6 million, and then \$4 million actually was the latest estimate in 2024. Could the Hon. Minister state what the \$11.5 million will be catering for?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Mr. Chairman. It is essentially three initiatives. The first is to complete an ongoing project, which is a rollover project. It is the upgrade and reconstruction of washrooms on the first and second floors of the head office. We will be doing two new small projects. The first is reconstructing the roof at the head office and upgrading washrooms on the third floor.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, if I can I turn the Hon. Member's attention to project code 2506200, Furniture and Equipment. I note here, Mr. Minister, you are requesting \$6.5 million but when I go to the project file number 69, the description given for this project is:

“The project entails provision for equipment.”

Could you say what equipment we are purchasing for \$6.5 million, the cost associated with each equipment and where these equipment will be assigned?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Mr. Chairman. Through you, this sum of \$6.5 million is to purchase desktop computers, a Private Branch Exchange (PBX) system and some cubicles.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, through you, I do not know whether the Hon. Member heard me clearly. Since he responded to my first part of the question, there are two other parts of the question: the cost associated with each item to be procured and also where these items will be assigned.

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Mr. Chairman. The computers are expected to cost \$2.6 million, the PBX system we have estimated to cost about \$2.7 million and the cubicles about \$1.2 million. Of course, the exact cost would depend on the procurement process in due course. In terms of utilisation, all of these items are intended for the head office, which is at Waterloo Street.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, a follow-up to the Hon. Member. Thank you very much for your responses. A sum of \$2.6 million will go towards the procurement of the desktop computers. Could you say the amount of desktop computers this cost will be associated with? Thank you.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, we are estimating that we can get at least 12 desktop computers for that price. If, when we go out to tender, we discover that we can get more, we will certainly utilise the resources available, because we do need to upgrade our computing capability. At the current time we estimate that, with that sum of money, we can get at least 12 computers.

Programme: 142 – Human Resource Development – \$153,090,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 143 – Human Resource Management & Technology – \$2,000,000

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Chairman, you said 142?

Mr. Chairman: Was that not 142 I just put?

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: No. We just finished 141.

Mr. Chairman: Sorry. Let us go back. We were at 141 Capital.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: I think I put 142 instead of 141.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Yes.

Mr. Chairman: Let us go back.

Programme: 141 – Policy Development and Administration – \$18,045,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 142 – Human Resource Development – \$153,090,000

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Project code 1207300 – Buildings: could the Hon. Minister disaggregate this \$25 million?

Dr. Singh: Sure, Mr. Chairman. There is a retention amount to be paid on some work that was done to the registry, that is \$254,000, and we have in addition to that two other projects proposed. The first is the rewiring of the training division, that is estimated at \$18 million, and the casting of the compound, that is estimated at \$7.2 million.

Ms. Halley: Project code 2506200 – Furniture and Equipment – \$127,590,000. Could the Minister disaggregate this sum and where the furniture and equipment is intended?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Mr. Chairman. The bulk comprises computer equipment and other office equipment, obviously. For the training division, we have computers provided there at an estimated cost of about \$7.6 million. We also have computer equipment and other training equipment, like a whiteboard, chairs, office furniture, *et cetera*, at about \$6 million. Some equipment for the Centre for Excellence in Information Technology (CEIT) at about \$8.9 million. Some equipment for the scholarships division, mostly computers and other office furniture, at about \$1 million. For the GOAL

unit, we have mostly computers and partitions or cubicles for about \$104 million, thereabout.

Programme: 142 – Human Resource Development – \$153,090,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 143 – Human Resource Management & Technology – \$2,000,000

Programme: 143 – Human Resource Management & Technology – \$2,000,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister and your staff for taking us through Agency 14. Let me invite the staff of the Ministry of Finance, Agency 03, to join Minister Dr. Singh. I ask you to turn to pages 64 and 65.

5.46 p.m.

Dr. Singh: Yes, Mr. Chairman, anytime you are ready.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. Hon. Members, we are at pages 64 and 65.

Agency: 03 Ministry of Finance

Current Expenditure

Programme: 031 – Policy and Administration – \$48,493,729,000

Ms. Fernandes: Good afternoon to the staff of the Ministry of Finance and the associated agencies. My Chairman, my first question through you, Sir, 6141 line item: could the Hon. Minister say if this allocation caters for the qualification allowances – the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) \$15,000, Master's \$22,000, Doctoral \$32,000?

Dr. Singh: We have made provision. The Hon. Member would be aware that we have concluded a number of multi-year agreements, including, of course, the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) one that I referred to earlier, and of course the historic agreement with the Guyana Teachers' Union (GTU) and others. A number of the provisions of those multi-year agreements have already been implemented. I should say some of the provisions have already been implemented, and others will be implemented during the course of this year. Those that have already been implemented have been budgeted under the respective agencies and those that are yet to be implemented would have been provided for under line item 6141. The short answer would be that this allocation will meet all of the

obligations that are associated with the multi-year agreements that we have concluded with the unions representing employees in the public sector, in the central Government.

Ms. Fernandes: A follow-up to the very same question. Could the Hon. Minister say when this specific qualification allowance is expected to take effect?

Dr. Singh: I am advised that the necessary circulars have been issued already in relation to the implementation of these allowances. In fact, I recall a lot of work was being done towards the end of last year to conclude, I think, the relevant PSM and finance circulars to implement these changes to the allowances. I am of the strong impression, and I am advised, that the necessary circulars have been issued and the adjustments to the allowances have been implemented.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, through you again. The Hon. Minister would appreciate that those circulars were not laid in this House. So, I am just trying to get specifically if these allowances are being implemented, for example, after the budget is passed or is it at a later date in the year. Since the circulars were already sent out, then we should be able to have a definite response.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I think I was as clear as I could have been. I would be very happy to double-check after the sitting and confirm with the Hon. Member. I am of the very clear and distinct impression that the circulars have been issued and that the provisions thereof have been implemented.

Ms. Fernandes: Would the Hon. Minister, through you, Sir, be kind enough to lay over that particular circular to the House?

Mr. Chairman: I think we might be breaking some traditions. Circulars stay within the Executive.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Minister, same line item 6141, you have a total of some \$24.5 billion here. I would ask you to lay over for us the amounts for the increase in the minimum wage for the Disciplined Services and the annual bonus. Also, what allocation is made for new recruits into the public service and any other in this line item? If you could, lay it over for us. I know you told us the last time that you would normally have a group of persons because this is a complicated calculation; so I am very sure that you would have these figures.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, we have had this conversation every year, and the Hon. Member is a veteran of this Committee, having sat on both sides of the House. I know that the Hon. Member is more than abundantly familiar with this particular provision, and I know that the Hon. Member knows that what this provision comprises is the Government's best estimate of what the salary increase will cost in the year of the budget, what new and additional recruits will cost, additional employment costs and employment cost shortfalls, and any other employment cost requirements that might arise. I do not know that we necessarily need to repeat that conversation that we have had every year.

Ms. Ferguson: A follow-up on this very line item 6141. My question to the Hon. Member with regards to the qualification allowance. While I hear the Hon. Member stated that the circular went out, is the Hon. Member aware that many public servants are now being told that they cannot or they will not be able to benefit from any qualification allowance because whether they have a Master's in Business Administration and they are in an accountant position they are now being told that they will not, because the qualification does not equate with what they are currently engaged in, in the ministry, and it goes for the other levels in qualifications. Are you aware that many public servants are now being denied that?

Dr. Singh: I am not aware of the assertion being made by the Hon. Member. I am aware that the circular, the most recent version of the circular that I saw, did make reference to the postgraduate qualifications being relevant to the office holder's official duties. In fact, I am looking at it here now. The allowances are paid for postgraduate qualifications that have been obtained in an area that is relevant to the office holder's official duties, and once that is the case, the allowances will be paid. If there is any lack of clarity, an approach can be made to the relevant authority, in this case, I would think the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Public Service, for any lack of clarity to be resolved. However, I am not aware of this assertion that the Hon. Member is making.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, moving on to line item 6272, Electricity Charges, I note that we are down to \$122 million for this year as opposed to \$6.065 billion last year. My question to the Minister is whether this allocation is just for the expenses to be incurred this year, and it has no liabilities provided here for the Guyana Power and Light Incorporated (GPL). That we are finished with that.

Dr. Singh: The Hon. Member is correct in her interpretation of how this number has evolved over the years. The Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, is correct in saying that the provision that we are seeking for 2025 is in relation to current year obligations. We are in the process of reconciling with GPL to confirm that there are no outstanding obligations owing. We are of the clear impression that we have discharged those historic obligations, as of today, but we are doing that reconciliation right now. To return to the question that the Hon. Member asked, the appropriation that is being sought for 2025 is in relation to current-year obligations.

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Chairman, through you, Sir, could the Hon. Minister turn his attention to line item 6321? Looking at the Bureau of Statistics, we see an allocation there of \$1.7 billion. I want to ask the Minister if he can tell this Committee why the 2022 census has not been published to date and what is the role of the Ministry of Finance in the compilation of the census?

Dr. Singh: Certainly, Mr. Chairman. I think it was a two-part question; the first part was... Could I ask you, Mr. Chairman? I know the second part was the role of the Ministry of Finance, but the first part, Hon. Member, could you repeat the first part of the question so that I can answer precisely what you are asking?

Ms. Fernandes: The first part of the question was for you, Hon. Minister; if you can, tell the Committee why the 2022 census has not been published to date.

Dr. Singh: Sure. Let me be very clear that national censuses and other statistical surveys are governed by law. There is a Statistics Act, and an Act that establishes the Bureau of Statistics and assigns responsibilities to the Bureau of Statistics, as is headed by a Chief Statistician. The responsibility for conducting and concluding the census rests with the Bureau of Statistics. That is the first point I wanted to make. The second point I want to make is that the Act does assign or designate a minister with responsibility for statistics, and the minister with responsibility for statistics is also the minister with responsibility for finance. So, the Bureau of Statistics falls within the ministerial portfolio of the Minister with Responsibility for Finance, but the Bureau of Statistics has statutory responsibility for the conduct of censuses and the issuance of the census reports.

6.01 p.m.

Thirdly, I am aware that the staff at the Bureau of Statistics have been working earnestly under very challenging

circumstances. I want to place on record our appreciation, as a Ministry, first of all – as their Minister – as a Government and indeed as a country, for the excellent work that they did. I do think that they deserve that recognition because they are a relatively small team and they have been working very hard to get as full a coverage as they possibly can in the case of the census, while of course discharging their many other obligations. I do know that they encountered several challenges, including, obviously, terrain and weather, *et cetera*, around the time of the census and in the months that followed immediately. I am also aware that they encountered challenges with the number of repeat visits that they had to do for the non-response rates – residences were known to be occupied, but the enumeration visit was unable to complete the survey in relation to those. I know that they encountered significant challenges in that regard. That is not unique to Guyana. For example, I have in front of me dates in relation to several other countries around the Caribbean. Of course, the 10-year census cycle is not unique to Guyana. There are several countries across the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) that did censuses at the same time as us and have not yet completed their reports.

We, as Members of Government, are as anxious as any other stakeholders for the census report to be concluded. I have conveyed this, as clearly as I possibly can, to the Chief Statistician at the Bureau of Statistics. They are aware that we look forward to receiving this data. Of course, the census data is extremely important in terms of demographic trends and policy making. These include spatial distribution of the population; prediction of spatial trends in relation to the population; where public service will be needed; and where public service can be scaled back, *et cetera*. We are as anxious as anybody else or perhaps even more anxious than anybody else, for the receipt of this data. We have conveyed this very clearly to the leadership and the staff at the Bureau of Statistics. At the same time, I have to be cognisant of the effort that I know they are making. I have to acknowledge that effort and express my appreciation for it. The Chief Statistician is here. He is hearing this conversation. The team at the Bureau of Statistics is aware of the conversation, too. I will simply say that the Government shares the view that the preliminary census report should be concluded as quickly as possible. We have conveyed that clearly to the leadership of the Bureau of Statistics. I have no doubt that the staff will conclude and issue it as soon as they possibly can.

Ms. Fernandes: Could the Hon. Minister say what stage the process is at right now? Did the Bureau of Statistics

complete the collection of data? Is it still collecting? Is it compiling? Is it analysing? What stage is it at right now?

Dr. Singh: I could certainly share the current state of information that I have. They have essentially completed the field work, which is the enumeration – visiting of the households, *et cetera*. As I said, there was a level of non-responsiveness from households in different areas, which obviously must be subject to analysis and triangulation with other data sources as well. Obviously, the Bureau of Statistics collects data from multiple sources. It has standard methodologies that it uses to test, validate, and triangulate the data that it has collected and compiled. Then, on the basis of that, it concludes its final tables – the final tabulation – to complete its preliminary report and then its final report, which is a much more detailed report with the full set of tables. I am aware that the field work is completed. My latest information is that they are at an advanced stage of analysing and triangulating that data. Work has been ongoing in parallel with the preparation of the report. My understanding is that work is at a very advanced stage.

Ms. Fernandes: Finally, from me on this matter, Sir, could the Minister say, if not from the 2022 Population and Housing Census's data, where is he deriving his data from, for example, when he looked at 600,000 citizens over the age of 18?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, obviously, we have multiple sources of data. We have, of course, the last census, which provides us with a baseline on the basis of which successive estimates are made every year. For example, we have other data that comes out of... We collect data from every ministry and agency, including the Ministry of Education. We have data on the number of children at school and the age distribution of the children at school. We have data that we collect from the Ministry of Health. There are multiple sources. We have data that we collect from the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, particularly in relation to our senior citizens. There are multiple sources of data that we collect on a routine basis and use for the purposes of policy making.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, could the Minister turn to *Volume 2*, page 42. I am looking at your Indicators, specifically, number seven, which speaks to:

“...national statistical reports published/to be published on the Bureau of Statistics website”

The last 2023 report told us that the target for 2024 is 44. We have here 44 as the achievement in 2024 despite us not having the census. Now, you have 48 for 2025. Could the Hon. Minister kindly say to this Committee what are the four additional reports the nation can look forward to in 2025?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I could certainly say that the preliminary census report is one of the four additional reports that we are looking forward to. I have a detailed list here. We publish reports on several things: prices; trade; Consumer Price Index (CPI); external trade, imports and exports separately; merchandise trade in particular, and the real sector Gross Domestic Product (GDP). On a regular basis, we publish the GDP time series. There are multiple reports that are published. I can quite easily do a comparison, I think. It is not presented in a manner in front of me that makes it easy to do, but I could easily do a comparison and tell the Hon. Member the margins of the sitting, what the additional reports are. I suspect that the particular focus of the Hon. Member's interest is the census. From the additional four that we are projecting; the census preliminary report is certainly one of those reports.

Ms. Lawrence: I have a follow-up: I am particularly interested in the four new reports – the additional reports. I know we are now exercising our interest and input in additional areas, not only of development but also in terms of investment. I would be happy if the Minister could tell us what the four reports are.

Dr. Singh: I could certainly have that analysis done and share it with the Hon. Member, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Fernandes: Under the same line item 6321, I am looking at the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA). Through you, Sir, could the Hon. Minister say how well the \$10,000 per child adjustment will be implemented and when? Is this adjustment going to be applied after the filing of Income Tax Returns and if not, how?

Dr. Singh: We will, in fact, later this evening – very shortly, indeed – debate the necessary amendments to the Income Tax Act to give effect to this \$10,000 per child deduction from taxable income for the purposes of computing tax obligations. Once that Bill is passed, which we anticipate will happen today, we will issue a guideline on its implementation. I will say to the Hon. Member, through you, Mr. Chairman, that the objective is for the benefit to be enjoyed upfront rather than to be claimed ex post, as is done with other benefits. If that was not sufficiently clear, the intention is for employed persons to enjoy the benefit as they

go rather than having to claim the benefit as a refund when filing their Income Tax Returns. A detailed guideline on its implementation will be issued by the GRA very shortly after the legislation is passed.

Ms. Lawrence: I am on the same line item. I am still on the Bureau of Statistics. This is page 665. Hon. Minister, if we look at the line with Other Recurrent Charges, we will see a substantial increase here. I would like to know if this is associated with the additional reports that you mentioned?

Dr. Singh: My apologies, Mr. Chairman. Could I ask the Hon. Member to repeat which line exactly she is looking at?

Ms. Lawrence: Sure. It is page 665.

Dr. Singh: It is page 665.

Ms. Lawrence: Yes.

Dr. Singh: Were you looking at a particular line?

Ms. Lawrence: Yes. I am looking at Other Recurrent charges. I am asking if there is an allocation in here for those persons and expenses to be incurred for the additional four reports?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, that recurrent charge is an aggregation. You will note that the lines that follow are indented. So, the rows that follow Other Recurrent Charges are subtotals – everything that follows – from Materials, Equipment and Supplies all the way down to Rates and Taxes and Subventions to Local Authority. Those lines from Materials, Equipment and Supplies to Rates and Taxes and Subventions to Local Authority aggregate up to Other Recurrent Charges. First of all, the Hon. Member can see the composition of Other Recurrent Charges. She will note, no doubt, that the increase is spread across various lines. She will equally, no doubt, be happy to hear that the projected expenditure for 2025 is anticipated to cover the cost of all the activities of the Bureau of Statistics in 2025, including the achievements of the targets that the Bureau of Statistics has set for itself.

6.16 p.m.

Ms. Lawrence: May I take the Minister further down the page to the capital expenditure with the sum of \$45 million? Could he give us an indication of what will be done with these moneys?

Dr. Singh: Well, Mr. Chairman, I am happy to do so, but this amount is also included in the capital budget, which we

have not gotten to as yet. I would be guided by you as to whether you want me to answer now or when we get to the Capital Budget.

Mr. Chairman: Let us do it now.

Dr. Singh: It is essentially, Mr. Chairman, through you, that the whole of the \$45 million is for furniture and equipment. The entire spectrum of furniture and equipment you might imagine an office like the Bureau of Statistics would need includes telecommunication switches, desktop computers, laptops, network infrastructure, servers, printers, cubicles, photocopiers, other office furniture, filing cabinets, *et cetera*.

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

Ms. Ferguson: It is Ms. Ferguson.

Mr. Chairman: I was waiting to see if the Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, was going to do another follow-up.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, may I turn the Hon. Member's attention to line item 6321, Subsidies and Contributions to Local Organisations? If we go to page 469, I note there is \$10 billion allocated for this year to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS). My question to the Hon. Member is whether provisions from this allocation will be made to pay retroactive pension for the years 2021, 2022 and 2023 at the minimum level? That is one. Secondly, for those pensioners who are receiving NIS pension at the maximum level, my question is, whether some amount of moneys from this \$10 billion will go towards them receiving an increase?

Dr. Singh: This sum of \$10 billion has a specific purpose, which has been the subject of considerable public discussion. It would be recalled that in this very House in October of last year, His Excellency, the President, delivered an address in which he made several announcements. This includes the commitment that his Government will make available an amount of \$10 billion for use by the National Insurance Scheme. This is to specifically address the fact that there are persons who have marginally missed – for one reason or another – the minimum eligibility requirements for a pension, that is, 750 contributions, and who, therefore, by virtue of having marginally missed this requirement, are unable to get a pension from the National Insurance Scheme. He mandated that those proposals be developed to address, specifically, that group of persons who would have missed, by relatively a small number of contributions, the required contributions for eligibility for pensions. This \$10 billion injection is specifically to address those persons who have missed and who do not have 750 contributions. Like I said, it

is within a clearly defined margin to address those persons and to give them a one-off payment in recognition of the fact that they have missed their eligibility for pension by just a marginal number of contributions.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, to the Hon. Member, a follow-up: Could you say to the Committee the number of persons who have missed the 750 contributions that this \$10 billion is likely to take care of? What is the number you are working with?

Dr. Singh: I would hesitate at this stage to say a number. I would say that NIS is currently analysing its data and is working on developing a proposal, which we will announce in due course.

Ms. Ferguson: A follow-up for the Hon. Member. Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, while I understand that the \$10 billion is to take care of those who have not reached the 750 contributions, am I to assume that the Government has no intention of paying NIS pensioners who earn pension at the minimum level? Do you have no intention of paying them their retroactive pensions for the years 2021, 2022 and 2023?

Dr. Singh: I do not know if the Hon. Member has missed the events of recent times, but we did announce last year a very significant increase to the minimum pension payable to NIS pensioners.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, you may proceed. He has been waiting a long, long time.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, very, very long, Sir. Thank you very much for acknowledging me. I want to turn the Minister's attention to line item 6321, National Procurement and Tender Administration Board. From this allocation of \$111,194,000, does it cater for consultation and other exercises relating to a focus on amending the Procurement Act in an effort to improve the Act for greater transparency and accountability?

Dr. Singh: I would say that there is no specific allocation for consultations on amending the Procurement Act. Obviously, we remain open to feedback, and we remain closely engaged with every conceivable stakeholder group. Were particular areas to be identified that might necessitate refinements to the current procurement framework, we would certainly be open to considering those. However, at the current time, the allocation does not include a specific amount that is intended to be used on any such dedicated consultation.

Mr. Mahipaul: A follow-up: The current Act in its formation caters for two full time members of NPTAB. May I ask the Hon. Minister, what are the salaries and remuneration packages for the two full-time staff members or the two full-time members who are there?

Dr. Singh: The two full-time members are performing the duties at the Tender Board, but they hold appointments elsewhere. I would be happy to provide clarity on the emoluments that they are in receipt of. They are in receipt of emoluments in their principal appointment which obviates the need for a full-time salary to be paid to them at the end at the National Procurement and Tender Administration Board.

Mr. Mahipaul: A follow-up: May I also ask the Minister when he will be providing that information, if he could include the benefits that are received also by the members who are serving on a part time basis?

Dr. Singh: Very well, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. Sir, could I have another follow-up? It was on 1st February, 2022, when the Hon. Minister made his presentation for that budget and indicated that we will be moving to an e-procure platform. It is three years after, it is February, 2025 now. Would the Hon. Minister be kind enough to provide us with an update on this e-procure platform that was supposed to be established by the end of 2024?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, considerable work has been done on this. In fact, we have had a couple of consultancy advisory services on the development of electronic or digitised platforms for procurement. We have reports at our disposal with options for consideration, and those are currently engaging our attention.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask for follow-up? Sir, the Hon. Minister promised that it will be fully operationalised by 2024. May I ask him if there is an extended time period that we are looking at to head into the direction of the e-procurement platform, which is a good tool to strengthen accountability and transparency in our procurement system, given that we are giving out more contracts than ever before.

Dr. Singh: Sure. I would not have at my disposal now a specific timeline as such, but we recognise the advantages of the deployment of more digital solutions and the very evident advantages that could be had from these. We certainly share the objective of wanting to be able to do this, even if it is done in a modular manner. We would like to be

able to do this as soon as possible. I do not currently have at my disposal an indicative timeline for deployment.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I follow up?

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you. The Hon. Minister also indicated back in 2022 that there was a remodelling of the Evaluation Committee and mentioned that the Evaluation Committee will be from a pool of evaluators but will not be members who are associated directly to the entity the contract is being evaluated for. May I ask if that is currently the *modus operandi*?

Dr. Singh: Yes, Mr. Chairman. This has, in fact, been implemented. This was something that we said we would do in the very early days of the current term in office. So, that has been implemented. There are instances where specific technical skills are needed to provide input into the evaluation. This is not generally the case, but there are instances where certain specialised skills are needed, which can only be obtained from the sector itself. To give you an example, in such areas as specialised equipment, like medical equipment, where, if you pulled three evaluators from a random pool, you might not necessarily get three persons familiar with specialised medical equipment. In those instances where there is a compelling case for specialised sector-specific expertise, I am aware that we might ask for input, but on a non-voting basis. It is just an advisory input from persons in the sector. Like I said, those would constitute the exception rather than the rule.

6.31 p.m.

Mr. Mahipaul: May I ask the Hon. Minister – and I think our side does support the movement of ensuring that the evaluators do not come from the sector of itself – if this also is the case with the regional procurement and tender administration system?

Dr. Singh: I am advised that the responsibility for appointing the evaluators rests with NPTAB. Nominations are made by the regions, and appointments are made by NPTAB from the nominations submitted by the region.

Mr. Mahipaul: Yes, Sir. I am well aware of that. With your permission, Sir, it is a pool of evaluators that are nominated and the practice has been to extract the three from that pool. The same practice applies at NPTAB – there is a pool of evaluators, and you extract three. My question to the Hon. Minister is, has he considered applying the same change that

was made for NPTAB to strengthen accountability and transparency, to apply at the very regional tender boards that also deal with hundreds of millions of dollars – close to billions, or probably billions of dollars – to make that change there for it to be effective also?

Dr. Singh: To the best of my knowledge, and the advice that is available to me currently, the regional tender boards select from among their pool. I would not, at this current point in time, be able to say what the prevailing practice is, but essentially, from the approved pool of evaluators, the regional tender boards will select. However, I get the point that the Hon. Member is making.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Sir. I am happy that the Hon. Minister gets the point that I am making. May I ask if he will endeavour to make the necessary changes so that we can facilitate greater accountability and transparency in the Procurement Act system?

Dr. Singh: Well, I will, in the first instance, endeavour to ascertain what the prevailing practice is and, on the basis of what I ascertain at that time, determine the way forward. However, the merit of the argument that is being made by the Member is understood.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Ms. Ferguson: I will go back to line item 6321, NIS. Based on the response given by the Hon. Member that for 2024, the NIS pensioners who earn at the minimum level would have gotten a substantial increase in their pension, I disagree with that, Mr. Chairman, because it was only 21.3%, which gives us a total of \$43,075, which the NIS pensioners at the minimum level got for 2024. I will further say that the Government, for me, is in violation of the National Insurance and Social Security Act 15 of 1960. That Act is clear: all pensioners at the NIS level must receive 50% of the minimum level – a 50% increase of the minimum wage. Therefore, I am still asking the Hon. Member, why is it that this People's Progressive Party/Civic Government would have violated and discriminated against the NIS pensioners...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, you are making a lot of accusations and imputations. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, would you like to proffer a comment?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I reject fully the outrageous assertions being made by the Member on that side of the House, in her customary factually inaccurate and highly

offensive manner. I reject out... Mr. Chairman, this Government's track record in relation to addressing the needs of our senior citizens is one that we are proud of. I appreciate that the Hon. Member... Arithmetic is not their strong point, but the Hon. Member will, if she were to do the calculation, see that the adjustment made last year resulted in the minimum pension being equivalent to 50% of the minimum wage that prevailed at the time.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, I have no difficulty with...

Mr. Chairman: Okay, I am not going to permit this exchange. Let us go back to what we are doing here. The Minister has corrected you that NIS is in compliance because of the substantial adjustment made last year.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Chairman, I think my question was clear earlier. Why is it that we had an increase in salaries for 2021, 2022, and 2023, and, based on the National Insurance and Security Act of 1960, once there are increases in salary, pensioners must be able to be paid 50% minimum. My question to the Hon. Member is, why is it that the pensioners who earn at the minimum level for NIS were not paid their pensions for 2021, 2022 and 2023?

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member, I must be daft. Minister, you have the floor.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I think I have addressed this matter exhaustively. I do not think there is much that I can add to this matter.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you very much. I think we may have exhausted the comments on this item.

Ms. Lawrence: One more question, Mr. Chairman, if you do not mind.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I have one too, if you do not mind, please.

Ms. Lawrence: Line item 6322 – Subsidies and Contributions to International Organisations.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead, Hon. Member.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hon. Minister, I note that, to the African Caribbean, and Pacific Countries (ACP), we have increased the contribution there. We have increased the allocation. Could you kindly explain to this Committee whether this is a requirement, whether they will

increase our contributions because of our new status, or whether this is for some other reason?

Dr. Singh: In relation to this item, there are essentially two international organisations to which we contribute. The first is the ACP Secretariat, and, if the Hon. Member would turn to page 474, which I suspect she is at, she will note that the amount that we are seeking is \$60.787 million. That comprises two contributions. The first is an amount of \$8.173 million to the ACP Secretariat, which is the same amount that was budgeted last year, and the second is an amount of \$52.614 million, which is the same as we paid to the Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre (CARTAC) last year.

Ms. Lawrence: A follow-up.

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

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Line item 6141 – Other Employment Costs: May I ask the Hon. Minister, in constitutional agencies such as Guyana Elections Commission (GECOM), Parliament, constitutional office holders, Members of Parliament (MPs), and so on, when the salary increases are given – the 10% and the 8% – we are also in receipt of those salary increases, if we will also be in receipt of the changes that are applicable in terms of your qualification? You have the master's degree, the Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), and so on – however high – whatever changes that were made there, if it is applicable also to the constitutional office holders? I think it is a good question because many people are asking the Ministers on that side...

Mr. Chairman: Okay, you asked the question and I think the Minister should answer.

Mr. Mahipaul: [Mr. Ramson: (Inaudible)] I do not have a master's degree.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, at the risk of disappointing my eminently qualified Colleague on that side of the House, who, I suspect, might have been anticipating the very substantial increase in his allowances in recognition of his academic qualifications, the qualification allowances emanate from an agreement with the Guyana Teachers' Union (GTU) in the case of teachers, and an agreement with the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) in the case of public servants. To the best of my knowledge, do not believe that Mr. Mahipaul would consider himself either a teacher or a public servant.

Ms. Lawrence: Hon. Minister, I want to take you back to the ACP contribution by Guyana. In 2024, you only paid \$4.960 million. You did not utilise the entire \$8 million, as you said, is payable to this organisation. Do we owe it? What is going on?

Dr. Singh: I am advised here again. It is a very valid question that the Hon. Member is asking. It leaps out at me, too. I am advised that we pay based on the demands to pay. We are not, as far as we are aware, in arrears. We paid all of the demand notices that we received last year, and so the \$4.960 million that we paid would have discharged all of the demand notices that we had have received. We are not aware that we are in arrears, but our understanding of what we are expected to pay annually is the \$8.173 million that we had budgeted last year. Thus, we have budgeted back for that figure this year because that is what we understand our annual obligations to be.

Programme: 031 – Policy and Administration – \$48,493,729,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 032 – Public Financial Management Policies and Services – \$9,114,515,000

Ms. Fernandes: I just have one question. Line item 6262 – Overseas Conferences and Official Visits: Could the Hon. Minister say what overseas conferences the Ministry is expecting this allocation to cater for in 2025?

6.46 p.m.

Dr. Singh: Here again, I think the Hon. Member would be aware that we have, here under the Ministry of Finance, Programme 2, a lump sum allocation to meet the overseas conferences and official visits obligations of almost the whole of the central Government. I think there are one or two agencies that have an allocation of their own. I think I have a vague recollection that we have had this conversation before. Essentially, this \$701 million is to meet the obligations of almost the whole of Central Government. In relation to what the specific travel obligations will be, I think there are some that are known in advance. For example, they are in each sector. There are certain statutory or mandatory meetings and international conferences that we always attend. We know that we will be at the United Nations General Assembly, we know that we will be at the annual meetings of the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) or the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), we know that we will be at the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers Meeting or the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. There

are some meetings that are statutory and annual that we know we will attend. Then of course, there are others that are more of an *ad hoc* nature, like invitations, conferences or meetings that are arranged or engagements that are arranged on a slightly less predictable or slightly more *ad hoc* nature. We respond to those we consider appropriate when we receive those invitations.

Ms. Lawrence: Could the Hon. Minister turn to line item 6331, Refund of Revenues. Hon. Minister, every year we allocate in the millions for this line item, but we always fall short in terms of expending it. Last year was worse. We fell into three digits. You are allocating again, \$15 million. What is inhibiting this expenditure?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, just to be clear, this refund of revenue allocation is not a refund of tax revenue. This is where somebody has paid for a government service, and they applied for a refund of the fee that they have made for the government service. You will note that the amount is a very modest amount so it could not have been for the refund of tax revenue. This is basically payment for government services. Someone may have paid for a government service and for whatever reason, they have to be refunded the revenue. The \$351,000 that he spent last year represents the totality of requests that we got for revenue to be refunded. That is all that we spent. We are seeking an allocation at the same level that we sought last year, which is \$15 million. The Hon. Member correctly observed that we have been certainly for the last few years, been spending less than the amount we have appropriated. That is because we basically refund on requests. Those are the requests that we got.

Programme: 32 – Public Financial Management Policies and Services – \$9,114,515 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates

Capital Estimates

Programme: 31 – Policy and Administration – \$65,832,259,000

Ms. Fernandes: Project code 4500800 – Guyana Revenue Authority, there is a provision for buildings. Could you say what allocation from the \$5.7 is going towards buildings, and which buildings?

Dr. Singh: Through you, Mr. Chairman, was the question, how much is for buildings?

Ms. Fernandes: Yes, and which buildings?

Dr. Singh: Sure. A total of \$999.1 million is budgeted for buildings. That comprises of \$644 million for on-going projects. There are several projects that are roll-over projects, including a bond at Lethem, office buildings at Lethem, living quarters at Lethem, rehabilitation of office at Corriverton, at Parika, some rehabilitation at Headquarters as well and construction of roof at Headquarters. There are several roll-over projects, including construction of a warehouse at Onverwagt, living quarters at Corriverton and in New Amsterdam. We have a number of new projects too – construction of wharf and office at Water Street, office buildings and living quarters, acquisition of land in Port Mourant, Linden, rehabilitation of Eccles building, construction of Charity office and Boat House, some new work at the new Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) headquarters, *et cetera*. It is a combination of roll-overs, like I said. It is \$644 million of roll-over projects and \$355 million of new projects.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you for that. On the same Programme Head, looking at software, what allocation is placed there for software and what software is being developed?

Dr. Singh: We have an amount of \$818.4 million for software and licences. That includes outstanding obligations for the Integrated Tax Management System or Revenue Management system, the Optimal System, which is a new Single Integrated Tax Administration System that we have implemented. We have an ongoing deployment of VAT for which we have a roll-over obligation of \$41 million, and then, additional works for further deployment of the Optimal System. I should add, licences for other software, as well.

Ms. Lawrence: May I take the Hon. Minister to project code item 1202200? Could the Hon. Minister say whether this retention moneys will be paid for the former Guyana National Cooperative Bank (GNCB) Sports Club building, which I think is supposed to be an Annex now for his Ministry?

Dr. Singh: I am advised that the obligations on that building have been paid. This retention is in fact, on some work that we did on the upgrading of the electrical system at the main Ministry of Finance campus, at Main and Urquhart Streets.

Ms. Lawrence: What is the retention for?

Dr. Singh: The retention is for construction of a walkways in the compound.

Ms. Lawrence: I would like to take the Minister to project code 1900400, Basic Needs Trust. Hon. Minister, in the

Profile you have listed here, several descriptions for several projects. I would like you to give me the amounts that will be used for the construction of schools. Could you say which schools? The construction and rehabilitation of community roads, could you say which communities. The Livelihood Enhancement Projects, what are we talking about here? Could you give some details about these projects?

Dr. Singh: The amount of \$410 million includes, like the Member correctly identified, allocations for education infrastructure, in particular, \$10.8 million for Kwakwani Nursery School, for Livelihood Enhancement, \$55.3 million, for construction of an Early Childhood Development Centre in Diamond and two sub-projects in Region 2, Mainstay and Mashabo. We also have allocations totalling \$92.1 million for skills training for employment and entrepreneurship. We implemented these in partnership with several agencies, including the Board of Industrial Training and some of our Regional Technical Institutes. We also work with the Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities, to roll out those training programmes. Those will benefit hundreds of persons through those respective organisations.

We also have sub-projects on community access, in particular some community roads in Region 6 - Black Bush Polder. In Region 5 – Bush Lot to Bath and in Region 6 – Kilcoy/Hampshire. As the Hon. Member would know, of course, we also do, sub-projects in the water distribution system, sinking of wells and construction of water distribution systems or water supply systems. In this case, we have another \$13.3 million for the water sub-projects in Warwatta and in Kurukabaru. We also project administration costs included in that amount.

Ms. Lawrence: I have a follow-up on the same question. Hon. Minister, you did not give me the amount for the community roads.

Dr. Singh: It is \$56.2 million for community roads. My apologies.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you. May I turn your attention to project code 3401000, Low Carbon Development Programme? Hon. Minister, there is a list of Programmes here. This particular Low Carbon Development Initiative has quite a lot of Programmes within the description. I would like to ask the Minister, given that over the last few years we have spent so much money – billions of dollars on this project, when will the House see a periodic report on the amount of moneys that we have spent on all those projects that have been done and so on? When will we see that type

of report for the amount of moneys we are passing in the House? This year we are passing \$57.4 billion. Thank you.

7.01 p.m.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member, I hesitate to say is like myself, but the Hon. Member is a veteran of this House, even more so perhaps than myself. She has been a Chairperson and she has served with distinction as Chairperson of the Public Accounts Committee of this House. I do not think she is the Chairperson currently. I think the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira is the Chairman, if I am not mistaken. However, she is a past Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). On a regular basis, this House gets, reports on the utilisation of these resources. First of all, in our successive annual budgets we articulate in our respective project profiles indicatively how much we anticipate that we would be spending in the various areas. Secondly, as we do with all revenues that come into the consolidated fund and are appropriated out of the consolidated fund with all public expenditure, we prepare audited financial statements which are audited by the Auditor General, which are submitted to this House and which are then examined in great detail by the Public Accounts Committee and I believe that the Hon. Member, notwithstanding, that she is not the Chairperson, I believe she still serves on the Committee. [An. Hon. Member:

She is not on the PAC anymore.] At multiple ... My apologies, I stand corrected, I am advised that the Hon. Member is not on the PAC any longer but like I said there are multiple opportunities. The annual budgets and the audited financial statements at which a considerable amount of detail is provided on the utilisation of these resources.

Ms. Lawrence: I am not trying to be felicitous. Given all that the Minister said, I just want to know, you have this initiative that you put out there that will take us from point A to point B. I would like to know whether having done so for several years, do you not do an analysis to say, 'this has worked, this has brought this particular aspect of poverty down, this has been able to give us positive points in this other area'. Do you not want to know that? You brought it to the National Assembly, so.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I find it rather ironic that a Member on that side of the House should come to this Committee and speak with such feigned passion about wanting to know what these resources are being used for. It is the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) that met US\$135 million already earned and received and sitting in bank accounts dispersed by the

Norwegians and did not use any of those resources for the benefit of the Guyanese people. It is the APNU/AFC that had resources to roll out in an Amerindian land titling project that was already designed and already financed. An Information and communication technology (ICT) project that was already designed for the Hinterland, already designed, already financed, resources already set aside for those projects. Solar panels to be deployed in the Hinterland and left those resources, we came back into government and found those ICT and solar panels locked up in a warehouse somewhere, languishing.

There was no concern by the Hon. Member, who was in the Cabinet at that time, about what these resources are being used for; US\$80 million was sitting down at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) that we had earned. Thanks to the Low Carbon Development Strategy the pioneering the Low Carbon Development Strategy, US\$80 million was earned and sitting down in account of the IDB. That is now being used to roll out a major solar project to deploy solar farms in Berbice, in Essequibo and in Linden. The Hon. Member sat in the Cabinet of the APNU/AFC and did not have the least bit of interest in utilising these resources for the benefit of the Guyanese people. This feigned concern baffles me because for five years, the Hon. Member sat in the Cabinet and had no concern whatsoever for the fact that these resources could have been deployed for the benefit of the Guyanese people, as we in the Peoples Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) are now doing.

Ms Fernandes: Sir, project code 4503100, Linden Enterprise Network, capital contribution – \$50 million. Through you, Sir, could the Hon. Minister tell this National Assembly why he is currently sitting in Cabinet whilst moneys are in a bank account for the Linden Enterprise Network and from 2020 to now, he has not put a board in place for persons to actually access those reports. Sir, let him furnish this House with that information.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, every year we go through this drama. While the Hon. Member repeatedly raised this issue year after year, this PPP/C Government, since we assumed office has been implementing multiple initiatives to the benefit of the people of Linden which the APNU/AFC had no concern to implement; not one single major project was implemented in Linden to create employment opportunities or business opportunities. Today, we are building the Linden to Mabura Road, we are building the Linden to Soesdyke Highway, we are building hundreds of community roads and buildings; the majority of which have created business and employment opportunities for the people of Linden. We have

also disbursed \$279 million of grants to the people of small businesses in Linden, grants to the people of Linden which the APNU/AFC did not... no such grants have not been given to the people of Linden, while we were in government.

Ms Fernandes: I will repeat my question to the Hon Minister, why is it that from 2020 to now, the Minister is sitting in Cabinet and has not put in...

[The Chairman hit the gavel.]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, let us get back to the issue of the Budget Estimates for 2025. I now put the question...

Ms Fernandes: Mr. Chairman... No, Mr. Chairman, I have some questions here. Could I take the Hon. Member to project code 2401300, Land transport, I note he is requesting some \$400 million to procure vehicles. However, if you look at the two previous years with this allocation being requested it is over one billion dollars to date that we would have speeding in the purchase of vehicles. Could the Hon. Member say the number of vehicles they intend to procure, probably the type of vehicles and where would these vehicles be assigned?

Dr. Singh: We came...

[The Chairman hit the gavel.]

Dr. Singh: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Sir, permit me to wait for the cacophony to subside. Like with so many other things, we came into government in 2020 and found the overwhelming majority of our country's infrastructure, the overwhelming majority of our government's equipment including our fleet of vehicles in an abject state of disrepair. As a result of under investment and as a result of poor or no maintenance whatsoever. Since we assumed office, we have resumed placing emphasis on building out our infrastructure and restoring, rebuilding and replenishing our stock of equipment including the respective fleets of vehicles. I think the Hon. Member is aware, this is a fact a lumpsum that is used to purchase vehicles for across the Central Government, this is not for the Ministry of Finance only. Over the course of the year we received request, we evaluate those requests, we rank them and prioritise them and we purchase vehicles from this allocation. Based on our experience in over the past few years, the overwhelming majority of vehicles that we have purchased have been typically what would be called double cab vehicles and minibuses. So, the overwhelming majority of the vehicles that we have bought have been double cab vehicles and minibuses as I indicated for distribution across several agencies.

Ms. Ferguson: Though his explanations were not as helpful as I really wanted it to be, I heard the Hon. Member stated that the moneys will be utilised to procure vehicles for across Government agencies. We have been considering estimates since last week and all the agencies and the Ministries that we have examined thus far, they have allocations in their budgets for transportation and so forth. So, firstly, could the Hon. Member say to this House, how many vehicles will be procured from this \$400 million? Secondly, as you stated, Sir, these vehicles will be assigned or dispersed to Government agencies. Could you list the Government agencies that will be benefiting from this allocation, thank you?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, The Hon. Member would no doubt be aware – having herself participated in the consideration of these estimates – that the overwhelming majority, I would not say all, but I would say the majority of the vehicles that were specifically provided for in agency budgets, those vehicles were typically in health and education programmes for very specific purposes. Typically, ambulances and or busses for school children, those were the majority of vehicles that were specifically budgeted for under respective agencies and this allocation will meet other requirements.

Ms Lawrence: If I can go back to the Poverty 4400...
[*Interruption*]

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, the House will no doubt record the rousing welcome that the Hon. Vice President received on his arrival.

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

Ms Lawrence: Mr. Chairman...

[*The Chairman hit the gavel.*]

7.16 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Go ahead, Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman: Online right now is Hon. Ms. McDonald, someone that is named 'Samsung' and no one else. Go ahead.

Ms. Lawrence: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Project code 4400700 – Poverty Programme. We have been allocated \$100 million to this particular programme over the years, and I would be happy if the Minister could tell this House what some of the intervention projects are that he is proposing to undertake this year. While the legend speaks to the most vulnerable

groups through community development programmes, could the Minister say whether, on his website, if there is some form of application where groups can go on and make applications and whether there is, on the website, an explanation in terms of how you can apply as a group for these funds?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, again, the Hon. Member, as a veteran of this House, knows that this is a demand-driven provision and from time to time during the course of the year, requests are made, and they are considered and granted from this allocation. The Hon. Member knows that, and we have this conversation every year.

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, could I take the Minister to subsidies? Contribution to local organisations on page 488.

Mr. Chairman: Yes, so let me put this head, first.

Ms. Lawrence: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

Programme: 031 – Policy and Administration – \$65,832,259,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, it was the same line. It was the same heading, Sir.

Mr. Chairman: I was just following the lead of the veteran, Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence, who asked that we go to the next head.

Ms. Lawrence: I am no veteran.

Programme: 032 – Public Financial Management Policies and Services – \$108,590,000

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I go to project code 4503100 – Contribution to Local Organisations. Linden Enterprise Network – there is an allocation of \$50 million towards capital expenditure. Could the Minister kindly say to this House what structure is in place to expend these moneys and to whom do they report?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, we have finished that item. That is part of programme 031. We are now at programme... You have already put that question. We are now at programme 032.

Ms. Lawrence: The Hon. Minister is a veteran at these things. I am quite certain...

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence, you had asked we go to page 488, right? Page 488... Sorry. Yes. I actually...

Ms. Lawrence: Mr. Chairman, you notice at the top there?

Mr. Chairman: Minister...

Ms. Lawrence: There is a Linden Enterprise Network – \$50 million.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence, you are absolutely correct. I read wrong and I will recommit. Go ahead. You and I will talk outside.

Recommittal

Programme: 31 – Policy and Administration – \$65,832,259,000

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you graciously, Mr. Chairman. Again, I put my question to the Hon. Minister. The \$50 million that is allocated here for capital contribution to Linden Enterprise Network – I am asking him, what is the structure in place that will take care of this \$50 million and spend it in accordance with what it is being requested for and to whom does that structure report to?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, the Hon. Member would be aware that we maintain a skeleton staff at the office there. This allocation meets the administrative costs associated with that skeleton staff at that small office that we maintain and they report to the Finance Secretary.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, a follow-up to that.

Mr. Chairman: Go ahead.

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Sir. Through you, Sir, we are aware that the moneys there are meeting the operational costs. However, Sir, there is a bank account with hundreds of millions in it that has not been able to be expended for loans to small businesses because there is no board in place. Could the Hon. Minister say why this board was not put in place as yet? Every year we are hearing about it.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, I have already addressed that matter earlier. The Hon. Member herself owes an explanation to this country as to why the Government that she was a part of capriciously, in the twilight of their term of office, increased the ceiling. When the Linden Enterprise Network (LEN) was conceptualised, the ceiling on loans was small loans – it was \$1 million. In June, 2019, long after, six months after they had lost the No-Confidence Motion, they increased that ceiling to \$10 million to facilitate larger loans to selected cronies of theirs. [Mr. Jagdeo: What was the date?] June, 2019.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, I now put the question....

Ms. Ferguson: No. Mr. Chairman, I have a follow-up. We still have time, Mr. Chairman. Still have time – no need to rush.

Mr. Chairman: You have a follow-up? Go ahead, please.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes, Mr. Chairman. Under the very project code 4503100 – Contribution to Local Organisations. Could the Hon. Member provide the positions for the skeleton staff at the Linden Enterprise Network?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, if the Hon. Member tables a question in relation to this matter, I would be more than happy to answer.

Ms. Ferguson: Okay. Follow-up, Sir. Thank you very much. Could the Hon. Member confirm whether the current Regional Executive Officer (REO) of Region 10 is heading this entity in the interim?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, that is not the case.

Programme: 031 – Policy and Administration – \$65,832,259,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Programme: 032 – Public Financial Management Policies and Services – \$108,590,000

Ms. Ferguson: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, through you to the Hon. Member, project code 2502300 – Furniture and Equipment – \$108,590,000. I note that the ministry is requesting \$108 million for furniture and equipment but when you go to the project profile, I recognise the project description is reading:

““Provision for furniture and equipment.”

Could the Hon. Member state what furniture and equipment we are purchasing with this huge sum of money and where would these furniture and equipment will be assigned to? Thank you very much.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Chairman, this is for all the departments of the Ministry of Finance. The bulk of which is for the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) unit, which manages the Government’s Integrated Financial Management System (IFMIS) so \$90 million of this total of \$108 million – \$90 million of that total – is for that unit, the ICT unit. Like I said, that is responsible for the whole of the Government’s payroll, the whole of the Government’s IFMIS, *et cetera*. Then the remainder is essentially for ICT computer equipment primarily and some items of furniture for all of the other technical departments – the Accountant

General's Department, the Office of the Budget, the Project Cycle Management Division, *et cetera*.

Programme: 032 – Public Financial Management Policies and Services – \$108,590,000 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Estimates.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, this completes the consideration of the Committee of Supply of the estimates of expenditure for the year 2025. The Assembly will now resume.

Assembly resumed.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Minister and the staff of the Ministry of Finance and its agencies, for taking us through your agency. Hon. Senior Minister within the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I believe I now have to report that the Committee of Supply has considered the estimates of expenditure for the financial year 2025 and has approved of them as printed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I will now put the motion:

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

The recommended lump sum subvention for each constitutional agency for the financial year 2025, as stated in Schedule 2, amounting to a total sum of eighteen billion, nine hundred forty-six million, five hundred sixty-two thousand, one hundred seventy-three dollars (\$18,946,562,173), which is charged upon the Consolidated Fund by the Constitution and for the sums voted for the constitutional agencies to form part of the estimates of revenues and expenditures of Guyana for the financial year 2025, approves the sum of five hundred twelve billion, four hundred thirty-six million, seven hundred two

thousand, ninety-two dollars (\$512,436,702,092), equivalent to two billion, four hundred sixty-three million, eight hundred eighty-nine thousand, seven hundred ten United States dollars (US\$2,463,889,710), to be withdrawn from the Natural Resources Fund for the financial year 2025, in accordance with the Natural Resources Fund Act 2021.”

Motion put and agreed to.

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 2025, Bill No. 1 of 2025 to be introduced at this stage.”

[*Prime Minister*]

7.31 p.m.

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 Appropriation Bill 2025, Bill No.1/2025 to be introduced at this stage.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Orders suspended.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with paragraph (2) of Article 171 of the Constitution, I signify that Cabinet has recommended the Appropriation Bill 2025, Bill No.1/2025 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 READING

The following Bill was introduced and read the first time:

Appropriation Bill – Bill No. 1/2025

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, 2025, 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 and the Public Service]

Question put and carried.

Bill read the first time.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, I move that the Appropriation Bill 2025, Bill No.1/2025 be read a second time.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT’S BUSINESS

Bills – Second and Third Readings

Appropriation Bill 2025 – Bill No.1/2025

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, 2025, 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 and the Public Service]

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.

Income Tax Amendment Bill 2025 – Bill No.2/2025

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Income Tax Act.”

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we now have the motion for the Income Tax Amendment Bill. Hon. Members, we will proceed with the Second Reading of the Income Tax Amendment Bill 2025, Bill No.2/2025 published on the 29th January, 2025. Hon. Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance.

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, is this the motion?

Mr. Speaker: Yes, Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service.

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I suspect that you were calling on the distinguished Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance to move the motion that this Bill be considered today.

Mr. Speaker: We did it earlier.

Dr. Singh: You allowed me the privilege of moving that motion on her behalf earlier in today's sitting. It is not my intention to speak extensively on the Bill before us, not least because it has been the subject of considerable discussion since the budget was tabled, and featured significantly throughout the budget debate that we had over the past two weeks. The Income Tax Amendment Bill 2025, Bill No. 2/2025, which has been gazetted and is circulated to Members, is a very simple Bill whose purpose is to bring into law the various income tax measures that were announced in *Budget 2025*. In summary, these are, first and foremost, to increase the income tax threshold, the amount of taxable income or the amount of income that is free of taxes from \$100,000 monthly to \$130,000 monthly. I might add that this achieves the most commendable and, indeed, remarkable result that this Government in this term of Office would have doubled the income tax threshold. We came into Office meeting it at \$65,000 per month, and in this term of Office, we have managed to double it to \$130,000 per month.

Secondly, this Bill introduces three very important innovations to our tax system. The first is a deductible or a deduction that is allowable from your taxable income for children, or for the number of children for which the person filing the income tax claim might be claiming the deduction. In particular, Mr. Speaker, it would be recalled that we announced that persons paying income taxes may be able to claim for children they have in the year of income – that is to

say, children under the age of 18. They may claim a deduction from their taxable income of up to \$10,000 per month per child. That benefit, I might add, is available to one parent – one claimant might make the claim for each child. That, of course, is a historic pro-family and pro-child innovation in our tax system. Recognising the very important and historic transition that our economy is going through with different modalities of work, greater innovation in the types of work people are doing and recognising, of course, that greater effort must be incentivised and rewarded. It would be recalled that we announced two significant innovations to our tax system. The first is that income earned from a second job up to a total of \$50,000 per month will be allowed as tax-free income or will be deductible from taxable income.

Income earned by way of overtime work up to a total of \$50,000 per month will also be allowed as tax-free or, in other words, will be allowed as a deduction from potentially taxable income. In addition to the increase in the income tax threshold, this Bill, the current Bill introduces those three important and historic innovations to our tax system. Additionally, this Bill has another very important objective, and that is to reduce the tax burden on every single taxpayer, and it achieves this by reducing the two rates that are applicable to taxable income. In particular, it would be recalled that there are currently, or, that is to say, before the enactment of the current Bill which comes into operation, there are currently two rates of income tax that are applicable, the first is a rate of 28% and the second is a rate of 40%. I might add, Mr. Speaker, that when we left Office, the highest rate of income tax was 30%, the higher rate of 40% was introduced by the A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) while they were in Government. Today, we are reducing those two rates – we are reducing the rate of 28% to 25%, and we are reducing the rate of 40% to 35%. Those two measures will redound to the benefit of every single taxpayer in Guyana. It is not my intention to elaborate further on these two Bills. Like I said, they have been the subject of considerable discussions since I first tabled them and throughout the course of the budget debate. I trust that they will enjoy wholehearted and unanimous support from our Colleagues on that side of the House, notwithstanding their preference for a higher rate of income tax as is evidenced by the measures that they implemented while they were in Government. With those few words, I recommend this Bill to this honourable House and I trust that it will be unanimously supported. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister Singh. Hon. Members, there being no other contribution.

[Mr. Speaker hit the gravel.]

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, this concludes our business for today on consideration of the Estimates for Financial Year 2025. Let me take this opportunity to thank the Clerk and Deputy Clerk and the staff of the Parliament for all their hard work and all the service providers, including the police, for taking us through these last two weeks.

7.46 p.m.

We were able to speak directly to our people through the media and also to Guyanese and other people overseas. We want to thank them for the extensive and intensive coverage we had of these proceedings. Hon. Members, the Clerk has organised some sumptuous refreshments, we invite you to partake. I now call on the Hon. Prime Minister.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to a date to be fixed.”

[Prime Minister]

Brigadier Ret’d Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the House be adjourned to a date and time to be fixed.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the House is adjourned to a date to be fixed.

Adjourned accordingly at 7.47 p.m.