



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

101ST Sitting

Monday, 17TH February, 2025

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.21 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

MEMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY (71)

Speaker (1)

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

MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNMENT (38)

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

Prime Minister (1)

+ Hon. Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Anthony Phillips, M.S.S., M.P.,
*Prime Minister,
Prime Minister's Office,
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205 Camp Street,
Georgetown.*

Vice-President (1)

+ Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P.,
*Vice-President,
Office of the President,
New Garden Street,
Georgetown.*

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

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

[Absent]

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

Senior Ministers (16)

+ Hon. Gail Teixeira, M.P.,
(Region No. 7 – Cuyuni/Mazaruni),
Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,
Ministry of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance,
Government Chief Whip,
Office of the Presidency,
New Garden Street,
Georgetown.

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

+*Hon. Dr. Ashni K. Singh, M.P.,
Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance
and the Public Service,
Ministry of Finance,
Main & Urquhart Streets,
Georgetown.

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

+ Hon. Dr. Frank C. S. Anthony, M.P.,
Minister of Health,
Ministry of Health,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Priya D. Manickchand, M.P.,
(Region No. 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),
Minister of Education,
Ministry of Education,
Lot 26 Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ *Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P.,
Minister of Home Affairs,
Ministry of Home Affairs,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, M.P.,
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Ministry of Agriculture,
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+ Hon. Pauline R.A. Campbell-Sukhai, M.P.,
Minister of Amerindian Affairs,
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
Lot 251-252 Thomas & Quamina Streets,
South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P.,
Minister of Labour,
Ministry of Labour,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
Minister of Natural Resources,
Ministry of Natural Resources,
Lot 96 Duke Street,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

+*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,
Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
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Bourda, Georgetown.

+ Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P.,
(Region No. 1 – BarimaWaini),
Minister of Housing and Water,
Ministry of Housing and Water,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Minister of Human Services and Social Security,
Ministry of Human Services and Social Security,
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+ Cabinet Member

*** Non-Elected Minister**

+ Hon. Charles S. Ramson, M.P.,
Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports,
Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports,
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+ Hon. Sonia Savitri Parag, M.P.,
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Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development,
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Georgetown.

Hon. Deodat Indar, M.P.,
Minister within the Ministry of Public Works,
Ministry of Public Works,
Wight's Lane,
Kingston,
Georgetown.

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

[Absent – on leave]

Hon. Warren Kwame E. McCoy, M.P.,
Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister,
Office of the Prime Minister,
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205 Camp Street,
Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

Other Members (15)

Hon. Mr. Alister S. Charlie, M.P.,
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Central Rupununi,
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Georgetown.

Hon. Dr. Vishwa D.B. Mahadeo, M.P.,
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No. 66 Village,
Corentyne,
Berbice.

Hon. Mr. Sanjeev J. Datadin, M.P.,
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Hon. Mr. Seepaul Narine, M.P.,
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East Bank Demerara.

Mrs. Yvonne Pearson-Fredericks, M.P.,
Mainstay Lake/Whyaka Village,
Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,
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South Cummingsburg,
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Georgetown.

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

Hon. Mr. Faizal M. Jaffarally, M.P.,
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New Amsterdam.
c/o Freedom House,
Robb Street,
Georgetown.

Hon. Dr. Tandika S. Smith, M.P.,
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Tuschen, North,
East Bank Essequibo.

Hon. Mr. Lee G.H. Williams, M.P.,
Paruima Upper Mazaruni,
c/o Freedom House,
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* Hon. Ms. Sarah Browne, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
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South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

* Hon. Mr. Vikash Ramkissoon, M.P.,
Parliamentary Secretary,
Ministry of Agriculture,
Regent and Vlissengen Road,
Bourda, Georgetown.

Hon. Ms. Bhagmattie Veerasammy, M.P.,
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Leader of the Opposition

Hon. Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan, M.P.,

[Absent]

Lot 10 Delph Street,

Campbelville,

Georgetown.

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

[Absent – on leave]

Lot 410 Caneview Avenue,

South Ruimveldt,

Georgetown.

Hon. Shurwayne F.K. Holder, M.P.,

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Lot 55 Henrietta,

Essequibo Coast.

Hon. Ms. Catherine A. Hughes, M.P.,

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Lot 13 A, New Providence,

East Bank Demerara.

Hon. Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond, M.P.,

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Hon. Mr. Sherod A. Duncan, M.P.,

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East Coast Demerara.

Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence, M.P.,

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Castello Housing Scheme,

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Hon. Ms. Amanza O.R. Walton-Desir, M.P.,
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Craig Milne,
Cove & John,
East Coast Demerara.

Hon. Mr. Vincent P. Henry, M.P.,
(Region No. 9 – Upper Takutu/Upper Essequibo),
Shulidnab Village,
South Central,
Rupununi.

(Culvert City Lethem)

Hon. Dr. Karen R.V. Cummings, M.P.,
Lot 2 Belfield Housing Scheme,
East Coast Demerara.

Hon. Ms. Tabitha J. Sarabo-Halley, M.P.,
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South Ruimveldt Park,
Georgetown.

Hon. Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, M.P.,
Lot 1110 Plot 'B',
Herstelling,
East Bank Demerara.

Hon. Ms. Annette N. Ferguson, M.P.,
Lot 842 Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.

Hon. Ms. Juretha V. Fernandes, M.P.,
Lot 1282 Block EE,
Eccles,
East Bank Demerara.

Hon. Mr. David A. Patterson, M.P.,
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Georgetown.

Hon. Mr. Ronald Cox, M.P.,
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Mabaruma Compound.

[Virtual Participation]

Hon. Mr. Jermaine A. Figueira, M.P.,
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Silvertown,
Wismar, Linden.

Hon. Mr. Ganesh A. Mahipaul, M.P.,
Lot 14 Plantain Walk,
West Bank Demerara.

Hon. Mr. Haimraj B. Rajkumar, M.P.,
Lot 18 Public Road,
Johanna Cecilia,
(Region # 2 Essequibo Coast).

Hon. Ms. Nima N. Flue-Bess, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Lot 88 Nelson Street,
Mocha Village,
East Bank Demerara.

Hon. Mr. Dineshwar N. Jaiprashad, M.P.,
Region No. 6 – East Berbice/Corentyne),
Lot 80 Babu John Road, Haswell,
Port Mourant, Corentyne Berbice.

Hon. Ms. Maureen A. Philadelphia, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica),
Lot 17 Block 1, Section F,
Plantation Belfield,
East Coast Demerara.

Hon. Ms. Beverley Alert, M.P.,
(Region No. 4 – Demerara/Mahaica)
Lot 169-170 Stanleytown,
West Bank Demerara.
c/o Lot 13 A, New Providence,
East Bank Demerara.

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

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

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

Hon. Dr. Asha Kisooson, M.P.,
Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly,
Lot 855, 3rd Field,
Cummings Lodge,
Greater Georgetown.

Officers (2)

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

Ms. Hermina Gilgeours,
Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly,
Parliament Office,
Public Buildings,
Brickdam,
Georgetown.

Hansard Division Officers (17)

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Ms. Marlyn Jeffers-Morrison,
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Ms. Shawnel Cudjoe,
Senior Editor

Ms. Shevona Telford,
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Ms. Lushonn Bess,
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Reporter

Ms. Eyoka Gibson,
Reporter

Mr. Daniel Allen,
Reporter

Ms. Rajkumarie Ramdeen,
Reporter

Ms. Jasmine Grant,
Reporter

Ms. Calissa Benjamin,
Reporter

Mr. Parmanand Singh,
Pre –Press Technician

Mr. Saeed Umrao,
Audio Technician

Mr. Daison Horsham,
Audio Technician

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ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Opening Remarks and Birthday Greetings

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, welcome back. I know we just left here a few days ago. Firstly, today, on your behalf and on behalf of my family and I, I extend birthday greetings to the Hon. Mohabir Anil Nandlall, Senior Counsel and Member of Parliament (MP).

Condolences to Hon. Minister Anand Persaud

Also, on your behalf and my family and I, our condolences to the Hon. Minister Anand Persaud on the passing of his mother.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Paper and Report were laid:

- (1) Minutes of Proceedings of the 15th Meeting of the Committee of Selection held on Friday, 24th January, 2025.

[Speaker of the National Assembly]

- (2) The Civil Aviation (Operations) (Amendment) Regulations 2025 – No. 2/2025.

[Minister of Public Works]

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[For Written Replies]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there are 15 questions on today's Order Paper. Questions one to nine are for Written Replies and questions number 10 to 15 are for Oral Replies. For the Written Replies, questions number one to five are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, and are for the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs. Questions number six and seven are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Nima Flue-Bess, and are for the Hon. Minister of Culture Youth and Sport. Number eight is in the name of the Hon. Member, Mr. Devin Sears, and is for the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation. Question nine is in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley, and is for the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs. The answers to these questions have all been received. Therefore, in accordance with our Standing Orders, they have been circulated.

(1) Construction of the Brickdam Police Station

Ms. Ferguson:

1. Can the Hon. Minister inform the National Assembly of the total project cost for constructing the Brickdam Police Station?
2. Can the Hon. Minister state the percentage of works with costs paid out as of 25th October, 2024, for construction of the Brickdam Police Station?
3. Can the Hon. Minister state when the project is likely to be completed as per the contract agreement?
4. Can Hon. Minister lay over to the National Assembly copies of the Contract agreement between the Ministry of Home Affairs and the contractor for the Brickdam Police Station project?

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]:

1. The total project cost for the Reconstruction of the Brickdam Police Station is \$5,922,063,000.
2. As of 25th October, 2024, the percentage of work completed for the project was about 10%. A total of \$1,493,870,244 was paid on the project as of 25th October, 2024, which included a 15% advance payment of \$888,329,204.
3. The project completion date according to the contract is 15th July, 2026.
4. This contract can be viewed at the Ministry of Home Affairs.

(2) Name and Background Information of the Company Constructing the Brickdam Police Station

Ms. Ferguson: Can the Hon. Minister provide the National Assembly with the name and brief background information of the company awarded the contract to construct the Brickdam Police Station?

Mr. Benn: The contractors who were awarded the contract for the Reconstruction of the Brickdam Police Station are R. Bassoo and Sons Construction Company and Qingjian Group Company. R. Bassoo and Sons Construction Company has worked for the Ministry on one other project in recent years.

(3) Construction of the Kitty Police Station

Ms. Ferguson:

1. Can the Hon. Minister inform the National Assembly of the total project cost for the construction of the Kitty Police Station?
2. Can the Hon. Minister state the percentage of works with costs paid out as of 25th October, 2024, on the construction of the Kitty Police Station?
3. Can the Hon. Minister state when the project is likely to be completed as per the contract agreement?
4. Can Hon. Minister lay over to the National Assembly copies of the Contract agreement between the Ministry of Home Affairs and the contractor for the Kitty Police Station project?

Mr. Benn:

1. The total project cost for the Reconstruction of the Kitty Police Station is \$191,907,925.
2. As of 25th October, 2024, the percentage of work completed for the project was about 68%. A total of \$71,019,977 was paid on the project as of 25th October, 2024, which included a 15% advance payment of \$28,786,188 that was paid in 2023.
3. The project completion date according to the contract is 13th January, 2025.
4. This contract can be viewed at the Ministry of Home Affairs.

(4) Name and Background Information of the Company Constructing the Kitty Police Station

Ms. Ferguson: Could the Hon. Minister provide the National Assembly with the name and brief background information of the company to whom the contract for the Kitty Police Station has been awarded?

Mr. Benn: The name of the Contractor that was awarded the contract for the Reconstruction of the Kitty Police Station is Dundas Construction Inc. This contractor has worked for the Ministry on one other project in recent years.

(5) Construction of the Beterverwagting Police Station

Ms. Ferguson:

1. Can the Hon. Minister inform the National Assembly whether moneys were allocated in the Estimates of 2024, for the construction of the Beterverwagting Police Station?
2. Can the Hon. Minister inform the National Assembly of the total project cost for the construction of the Beterverwagting Police Station?
3. Can the Hon. Minister state the percentage of works with costs paid out as of 25th October, 2024, on the construction of the BV Police Station?
4. Can the Hon. Minister state when the project commenced and is likely to be completed as per the contract agreement?
5. Can Hon. Minister lay over to the National Assembly copies of the contract agreement between the Ministry of Home Affairs and the contractor for the BV Police Station project?

Mr. Benn:

1. Yes, a total of \$38,450,000 was allocated in the Estimates of 2024 for the Reconstruction of the Beterverwagting Police Station.
2. The total project cost for the reconstruction of the Beterverwagting Police Station is \$119,027,202.
3. As of the 25th October, 2024, the percentage of work completed for the project was about 10%. A total of \$17,854,080 was paid on the project as of 25th October, 2024, which was the advance payment of 15% of the contract amount.
4. The project completion date according to the contract is 1st September, 2025.
5. This contract can be viewed at the Ministry of Home Affairs.

(6) Members of the Interview Committee of the Culture and Creative Industry Grant Programme

Ms. Flue-Bess:

1. How many members comprise the

Interview Committee that determines the awardees of the Culture and Creative Industry Grant?

2. What are the designations of the Members of the Committee?

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]:

1. Four (4) Members
2. Designations of the members of the committee – Hon. Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports (Chair), Director of Culture, Director of National Events and Technical Officer.

(7) Number of Artists and Musicians Awarded the Culture and Creative Industry Grant Programme

Ms. Flue-Bess: Can the Minister provide the number of artists and musicians who were awarded the Culture and Creative Industry Grant in 2024.

Mr. Ramson: Thirty-two (32)

(8) Venezuela-Guyana Border Controversy

Mr. Sears: What is the status of the ongoing proceedings and discussions regarding the Venezuela-Guyana territorial controversy?

Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation [Mr. Todd]: Guyana remains committed to the peaceful resolution of the controversy over the validity of the 1899 Arbitral Award in accordance with international law, as determined by the International court of Justice (ICJ). On the 9th December, 2024, Guyana submitted to the Court its final written brief on the merits. Venezuela's final written submission is due to be filed on the 11th August, 2025. Guyana looks forward to the receipt of Venezuela's legal arguments and to engaging with Venezuela at the oral hearings that will be scheduled by the Court soon thereafter.

Most recently, President Maduro, as well as the National Electoral Council of Venezuela made public statements announcing Venezuela's plan to hold elections on 27th April, 2005 in "Guayana Esequiba," in which "the people of "Guayana Esequiba" will elect a "Governor of Guyana Esequiba State." This portends an effort by Venezuela to carry out government activities – elections – within Guyana's sovereign territory. It would be the most blatant and threatening act of aggression by Venezuela thus far, and

it would be tantamount to the physical takeover of an integral part of Guyana.

The Government of Guyana immediately brought this threat to the attention of the United Nations Secretary General and the Secretaries General of CARICOM and the Commonwealth. The statements were also brought to the attention of the ICJ, wherein Guyana emphasised that it considers President Maduro's statement both an affront to our sovereignty and territorial integrity, and an offense against the Order of the Court on 1st December, 2023. Guyana also appealed to the international community at large to use its influence with Venezuela to persuade it to refrain from unilateral actions to change the status quo pending the final resolution of the controversy by the ICJ, and to respect and abide by the final judgment of the Court, whatever it may be (as Guyana has already pledged to do).

While we remain committed to the ICJ as the means of settlement of this controversy, we have indicated that we also remain open to establishing and maintaining friendly relations with Venezuela. We are not however opened to having any discussion on the matter of the border or any other issue that is before the Court and no such discussions have ever been conducted.

(9) Settlements Established by the Government for Venezuelans Residing in Guyana

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Can the Minister provide an updated list of the names of the settlements established by the Government for Venezuelans residing in Guyana?

Mr. Benn: The Farm Corp is one of the settlements near Mabaruma in Region 1; that the Government of Guyana has established for Venezuelans residing in Guyana, which is also used for transit purposes.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[For Oral Replies]

Mr. Speaker: Questions 10, 11 and 12 are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley, and they are for the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service. Question 10 is from the Hon. Member, Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley, and is for the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh. I will say that a lot of this information is contained in the Estimates, but I will allow the Hon. Member to ask the question and the Minister to respond. Ms. Sarabo-Halley, you have the floor.

(10) Public Servants Employed on Contract

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Hon Minister please inform the House of the number of Public Servants currently employed on contract, as of November 2024, outside the remit of the Public Service Commission?

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

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Allow me, first of all, Sir, to thank you for making the point in that regard and pre-empting me a little, which I appreciate. You made the point, as I said, that, first of all, and as the Hon. Member knows, no doubt that information on staff on contract is, as a matter of course, included in the Staffing Details tables published under every programme and within every agency in the National Estimates of the Public Sector, Volume 1, which we just considered. The Hon. Member would also, of course, be aware that Standing Order 20 (p) does stipulate that:

“A Question shall not be asked seeking information set forth in accessible or ordinary works of reference...”

Notwithstanding, Sir, I am happy, nevertheless, to inform the Hon. Member that were the Staffing Details tables contained in the National Estimates to be examined, it would be ascertained that, as at the end of December, 2024, which is the point at which we have data readily available, there is a total of 8,173 persons employed on contract. I might add that the only agencies for which those details are not published would be the Constitutional Commissions because they are allocated their moneys in a lumpsum, in accordance with the Constitution. There is no disaggregation of their employment by contract and other individual line items. Otherwise, this information is available for everybody else, every other agency – all ministries, regions and departments in the Central Government. The total is 8,173, and it incidentally includes the information for the constitutional agencies which we have obtained. Thank you very much, Sir.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, just to note that the question was asked before this Budget came out. This information was not in the public when the question was asked. This is just a follow-up: Could the Hon. Minister say whether the salaries given to the persons on contract are above the salary scales recognised by the Public Service Commission (PSC) and the Ministry of Public Service?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, the answer to that question is no. That is not ordinarily the case.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: This is the final follow-up on this one. Could the Hon. Minister then say if the Government has weighed the options – since there is no difference in terms of the salaries – and determined that gratuity is more economically feasible for the country and the individual over pension for years of service worked?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, this People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government has infinite faith in the ability of the citizens of Guyana to make and exercise judgements on their own behalf. We do not presume to know the liquidity preferences of any individual citizen. There are some citizens who would be perfectly happy to forego a 22 1/2 % gratuity in the interest of earning and becoming entitled to a post-retirement pension when they individually and respectively retire. There are other citizens who might consciously and deliberately prefer to forego a post-retirement pension upon their eventual retirement and, instead, receive today a 22 1/2 % gratuity on top of their monthly emoluments. We make that choice available to public servants. If you wish to go on the Permanent/Pensionable Establishment, you are entitled to do so, once, obviously, you meet the requirements of the job, *et cetera*. We do not prevent anybody from going on the Permanent/Pensionable service. If on the other hand, they wish to receive a pension, as a conscious-thinking rational individual, if on the other hand, you wish instead to receive a gratuity and not a post-retirement pension, then we allow you to exercise that choice. Mr. Speaker, it is apposite to note that, during the five-year period from 2015 to 2020 when the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) was in Government, they made efforts, I will use the word loosely, I suspect I would be venturing onto the fringes of parliamentary propriety, but they outlawed, not completely, but largely outlawed contract employment.

10.35 a.m.

Several persons were compelled to give up/surrender their contract/gratuity status and go onto the pensionable establishment, several persons, thousands of persons. What that meant instantly was that these persons lost their 22.5% gratuity. They suffered a cut in their emoluments. That 22.5% was lost by the heavy-handed approach taken by the APNU/AFC to say that they must go onto the pensionable establishment. Doctors in the public healthcare system were told that they must go onto the pensionable establishment,

and their gratuities were taken away from them. Sir, that gratuity was taken away from them. Their emoluments were cut. Let us understand what 22.5% represents. It is almost a quarter of your emoluments. They took, literally, a quarter of these people's emoluments out of their pockets because of their heavy-handedness. Several delegations of doctors went to see the Leader of the Opposition, now the Vice President, and said that they were aggrieved by that Government for taking away their 22.5% gratuity. They appealed to the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) to fix it. So much so, that we wrote in our Manifesto that when we come back into Government, we will restore the right of the people to go on contract gratuity. As soon as we came back into Government, we gave those doctors the right to go back on contract/gratuity, and they all went back on contract/gratuity.

Mr. Speaker, I have public servants working in the Ministry of Finance, and I have a particular example in mind. Obviously, I will respect the confidentiality of the conversation that I had, but this is a long-standing public servant. I spoke with this gentleman, and we spoke generally about what transpired. I was basically catching up on things that would require my attention on my return in 2020. One of the first things this gentleman said to me was that he was forced to go on the Pensionable Establishment, and he said, 'Minister, I would like to go back on contract/gratuity because I want my 22.5%'. We respected and granted his wishes. He is back on contract/gratuity today. This is because he, like so many others, consciously preferred to receive a 22.5% gratuity now, instead of a post-retirement pension. In typical fashion, the APNU/AFC has no concept whatsoever of respecting the wishes of the people as is reflected in their electoral behaviour. We, on the other hand, in the People's Progressive Party/Civic, will always respect the wishes of the people of Guyana. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, before I give you the floor, you asked a question pertaining to the number of persons on contract. We have now gone into their salaries and pension arrangements. For me, it is a deviation from the question. If you could...

Ms. Ferguson: [*Inaudible*].

Mr. Speaker: Ms. Ferguson, do you have something to say to me?

Ms. Ferguson: No, Cde. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: I will suspend and you can say it. Good morning to you too. Yes, Ms. Sarabo-Halley.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I am listening to you, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: If you are going to deal with numbers, I will allow one more. If not, we will move on to your next question.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, you can guide me. I asked about the number of persons who are on contract, and contracts suggest certain things as opposed to persons who are not on contract. I am...

Mr. Speaker: I am not a lawyer. I have just been a lawmaker for almost 30 years, not a lawyer.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I understand that.

Mr. Speaker: I am not going to...

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I am seeking your guidance. Basically, you are saying that even though we spoke on contract, we cannot get into numbers, we cannot get into the specifics of the contracts.

Mr. Speaker: Right now, I am dealing with numbers. The Clerk will tell you that when we go through these things, I err on the side of caution and because I am not a lawyer, I do not know all the legal principles. I am safe that way. So, please, let us stick to the numbers.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: All right, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: All of the breakdowns for all of the agencies are contained in the budget.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, as I initially said, those numbers were not available when the question was asked. That was the basis of that.

Mr. Speaker: No. We understand that and you repeated that.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I will go to the next question and then deal with what [*inaudible*].

(11) Public Servants who resigned from the Public Service

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could the Hon. Minister indicate the number of public servants, including those from the traditional public service, including nurses, doctors, teachers and soldiers, who have resigned from the public service between August 2020 to November 2024?

Dr. Singh: Permit me, Sir, to once again turn to the Standing Orders that govern our proceedings. Standing Order 20(b) – I am not reading the preamble, but the *chapeau* – states:

“21(b) a question shall not deal with the action of a Minister for which he or she is not responsible to the Assembly”

The Hon. Member, as a former Minister of Public Service would – and I can only imagine that she is asking me in my capacity as the Minister responsible for the Public Service – I believe, be aware that teachers, police officers and soldiers do not fall within the remit of the Ministry of Public Service. In relation to those agencies and categories of public service employees who do fall within the remit of the Ministry of Public Service, it is my duty to inform the Hon. Member, based on the information currently available at the Ministry and supplied to me by the technical team there, a total of 2,832 employees are estimated to have resigned from the public service between the period from August 2020 to December 2024. Thank you very much, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Before I call on the Hon. Member again, Minister, you are absolutely correct. In fact, when we looked at this question, I raised the issue about exactly what you said. Public servants are public servants as defined, and anyone else could maybe be a State employee or something else. Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, you have the floor.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a follow-up. Could the Hon. Minister state whether any formal assessment has been done to determine the number of resignations and what systems have been put in place to reduce the level of resignations in the public service, or whether he sees this as a normal level of resignations per year?

Dr. Singh: The economy of Guyana is going through some significant changes that are relevant to the matter that is being raised in the current question. Since the return of the People's Progressive Party/Civic to Government in August, 2020, there has been a clear increase in the rate of economic growth, an expansion of private sector activity across the entire spectrum of productive activity and entry of new investors – both foreign direct investors and domestic private sector investors, establishing new companies and business enterprises, employing people – creating employment opportunities and generating income earning opportunities for the people of Guyana. What this means is that all citizens of Guyana now have a wider array of employment opportunities, frankly, not only the previous five years, but

indeed at any other time in our country's entire history. There are more employment opportunities today in Guyana than at any other time in our country's history. That has very evident implications for the mobility of labour because people are now able, as they should in an ideal world, to look across the entire spectrum of opportunities and pursue those where they are able and eligible to do so.

In fact, we are going further. We are investing heavily in training for all Guyanese people including public servants of course. This includes training through the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) Scholarship programme, on which much was said during the course of the budget debate – the removal of fees at the University of Guyana (UG) and the cancellation of outstanding student loans in relation to courses done and loans taken to finance courses there. All of these initiatives are aimed at upskilling Guyanese nationals by giving every single one of them an opportunity to acquire new skills with a view to them improving their own individual circumstances and contributing to national economic life. That investment in training is also having additional implications for the mobility of labour. People are able to move back and forth between jobs, between employment and self-employment, entrepreneurial opportunities and across employment opportunities as they wish. That is a healthy thing. We are pleased as a Government at the successes we have achieved in creating more employment opportunities, so that every single Guyanese person has a wider array of choices in terms of what kind of productive activity, employment opportunity and entrepreneurial activity they wish to engage in. We see that as a resoundingly positive thing. At the same time, we have also, of course, been raising the terms and conditions of employment in the public service. These improvements have constituted not only the multi-year wage agreements that we have concluded, including the recent ones with the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) and the Guyana Teachers' Union (GTU) adjustments in allowances, but also other non...

10.50 a.m.

These improvements have constituted not only the multi-year wage agreements that we have concluded, including the recent ones with the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) and the Guyana Teachers' Union (GTU), adjustments in allowances, but also other non-wage benefits, including things like initiatives to make sure citizens have access to house lots and citizens have access to better social services, *et cetera* – all aimed at improving their quality of life.

Mr. Speaker, I will say that we are actually observing a very interesting phenomenon. Given the level at which public service wages have now increased – wages in the central Government, I should say, because that includes teachers and the Disciplined Services, *et cetera* – in keeping with the same mobility of labour to which I referred, we are now able to attract employees from the private sector into the Government. I recall, for example, a time when it would have been very rare for a person working in a bank or an insurance company to apply to the central Government for a job. Today, not only do we see applications coming from people working in banks and insurance companies expressing an interest in working in the central Government, but also accepting offers of employment in the central Government and moving from banks and insurance companies to the central Government. The Hon. Minister Manickchand pointed out that there was a time when it would have been unimaginable for teachers to leave a private school to come and work in a public school. Today, we have teachers who are working in private schools, applying for jobs in the public education system, accepting job offers, and leaving private schools to come to work in the public sector. Here again, like I said, Mr. Speaker, the availability of a wider range of employment opportunities to Guyanese nationals is a positive thing and is a thing that was missing when the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) was in Government. Thankfully, it has been restored and expanded dramatically since the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) returned to Government in August, 2020. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Minister. Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley? Hon. Members, the next question, No. 12, is also in the name of Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley. Before I put this question, I want to take you back to Standing Order 20, which states:

“The right to ask a question shall be subject to the following general rules, as to interpretation of which the Speaker...”

is

“...the sole judge: -”

It states:

“The proper object of a question is to obtain information on a question of fact within...”

which

“the official cognisance of the Minister to whom it is addressed, or to ask for official action;”

From the polls I have seen, Yours Truly has been given excellent ratings, except for a few persons, in the execution of the job of Speaker. However, in spite of the Speaker's intellect and experience, there are some moments of lapses. Allowing this question was one of such moments because 20 (F) mentions the issue of opinion. After I looked at this again last evening, I thought this was soliciting a view and opinion and not asking for a fact. Then, it was brought to my attention this morning, also, that the question was asked during the Budget debate. It is on the Order Paper, and I will still allow the Minister to proffer an answer to the question, but first, let us ask the Hon. Member to state the question.

(12) Time served on a Government's Scholarship

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for inadvertently allowing me to ask this question at this point. Mr. Minister, I think we had a very productive engagement during the Budget debate when we discussed this particular matter. Let me just ask the question because there is a follow-up that I would like to get to. Can the Honourable Minister inform the House whether the Public Service Ministry was willing to shorten the time served on a Government scholarship for a Degree from five to three years before the person pursues specialisation?

Dr. Singh: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am fully aligned with you and the Hon. Member in both your respective recollections in relation to the fulsomeness of the engagement on the Estimates of Expenditure for the Public Service Ministry (PSM). You all correctly recalled that we had a comprehensive discussion, including on this matter. She, no doubt, clearly recalls that this question was posed during the course of the Estimates and I would respectfully like to draw her attention to the answers that I provided during the said consideration of Estimates. I believe it is, or will be, recorded in the *Hansard*. Thank you very much.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just a quick follow-up. Minister, based on the answer that I received then, there was one question that I did not ask, and that is if the Public Service Ministry sees a difference between the Government scholarship and the Guyana Online Academy of Learning (GOAL) scholarship, in terms of the fact that persons do not have to serve time and they can get another degree, as opposed to the Government scholarship, where they have to serve in order to move on. I am just wondering

if they see a difference between those particular scholarships.

Dr. Singh: Yes. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I think the Hon. Member had asked a similar question the previous year. I have a recollection, but nevertheless, I will say that, clearly, there are differences between the GOAL scholarship programme and the traditional scholarships that are administered by the Public Service Ministry. I would not necessarily say that GOAL does not require public service. I think it is widely known that benefit recipients of the GOAL scholarship programme are required to do some kind of public or community service project in relation to their award and receipt of their scholarships. However, that is different from the traditional contractual arrangements that apply to PSM-administered scholarships, as I am sure the Hon. Member would know. Over and beyond the very evident similarities and differences between GOAL and traditional PSM scholarships in relation to the matter that constitutes the substantive question, the Hon. Member will recall that I did say that this matter is engaging active consideration by the Government, recognising the changes that are being made to the scholarships, given that tuition fees have now been abolished at the University of Guyana (UG). Thank you very much.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Final question, Mr. Speaker. Could the Hon. Minister state, based on all that has been said, whether or not he receives a pension as Government Minister?

Dr. Singh: Mr. Speaker, pensions payable to former Members of Parliament (MPs), and the treatment of those pensions when they return to the Parliament, is a matter governed by law and well-established parliamentary practices. Unlike the APNU/AFC, who are strangers to the law and have no respect for the law, we in the People's Progressive Party/Civic respect the law and comply with it.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have three more oral questions and we just have 10 minutes remaining on this particular item on our agenda, so let us move on. Question No. 13 is from the Hon. Member, Dr. Karen Cummings, for the Minister of Health. Dr. Cummings, you may ask your question.

13. Recent Maternal and Neonatal Deaths at the New Amsterdam And Suddie Hospitals

Dr. Cummings: One second, Mr. Speaker. I will take less than the time allotted. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Recent maternal and neonatal deaths at the New Amsterdam and Suddie Hospitals: Can the Honourable Minister inform this

National Assembly what are some of the causes of the recent maternal and neonatal deaths at the New Amsterdam Public Hospital and the Suddie Public Hospital earlier in the year? It is the first one.

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First of all, maybe it might be good for the House to understand what it is exactly that we are talking about when we talk about a maternal death. This is the death of a patient while pregnant or within 42 days of termination of pregnancy, irrespective of the duration and the site of the pregnancy, from any cause related to or aggravated by the pregnancy and its management, but not from accidental or incidental causes. We have, under this category of maternal deaths, generally two types that we look at: direct obstetric death and indirect obstetric death. Mr. Speaker, it would be good to note that when we reviewed obstetric deaths from 2018, we had about 20; in 2019 we had 23; in 2022, we had 17; in 2023, we had 17; and in 2024, we had 14. We are seeing a decline in these deaths. To come directly to the Member's question, for 2025, there have been no maternal deaths at the New Amsterdam Public Hospital or Suddie Public Hospital.

Dr. Cummings: Well, they have to check the veracity of that because I have interviewed the mother...it was well known. I will have to speak to the Minister subsequently because there were two back-to-back deaths at New Amsterdam Public Hospital. The funeral took place last month. All right. I will go to the next question.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, we had some facts from the Minister. You are stating some information that has come to you, and you are talking about the veracity. Could we ask Dr. Anthony to respond?

Dr. Cummings: Was it 2024, rather than 2025, you are saying, Minister?

Dr. Anthony: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Member asked whether or not there was a maternal death in New Amsterdam Public Hospital in 2025. There was no death at the New Amsterdam Public Hospital.

11.05 a.m.

[**Mr. Mahipaul:** She never specified a year.] I assume that it is 2025 you are talking about. [**Mr. Mahipaul:** It is 2024 we are talking about.] [**Bishop Edghill:** Give him the numbers for 2024.] In 2024, we had 14 deaths across the country. There were no deaths at the New Amsterdam Hospital in 2025. There were no deaths at Suddie Hospital in 2025. If what you are asking is whether

we had maternal deaths for 2025, yes, we had three. We had one at Port Mourant Hospital. That is not New Amsterdam. We had another one at Charity. That is not Suddie Hospital, and we had a third at Bartica. There were three maternal deaths in 2025, but they did not happen at New Amsterdam or Suddie Hospitals. The accuracy of what I am saying is quite accurate.

Dr. Cummings: Were they direct causes or indirect causes?

Dr. Anthony: One of the causes of the first patient, I would not go into the details of the patient, is they suffered from a ruptured cerebral artery, which caused bleeding. That was because she was suffering from eclampsia. You would know that when persons come in with those conditions, they would have a lot of difficulties and it is very difficult to manage such a complicated patient. The patient came in and the doctors who were managing that patient had less than an hour to work with that patient. Unfortunately, that patient died. The second person who died suffered from cardiogenic shock. Again, you would know that with such a condition, persons can deteriorate rapidly, and in this instance, that is what happened. The third patient that we had this year had severe anaemia. The patient was seen at Charity Hospital and was transferred to the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation (GPHC). When we checked the haemoglobin (HB), it was 1.4. You could understand what was going on there. We transfused but while we transfused, the patient was almost in shock. We had that patient in the ICU at the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. The patient died from Disseminated Intravascular Coagulation (DIC), sepsis and multi-organ failure.

Dr. Cummings: Thank you for that answer, Hon. Minister. You just underscored that we are failing in terms of prenatal care. Safe motherhood has five concepts. What was happening before pregnancy? A pregnancy is nine months. Anyway, I will go on to the second question.

14. Supervision of Junior Doctors at the Obstetric Wards of the Regional Hospitals

Dr. Cummings: I beg to ask the Minister of Health Question No. 14 standing in my name: Can the Honourable Minister inform this National Assembly if there is adequate, as is required, supervision of junior Doctors by experienced and skilled health personnel at the Obstetric Wards of the Regional Hospitals, bearing in mind that the health system is itself haemorrhaging from significant loss of senior staff members?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, before I call on you to stand, I think there are two issues there, one was an assertion that we are failing and secondly, the particular question posed, which was supposed to be No. 14. Right now, it is 40 minutes since we started questions. At the end of the Minister's response, we will have to move on with respect to our agenda.

Dr. Anthony: First of all, the three cases that I mentioned, we were very specific in the treatment of these patients. I am sure, as a practising physician, if you have a person who came in with anaemia, where their HB was 1.4, and she is pregnant, you could understand the complications of that patient. The system did not fail. The system responded because we transfused this patient, and the patient had the best care. We moved that patient from the particular hospital to the Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation. In the other instances, again, you should know that if someone is suffering from eclampsia, which means during their pregnancy they had high blood pressure, and they were fitting, that person could deteriorate. You would know that complications of pregnancy is one of the reasons why mothers would die during pregnancy. There is a 17-18% chance that this could happen. This is not the system failing. The system has actually improved so that we could respond to these types of emergencies.

What you left in 2019, we have significantly improved it. I can tell you that...and the figures are there. In 2018, you had 23 maternal deaths. Last year, we had 14. Do you not think that is an improvement? It is an improvement, and it is going to improve further. Not only are we training more people, but we are also giving them the equipment that they need, and we are providing better conditions for them to work. In addition to that, across this country, we have also added operating theatres. If they need to get a Caesarean Section (C-Section), they will be able to get that. How many operating theatres did you have that were working? [Mr. Mahipaul: Seven.] Now, we have more than 24. In addition to all of this, we have constantly been doing training for doctors so that any complications for mothers during their pregnancies, we can respond adequately to them. Now, ... [Interruption.]

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, the Members out of their seats and shouting have to pay you some respect. Go ahead.

Dr. Anthony: I would now like to answer the second question. [Interruption]

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

I want to start at the end of the question because the Hon. Member said that the system is haemorrhaging – the system is bleeding. Let us take a look at what has happened to the system. In 2015, under the APNU/AFC Government, there were 690 medical practitioners in the country. In 2023, we had 1,382 medical practitioners. That is a difference of 692 doctors between their time and what was happening in 2023. You tell me how that is haemorrhaging. You tell me how that is bleeding. We have more doctors now in the country, and they are providing care.

Let us go to the supervision aspect. The Mabaruma Hospital: when you were there, they had no Consultant working at the hospital. Right now, there is a Consultant at the Mabaruma Hospital in Obstetrics and Gynaecology. The Suddie Hospital: I am not sure whether you had any person there, too. Right now, we have a Consultant in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, and we have one Senior Registrar who is working at the Suddie Hospital. The West Demerara Regional Hospital: there are three consultants in Obstetrics and Gynaecology, and three Senior Registrars are also working there. The Diamond Diagnostic Centre: three Registrars are working there. The Mahaicony Hospital: There is one Consultant and two Registrars. Fort Wellington Hospital: two Registrars. The New Amsterdam Hospital: there are two Consultants and three Senior Registrars. The Bartica Hospital: there is one Consultant and one Senior Registrar. Mahdia Hospital: there is one Consultant. Lethem Hospital: there are two Consultants and one Registrar. Linden Hospital Complex: there are two Consultants and two Registrars. The Georgetown Public Hospital Corporation: there are five Consultants, four senior Registrars, six regular Registrars and 14 Residents. Tell me if that is not supervision. When you were there, many of these places did not even have a Consultant. This year, we are going to add 18 more consultants in Obstetrics and Gynaecology to the system.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bills were introduced and read the first time:

(1) The Court of Appeal (Amendment) Bill 2025 – Bill No. 3/2025

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Court of Appeal Act”

(2) The Advanced Passenger Information and Passenger Name Record Bill 2025 – Bill No. 4/2025

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to make provision for the collection, transmission, sharing, storage and regulation of Advanced passengers”

11.20 a.m.

(3) Regional Security System Bill 2025 – Bill No. 5/2025

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the implementation of the Treaty establishing the Regional Security System and for connected matters.”

(4) CARICOM Arrest Warrant Bill 2025 – Bill No. 6/2025

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to give effect to the CARICOM Arrest Warrant Treaty and to provide for related matters.”

PUBLIC BUSINESS

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

MOTIONS

Rehabilitation of the Le Repentir Cemetery

WHEREAS the Le Repentir Cemetery was established in 1861 as the final resting place for persons residing in our Capital City Georgetown;

AND WHEREAS over several years we the citizens have witnessed its expansion from its original size from 103.508 acres to some 106.508 acres, thus utilizing all the land available;

AND WHEREAS over several years, we have witnessed the degradation of the land, which has resulted in tombs falling into the canals, cracking tombs and, in some cases, some are broken. While the drainage has become almost non-existent, thus creating what looks like a jungle and a haven for persons of nefarious characters;

AND WHEREAS the Georgetown City Council is unable to garner adequate funds to provide services such as security and maintenance, among others;

AND WHEREAS Guyanese of all races, religions and financial standing are unable to visit the final resting place of their loved ones.

BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly calls on the Government to upgrade this historic facility and implement a plan for its maintenance, including the drainage infrastructure, thereby elevating it to the status of a national memorial.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, today is the day when Opposition motions get precedence. I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Volda Lawrence, who will move her motion.

Ms. Lawrence: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, Hon. Speaker, fellow Members of Parliament (MPs) and citizens of Georgetown, Megan Rapinoe said:

“Every person has a responsibility to be a participant in this society and make it a better place for everybody in whatever capacity they can.”

So, this morning, I rise with a deep sense of duty and responsibility to propose this motion for the rehabilitation of the Le Repentir Cemetery, a sacred resting place for our citizens, that has long been neglected. To my mind, Sir, this proposal is not merely about restoring a cemetery; it is about honouring our past, respecting our present and safeguarding our future.

The Le Repentir Cemetery, established in 1861, has been serving as the final resting place for generations of our citizens. Many of our forefathers, community leaders, martyrs, and loved ones have been laid to rest within its hallowed grounds. Yet, today, these grounds, which should be easily accessible, evoking a sense of peace, respect and reverence, have become an ugly scene of neglect, decay and even danger. Over the years, we have witnessed the cemetery's expansion from its original size of 103.5 acres to 106.5 acres, with almost full utilisation of all the available land. However, with that expansion has come deterioration; tombs have fallen into canals, others have cracked and, in some cases, vandalised and completely broken. Drainage within the cemetery is nearly non-existent, leading to an overrun landscape that now resembles a jungle.

Le Repentir Cemetery, instead of being a place where families visiting their loved ones can find solace, alas, has become a haven for criminal activities. It is unacceptable that a site meant for respect and remembrance has turned into a place of fear and neglect. The Georgetown City Council, tasked with maintaining the cemetery, lacks adequate funds and manpower to provide critical services such as security, regular maintenance and proper infrastructure. This is not just a matter of municipal concern; it is a national issue, for a society that fails to care for its dead will struggle to uphold the dignity of the living, someone said.

The resolve clause of this motion calls on this House to recognise the urgent need for intervention and commitment, and I propose the following to this House: one, restore the cemetery's infrastructure, ensuring proper drainage, clearing overgrowth and undertaking or executing repairs to damaged tombs. Two, implement a sustainable maintenance plan providing the Georgetown City Council with the necessary resources and support. Three, improve security, thereby ensuring that families can visit their loved ones in safety and peace. It is a well-known fact that families looking for their loved ones who were buried there must ensure that they have security, that they pay persons to clear the bushes so that they can have access to their tombs. We do not want this to continue. Surely, the Members of this National Assembly will agree with me and will not allow this sacred ground to fall into further ruin. Therefore, let us act, not just in homage to the dead but for the dignity of the living. I therefore urge all Members of this House to support this motion and take a stand for respect, remembrance and responsibility. We owe our loved ones that respect. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I put the motion to the House. [*Applause*]

Minister of Public Works [Bishop Edghill]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Allow me to thank the Hon. Member, the mover of this motion, for giving us an opportunity to discuss what I may consider a very important subject that affects all Guyanese from all walks of life. I would like it to be recorded that nothing that I will say in this debate should be interpreted to mean that the Government is unwilling, unable or reluctant to ensure the beautification and the enhancement of the appearance of not just the Le Repentir Cemetery, but cemeteries throughout the length and breadth of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, it could also be important for you to note that maybe the Hon. Member or some other Members are privy to an ongoing exercise, which commenced several months ago, when, at the level of the Cabinet, we decided that across the country all the cemeteries should be addressed, and we should bring improvement. So, this National Assembly is debating a motion where the Government, the Executive, is way ahead in terms of actions in getting this corrected. So, there should be no fight, but I must put on the record a number of things. The Hon. Member, the mover of this motion, referred to the City Council being unable to fund the rehabilitation and enhancement of the Le Repentir Cemetery. The Hon. Member, the mover of this motion, is a senior Member of a political party that owes the Mayor and City Council \$6.4 billion for rates and taxes. If the company, that is the holding facility for Congress Place, simply paid their rates and taxes, the issue of the enhancement of the Le Repentir Cemetery by the competent authority, which is the

Mayor of City Council, could be addressed in a weeks' time. Simply pay your rates and taxes.

The Mayor of Georgetown, who is an elected member, the list on which he was elected was a list that was presented by the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R). I would have thought that this well-scripted presentation, which came from the distinguished Member, Ms Volda Lawrence, is being read in the wrong Assembly. That script is for City Hall, where the majority of the Councillors are PNC/R Councillors. They should move a motion to say pay your rates and taxes and let us do something to improve Georgetown, including the Le Repentir Cemetery. So, I am very concerned about this. The second thing that I want to point out, which is very important, is that the Hon. Member, the mover of this motion, did not tell this Assembly that under the Laws of Guyana, Chapter 28:01 that deals with municipalities and Chapter 28:02 that deals with Local Authority Areas, it is the responsibility of the local authority, in this case the Georgetown Mayor and City Council, to keep the cemetery in good condition.

11.35 a.m.

As a matter of fact, all the persons, family members who have to engage funeral homes or parlours – the moneys they pay are paid to City Hall for the spot. It is not a free story. Where is the money that is being paid for burial going? We have to answer that question. Every person who is buried, his/her family member has to pay a fee to get access to the *Le Repentir* Cemetery to bury the dead. Allow me, Mr. Speaker, to inform this National Assembly of the Government's engagement in the city of Georgetown, where the *Le Repentir* Cemetery is just a small aspect of this. I will tell you a little story of something that actually happened. We know that the Enmore Martyrs are buried in the *Le Repentir* Cemetery and there is an annual celebration of their sacrifice. There is a wreath-laying ceremony and that has been observed no matter who is in Government. There is a monument at Enmore. In 2021, after assuming Office... [Ms. Teixeira: There is also Walter Rodney.] Yes. There is Walter Rodney. ...as the Minister of Public Works, we decided that we would create a decent and well-put-out approach that would last for years, so that when the family members of the Enmore Martyrs, the labour unions, government officials or whoever would want to go there to pay tribute, they can do so.

We engaged a small contractor to clean up and make a concrete road. Do you know what happened after? The city Engineer showed up to stop the work. The city Engineer

showed up to stop the work. I am going to say it a third time – the city Engineer showed up to stop the work on instructions from the City Hall. A City Hall where the People's National Congress Reform (PNC/R) has the majority – the Mayor and everything – sent the city Engineer to stop the cleanup and the rehabilitation to the Enmore Martyrs' tombs. A beginning of what we are now asking for here today – because, just as how the Enmore Martyrs' family members must be able to get to their tomb; the labour unions must be able to get to their tomb; the family members of Dr. Rodney must be able to get to his tomb; I should be able to visit my father's tomb, who is also there; and many others in this room. By the failure of the City Hall to get the job done, the Government intervened and we were given cease orders. Why is this Motion in this House? Are we playing politics or somebody is not being informed? Are we seriously discussing something that is for the good of all of Guyana or somebody is not being properly informed? I did the work because I refused to take the instructions. I completed the task and we went on to fix several other places in the *Le Repentir* Cemetery.

Mr. Speaker, allow me... [Mr. Mahipaul: (Inaudible)] Artificial intelligence (AI) and misinformation seem to be the modus operandi of some of you so continue. We could defend that at any time. Since we came to Office with the understanding that Georgetown needed a renewal and Georgetown needed to be rehabilitated in several different ways, we have spent – just on the main access roads, including the access roads contiguous to the *Le Repentir* Cemetery for the enhancement of Georgetown and bringing dignity to the living, as the Hon. Member ask that we do – almost \$20 billion in the improvement of Georgetown. I can give you the journey and how we had all the humour. We started at Hunter Street, which was a choke point. When we said it would be a three-lane – two lanes going south in the afternoons and two lanes going north in the morning – we had criticism from Members of Parliament. When we went to Albouystown and started to rehabilitate all the drainage networks to take the people out of flooding, using the same people from the area to get the work done, do you know what the Mayor – who is now no longer the Mayor – Oh, he is here. Well, I could call his name because he probably could... – wrote us a letter seeking to interrupt the Government's interventions, stating that we needed the permission of City Hall. I would like to get a letter from the Mayor and City Council, now that we have finished Cemetery Road and we have fenced it particularly to stop the dumping of garbage. I am going to go just now to the dumping of garbage and tomb squatting. There is tomb

squatting taking place in the Cemetery right now. I will explain.

Mr. Speaker, I am assured that you travel that road. Do you know what is happening right now? People are cutting the fence that we have erected to go and build tombs. They are cutting the fence. I did not see anything like that in the Motion, which is that we ask that there be stronger enforcement and responsible actions taken by citizens who are damaging Government's property when efforts are being made by the Government to enhance the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. We went to Independence Boulevard. It is an area that, Mr. Speaker, you are so familiar with because much of your boyhood days, both your soccer and cricket, were played on that Boulevard. Now, we have the description of the Boulevard as Brooklyn, New York. That is how the people of the area described it when it was completed. Right now, as we speak, Sussex Street, on both sides of Cemetery Road, which runs on the outskirts of the *Le Repentir* Cemetery, is being rehabilitated and upgraded, which would give greater access to the *Le Repentir* Cemetery.

Mr. Speaker, I want you to see the pattern that is unfolding. We are working from the outside coming in. For the first time in the history of Guyana, we are going to have a road from Cemetery Road on the southern extremity of the *Le Repentir* Cemetery all the way to Mandela Avenue. Princess Street, which is the northern extremity of the *Le Repentir* Cemetery, is also being rehabilitated and major works are being undertaken. In the *Le Repentir* Cemetery, there are several main roads and drains that have to be addressed. The Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, is asking that we take care of the drains, the roads and I would want to add lights. Okay, nice. If there are lights, our estimates that we are working with – if the company that is a holding company for Congress Place, we have their rates and taxes – I only need \$1.3 billion out of that \$6.4 billion and we can get all the work done in Cemetery Road. Just \$1.3 billion out of the \$6.4 billion to deal with all of the main roads, all of the cross streets and all of the drains. We have the estimates and we are working on them. As a matter of fact, you will see very soon people from the area – East Ruimveldt; West Ruimveldt; Albouystown; and North East, La Penitence – being engaged in small contracts to do concrete roads in the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. Mr. Speaker, for the avoidance of doubt, I have brought to the Assembly the photographs and Google images of all the streets that will be undertaken. This is not something that we have to go and think about. This is something that we already have the plan and we already have...

[The Hon. Member displayed photographs.]

The six main roads between the Cemetery from east to west direction, give access to the Cemetery and they will be rehabilitated. The 13 cross streets/minor roads that run perpendicular to the main roads will give further access to areas within the Cemetery. There are four footpaths that run between the cross streets which will provide further access to the Cemetery. All are part of our urban rehabilitation programme for the development of Georgetown and the Cemetery being part of that. As I told you, one of the things that we are having right now is, whether it is the parlours or family members, because of the vegetation that exists there – wholly as a result of the neglect of the Mayor and City Council – people are now burying their dead in the paths of the road and that is what I am calling tomb squatting. Now, the roads are going to be fixed, we have a problem because people are very sensitive when tombs have to be moved. We have a situation that is there and one of the things, Hon. Member Mr. Jones – I see you are paying very keen attention – we have come up with the engineering solution and it is simple.

11.50 a.m.

Going forward, when somebody buries his/her dead, rather than just casting the tomb, he/she will have to do a certain number of feet off the tomb to ensure the distance between this tomb and the next tomb is concreted. This is so we do not have the problem of grass and trees growing between the two. That is simple and straightforward. When one gets his/her space for the tomb, after we put in the roads and the drains, he/she just needs two feet between one tomb and the next tomb. We concrete it and we keep going down. In that way, the maintenance of the Cemetery would require minimum intervention as against the remaining grass, trees and everything growing there. That is part of our development plan, and that is not just something for *Le Repentir* Cemetery; it is something for all the cemeteries countrywide. We are going to put a proposal to the local authorities so they can adopt it as a new protocol. When somebody goes to be buried, he/she gets the design of the tomb, how many feet to go down and how high. Some people want to build mausoleums as well, however, the space between must be adequately addressed to prevent future growth of vegetation.

I know I have other Colleagues who will be speaking on this Motion and I am sure that when they come to speak they will elaborate on several other aspects. I would like to remind this House that it was the People's Progressive Party/Civic

(PPP/C) Government who brought a halt to the dump site in the Cemetery and contracted with support of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) the establishment of the Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill Facility. You would recall on how many instances fires broke out in the Cemetery. You would recall that under the watch of City Hall, one would go through Cemetery Road and there would be truckloads of garbage dumped at various intersections. This is not something that we are manufacturing. It is something that all the people who live in the neighbourhood and all the people who traverse that thoroughfare have seen.

We have not sat on our hands as it relates to the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. We have been proactive and, since we have recognised that no matter what we urge City Hall to do and what we give them money to do... Under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) tenure in Government, there was a Georgetown restoration programme.

[**Mr. Duncan:** It was very effective.] Was it very effective? The Auditor General has been unable until now to complete the audit. Do you know why? I do not have the Report of the Auditor General, but I am a Member of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC). The Chairman of the PAC is in this House, where it states that hundreds of vouchers were paid without any authorised signature and no supporting documents. Where did the money go? There was a Georgetown restoration programme that included the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. Where is the money? Let City Hall say where is the money.

We can go through that same Report of the Auditor General. City Hall has not been audited for years. Do you know why? We are hearing, forever, we do not have the money; we do not have the money but the audited report is to tell one where the money went and how it was spent. City Hall must get its act together. Whether it was under Mayor, the Hon. Pandit Narine, Mayor Mentore or all the other Mayors who went before, including my good friend, Mr. Hamilton Green...

[**Mr. Duncan:** ...and Chase-Greene.] ...and Chase-Greene. Everybody must be able to say where the money is. I do not know if the Hon. Member consulted with her Colleague, who I think is now the General Secretary of the AFC about what the programme of the Ministry of Public Infrastructure was when they were in the Government; of course, they were in the same Cabinet. The money that I need to fix the *Le Repentir* to put in the drains, the roads, the lights and the cameras...

[**Mr. Mahipaul:** We are not giving you any money.] If Congress Place pays its money, we have it. You do not need to give me, give it to the City Hall; give it to the City Hall. How much money did we spend on D'Urban Park? The same one point

something billion dollars that was spent on the beautification of Georgetown by building the D'Urban Park, which is a home right now for vagrants, crocodiles, centipedes and wood ants; if that money was properly spent the *Le Repentir* Cemetery would be looking better.

The reality of what we have here is that we must be able to understand some simple principles. Let us establish it, from the time the PPP/C entered Office in 2022, whether it was Minister Xavier, Minister Nokta, Prime Minister Samuel Hinds, Minister Robeson Benn and now Minister Bishop Juan Edghill, the Government of Guyana have made several interventions financed by the Government of Guyana and financed by Central Government at different times for clean-up and rehabilitation of City Hall. Number two, this debate in the National Assembly should be used to stir all citizens into action, including the business community, who sometimes hire cheap labour to dispose of their waste, rather than people taking it all the way to Haags Bosch Sanitary Landfill Facility. We still have waste being dumped in the City Hall. All of the funeral parlours and people who are engaged in burials at the *Le Repentir* Cemetery... Do you know, Mr. Speaker, there was a time, – I am sorry that I have to say this but I am going to say it, because I believe in saying the truth. – when the most well-kept section of the *Le Repentir* Cemetery was the Muslim burial ground and that was because the Muslim organisations used to go and actually clean the area.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, on that point, we will have to ask for an extension.

Mr. Mahipaul: No. He is just being repetitive, let him sit.

Mr. Speaker: No. He is at the right point because three years ago we could not access the grave of my dad because there were killer bees there. Go ahead.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for the Hon. Member, in accordance with the Standing Order, be given more time to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, the Standing Orders provide for up to 15 minutes for you to conclude.

Bishop Edghill: Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and faith-based organisations played their roles and that must be acknowledged. We are cognisant that we have a significant drainage issue at the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. The

drainage issue is because a lot of the drains are blocked with garbage. We have to be able to clean and make way. Once the drains are blocked, the water remains on the land, it becomes soggy and people cannot have access.

I think, it would be remiss of me, while we are discussing the awful appearance of the *Le Repentir* Cemetery, we must take note that there have been significant improvements to the general appearance of Georgetown as a whole. Whether we start with the seawalls, we still have to get the shantytown appearance, at a certain section to come in line. We have been working with those stakeholders to get that done. Whether you want us to talk about the entire Lamaha Corridor, you could recall that there used to have a whole lot of squatting houses there but that is now a green space that people could use. You may recall the way the Independence Boulevard used to look; now, it is one of the most used environments. I came through there this morning, while we have contractors who we pay to clean up. After Sunday, the Monday morning does not always look so good and we have to be able to get some improvements on that. The Cemetery Road, which some believe would have never been completed... I would like to say that no matter how difficult a project is for its implementation and the challenges we face, whether it is with a contractor or the environment, the PPP/C has a record, when we set out to do something, we do it and we deliver it.

Now, we are adding to all of that. Conversation Tree is an area that you are familiar with because most of my Colleagues on that side have to drive to go to Congress Place. What used to be canals with heavy vegetation, in what was called an upscale neighbourhood has now been transformed. We have a very efficient archery, an expanded thoroughfare, safety measures are being put in place and we are now continuing that all the way down to Francois Avenue. That is Georgetown. We are seeing what we did at Vlissingen Road – the geometric improvement; and what we did on Lamaha Street from Vlissingen Road heading east all the way back to Mandela. You have seen the rehabilitation of the bridges. As a matter of fact, the first bridge that we had to deal with, as a government, in Georgetown was the Sussex Street Bridge. When we went out in an emergency mode to get that bridge done, we had challenges from the Mayor and City Council (M&CC) again.

12.05 p.m.

The M&CC wants us to give them the money to build that bridge – an entity that has not been audited in 20 something years. We did the Sussex Street Bridge. In the same

approach, whether it is in Linden, where we did waterfront development; whether it is in New Amsterdam; whether it is in Bartica; Supenaam; Charity; Corriverton or wherever our urban renewal and beautification programme is making a difference in Guyana. It is being utilised by thousands of Guyanese and thousands of our visitors when they come to Guyana. The *Le Repentir* Cemetery is a subset of what we will be doing for Georgetown. You can be assured. Long before this Motion, the work has started. We will continue to execute it, not only at the *Le Repentir* Cemetery but across the country. The decision of the Government, the instructions from the Executive and the policy we are working with will see us working with the Local Authority Areas (LAA). We have to do things differently and ensure that we take care of these areas. Due to where some of them are positioned, they are very obvious to people. They are along the main highways. They are in the main, we see them and we have to fix them.

I will close by simply saying that this Motion is probably in the wrong House. Since it is here and provides an opportunity for us to discuss Government's plan, I want to assure all Guyanese that we start by taking care of the living first. Somebody is going to be smart enough to say – why you did not do it yet? We had thousands of roads to fix where people are living. Now, that we are concluding that sort of engagement, our second level is getting these other facilities. Minister Mr. Ramson is taking care of playgrounds throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. [Hon.

Member (Opposition)]: Those are non-accessible.] You could heckle that they are non-accessible, but they are no longer bush pastures and cow pens as they used to be before. People are actually using them and playing. Many of them now have floodlights. We are moving forward.

For our schools, the Hon. Minister, Ms. Manickchand, will tell you that in this new wave of urban renewal and what we are doing, all the school compounds where the children have assemblies – stand on mud and is slushy when it rains... We are going to tarmac every school compound so the children can have their assemblies and be out of the mud. Those are the things we are doing countrywide. With these words, I have made my views known and I have given the people of Guyana the assurances that they need. Their Government is acting on their behalf, not just because of this Motion but because they care and want to do better for Guyana. God bless you and thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Minister of Public Works. Hon. Members, this is a good time for us to take the suspension. Let us try to be back here by 1.15 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 12.10 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.27 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Members, please be seated. Let me now invite the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, to make her contribution. This is to let speakers know that for this particular Cemetery, I know almost every tomb in this place. I spent over 50 years catching fish, bush cooking and playing cricket. We lived on Garnett Street by the southern entrance of the Cemetery in Albouystown – Auntie Desmond, plums... They were some of the best plums. The Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, you have the floor. Keep your facts straight.

Ms. Ferguson: Mr. Speaker, you know that you do not have a problem at all with facts from this side. [Mr.

Mahipaul: We are always straight.] We are always truthful from this side of the House. A pleasant afternoon, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House. Coming after lunch is a very, very difficult thing but I will try my best to do what I have to, nevertheless.

I rise to add my voice and support to the Motion on the Rehabilitation of the *Le Repentir* Cemetery moved by my Colleague, the Hon. Ms. Lawrence, Member of Parliament. First of all, I take this opportunity to commend her for tabling a motion of this nature which, in my opinion, is not and should not be a contentious one. It is one that should have the full support of the House where the Opposition and Government can collectively set the stage by working together to restore a national site in our city. I thank the Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, for sharing a brief historical overview of the main cemetery in the city. It was quite a refreshing one, my Colleague.

Before I delve further into my presentation, there are some points that the speaker before me referenced. The Hon. Member said that the Government is not unwilling and they are not unable, but they are in the habit of rehabilitating areas in the city to beautify them. It struck me when the Hon. Member went down the political line. That is where I had a problem. As I said before, this is a simple Motion that just warrants all of us to give our support so that we can restore that historical site. The Hon. Member further stated a motion to this effect should not come to this House; it should be in the halls of City Hall. While I might have a little appreciation for what he said, at the end of the day, we all know what is happening at the level of City Hall due to what the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government did to the City Hall over the 23 years they were in Government – 1992 to 2015. We must never forget that. If the Hon. Member wants to go down the political line, well, I have a moral

responsibility to remind him of what the city was like under the People's Progressive Party/Civic. The Hon. Member said in this House that the People's National Congress/Reform, a Party that I am a proud Member of, owes some six point something billion dollars in taxes. The Hon. Member failed to say, in this House, that his Government... I am going to the record of his Government. [Mr. Jones: His Party...]

No. I am going to go to his Government. Just now, let me find my facts. The Speaker said to come with facts. I am quoting from an article carried on 14th June, 2023, by the *Kaieteur News*. Bishop Edghill, the headline reads:

“Central Govt. owes City Council over \$13B – Mayor Ubraj Narine”

Mr. Speaker, with your permission, may I highlight a few points from a press conference that this article actually generated from. This is what the former Mayor of the City of Georgetown had to say at his press conference:

“The PAHO (Pan American Health Organization) building that PAHO is housed on owes Council \$200 and something million Guyana dollars.”

Which ministry does that building come under?

“That building comes under the Ministry of Health, no taxes on PAHO but the ministry ought to pay that taxes...”

This is what the then Mayor Narine had to say. He further continued:

“Transport and Harbour at the Ministry of Public Works owe this Council \$100 and something million dollars. If we get out money, the Council...”

Bishop Edghill, the Council will be able to do all the upgrade at the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. May I also remind this House:

“According to him, in 2020, the Council got zero subvention while budgetary allocation was \$10 million for that year. He said in 2021, 2022 and 2023, the subvention was \$30 million.”

In that statement, the question was asked by the Mayor then:

““How can such a paltry, pitiful sum of money maintain this country's capital city – a city with a population of some 355,000 residents and visitors, in an area of 70 square kilometres?””

Now, Bishop Edghill, if I were you, this morning... [Mr. Mahipaul: It is the Hon. Bishop Edghill.] It is Hon.

Member, Mr. Speaker. ...I would not have gone there. For you to say that the People's National Congress Reform owes some six point something billion dollars when the Government owes \$13 billion.... If we give the city the moneys that the Government owes, the city would be able to do what is required of it. I know the Hon. Bishop Edghill will know this verse well.

1.37 p.m.

It is taken from Matthew 12:17, which says, 'give unto Caesar the things that are due unto Caesar and give unto God the things that are due unto God'. What I am simply implying here is that if all of us – whether the Peoples National Congress (PNC), the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), the Government and individuals – pay our fair share of taxes, we will be able to benefit tremendously from the services of the Mayor and City Council (M&CC) of Georgetown.

Mr. Speaker, I am moving on. I remember, as a young girl, walking through Cemetery Road with my mom and siblings, visiting relatives in South Georgetown. The experience was one of a lifetime. Walking in the avenue, the area was well illuminated, and the greenery was quite obvious. This year, on 6th August, 2025, to be precise, will mark 40 years since my dad passed. It is clear in my head that he was buried in the Le Repentir Cemetery. I recall the cemetery was well maintained. Running drains were ubiquitous, and roads in the cemetery were easy to traverse on. I also have great recollection of riding, as a young girl, my bicycle and motorcycle through the cemetery, from Cemetery Road all the way up to Sussex Street, where they have the St. Stephen's Primary School. On the northern side, you could see Princess Street, and on the southern side, Sussex Street. You could see all of the houses in that catchment area, clear as day. Death is inevitable, and the Le Repentir Cemetery is and will be the final resting place for all. It pains me to see the current state the Le Repentir Cemetery is in, as a citizen who regularly, as I said earlier, traverses that corridor; up to yesterday on my way to church and from church that was my route. When I look to my left and look to my right, what do I see? A full jungle. You can hardly see tombs well maintained or well painted. I have witnessed and heard of the difficulties loved ones face whenever they have to put their loved ones to rest or maintain the areas where they are laid to rest.

Guyanese have a culture these days. On Mother's Day, we see many people going to the cemetery to maintain their mom's tomb, or on special occasions such as birthdays, or

whatever the case may be. Sometimes, when you pass there, you can hardly make out human beings, living beings, in that area because the bushes are so high. While the primary focus of this motion is on the Le Repentir Cemetery, there are other cemeteries in the city – and you know that, Mr. Speaker – such as St. James the Less Church, St. Sidwell's Anglican Church, and I think we have a new one around the Bel Air area. When you pass, you can see the tombs in these areas and they are well maintained. We all know that these areas are not as dense as the Le Repentir Cemetery. What you will find is that it is easy for churches or loved ones to upkeep the final resting place of their loved ones. According to a publication *via* the Mayor and City Council's website, dated 16th June, 2022, it reported:

"The Council created its final draft report of the Le Repentir Cemetery Expansion Master Plan in March 2019 which highlighted the need for a re-envisioned burial site which would be elevated to the status of a national memorial."

We heard the speaker before us lament and boast about what the central government has in place for the upgrade of the cemetery, or perhaps all the cemeteries in the city or outside of the city of Georgetown. What this Hon. Member failed to say... I know he showed us a couple of images from the *Google Maps* and all kinds of things, but it would be good for the Hon. Member, after presenting his presentation to this House, to share the blueprint of what the Ministry of Public Works has devised to enhance the cemeteries across this country. It clearly says to me that there is a disconnect between the central government and the local authority area. In this case, it is the Mayor and City Council because, mind you, Sir, they said that they have a master plan. Then we are now hearing that the central government has a master plan. I want to find out, and perhaps speakers coming from the Government's side, the Hon. Member, Ms. Parag, would better be able to say to us whether consultations/engagements, were done with the elected officials of the Mayor and City Council. So later in the year we would not see a plan coming out from the Ministry of Public Works and a plan coming out from the Mayor and City Council. Then, *yuh gunn* hear the Mayor and City Council complaining bitterly that there was no engagement with central government and the Mayor and City Council.

While the Hon. Member boasts that over \$20 billion was expended by the central government to improve the aesthetic of the roads, the drains and all kinds of things, what the Hon. Member has not said to us is whether the Mayor and City Council was engaged, because we have complaints from our

elected officials. While we appreciate what the Government is doing, I believe – and we all believe because the Constitution allows for that – we must have engagements when it comes to certain decisions of this country. What you find happening is the bullyism tactic by this Government. They believe that they are the Government and they can control, do things as they like, without engaging elected officials. This is wrong. The report further stated:

“In the Council’s plan, enhanced revetment works will prevent the further degradation of the land which has resulted in tombs falling into the canals...”

We heard our Hon. Member, Ms. Volda Lawrence, allude to that fact earlier.

“...and others laying precariously. This will also upgrade the drainage infrastructure of the cemetery which will assist in providing relief for the surrounding areas.”

Mr. Speaker, again, with the high-handed approach by this Administration... You would recall, when we were doing – not we – when they were doing the Cemetery Road Expansion Project, many people who lived in the Castello Housing Scheme... The roads running East to West on Cemetery Road, those roads are actually higher than the drains. What the residents were complaining about was that whenever it rained their yards were flooded. So, Bishop, while I heard what your plan or your Government’s plan is for the upgrade of the Cemetery Road, I trust, Sir, that the relevant personnel will be engaged so we would not have a repeat of what transpired during the expansion of the Cemetery Road during these massive works in the cemetery. According to the Mayor and City Council’s plan, the space for benches and the lighting to allow for comfortable viewing and reflection is also allocated to add to the beautification effort. Sometimes I wonder whether the Government... because *yuh* know they like to copy; they *don’t* come with *notting* original. They like to plagiarise. They *don’t* come with *notting* original. I can only conclude that they were able to get a quick peep of the plan at the Mayor and City Council, and the Bishop knew that he had to speak to this motion so he hurriedly came up with something to say that this is what the central government is going to do. Nowhere in *Budget 2025* Mr. Speaker, nowhere in *Budget 2025* Bishop, have I seen an allocation for the beautification of the Le Repentir Cemetery. So perhaps your colleague, I do not know if it is... It is not under your Ministry and I have not seen it under her Ministry – the Hon. Sonia Parag.

Just under three weeks – and I am building on the last point I made – this National Assembly approved \$1.38 trillion for *Budget 2025*. As I said before, during the consideration of the estimates for both Ministries in this House... Perhaps, if I am wrong, Ms. Parag can correct me, but I cannot recall us discussing the cemeteries. What I know we discussed and approved sums for was the rehabilitation works to be done at the East Le Penitence Market. I remember, Mr. Speaker, you saying, ‘Oh, Albouystown Market’ when you asked her the question. It was East Le Penitence Market, East Ruimveldt Market and Bourda Green. I think it was four, but I can recall just those three offhand. There was nothing for the Le Repentir Cemetery. The resolve clause is basic and simple. Why am I saying this, Sir? Because it is seeking the request of this National Assembly. We are also making an appeal through this National Assembly for the Government to implement its maintenance plan to restore our national memorial. From my readings and research, which I shared earlier in my presentation, there is a blueprint already developed by the Council; it is just for implementation. Let us avoid the political rhetoric we heard here earlier. I hope the colleagues on that side of the House who will speak on this Bill will yield to my advice. Petty politics will get us nowhere but continues to hinder development and progress, which ultimately affects our ordinary citizens, whose only desire is to see their political leaders mature and work in the interest of nation building. Therefore, without hesitation, I fully support this motion moved by my colleague, Cde. Volda Ann Lawrence. As I prepare to conclude, Mr. Speaker, I am reminded by this exhortation, the chorus contained in one of our most profound national songs written by Mr. William Rutherford Alexander (WRA) Pilgrim.

1.52 p.m.

What does the stanza state? I am a good singer, but I would not do so today:

“Let us co-operate for Guyana. Let us co-operate for our Land. Let us resolve to fight together. See we do it right together. Can we do it? Yes, we can.”

It is reminding us of what is our national motto, of who we are. We are one people, not this ‘One Guyana’ thing *whu* floating around *deh* place. We are one nation, and we are one destiny. Let us unite. Let us co-operate and let us all support this motion to witness the restoration of the Le Repentir Cemetery, a final home of many Guyanese. Mr. Speaker, with those few words, I want to thank you very much for giving me the opportunity. May God’s blessings be with us. I thank you very much, Sir. [Applause]

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: Mr. Speaker, and Hon. Members, I am a bit dismayed, surprised, and in some ways shocked at our having to have this type of debate, this motion, considering from whom it comes and its provenance.

It appears as though every time there is a sign of progress, of significant effort being made by this Government, the PPP/C... Over the years, you *gat* what we know and what you would have perhaps experienced in that cemetery, ‘follow-me’ and bees and other dangerous things. Maybe not as dangerous as then, but as of now. The minute you start building the cemetery road, Vlissengen Road continued, the minute you have plans to develop the cemetery, the minute you have work that is programmed by the PPP/C Government, you have those persons who have been responsible for the state of affairs in that cemetery itself, which we inherited, come here in a sanctimonious manner to deflect, to say that the reason the cemetery and other places in Georgetown and the country are like that is because of the PPP/C.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that practically all of the city governments since Independence, are PNC-led Governments – practically all. The fact that the cemetery remained in that way – we inherited it in that way in difficult circumstances where we tried to improve it – speaks to governance under the People’s National Congress, APNU reformed, whatever they want to call themselves. It epitomises what government under the People’s National Congress – and whatever else they call themselves – represents for Guyana, for the city of Georgetown, unfortunately. I could call some of the names, who were mayors of Georgetown, all top PNC men: Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham, Hamilton Green, and others. [Mr.

Mahipaul: Call Patricia Chase-Green too.] Yes. Green – whatever Green they are. I am saying that they have always come out of the PNC. They have always been PNC, and they are... You can find them today, living and dead, those relics who have created the situation we have in the city of Georgetown. They have the people captured. They use racism to avoid improvement. They use the City Council as a slush fund – a place to place their people and get moneys from the rates of the taxes of citizens – to further their nefarious activities in keeping our people divided. This is what it is.

I have some experience of clearing up that cemetery, the Le Repentir Cemetery. I cleaned it three times, with money from the Ministry, using prisoners from the Guyana Prison Service, and with the support too of the Ministry of Local

Government. The Hon. Kellawan Lall was Minister then, and there was a confrontation on the big heaps of garbage – which we eventually removed – where Minister Lal was apoplectic about the state of the cemetery, and perhaps got a bit too sarcastic in trying to bring awareness and readiness to the problem of the fires, the stink, the smoke, and the criminality. I wonder whose criminals they were. However, Hon. Kellawan Lall paid the price for being frank about what was occurring out there, and while he was being attacked by elements of the press in relation to when we went out there to clean that place; myself and engineer Walter Willis went out there. We cleaned it three times, and it was clear right across when we were finished.

You had your chance when you were five and more years in Government. You retired to places. I remember Edgar Allan Poe talking about *The Masque of the Red Death*. While the contagion was about, the coronavirus (COVID-19), you did nothing in relation to the cemetery, and the city, and other places, and the health of the citizens of Georgetown. Mr. Speaker, Ms. Volda Lawrence herself, I think, and I said before, has penance to do, and perhaps more penance should be done to apologise in this House for what she has done in relation to the question of democracy in Guyana – how her statements, how her handwriting, how her script appeared on the results of the elections for Georgetown at the last round, and we had to do recounts. There are some people, many of them on that side of the House, who ought to be doing penance, and perhaps should be doing more and more penance, and if...

Mr. Mahipaul: Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul is on his feet.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Your guidance on Standing Order 41. The Hon. Minister is referring to a matter that is before the court and is yet to be judged by a competent court. I do not know if you will agree with me, Sir, but the statements he made about signatures on documents and so on, all of that is before a court to adjudicate. I am seeking your leave for him to withdraw such a statement, given that it is *sub judice*. Thank you, Sir.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker, I am not reporting a dream. I am reporting what is a fact.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, just give me a chance to rule. I do not think, Mr. Mahipaul, the issue of the signature on the document is being contested in the court. So, I will not be able to uphold that objection. Go ahead, Mr. Minister.

Mr. Benn: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I repeat again: Georgetown and the main cities in Guyana have almost always continuously been under PNC Administration. In Georgetown, where we inherited at Independence a garden city, it became a garbage city. The attitudes and behaviour in the city are defined by the PNC and their acolyte behaviour in the city and in the City Council. From extorting people in the marketplaces and businesses and encouraging people to take money from the roll... I think there was an incident where a chief constable had money in a pickup – bags of money. The attitude...

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

You have spoken, Madam. [**Ms. Ferguson:** The motion is on the cemetery.] Yes, and you are destined therefor.

Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that at the time that we cleared out the cemetery, particularly on the eastern side, by hundreds of truckloads – and we had set up the Haags Bosch facility, having a modern waste management and disposal facility – we were being attacked by people who were sent out there to interfere with the work. When they had the opportunity later to make payments to Cevons Waste Management Incorporated, Puran Brothers Disposal Incorporated, and Crawler and Wheeler Disposal Service – if I remember, those are some of the contractors – they did not pay them; the City Council. We had to pay them, again. Other than the rates and taxes which were garnered by the City Council for these purposes, the Government had to step in to pay. Yet, you come here, sanctimonious, without any apologies or regrets, on these matters.

At the time, we had the country templates on the waste pile at Le Repentir. Hon. Kellawan Lall was discussing raising the issue of the \$75 million a month being spent at the City Council on wages and salaries, and the question of why the City Council workers could not be made to work – the 700 or more million dollars which they had, in relation to doing work in the City Council, according to their budget – why the money was not being spent where it should, and why, perhaps, there were no audits which would identify where the money is going. I do not know now if there has been a recent audit. We should call for an audit now. One of the issues which Hon. Kellawan Lall, also known as ‘Peck’, raised was that we should have an interim management committee in relation to the running of the affairs of the City of Georgetown. That was sabotaged. That was shut down by the members of the party on the other side.

Mr. Speaker, these are the people who come here and try to deflect, and try to say that it was not me, it is the PPP/C. All those years, it was not me, it was not them; it is now the

PPP/C. As soon as progress is happening, now that a plan is in place... Hon. Minister Edghill pointed out that there is an extensive programme of work intended to fix the place finally, and suddenly they have an interest in it. They want to be a part of it. They want to find favour in it somehow. They want to have comity with it – *sanctimoniousness*.

2.07 p.m.

Mr. Speaker, the Le Repentir Cemetery was established out of the estates of Baron Louis Pierre De Saffon in 1785. De Saffon came here, which is why he named his estates Le Re Souvenir and La Penitence; the penitence, because he found himself in a state of penance after having a duel in France with his brother, whom he killed in a fight over a woman. He came grief-stricken. During the COVID-19 time, the estate house collapsed on Saffon Street. You can go and see the place there now. I think he is buried in St. Saviour's Church yard. There is a memorial to him in St. Saviour's Church yard.

One of the things one would say in terms of the things which we benefit from, which we get in our country, and which we should uplift... I want to totally reject the suggestion that the PPP/C will allow these places to fall into disrepair and neglect. We will never forget; we will always maintain. We will always take the opportunity to build up back these places. Our people, my grandfather, my father-in-law, my cousins, they are all buried there, and I cannot get to their places. Where the Enmore Martyrs are buried, where Walter Rodney is buried, where all those Guyanese of renown like Michael Forde – whom I knew personally as a child growing up – is buried, we will never forget them; we will never forget their places to memorialise their sacrifices in this country. We in the PPP/C will never... That is why the Minister has the mandate to fix the roadways into there, to clean it up, to drain it, to fix it, to bring it back to the state to which it was once again.

The problem which we have had is, after we clean it and fix it there is no maintenance, no cleaning. The honourable lady before suggested that they have a plan. She talked about plagiarism, and she read three-quarters of her presentation from, supposedly, the plan. [**Ms. Ferguson:** I made reference to an article. Do not tell me plagiarism.] You said plagiarism and you were reading from plans and other places without quoting.

I want to let everyone know that we here will continue to work at that place. We demand that the City Hall do the right thing for its citizens and for the people of Georgetown, Guyana, and to explain and to account for the moneys it

takes in rates and taxes, and to let us see the benefits to the citizens of Georgetown's rates and taxes in the work that the City Hall does. That is simply what we want to do. We will otherwise continue to say, this is the last chance that you have to show the citizens that you really care about them, or that you are concerned about them, that you are concerned about their safety and security. You are still in residence, not squatting, at the City Hall, but it is perhaps your last chance. If the City's residents and the persons in Guyana cannot by now recognise what the PNC governance means in any place and any time in Guyana, perhaps they cannot be helped, perhaps they are frightened and terrorised, perhaps they are not allowed to express themselves publicly and at the ballot box, in relation to rejecting the kind of life and living they are forced to live under the PNC/A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) governance. This is what it is about. So, when...

[**Mr. Mahipaul:** (*Inaudible*) Yuh hear, 'Robeson'? Unparliamentary (*inaudible*)] Yes, I am glad that the lady is running ahead of her demons. [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker, it is shown again and again. We had the story at Mocha the other day. At Mocha, the Government went to make improvements to the roads and the reserves there. Of necessity, they had to move some people. Most of the people decided that they will go for some compensation. The PNC/APNU activist went out there, stood in front of the machines, attacked the Police verbally and otherwise, ran out there with a cutlass – a Member of Parliament (MP) now, elected to this Parliament – to attack the Government, to attack progress and prosperity and development for that community. We have it on video.

This matter recently found its way into the courts. This matter recently went to the courts, where those residents were made to spend their moneys to go to the courts, to go against everything – clear rationality, the laws and everything – to protest and to say that they had to get compensation, that their rights were taken away and all kinds of things which they usually talk about. Authoritarianism, that is what they talk about our Government. What happened in the Courts again? They lost; they lost again. [**Ms.**

Flue-Bess: If the people [*inaudible*] the Courts, *wuh yuh* expect? You running *de* Court.] You could try to run me with a cutlass any day, I will deal with you. You run me with your cutlasses, any day.

As part of this discussion/debate, I would like to have consideration, perhaps if we are to find some togetherness, which some Members on the other side speak of surprisingly, that they think of an interim management

committee (IMC) now for Georgetown. We should perhaps talk about that. Let us have it. Let us add it to the motion. The citizens deserve better. We all want better. Georgetown is that which everyone sees when they come to Guyana, and Georgetown is the example of Guyana which they would think of when they see what is happening in Georgetown. Who *rules the roost* in Georgetown? The APNU/AFC.

When the French seized Demerara and Berbice, when the French seized Demerara and ran the country for a number of decades, they established Georgetown. They called it *Le Neuville*, the New City. [**Ms. Ferguson:** You and the history talk again.]

Yes. They made a street, which we now call Brickdam; one of the main streets which they made in the *Le Neuville*. Rampant revolutionary France brought it all the way here and talked about building a new city. In this time and place, here and now extraordinaire, it has fallen by the will of the people for the PPP/C to build a new Guyana. We are building a new Guyana. You can vex over there. You can have all remarks of disapproval. You can deflect about the way things have happened and have come to be, but you will not be able to stop us from rebuilding our country, for each Guyanese, for the 'One Guyana' our President Irfaan Ali speaks of. We will build a new Guyana, and all this machination... because this discussion is a machination. They want to take credit. They want to deflect. They want to say that the way things are really has nothing to do with us, it is the PPP/C, who is not the City government, who has never been the City government. This is the time now, where the people have to take consideration, the City of Georgetown, and to choose wisely, not to go again to the same old, broken-down messaging, the same old backwardness, the same ambition and visionless ways of running the City and the country.

On behalf of the Government, the Ministers of Public Works, the Minister particularly of Local Government and Regional Development, I want to be able to support the efforts of the Government and the amendment, in relation to rebuilding the City of Georgetown, clearing out, pumping out, and refashioning the Le Repentir Cemetery, so that those who went before us, who worked to build the country, can rest in peace, can be gratefully dead when the work would have been done, to build a new cemetery, a new environment, new ambition, new perspectives, and we are not anymore perhaps longer in the situation when you were catching hassar and patwa in the City. I saw a hassar nest when I went there during the COVID-19 time. There was so much water there, I could not get to my father-in-law's grave. With that, I support the amendment. I can only say, again reflecting on Coleridge's work in *The Rime of the*

Ancient Mariner, which you well know, that those who have penance done, must do much more penance, have plenty more penance to do. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and Hon. Members. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister, Mr. Benn. Now, for one of the younger citizens of South Georgetown, who may not know that history, the Chief Whip of the Opposition, Mr. Christopher Jones.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Thank you very much, Cde. Speaker. Colleagues, a pleasant good afternoon. Let me at the outset take the opportunity to extend congratulations to the Hon. Member, Cde. Volda Lawrence, for piloting this motion. It is indeed a very timely one. I also want to commend the indications we have gotten from the Government, with the intention to support the motion, albeit with some amendments. Let me start off this way. There is a quote that states:

“The life of the dead is placed in the memory of the living.”

There is another quote:

“The dead cannot cry out for justice; it is the duty of the living to do so for them”.

2.22 p.m.

One that many Members of this House would be familiar with, and this is taken from Ecclesiastes, which tells us that ‘there is a time and season for everything under the heavens, a time to plant and a time to pluck up that which was planted, a time of war a time of peace, and a time to be born and a time to die’. The one question all of us on these earthly planes will continue to ask ourselves is, ‘where would our final resting place be’? Would it be a place in which our loved ones will be able to find us, and of course, remember us?

When the Hon. Minister, Bishop Juan Edghill, started off, I was expecting just to simply hear support for the motion or so, but, of course, we are politicians and, therefore, it is expected that we would take the opportunity to do a little bit of politicking. So... [Ms. Parag: That is what is going to happen now.] Of course, I cannot pass it down; it is too sweet. The Member who spoke before me, the Hon. Robeson Benn, mentioned that... [Mr. Mahipaul: The historian.] The historian, for how many years, the Georgetown City Council has been under the leadership of the People’s National Congress/Reform (PNC/R) and many successful efforts has been made by the People’s Progressive

Party/Civic to gain control of the City, but they have failed to do so. Of course, being the political party they are, they set out to do everything possible to make it a difficult or nearly impossible task for the Georgetown City Council to administer the City’s affairs.

In terms of funding for the Georgetown City Council to do what is necessary, I will take this House back to 1995, under the then leadership of the former Mayor, His Worship, the Mayor Hamilton Green, former Prime Minister of Guyana, who, in his efforts in the City Council at the time, made efforts to introduce lotto to Guyana. This lottery that we know today was the brainchild of His Worship the Mayor Hamilton Green. It sought to have the Georgetown City Council receive 25% of the sales from the lottery that would go directly to City Council’s coffers so that they could take care of the affairs of the City. As far back as 1997, for the year, the lottery paid a sum of US\$4 million or in today’s rate, an equivalent of \$840 million. That is just the amount of money the Georgetown City Council would have been receiving from the lottery from 1995 when it was piloted by then-Mayor Hamilton Green. However, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic rejected this, and what they did, Sir, was take over the lottery for the Central Government. Therefore, all of these funds have since been going to the Central Government. Then what is more so, we were told that as the citizens of the country, this lottery fund was going to a special sport to fund sport organisations and athletes. To date, there is no sport discipline, federation or association that could indicate how much moneys they have received from this lottery sports fund to date. [Bishop Edghill: You did not give any...]

The Hon. Member Bishop Edghill said I did not give any. Every single week or month there is a complaint from an association or federation, ‘Mr. Jones, we wish if you were still there’. For example, ask the current Director of Sports, I forgot his name, my apologies, my friend... [Ms. Flue-Bess: Steve.] Mr. Steve Ninvalle, the Hon. Director of Sports, whose association used to receive a lot of funding from us.

The Hon. Member spoke about moneys owed to the Georgetown City Council by the PNC/R. You know to do a similar paraphrase to the Hon. Member, Deborah Backer, who sat in this House, at that time she was speaking about various political parties that every party have bad eggs. However, in this context, I would want to say that all political parties owe the Georgetown City Council. Based on the records I received from the Georgetown City Council the People’s Progressive Party/Civic owes the Georgetown City Council. If the figure is correct, it is some \$7.7 billion. If the figure is correct.

What is more so, Sir, I will take you back to under the APNU/AFC Administration, in which a memo or instruction directed all Government agencies and ministries to pay rates and taxes whether to the City or the municipalities and they had to pay those over. The National Sports Commission, for example, paid to City Hall a sum of \$50 million in our rates and taxes. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the Central Government to ensure that moneys go to the City Council via the very ministries.

The proof in the pudding – I have here a list of Government agencies and ministries that owe rates and taxes to the Georgetown City Council. In this list, for example, I will just go through a few, the Ministry of Health's building, Battery Road Kingston \$1.33024 million; Ministry of Public Works, Water Street, Kingston, \$1,103,207; Ministry of Public Works, 16 Mud Water, Kingston \$606,000; Ministry of Public Works, Water Street, Kingston, \$15.865,359 million; Guyana Police Force revenue, Ruimveldt location, \$235,000, and the list goes on. Page after page of ministries and Government agencies that have outstanding moneys for the Georgetown City Council.

Using the same point from the Hon. Ministers Edghill and Robeson Benn, if the Government ministries and agencies pay to the Georgetown City Council these rates and taxes they have outstanding, the City Council would not need a single dollar from Central Government. The Hon. Member spoke again about the fact that efforts by the People's Progressive Party/Civic to take control of the City... As I mentioned before, it is a careful orchestrated political plan by the current Government to ensure that the City Council or any municipality that comes under the Opposition is starved of the resources they need.

The Hon. Member made several mentions of former Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, Mr. Kellawan Lall. I was shocked or as some of the folks in Linden would say, I was 'shoketh' that the Hon. Member would mention the former Minister's name, Mr. Kellawan Lall. This is because this Hon. Minister, after his efforts to get control of the Georgetown City Council and failed to do so, stated publicly and I quote – Mr. Kellawan Lall – he publicly expressed the desire for a public health crisis to occur in the City of Georgetown. That is the extent to which the Government would go. If they cannot control it, then they will destroy it. It is unfortunate. As I did mention, my intention today was not to go down this line, because I rather suspect all of us would agree that the rich history behind the Le Repentir Cemetery that dates back to when it was

founded or started in March, 1861, was something of utmost importance, so I will now go into my presentation.

I rise to address an issue that speaks to the very heart of our nation's history, culture and dignity, the rehabilitation of the Le Repentir Cemetery. Le Repentir Cemetery, established in the March, 1861 is the country's largest burial site, spanning 106.5 acres. Its origin tracks back to Plantation Le Repentir, owned by Frenchman Pierre Louis De Saffon, who travelled to the Demerara colony... [Ms. Parag: Saffon.]

Pierre Louis De Saffon, who fled to the Demerara Colony in the 18th Century after a fatal duel with his brother. In remorse, he named his estate Le Regret, La Penitence and La Repentir, reflecting themes of regret and repentance.

For over a century Le Repentir has been the final resting place for approximately over 125,000 Guyanese from all walks of life, workers, poets, freedom fighters, pioneers who shaped this country's journey. With designated sections for Muslims, Hindus, Roman Catholics, Anglican, Lutherans, Chinese, Bahais and Presbyterians. It holds the remains of the Enmore Martyrs; literary icon, Egbert Martin; former Ministers of Government, just to name one, Dr. Faith Harding; Leader of the Working People's Alliance, Dr. Walter Rodney; former Parliamentarians Dr. Deborah Backer, Lakshmi Kalicharan; Father Darke, Father Rodrigues, just to name a few and generations of our ancestors.

However, what should be a sacred site reflecting reverence has now become an eye sore – overgrown vegetation, vandalised tombstones and flooding has turned this historical landmark into an eyesore rather than a place of honour. In Mexico, during the month of November, particularly the dates, the 1st and 2nd, a celebration to honour the deceased, which is called the Night of the Dead or the Day of the Dead, coincides with the All Saints and All Souls Day in the Catholic calendar. Though often compared to Halloween, it is unique and deeply spiritual. During this time family members gather at the cemeteries to clean, decorate graves, light candles, spend the night praying, singing and sharing memories of their loved ones. In Guyana however, family members would gather at these places, the cemeteries, to pay respect to their loved ones during Mother's Day and Father's Day, just to name a few. The challenge, however, is accessing the ground or even finding where their family members were buried.

This is not just about a cemetery, this is about national identity, our national identity. The people who do not respect the past cannot truly build a strong future. We must act with

urgency to restore the Le Repentir, not just as a burial ground but as a historical, cultural landmark that preserves the legacy of those who came before us. Some of the famous burial sites are those like the Arlington National Cemetery, the New Orleans Cemetery, and the Westminster Abbey, which over time attract a large number of tourists. Noting that Guyana's cemetery, the Le Repentir, dates back to 1861, one could only assume the amount of historical value that could be found there. That is why, Sir, in addition to the resolve clause in the motion, I will make three proposals.

One, that with the Administration's assistance, a three-phase rehabilitation plan to restore dignity to the Le Repentir, immediately cleaning up and securing enhancement; cleaning overgrown sections, repairing pathways and establishing a regular maintenance schedule. Additionally, we must introduce better security measures to prevent vandalism.

2.37 p.m.

Two, structural restoration and modernisation. Restoring damaged tombstones, improving drainage systems to prevent flooding and the installation of proper lighting and signage to ensure safe access.

Three, cultural and education integration. Transforming the Le Repentir Cemetery into a historical site that educates future generations. We can create guided tours, digital recordings and, of course, the historical space to honour notable figures buried there. I mentioned a few above but I know for certain they are much more. The BE IT RESOLVED clause states:

"That this National Assembly calls on the Government to upgrade this historic facility and implement a plan for its maintenance, including the drainage infrastructure, thereby elevating it to the status of a national memorial."

The efforts require collaboration between the Government, local authorities and even private stakeholders who recognise the value of preserving our national heritage. It is not just for antics, Hon. Bishop Edghill, it is about respect, honour and ensuring that future generations inherit a site worthy of remembrance. Cde. Speaker, I urge this National Assembly to lend support to this motion in this House and that we can work collectively together to see the restoration of the Le Repentir Cemetery. As the Hon. Member, Ms. Gail Teixeira, mentioned, indeed they have indicated their support for the motion, though be it an amendment so that we can

see the restoration of the Le Repentir Cemetery. I thank you. [Applause]

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]: Mr. Speaker, I think that for the entire House, while there is a degree of consonant on thought and objective for, if I can use the Hon. Member, Mr. Robeson Benn's word, the 'provenance' of this motion. I want to be very clear that the Government of Guyana takes very seriously the responsibility of all of the affairs of Guyanese, Guyana and no motion is required for us to undertake and execute the work that is required of the Government, even when particular areas or subdivisions of Government are failing.

I want to go to the text because sometimes it is very important that we get clarity, not in a hearsay format. First of all, the lawyers will tell you that hearsay is inadmissible as evidence in court unless it falls into one of the known exceptions to the hearsay rule. I wanted to provide from Chapter 28:01 what it says, the specific responsibility, as it is outlined. This is found in the City's burial by-laws made under sections 303 and 304. In three it says:

"The council..."

In this situation, we are referring to the Mayor and City Council (M&CC).

"... shall keep the burial ground free from all nuisances of every kind and description and from all bushes and weeds, and shall keep in good order and repair all roads, bridges, fences and palings of the burial ground and shall maintain a proper system of drainage thereof."

That is what the responsibility of the Mayor and City Council is. There have been claims about revenue in relation to the Mayor and City Council. No one has come to this House from the other side specifically to say what the revenue of the Mayor and City Council for Georgetown over the last three years was. Let us specifically start there because we know that it is your responsibility – your being the City Council's responsibility – of which the People's National Congress (PNC) has been in charge of the City for as long as it has been in existence, since our independence. What has its revenue been in the last three years? Allow me to share with this honourable House what that sum was. In 2022, it was \$2.3 billion. In 2023, it was \$2.5 billion. In 2024, it was \$2.1 billion.

The Central Government has undertaken the responsibility entirely for the roads, of which there is hardly a road in the City of Georgetown – and now almost getting to every part

of Guyana – that is in a state of disrepair. There is no road, or if there are, there are very few and they are being addressed. This is being undertaken. The expenditure is being undertaken by the Central Government, even though it is the City's responsibility. There was no motion that was required for us to execute that function, but we did it because we knew that it was important for the welfare and livelihood of people and people's comfort, *et cetera*. It is important for economic activity. All of that is important for roads, obviously. There was no motion required also to have been submitted by any Member of the Opposition for us to commence the upgrade of the 34 community grounds across Georgetown. There was no motion required.

The Government of Guyana decided that as we have moved beyond the basic infrastructure, important infrastructure that increases welfare and quality of life – the Central Government made the decision to start to upgrade all of the community grounds in Georgetown, all 34 grounds in Georgetown. Now, it is not that these grounds did not exist before. There will always be a need for that investment to be made. Why am I mentioning the point about whether there was a motion for that or not? It is unfortunate that this subject matter has become one where it has to be brought to this House for us to expose the state of affairs of our burial ground and the condition that it is in. It is really a very sad state of affairs. Not just because it is a burial ground, but no one in this House, regardless of which side of the aisle you sit on, no one is happy to see burial grounds in the state of condition they are in.

It is also unfortunate that the motion is limited to the Le Repentir Cemetery, as though all of the other burial grounds in the country are in great condition and that, somehow, it is the Opposition now that is making a demand of the Government as if they are taking a high road – because they left us a burial ground in the most glowing and pristine condition – which is ludicrous. Complete ludicrous. The fact is, with the \$2 billion the City Council receives, one will be hard-pressed to say what City Council uses that revenue for, which is collected from all of us to improve the quality of life for residents of Georgetown.

The previous speaker spoke about how the People's Progressive Party/Civic has failed to win Georgetown. First of all, I want to correct something that he said, which is that the People's Progressive Party/Civic owes rates and taxes. The People's Progressive Party/Civic, as I am advised, does not owe any rates and taxes to M&CC. I would like, Mr. Speaker, that unless the Hon. Member or Members of the other side who are speaking subsequently, if they do not

produce any record to show that, then it must be expunged from the record. [Dr. Singh: They must apologise.] It must go further. The General Secretary of the People's Progressive Party/Civic – I heard him speak at a press conference just about three weeks ago – he said at the public press conference that we do not owe any rates and taxes to M&CC, and no one has since challenged it. I find it to be highly inappropriate that the statement can be made here without providing any evidentiary material to support the claim. Anyway, leaving that to one side. What has not been challenged, however, is the fact that the People's National Congress owes over \$6 billion in rates and taxes to the same council that they have controlled for the last 50-plus years. Now, here is what the Hon. Member or the Hon. Members on the other side will not say. The first time we had a local Government election in 2016, after many years, and it was agreed on – by the way it was agreed – that those local Government elections would be deferred.

2.52 p.m.

The first time it was had. The People's Progressive Party had two seats at the City Council. By the next one, which was in 2018, we moved to seven. [Dr. Singh: From two to seven.]

From two to seven. Now, with the last one being held in 2023, we now have eleven. I want to place on record now that, by the next Local Government Election, the People's Progressive Party/Civic will control the City of Georgetown with the number of seats. We will have the majority of seats at the next Local Government Election. We are not doing it by trying to rig any elections; we are working in every single community, every single day, and we are working with residents of the community with the intention so that people can see. They can see the difference in what the People's Progressive Party/Civic is offering and that change has already begun. Changes sometimes do not happen in a cataclysmic way, where you may fall off an edge. Sometimes it does not happen in that way. Sometimes revolutions happen, and it does. However, change in many instances happens in a gradual way. I have shown the trend from two to seven to eleven, and with the work that we will continue to do, our goal is to continue to show the country what our Party will deliver in terms of improvement of governance for this country. It takes work – it takes hard work. Go and ask...

Let us be clear about what is the role of the councillors and their responsibility. Go and ask the residents of that Constituency, the respective Constituencies in Georgetown. Go and ask those residents if they ever see their councillors. Go and ask them, and then when they go, let us say they

want to skip that now, ask them what kind of response they get from their councillors in their respective areas. **[Dr. Singh:** The Mayor was rejected by his own Constituency.] That is true, the Mayor lost his Constituency.

I remember they were planning in 2018; they were planning to coronate a new mayor – they were planning to coronate a new mayor emanating from the Campbellville Constituency. Not knowing that our candidate beat their candidate for the first time, and they were in the Government. Why? You think that people do not understand? People do not understand that if you are empowering your leaders and you cannot go to them for assistance, there are things that governments and political leaders are unable to help with. There is no doubt about that. We cannot fix everything; we cannot fix all of life's problems. However, if there are things that can be done to assist people, every effort must be made to do that. Even if it is a little bit, people will appreciate it. It first starts with engagement and making yourself available. The councillors from the City Council, it is almost impossible to get in contact with them. **[Ms. Parag:**

Except ours.] The ones from the Opposition side. They have the control, so if you have control, you are able to respond since you have the control. That is what power does. It is no different from what transpired during the 2015 to 2020 period.

[Mr. Speaker left the Chair.]

[Mdm. Deputy Speaker assumed the Chair.]

The Government then, Central Government, and Ministers went into a cocoon, a cocoon where no one... They were entirely isolating themselves from people. No different from the previous President, Brigadier (Ret'd) David Granger. It became so bad that they had to get cardboard cutouts so that people could engage with and interact with a semblance of their President. Ministers could not even get in touch with their President. Some of the Ministers did not even talk to each other. Let us understand that this role of Government is a very serious role. It is not unskilled work, and many people believe, too, that the more you shout or the more you talk, somehow, that gives you some magical acquisition of skills. It does not. That is why when you examine the individuals who are placed in the positions on what it is that they are offering to people is very limited. I am raising this here because the constant request – first of all, Government pays hundreds of millions of dollars in rates and taxes every single year to the City Council. Every single year, the Government, the Central Government. I know my Ministry

has lines that are catered for rates and taxes that we pay. I know that it is there. I know we pay to the City Council, which means that they have a revenue stream. I already said that they were able to collect over \$2 billion, every year for the last three years. So, you have to show what you have been doing with the money.

You can tell me. This is because they are not doing the roads or they are not clearing the canals. Look at the state of condition of the markets. Go into the markets, which the Central Government now has to budget for. When they say pay people the money, that is what they are saying. We will not pay money into a black hole. You cannot put money into a black hole; that is not the way it functions. Check to see when the last time was when there were audited reports from the Mayor and City Council. Go and check and see. Just maybe, I think around 2017 or 2018, sometime around that time. The previous or one of the previous Town Clerks attempted to sell off an entire swath of land in Bel Air. It was not until the residents started to raise serious objections about what was happening there that the attempt was aborted.

Right now, people are being pressured for rates and taxes, but, anyway, I do not want to say this because I should not say what is happening behind closed doors that other people are reporting to me. Unfortunately, the capital of our beloved country is in the state it is currently in. I drove around yesterday. Yes, yesterday. I wanted to take my family out in the morning, get some breakfast and some ice cream, *et cetera*. You drive around the state, you drive around the City, and you see the build-up of garbage, the neglect of our public spaces and no one in this country could be happy that this is the capital that we are living in currently.

The Government of Guyana has started a very important beautification and transformation process. You have seen some of it happen already. In fact, some of that work is happening right opposite the mover of the motion, the Hon. Member Volda Lawrence, just at that community ground where the Hon. Member is living. I do not know if she still lives there, but that ground, just this last weekend and the weekend before, after the investment we made, is one of the grounds where we put a fence in, installed lights and improved their access. All of that. That ground was filled with one thousand persons – young people in the night playing football all the way up until 12.00 o'clock at night. Young people having a good time. Go to Independence Boulevard, Albouystown, Minister Kwame McCoy will tell you, and anybody who drives past there at night, you will find hundreds of people – hundreds of people in the night

from about 6.00 or 7.00 o'clock at night, hundreds of people out there. That was the Government. We made that investment. They are out there with their families, they are playing, having fun, all of that. The Government made that investment; no motion was required.

Go to Lamaha, on what was a mud dam, which used to have squatting. When I was growing up, and I used to go to Stella Maris Primary School, coming down from the corner there by Critchlow Street, you are walking down Albert Street, there used to have squatters living on that dam selling. There used to be these neatly lined beds of vegetables – pak choy, lettuce and all of those things that were on that bank there. Go and see the transformation that is happening there now. Beautiful walkways with flowers, benches, washrooms, security, and lights. People go to Lamaha Street simply to take out wedding pictures – wedding pictures because the area has been transformed. That is what is happening right before our eyes. The Central Government made that investment. We made that investment. It did not happen because of a motion. It did not happen because of some plan that was sitting somewhere, or some idea that was sitting somewhere. We do not want to spend our time talking. We want to spend our time doing and working. Working with people in this country, for the best interest of this country. Not everybody wants to do that, though.

3.07 p.m.

There are lots of people who prefer to see things fall apart, but they would also want to claim some kind of credit if something is done. Go by the seawalls from the back of the Guyana Marriott Hotel all the way to Camp Street. Go and see the transformation that has already happened – not is happening but has already happened. The whole area has now turned into a picturesque space for families, young people, entertainment – and clean entertainment too – and small businesses where people can get opportunities to experience the great coast that we have – the breeze, the zephyr. That transformation is not happening; it has happened. Now, do you think there will be any area in this country that will be untouched by us? We will not leave anything or anyone behind. We will not.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Minister, to continue, you require an extension, please.

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Ms. Parag]: May the Hon. Member please be given some time to complete and conclude his presentation?

Motion put and agreed to.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: You may continue.

Mr. Ramson: The transformation that is happening is not because of a motion; it is happening because of intent. It is happening because of a vision and a focus on deliverables, results, and building with people. Any project that you hear Members on the other side criticise about delay – I want to make this point – is being built by Guyanese. The contractors are Guyanese, and the workers are Guyanese in almost all cases. In many instances, the fact is that the delay happened because there is just too much happening in the country. It is hard to build a house today that will finish on time. Even ExxonMobil Guyana, which is building its headquarters in Ogle, is behind.

The point that I am making is that we are working with people. Obviously, Government's responsibility is to the people, too. We are also not leaving the Guyanese people behind because they also have to play a role in building the country. I also want to say this as well: the transformation that is happening – not around the country and in Georgetown – at the City Hall building, is because of the central Government. That place was left for decades without any investment or maintenance work. It was falling into a state of decrepitude. Government made the investment. Do you know when it made the investment? It was probably in 2021, if I remember correctly. Do you know what was the cost of that contract? If I am not mistaken, it was over \$700 million. It was \$600 million or \$700 million. Central Government decided that it was aware that the beauty of the city should be brought up to a level where we can feel proud of it. We made the investment. It did not happen because of a motion. Nobody forced us to do it. We did it because we know the importance of it.

As we are on that, there is a reason it costs so much. The reason it costs so much is because they needed to restore its heritage value as well. The building has significant heritage value. I want to point this out: Government has been working with the Kings Foundation and the Commonwealth Heritage Forum for which the National Trust of Guyana is playing an integral part on behalf of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport to develop a plan, which you are going to hear a lot about in the next few months. We are moving swiftly towards implementation. That was one of the reasons I did not table the new National Trust Bill last year. It will be tabled this year. Not a motion. I also want to emphasise the point that no one benefits from the city being in the condition that it is in right now. The Le Repentir Cemetery –

correctly identified as being established in 1861 – has very important persons buried there, including the Enmore Martyrs and Mr. Egbert Martin, who is considered the founder of Guyanese literature. There are some other names that have already been mentioned.

I am going to say that, and I want to emphasise this point, on our side, we take our responsibility of Government extremely seriously. It is very difficult for any group of people to maintain this level of intensity and focus on the delivery of government work. There is a maniacal focus on ensuring that we use this period as the transformative period for everyone in this country. Despite the fact that we agree that we are sharing a degree of common interest, no motion is required for us to execute what we consider to be our role as the Government, even when other agencies or institutions are failing. The people of Guyana – everyone – deserve to live in a great country. The people of Georgetown will also get better governance when the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) takes control of the City Council. What I will also say is, until that happens, every responsibility of government, which is to ensure that people live a better quality of life, we take that very seriously and will do whatever it takes to execute that to the best of our ability. I thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. I now call on the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, to make his presentation.

Mr. Mahipaul: I rise today in full support of this motion, which calls for the urgent restoration and maintenance of the Le Repentir Cemetery – a site of deep historical and cultural significance for all Guyanese. It is necessary for me, after hearing the contributions of the Hon. Bishop Edghill, the Hon. Mr. Benn, and the Hon. Mr. Ramson, to respond to some of what was said. It is necessary for me to put on record that this motion is a simple one. What I had expected was agreement, and, perhaps, we could have gotten through this in probably half an hour. Instead, my Hon. Friends on the other side sought to introduce the usual politicking, thinking that the Guyanese people can easily be fooled.

When we listen to the arguments that are put forward by my friends on the other side, it is as though they want us to believe that Guyana began its existence in 2015. They seem to want us to forget that 23 years before 2015, the People's Progressive Party/Civic was in Government. When we speak of Georgetown being a garbage city, it was under the People's Progressive Party/Civic. The Hon. Member, Mr. Benn, is not a new Member to the PPP/C; he served in

Government under those 23 years when Georgetown became a garbage city. The Hon. Member, Ms. Manickchand, is not a new PPP/C Member; she served in the PPP/C when Georgetown became the garbage city. The Hon. Member, Mr. Mustapha, is not new to the PPP/C; he served when Georgetown became the garbage city. The Hon. Member, Dr. Anthony, the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, the Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, the Hon. Member, Ms. Teixeira, the Hon. Member, Mr. Nandlall, the Hon. Member, Dr. Jagdeo, the Hon. Member, Ms. Sukhai-Campbell, the Hon. Member, Mr. Hamilton, Mr. Bharrat and Mr. Croal.... name all of them. When Georgetown became the garbage city, it was under the People's Progressive Party/Civic.

In 1992, when you came to Government, it was the garden city. It seems to me that because the People's National Congress/Reform (PNC/R), through a democratic process, is controlling or governing Georgetown, it is bothering you. It is a problem and like a plague in your minds. Let me tell you all something – the People's National Congress/Reform will always be voted in as the Georgetown Mayor and City Council because the people of Georgetown know who are responsible for the state of Georgetown.

3.22 p.m.

Let me put that in your heads. Put that in your heads and think about it, and know the facts. I heard the Hon. Member, Charles Ramson, say that he took a drive around Georgetown yesterday, not long ago. After he served in the Government for over four years, yesterday, he accepted that Georgetown is in a state that it should not be in. Let me remind him that in 2015, it was not in that state. Between 2015 and 2020, it was not in that state. In 2015, when Mr. David Granger came into government, it was the people and the private sector...it was not the government. It was not the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Government. It was the people, ordinary Guyanese people, how fed up they were with the 23 years, came together, formed themselves into teams, and created a movement to clean Georgetown because of what it was. It was then that Georgetown was restored to the garden city. The last time it was the garden city before 2015 was in 1992, just before the PPP/C came into government.

The PPP/C has always had a problem with Georgetown. From 2015 to 2020, there were high praises for the Coalition Government because there were worthy investments made in restoring Georgetown to the glory it was supposed to be and was during that period. After four and a half years of this People's Progressive Party/Civic, they now come to tell us

that it is in a state it should not have been. You created it in that state. All of you over there are responsible for the state of Georgetown right now. We must not forget that.

We must remember that when the Hon. David Patterson served as the Minister of Public Infrastructure, rain would fall today, and water would come off the land in half an hour. We must remember when the Hon. Member, Mr. Robeson Benn, served as the Minister of Public Works, rain would fall today, and weeks after, water would still be on the land. It is not a case where it cannot be addressed. The Hon. Member, Mr. David Patterson, showed us that we can fix Georgetown. The Minister of Communities at the time, the Hon. Ronald Bulkan, showed us that we can fix Georgetown. The APNU/AFC showed this nation that we could restore Georgetown to its glorious days of being the garden city, but the People's Progressive Party/Civic simply has a problem because they are not controlling Georgetown. Well, you will never control Georgetown because the people of Georgetown are sensible, and they know who are responsible for having them in the state they currently find themselves. In nine months' time, they will show you what it is that they can do.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, let me also tell you that the Hon. Charles Ramson said that the Mayor and City Council collect around \$2 billion from the people in Georgetown. What he did not tell us is that the central Government collects hundreds of billions of dollars from Georgetown's environment. When the people of Georgetown call for an investment from the central Government, you are collecting money from the people of Georgetown too. The central Government is collecting several billions of dollars from the people of Georgetown. So, do not make it sound as though you over there do not have that responsibility for the people of Georgetown. Do not make it sound as though the people of Georgetown are not entitled to be given developmental projects. You collect billions of dollars from them. That is why it is necessary for me to mention that when the Coalition was in government, we made significant investments in Georgetown and not just Georgetown.

It must be recalled that when we talk about these towns and their subventions, the People's Progressive Party/Civic had a subvention for Georgetown at \$22 million in 2015. We had absolutely no oil money, but we were able to raise that subvention to \$30 million, a 36.4% increase without oil money. From 2020 to now, I would love to hear the Hon. Sonia Parag tell me where it is; not a single dollar. The subvention after four and a half years is still at \$30 million. The thing is, we have the oil money now. We have the oil

money to do everything else. Their salary went up by 35%. The same 50% they are talking about every minute they get the time, they are enjoying that 50%, and they increased it to 35% more. The subvention for Georgetown has not been increased. Zero dollars in subvention. They will stand here, and they are going to tell us everything else that they have done for Georgetown. Listen, the Coalition did a lot for Georgetown too, and increased its subvention. The Coalition invested in the Georgetown Restoration Programme. At the same time we increased the subvention, we also focused on ensuring that the Georgetown Restoration Programme saw massive development in Georgetown. Let me reiterate. Not only did we increase the subvention, but between 2015 to May of 2020, \$988.999 million was spent under the Georgetown Restoration Programme, without a cent from the oil, to assist in rebuilding and strengthening the capacity of the Mayor and City Council to develop, enhance, and deliver economic and environmental services.

The APNU/AFC's central Government rehabilitated the Kitty Market, phases one and two. No amount of shouting from the other side and no amount of *stink mouth* can stop me from telling this House and the people of Guyana what the Coalition did for its developmental project for Georgetown. We rehabilitated the East Ruimveldt Market, phases one and two. We rehabilitated the Bourda Market and the East La Penitence Market. There was funding for constituency-led community development works, including cleaning of alleyways, installation of streetlights, construction of bridges, repairs to roads and upgrade of the park, provision for equipment, and construction of a new administrative building.

Do not make it sound as though they are brand new to bringing development to the Mayor and City Council and the City of Georgetown. Guyana, as I said, did not exist the other day. The 23 years that you sat there in government in the filth that Georgetown was, created by you, we had to clean it. Again, I say, we not only increased the subvention, but we invested, and it is that programme we started that you are now running on. It is nothing brand new. You are copycats because it is something that worked. The arch at Brickdam, how many people knew about it? They only knew about it when Mr. David Granger and the APNU/AFC came into power.

I have to now talk about something that Cde. Bishop Edghill spoke about. To the Hon. Bishop Edghill, you need to apologise to that father who is mourning the death of his 13-year-old. I told you that already. When we look at what Cde. Bishop Edghill said in terms of Georgetown, I want to put on

record that the Mayor and City Council – and this is taken from the Auditor General's report – submitted its financial statements for up to the year 2018/2019. It is detailed here. They submitted their financial statements for 2005, 2007, 2012 to 2016, and 2018 to 2019. That is in the Auditor General's report. It is not them who have to deal with the audit. The Auditor General has to find the time to go there. The Mayor and City Council of Georgetown did their part, which was to submit their financial statements.

Listen to what he would not tell us. He would not tell us how many years the other councils that are controlled by the PPP/C are lagging. You would not tell us that the Anna Regina Town Council's last year of audit was in 2017. You would not tell us that. You would not tell us that the Rose Hall Town Council's last year of audit was in 1998. You would not tell us that. You would not tell us that the Corriverton Town Council's last year of audit was in 2021. You would not tell us those things, but you want to create an image as though Georgetown is lagging. Well, my good friend, Georgetown has satisfied what they ought to satisfy, and that is to submit their financial statements. It is now the Auditor General who has to find the time to go and do his part. You and I know that. [Bishop Edghill: (*Inaudible*) the Public Accounts Committee) (PAC). I like that.] It is the facts.

Let me say that in communication with the Mayor of Georgetown – and this is what the Hon. Christopher Jones said – the PPP/C Government owes the Mayor and City Council \$7.7 billion. Pay the people their money so they can do their work. Do you know what, Mdm. Deputy Speaker? From when we had a budget in August, 2015 to the last budget in November, 2018 for 2019, the Coalition did not owe a cent to the Mayor and City Council. Their rates and taxes were paid. The PPP/C Government needs to stop coming to this House with a line item that says 'rates and taxes' have billions of dollars in its accumulated amount and not transfer it to its rightful place, which is the Mayor and City Council of Georgetown and the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs).

3.37 p.m.

Hon. Zulfikar Mustapha, the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) owes them too. The GuySuCo owes the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NDCs) lots of money. So please, the next time you come with your supplementary, which is probably one more time you are going to have to come, probably in July, because we know November you are gone...So, when you come in July for the supplementary,

please ensure you cater to pay the NDCs so that they can do their work and develop their communities.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker, we have to remember also...As I said, the PPP/C wants us to believe that it is only 2020 we started. We were not there all the time. In the year 2020 was when God said, let us do it, and we started, and that is when Guyana started to flourish. They did not have anything like Mr. Kellawan Lall. Mr. Kellawan Lall was not one of them. Was he one of you? Oh, the House went into silence. Mr. Kellawan Lall was the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development when he said that he wished for an epidemic in the city. He wished for an epidemic to break out in the city, and a couple of mornings after he said that, remember what we had. Chikungunya. We had chikungunya. These are the honourable people who want us to believe that they did not exist. The records show that in 2015, when the Coalition came to Government, the transformative agenda that was on the table, which commenced without oil, is what these honourable people over there are building on with oil money. It is no different from 1992 when we had the economic recovery programme in place. It was the People's National Congress (PNC) that brought the economic recovery programme, and they inherited it in 1992, strived on it, and made significant movements. It was up to 1997, and then we started to see the decay under Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo when he came about.

History has shown us that the PNC has always had the idea, and it is the PNC's documents that they are working on, and then they want to come in now and snatch it as though it is brand new. It is not brand new. When you look at the work from 2015 to 2020, we improved the NDCs. We started to develop playgrounds in this country without oil money. We started to develop them. Wakenaam, Maria Johanna Community Centre ground – we developed it for children to play on and for the community to enjoy. Wakenaam enjoyed an asphaltic concrete road – something they had never seen before – under the Coalition Government. They started to enjoy street lighting under the Coalition Government. They started to enjoy reinforced concrete bridges under the Coalition Government.

Leguan saw the same improvement: riprap structure across the coastline. The Coalition invested billions of dollars. We created new towns in this country. Zeelugt Sugar Welfare Scheme, which was a stronghold of the PPP/C, never had light, water, or proper roads for 23 years. When the Coalition came to Government, we gave them asphaltic concrete roads. We gave them streetlights. We gave them proper drainage, and you came here to tell us that we did nothing. Those

people know what we did for them. They know that we did it without a cent from oil. I can list several farm-to-market roads that we created, we built, and we focused on because they did not exist for the 23 years those people – those honourable *kavakamites* – were in office. They only became visually accessible, and it only became operationalised because of the vision of the APNU/AFC.

Could you imagine, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, if we had oil resources? Could you imagine if we had oil resources at our disposal? The people of Guyana now have four and a half years of the PPP/C and four and a half years of the Coalition. They see what it is that the PPP/C has done, and they know what it is that we have done. They have not seen anything of transformation from the PPP/C. I am not going to stand here and attribute the four-lane road to the PPP/C. Hon. Member, Mr. Sherod Duncan, has said it before. That plot of land was always there for that road. It was always there for that four-lane road. Since Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham's time, the vision was always there for a road to go there. However, we did not have the resources, and we did not have the money. The need for the Demerara River Bridge has always been in the pipeline. The Demerara Harbour Bridge was a vision from Burnham. We always knew that the floating bridge had a lifespan. So, we knew that there was a need for a new bridge. It is not something that is new that the PPP/C brought. Do you know what is new that the PPP/C has brought to this country, Mdm. Deputy Speaker? The corruption. It is stinking. That is what they have brought. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, we cannot use...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Hon. Member, you know what you did. Please, Hon. Member, retract your unparliamentary term.

Mr. Mahipaul: I was referring to a report, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I will withdraw the context in which it was used. However, my understanding – and I am going to yield to your guidance – is that you cannot use the word in its context to label. However, there is an official document called the *Corruption Perception Index*. That is a document. I am not labelling. I am making reference to the *Corruption Perception Index*, which is a report that has labelled the PPP/C as being the 'C' word. I do not want to use it again to show any disrespect for your chair. However, that report has labelled them to be 'C'. You know what I mean, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. You know that. Under the Coalition Government, a report of a similar nature did not have us as 'C', as we are now. Imagine, they have all the oil resources, Mdm. Deputy Speaker, and this is what we are subject to. We are subject to this, Mdm. Deputy Speaker.

I want to say that we on this side never expected this debate to descend to the behaviour that was demonstrated by the People on the other side, which began with the Hon. Bishop Juan Edghill and I am sure it will be concluded by the Hon. Sonia Parag in a similar manner, because she has demonstrated already what it is that she is capable of doing. However, I had to use my time to inform the Guyanese people that they must not fall prey to believing that Guyana began in 2015. Guyana had 23 years of the People's Progressive Party/Civic, and they damaged our country in those 23 years.

From 2015 to 2020, we saw some degree of transformation, and it is that transformation that they are now building on with the oil money. They are simultaneously filling their pockets, getting rich by the day and engaging only friends, families and favourites. However, we on this side of the House are assuring the people that *the rising tide will hoist every boat*, and not just a few. We are assuring the people that we will continue from where we began with the interest of making the small man the real man. We will bridge the gap that currently exists between the haves and the have-nots. We will ensure that we do not create a broader gap between the rich and the not-so-rich. When we talk about salary increases, if we give 10% to the lower man, we will give a lesser percentage to the higher man in terms of their salary. It cannot be fair for a man earning \$100,000 to get 10%, which is just \$10,000, and those over there who earn a million dollars to collect \$100,000. We cannot have that. We cannot create a big, wealthy crew of a few people, and at the same time have a large, small people benefiting. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, in closing...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Before you continue, Hon. Member, you require an extension.

Mr. Jones: Thank you. Mdm. Deputy Speaker, I do move that the Hon. Member be given 5 minutes to continue his presentation...

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: He is actually entitled to 15 minutes.

Mr. Jones: Fifteen minutes, sorry, to continue.

Mdm. Deputy Speaker: Continue, Hon. Member.

Mr. Mahipaul: Thank you, Mdm. Deputy Speaker. I am not hoping to use all 15 minutes.

[*Mr. Speaker assumed the Chair.*]

However, I have to say that under our Government, which is coming in a few months, we will not have a Su-gate either.

We will not have a scandal where any Chinese individual will be seated in the living room of any of our Government Ministers – none of them. If any of our Government Ministers engage in such, they have got to go. They have got to go. We will not have a Su-gate, Mr. Speaker. I was mistakenly going to say Mdm. Speaker there. Forgive me, Sir, but...

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker, I heard what seemed to be a racial attack on a member of the Guyanese community. I would like the Hon. Member to withdraw the statement he just made about Chinese people – any Chinese person.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you ought to have raised a point of order. Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, you may continue.

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, under the APNU/AFC, we would not have a *bruk-up Benn* either. We would not have any *hammer man Benn*. You will remember, Sir, that that was a slogan used when the Ministry of Public Works, in the 23 years of the PPP/C, was just walking around hammering down people's property and breaking up people's property. We will not have that. We will have good governance, decency, transparency, and accountability. We will ensure that we lift everyone out of the nightmare in which they currently find themselves. I believe, Cde. Speaker, with the new Government soon coming, the People's Progressive Party/Civic will have to be buried at the Le Repentir Cemetery. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [Applause]

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Member has not withdrawn the statement I referred to, which he said here.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Member, Mr. Benn, he is not on the floor and, you know, I did not recognise that point on which you stood. I will check the minutes and if there are any contraventions of our Standing Order, we will make the adjustments. Hon. Member, Minister of Local Government and Regional Development, the Hon. Ms. Sonia Parag.

Minister of Local Government and Regional Development [Ms. Parag]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I am rising in response to the motion that has been tabled before this honourable House by the Hon. Ms. Volda Lawrence, and also the amendments that have been moved by me on behalf of the Government of Guyana. I would like to thank the Members on this side of the House who stood up and represented, ably and capably, in relation to the support of the amendments to this motion. The Le Repentir Cemetery no doubt holds and should hold a special place in all Guyanese hearts, not just those who are living in

Georgetown. Rehabilitating that cemetery is something that is good, and therefore I applaud this Government for taking steps way before a motion was brought to this House to do that.

3.52 p.m.

I am unable, from the onset, to support the Motion, not because the rehabilitation of the *Le Repentir* Cemetery should not happen but, because of the undertone of the political daggers that are being pointed and thrown at the Government – the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) – for years of neglect, that they claim are attributed to the PPP/C. I notice that my Friend, the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, thought the need to shout as much as he could. You know what they say sometimes, "although I have shouted, it was to quiet the noise because I could not hear myself". Sometimes when one has an argument, shouting his/her argument does not make the argument better. I will say to the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, his arguments were not better in relation to supporting either his Motion or the amendments to the Motion.

We have had many speakers and we have learnt quite a lot about the historical background of the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. I have heard it being called the *Le Repentir* Cemetery and all sorts of things. In the French language "Le" is pronounced as "Luh". I did French in High School. Let us start with that. Let us start by calling it what it is – the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. The history is wonderful. The fact is that is the first cemetery we have had in Georgetown. It holds a special place for those who have survived their ancestors who are buried there, their families and friends. We had a speaker before us who sought to speak on everything about the PPP/C Government and some of what, Mr. Mahipaul said – that they did while in Government.

The first fact that we have to establish in this House is – It swayed as it came with speakers before. – the Mayor and City Council has always been People's National Congress Reform controlled and the A Partnership for National Unity controlled from the inception. The second fact is, the *Le Repentir* Cemetery by law is supposed to be taken care of by the City Council of Georgetown. It is by the collection of rates and taxes – Let me make it clear; let me define that clearly. – and not by subventions that the Council supposed to take care of the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. They want to say that the PPP/C Government is not investing enough in the Mayor and City Council to enable them to do what they have to do with Georgetown, the Cemetery and so on. Let me state one fact. First of all, the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson,

came to the House very enthusiastic about the Cemetery. The Hon. Member has always been about cemeteries, deaths and so on. The Hon. Member said that this Government owe \$13 billion to the City Hall. Mr. Mahipaul may have called the Mayor. Let me say, I have also spoken to the City Council and I can definitively say that this Government do not owe the City Council any money.

Let me state this. As a matter of fact, we do not owe. The Council is getting \$13 billion there and \$7 billion there. I definitively say that we do not owe \$13 billion. The People's Progressive Party/Civic do not owe any moneys to the City Hall – no moneys whatsoever. [An Hon. Member: You just said the Government.] I meant the PPP/C. The People's National Congress Reform, on the other hand, owe \$6.7 billion and more to the City Council. That is on record. You want to come and you want to talk. I can pull the records when you were in Government and show how much your Government – the APNU/AFC – owe to the City Hall. I can show you. I will lay it over to this House. Let us establish, this Government do not owe \$13 billion. The People's Progressive Party/Civic do not owe any moneys to the City Council – not a cent. As a matter of fact, we have paid by the year. When an invoice is given to our Party, we go and pay our moneys to the City Council. The PNCR is not doing that.

You come, talk about flaring yourself, corruption... Sorry, Mr. Speaker, on the 'c' word. ...and this Government. Let us start with a signing bonus that is supposed to be in the Consolidated Fund. Let us talk about the US\$18 million signing bonus that the APNU/AFC Government first said that they did not know about and that it was a gift. They said it was hidden somewhere. They said, "was it there; we went to sign; but really was it there?". When confronted, the then Minister of Finance said, it is a gift. Why? He was confronted by the people of the country in relation to that signing bonus. Had the people not confronted him on it, where would that money be? Would we have known about it?

The Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, also stood in this House and said, "let us talk about the 23 years of government". Yes, we have been down a historical path of Government. Do you know who was there? The Government Chief Whip, Ms. Teixeira, in 1992 was there when the PPP/C Government took the reins of Office after devastation of this country and plunging this country into poverty for 28 years of rule and dictatorship. [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] No. I want you to listen to this. When Ms. Teixeira got into Office, complaints were coming from the

residents in the City. I was not here but Minister, Ms. Teixeira was here. The Hon. Minister was in the City and she was a Minister. The complaint that came to her was that the City was so filthy that diseases can come from it. Do you know what? The PPP/C Government came and met the filth in 1992. The Cheddi Jagan Government and the PPP/C Government at that time had to set up a task force and a committee to manage the garbage situation in the filthy City to clean up the City.

When they come to you and say programmes were started by them and are continued by us, that is where there are the mistruth and untruth. The Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, is here and spoke of a history that he does not know of. I can speak because Ms. Teixeira has been a Minister since 1992. When you came into Government... [An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] I know you like to talk to the dead too. Let us fast forward. Mr. Mahipaul also said that from 2015 to 2020 we came in... One would think that was the only time they have started a government. ... and did an excellent job in the City from 2015 to 2020.

Let me read from the *Stabroek News* newspaper. Mr. Speaker, listen to this and I want all of you to listen to this date. It is 30th April, 2020. You would know that was when. We were in the middle of five months of an election-rigging and the holding up of a whole country. They were not governing but using the indecency to go and rig an election. I can lay it over, Mr. Speaker. This is what was written to the Editor by Jenny. It states:

"I remember in 2016, there was a cleaning frenzy in preparation for celebrations of Guyana's 50th Independence.

Let me say, when they come to this honourable House and tell you that we have been cleaning the City and the cemetery, the cemetery was a part of the Jubilee cleaning up and a frenzy. It was the only time they went and clean it.

"The cemetery was weeded and drains were cleaned by the Georgetown Mayor and City Council (M&CC) which promised to properly maintain the site. Three years later, ...

This is Jenny writing because Jenny's parents are buried in the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. She could not access it.

"...as recently as August, 2019, I read announcements in the local media again about the rehabilitation of the cemetery.

Clearly promises were forgotten."

This is by the APNU/AFC who said we will clean and we will maintain. They utilised moneys to go into a frenzy for the 50th Jubilee. It was a big party and did not maintain beyond that. Fast forward to 2019, three years later and the lady cannot access either of her parents' grave. [Mr.

Mahipaul: Who is Jenny?] I will lay it over.

They want to talk about the 'c' word again. I would like to go back to the Mayor and City Council. The Mayor and City Council does not engage constituencies or residences in relation to any budget planning. I have the evidence of this one here. Mr. Speaker, permit me to tell you about this. The Mayor and City Council deducted PAYE from employees and did not remit \$1.7 billion to the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA). No one knows where that \$1.7 billion deduced from the employees is – no one knows where that is. It is circulated in a document. I can tell you, the Human Resources Department administered and approved one monthly payroll amounting \$103,437,900 inclusive of \$5,008,801 in overtime. There were statutory deductions were made but were not remitted to the GRA. This is only a part of the \$1.7 billion.

No one knows what the City Council did with that money. They want to come to this House and say that when the PPP/C is in Office, we starved them of funds, so that they cannot... [Mr. Mahipaul: Where is the document?]

I can get it laid over. Do not worry. They come to tell this honourable House that the PPP/C Government starved the Mayor and City Council of Subventions. The Mayor and City Council continuously breached the Fiscal Management and Accountability Act by not submitting estimates for budget on time ever. It is always a month later.

4.07 p.m.

Now, if this Government is going to invest in this city and we have been, we are going to ensure that the implementation of projects is managed by the Government because we cannot trust. From the breach and mismanagement of the Financial Act and the finances of the City Council, we cannot have confidence that the Council will execute these projects. The Government makes no apologies at this time because the Mayor and City Council submits a workplan to the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. The workplan submitted is fitting within its subvention allocation and according to that workplan, the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development releases the subvention to the Mayor and City Council.

Let us talk about increase of subvention – For all 70 of the Neighbourhood Democratic Councils (NSC)s that we have in this country, inclusive of those controlled by the APNU/AFC have not only received \$5 million in subvention but an additional \$4 million under a grant, under the Subvention programme. We have added to the subvention for each NDC, even the ones controlled by the APNU/AFC in which they are grateful. They have expressed that. The Mayor knows that he has sent the workplan to the Ministry and, as of December, 2024, the Mayor and City Council received subvention in full.

I would like to speak a bit on the Restoration Project that they speak so highly of from 2015 to 2020. In 2018, the APNU/AFC Government undertook to restore the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. They said that they were going to spend \$150 million. In that scope of works, they were cleaning and putting up a fence. As I stand here today, I checked the records, the scope of works of that \$150 million project was never completely executed for the *Le Repentir* Cemetery – never completely executed. As a matter of fact, it was the Hon. Minister of Public Works, Bishop Juan Edghill, when the four lane was being done for Cemetery Road who constructed the fence for *Le Repentir* Cemetery, although that formed a part of the scope of work for the \$100 million that the then Town Clerk spoke of as being a project of restoration at the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. How can this Government and how can the people of Guyana trust them when they said we have \$100 million and up to today's date the scope of works for that \$100 million cannot be executed? How can we trust and have confidence in them? One cannot; one cannot.

In 2014, there was a Minister of Tourism, a Minister of Housing and a Minister of Local Government - the Hon. Mr. Whittaker I think - at that time, there was \$1 billion allocated, in 2014, by the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government for a caption called 'Clean-up my Country'. This Government continuously – whether it has been from 1992, whether it has been in 2006, 2011, 2014, 2020 to 2025 – have been plugging money into the city and into the country to ensure that we tackle all areas. A sum of \$1 billion was spent on that and the *Le Repentir* Cemetery formed part of that clean up exercise. Further, for the Mayor and City Council machinery, there were \$500 million for the clean-up of main canals, rehabilitation of the Mayor and City Council machinery to ensure maintenance and continuance maintenance of the city of which the Cemetery was also a part of it. There was \$100 million in 2014 directed towards the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. On 16th September, 2014, *Demerara Waves* reported that the works were commenced

and were ongoing for the clean-up of the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. In 2024, National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) tendered to clean the borders of the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. In 2022, I am giving you a more recent history down the line, Mr. Walter Rodney's tomb was now officially a national monument in the *Le Repentir* Cemetery, under the Peoples Progressive Party/Civic Government.

I would like to speak on the Hon. Member, Bishop Juan Edghill, who spoke on his projects under the Ministry of Public Works. The Hon. Member does not know that last night I looked at a *YouTube* video of a citizen of Guyana who wanted to see what works were being done, how they were executed and the impact that they will have. They started from one part of that Cemetery Road and came all the way down. The video showed the fence that was done and how the four-lane will be connected to the other roads that were being done. While the citizen thought that it was ordinary drainage works, they realised that it was far more complexed than that, in terms of connectivity with other areas. Internal roads are being done in the Cemetery of itself and that is the first phase of the restoration and rehabilitation of the *Le Repentir* Cemetery under the Urban Renewal Plan.

Let us talk a bit about the Urban Renewal Plan that is a project and a programme under the Peoples Progressive Party/Civic Government. Over \$19 billion has been executed by the Ministry of Public Works for main access roads in Georgetown – over \$19 billion – from 2022 to 2024. The walkway on Lamaha Street was also done through the Ministry of Public Works as a part of the Urban Renewal Plan. Look at the view and look at the beauty of the Lamaha walkway now. It is lined with benches, lined with beautiful trees, line with flowers, lovely lights, people can go to have a seat there with their family and people can take their birds out in the early morning. I see them with their birds out there because they now have a space that they can safely go and it beautifies our town. There is \$1.5 billion being expended on the Independence Boulevard, which I have also taken a drive along and it is beautiful. In December, when we had the Christmas tree light up, look how many citizens came out and enjoyed it. On a weekend basis and a daily basis people can enjoy the space. The Esplanade which, is the First Lady's project that enhances the Urban Renewal Plan is an area where one can find, no matter what day of the week one goes on families out there, with their pets, by themselves or just going for a run. One can find them in that space and having a wonderful time in that space.

The sum of \$475 million was the investment of the four-lane road, Cemetery Road. We can now drive safely. We can

commute. We can connect to other roadways to ensure efficiency of movement as well as less traffic congestion. There are concrete drains on both sides of the four-lane. I dare say, that is the beginning of the restoration of the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. There is concrete drainage that lines the border of that Cemetery along with the fence that has been put up for safety and security that the APNU/AFC have been talking about but they had never done.

The sum of \$500 million has been expended by the Ministry of Public Works on the cross streets from the Cemetery and \$100 million on internal roads in the *Le Repentir* Cemetery is being done by the Ministry of Public Works. There is a continued plan for the restoration of the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. We do have a plan, as a Government, for all of the cemeteries across the country. There will be a collaboration between the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development, the Local Democratic Organs, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Public Works to ensure that we have this established.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Annette Ferguson, spoke about when you come to this House you must consult with the relevant authorities. I do not think the Hon. Member follows my page, but the Mayor was personally invited, called him personally and – He can attest to that. – invited him with councillors, to my Minister of Local Government and Regional Development to involve him in a meeting that I had with the King's Foundation on the restoration and the urban development for our capital city and he partook in that meeting.

[Ms. Ferguson: Partook?] It is past tense. Do you not know what tense is? He was a part of that meeting and he contributed. He can contest to that. The new plans for the *Le Repentir* Cemetery will also include constant debushing, cleaning and maintenance. This is the part that I believe that will assist very well. The Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, can hear me on this. Between the tombs that are there, there are some narrow spots and maybe some wide spots, and in between that there are the grass that grows very quickly. As it rains, the grass will grow even faster. The Government have put a plan in place that will be executed shortly to ensure that we will now be putting concrete strips between the tombs to prevent grass and vegetation growing. This is so that there will be less maintenance and it can have a better look, also people can be able to visit the tombs of their loved ones with ease. Those are some of the things we are putting in place in relation to the *Le Repentir* Cemetery.

On a more holistic plan for the town – This is to promote sustainable urban development. – the Government of Guyana, through His Excellency, is partnering with the

King's Foundation and the Qatar Foundation's Earthna Center to promote the Guyana's Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) 2030. A signature building will be constructed in Georgetown using all local materials and all local skills set. The building will demonstrate the cultural and environmental heritage. It will inform modern practices and will provide an important template for that sustainable urban development and locally led construction in Guyana. That is just one part of what we are doing. We want to establish in Georgetown with the King's Foundation a restoration, not only on the part of Georgetown but different spaces in Georgetown. The Botanical Gardens has already begun. We want to be able to connect that with the park and the restoration of the park.

4.22 p.m.

As you see, the First Lady's office has already worked on enhancing the National Park with the Kiddies' Corner or the Play Park that we have. I know Hon. Member Mr. Mahipaul has taken his son there already. It is a beautiful space to be. Also, we want to be able to create green spaces in Georgetown. The Hon. Vice-President recently announced that there will be a project that will commence shortly of planting, over a number of years, \$50,000 trees in this urban space, and along the East Coast and East Bank. That will also be a part of that holistic plan that we have. There have been massive investments in the town as we have been going along, as we have started since 2020 and moving on to 2025...

Mr. Speaker: To move on further, you will need an extension, Hon. Minister.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member be given an extension of time. I believe, it is 15 minutes under the Standing Orders to continue her very good presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister Ms. Teixeira. Hon. Minister Ms. Parag, you may continue. You have 15 minutes to conclude.

Ms. Parag: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. We will also have, in that restoration project, the restoring of historical buildings and historical sites. You will see the town coming back to a space where the restoration of these historical buildings will be done. You will have green spaces that will be safe, family-friendly and family-oriented. It does not stop there because it also includes the cleaning of the cemeteries and the restoration of markets. The Hon.

Member, Ms. Lawrence, during the Budget Debate asked about the Bourda Green Market and that is one area we are looking at to construct. We are looking at rehabilitate parts of the Stabroek Market as well. There is also the King's Foundation who we begun a conversation in relation to the Stabroek Market, and the Mayor was a part of that conversation too.

There are many things that are going to be happening. However, they will be led by the Central Government. As I have said before, the restoration of the city and the projects that we want to implement, while our country is transforming, while we want to promote a healthier living or lifestyle in our town, necessarily includes all of the connecting dots that we want to have in our town. It is because of all of these investments and what we have been doing for many years in terms of developing our town that I have moved the amendments before the honourable House now. It is those amendments that I will... One second, Mr. Speaker. So because of those efforts and investments... You have seen in what I have put forward, that:

“BE IT RESOLVED that this National Assembly supports the Government in its effort to upgrade this historic facility and to implement the plan for its maintenance, including drainage infrastructure, thereby elevating it to the status of a national memorial.”

It forms part and parcel of the Government's effort and financial investment in the township. It is to promote a healthier and better lifestyle for the residents of Georgetown, and those who are coming from different areas in our country to Georgetown.

Mr. Speaker, in relation to solid waste, – I have to say this for the umpteenth time. – the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and Central Government are not responsible, by law, for the collection or disposal of garbage. It is solely with the Mayor and City Council, with the rates and taxes that it will collect. This is something that I need to put out there. The previous Government, with all that they claimed they have done – which I have no evidence of and see no evidence of – and they say the people know what they did, but the people know what they did not do and that is why they are over there. They have not created one landfill site in this country that we know of at all. This Government, from 2020 to 2024, created 13 landfill sites in different regions and invested tremendously in that. In the upcoming 2025, we will be establishing landfill sites in Regions 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9 & 10. All of those will be getting landfill sites. We

will also be procuring garbage trucks from the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development to enhance the capabilities of the Local Democratic Organs, including the Mayor and City Council of Georgetown.

While this Government is not mandated by law to do all of these things, we are making the investment, nonetheless, because we want to be able to satisfy our people. When they talk about not equipping, we are not equipping the Mayor and City Council with the funding because of its previous and continued mismanagement of funds and lack of any vision in terms of providing something for the people of this town that they can be proud of. They have nothing like that. I, therefore on behalf of the Government, table the amendments to the Motion on the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. The amendment to the above Motion is as follows:

“After the last AND WHEREAS add a new AND WHEREAS which reads as follows:-

“AND WHEREAS the Government has initiated a plan to upgrade cemeteries across the country, including Le Repentir Cemetery in 2025.”

Amend the BE IT RESOLVED clause as follows:-

Remove the words “calls on” and replace with the word “support”

add the words “in its efforts” after the word “Government”

Add the word “to” before the word “implement”

Change the word “a” to “the” before the word “plan”

The amended clause will now read:

BE IT RESOLVED that this National Assembly supports the Government in its effort to upgrade this historic facility and to implement the plan for its maintenance, including drainage infrastructure, thereby elevating it to the status of a national memorial.”

The Government understand full well that our citizens need to have a place where they are proud to have their ancestors buried, where they can go with ease and comfort. We have continuously executed works to maintain the *Le Repentir* Cemetery. Despite all that have been projected in this honourable House and onto the media, the only time that the Mayor and City Council – the People’s National Congress (PNC)-led Mayor and City Council – took this seriously was when they were holding a jubilee for the Republic anniversary. In 2018, they knew their five years of a term

was coming to an end and they decided to do something. However, that something was never done and completed.

Mr. Speaker, it is always this Government who help, invest and make sure that every sector gets better. Everything that was done in 2014 and everything that was done in 1992 for the cleanup of the city were also done without oil money – far from oil money. They were actually done with a debt hanging over every single Guyanese head but still, they were done. When the Opposition want to talk about the ‘c’ word and not having oil money, then they should not have spent over \$70 million on scholarships for themselves. They should not have gone and increase their salaries before looking at the people. They should not have gone and hide a signing bonus which they did not think the people would know about. They should not have gone and spend \$150 million on a feasibility study which they did not use. We have to talk facts when we come to this honourable House. If they are going to start their presentation by saying, we always come here and talk facts, make sure that you have the evidence of the facts because what is publicly known is otherwise. Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. I ask the honourable House to support the amendments that are proposed by the Government of Guyana. Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Lawrence, proceed.

Ms. Lawrence (replying): Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to begin by responding to some of the many said, first by the Hon. Member, Bishop Edghill, and then I will move on to the others. I will stick to a few, Sir, to not lose focus on the purpose of the Motion titled: *Rehabilitation of the Le Repentir Cemetery*. I am paraphrasing. The Hon. Minister said, the Government is not unwilling, unable nor reluctant to ensure the beautification of not just the *Le Repentir* Cemetery but all the cemeteries. Kudos – happy to hear that and the people across Guyana would be very happy to hear that. Then, the Hon. Member went on to say something which I thought of when I was preparing this Motion. The Hon. Member said, there should be no fight and I do agree with you. This is not a matter for us to fight over. Instead of proceeding in the frame of there being no fight and telling us more about this \$1.3 billion which we learnt of in his speech this morning, he went on a 2025 campaign. A campaign on a motion that speaks to a cemetery. I was not surprised but, I must say, Hon. Minister, I was disappointed.

Just as those persons who live on Savage Street and Toucan Drive listening to the debate – they did reach out to me on

WhatsApp. They were like, “Oh boy, what is really happening? It is the Cemetery we are talking about.” I do not represent the Mayor and City Council here or any other place. I stated clearly in my opening that I propose this Motion with a deep sense of duty and responsibility. However, in all fairness to the Georgetown City Council, it is not true that they are not doing anything. We heard about some of the things from the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul, and the Hon. Member, Mr. Jones. Many of the projects that were proposed by the Mayor and City Council from a long time onwards are how they can be able to garner moneys to meet their expenses. I recall that in March, 2019, a cemetery modernisation plan was completed by some consultants for the Georgetown City Council. It was presented to the then Minister of Communities. In 2020, it was also presented to the Minister of Local Government and Regional Development. We cannot say they are not doing anything. There is a plan.

4.37 p.m.

I am also aware that on 1st February, 2025, the Engineers Department published a new fee structure for burial and services in that very cemetery, and I assure this House that even the increases listed there cannot suffice for the maintenance of the Le Repentir Cemetery. The costs range from \$3,000 to \$24,000. Not everybody who dies is buried in the Le Repentir Cemetery. They are buried all across the country. Some days, nothing is going on there. I also recall that, in 2023, the Council’s proposal was to have properties in the city revalued. As you are aware, many persons have turned what used to be cottages into five- and six-storey buildings and are still paying the same rates as though they were cottages. More services, more people, more housing, more businesses, and they are expected to provide the services, but they cannot, cannot revalue the properties. I further recall *News Room* reporting that the Hon. Vice President Bharrat Jagdeo has consistently stated that under a PPP/C Administration there will be no increase in property taxes in Georgetown. Yet, we expect the City Council to carry out its mandate.

In June, 2023, he addressed concerns, that is, the Vice-President, about potential tax hikes, emphasising that the PPP/C had no plans to raise taxes in the city. He highlighted that previous contracts under the past Government aimed to update property valuations, which could have led to increased taxes, but he said the PPP/C opposed such measures. May I ask the Hon. Juan Edghill, why is his Ministry collecting payments for billboards around the city when the Chapter 28:01 law gives that right to the Mayor

and City Councillors of Georgetown? [Bishop Edghill: We will discuss it just now.] Thank you. We can go on and on, throwing words back and forth, and back and forth, and forth and back, but that will not solve the issue of the maintenance of the Le Repentir Cemetery. I wish, therefore, to highlight once again the fourth WHEREAS clause, which states:

“...the Georgetown City Council is unable...”

Hon. Parag.

“...to garner adequate funds to provide services such as security and maintenance, among others;”

I rest my case, Sir. Let me turn my attention to the Hon. Minister Ramson. I always hear him bantering about this ground opposite me, and what the Government is doing and so. What I like about what he says is that he met a ground, not like in other cases where he would come and say there were bushes and they turned it into a play field. He met a ground, and I want to tell him something about that ground.

That ground was an open space filled with bushes, and it was used by some unsavoury characters to hide properties which they stole from people in the community and surrounding communities. During that time, I became very familiar with the officers at the Impact Base on Brickdam, at the Brickdam Police Station, and they were very helpful. I remember after one incident, the officer – I would not call him by his name; he is still in the force. I do not want him to get sent home – said that the best thing for us to do is to clear this area and ensure that there are no bushes or any encumbrances that these characters can use. That thought shared became the catalyst for the beginning of the present play field being in the state that it was, as the Hon. Minister found it. He said he put up a fence, and I disagree with him. He replaced the fence, part of the fence. He said it is now being used by the youths in the community and other communities. I have news for you, Mr. Minister. I have a file this thick with requests and responses to young people in the La Penitence and Ruimveldt areas who held various programmes on that very field. We even had a rounders club on that very field representing the communities. What you are doing is nothing new. It is just a continuation, and it is your duty to do that, just as it was my duty to ensure that that field was kept in pristine condition even when you were in office. This back and forth and forth and back, we are tired of it.

Let me turn my attention, not to the Hon. Member who has not placed a motion or a question in this House, but to the Hon. Minister Parag. Hon. Parag, you spoke about putting up

a fence on the Cemetery Road on the eastern and western sides. I want to say to you that there has always been a fence there. [Ms. Parag: *(Inaudible)*] I am telling

you, there has always been a fence there. When the Coalition Government went into Office, they refurbished it and they put up a new fence, and they took away all the wiring. All the fencing disappeared. I assure you, that same fence that you put up – I lived there, Madam, for 60-odd years – I assure you that that will go too.

You spoke about putting the concrete between the tombs, and I heard the Hon. Minister Edghill say that too. I just want to tell you something; that is already happening. It is already happening. They are already putting concrete between the tombs. It is not anything new. What we have to do is to deal with those places where burial is not taking place presently. You speak about the City Council's mismanagement. Mdm. Minister, if there is mismanagement at the City Council of Georgetown, as the Minister, call in the police. What I would advise you is for you and your Government to rethink the present structure of our City Council; it is long outdated. We need to change it and make it more modern so that they can operate in a manner that can be able to not only manage the city properly but also have a tier whereby we can have more participation, and it can be run from a business perspective. [Mr. McCoy: Since

you know and you had all *yuh* plans you should have done it.] I know that there are some of us who come to this House just to make noise but I will not, I will not, be distracted this afternoon.

The last WHEREAS clause of this motion calls for an implementation plan for maintenance of the Le Repentir Cemetery – a maintenance plan. Investing millions of dollars into new projects is pointless if we do not maintain them. Lack of maintenance leads to costly failures, safety hazards and expensive repairs down the line. What we need is a proactive maintenance plan which will extend the lifespan of the infrastructure, which will save taxpayers' money and ensure services remain reliable. Prioritising continuous upkeep over new development is not just smart, it is responsible governance.

Today, I wish to thank all the Members who spoke on this motion – all of them. This 17th February, 2025, gave this House, through this motion, an opportunity to do what is right, and that is to ensure that the Le Repentir Cemetery is put into a position where persons can visit the tombs or the resting place of their loved ones, and persons who seek to bury their loved ones can do so, without fear and without having to walk with a chainsaw. This evening, the true test

of democracy is not in the victory of which side wins. The true test would be for the people of Guyana, in this House and out of this House, to be able to visit the Le Repentir Cemetery and use it for the purpose it was built for – to be able to visit their loved ones, to be able to bury their loved ones, to be able to look at this space in our country and feel proud.

4.52 p.m.

It would be able to allow persons to not be afraid to enter in, not to have to pay for police escort to take them in, but rather to be able to enjoy the ambiance, to enjoy their visits and, most of all, to be able to recognise that their taxpayers' dollars are being spent for the upkeep and maintenance of the Le Repentir Cemetery. There are some amendments as read by the Hon. Member. We, on this side, have no fear of those amendments. We support the amendments because we would like to see the people of Georgetown, and Guyana as a whole, benefit from the use of the Le Repentir Cemetery. I thank you.

Bishop Edghill (right of reply): Mr. Speaker, I rise under the Standing Order 39(2) which states:

“A Minister may conclude a debate on any motion which is critical of the Government or reflects adversely on or is calculated to bring discredit upon the Government or a Government Officer.”

It is in the spirit of this Standing Order that I stand to correct a number of misinformation and inaccuracies, and to ensure that the record properly reflects what are the facts.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Let me acknowledge your right of reply under that Standing Order and give you the floor.

Bishop Edghill: Thank you very much, Sir. A few days ago, Mr. Speaker, it looked like we were having troubles with our platform with *WhatsApp*. I am glad that we were able to get that fixed, because just like the Hon. Ms. Lawrence, who received a *WhatsApp* message from someone, particularly named ‘Street’, my WhatsApp is also working and I did receive a message that states, ‘what is happening in Parliament today’. The same people who took away the cash grant from the children, the same people who took away the money from the Joint Services, the same people who took away moneys and livelihoods from 7,000 sugar workers, the same people who took away benefits from loggers and miners, the same people who took away benefits from the Guyanese people who are alive, are now seeking to represent the dead.

People who are alive... [Dr. Singh: ...were punished (*inaudible*)] ...were punished and now we are having a big discussion about the dead. I did reply. Yes, I will reply. [Mr. Jordan: Bishop, you need to remember it is appointed unto all men once to die but after death comes (*inaudible*). Remember that, right.] Yes. Yours is coming soon. I did reply and I indicated that I believe what is happening here – coming from the Opposition's benches – is a desperate attempt to endear themselves to the citizens of Georgetown, having failed to serve them while they were there in the period 2015 to 2020. It is a battle for minds. It is because of Mr. Mahipaul's lack of content presentation, his juvenile approach to this matter, and his usual pomposity of infantile politics, that I will bring to this honourable House that his colleague who is sitting right next to him, who chairs the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), would have said, 'Mahipaul, *yuh* should shut *yuh* mouth; *yuh* know 'Edghill' *deh* in *de* House.

I want to read from the Report of the Auditor General, 2017. The Hon. Member, Ms. Juretha Fernandes is smiling. She knows exactly where I am going. While the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) was in Office, the APNU/AFC said they love the people of Georgetown and they will do something for the people of Georgetown, and they gave moneys to the City Council of Georgetown to execute some works in Georgetown. This is what the Auditor General had to say in 2017 about the \$300 million that was allocated in 2015 under the Ministry of Communities:

Paragraph 523

"The project profile as included in the national estimates stated that the allocation was for Georgetown restoration initiatives. The intended benefits include: (i) environmental improvement; and (ii) improved health and well-being. According to the Appropriation Accounts, the full sum was expended."

This is all of the \$300 million.

"An analysis of the expenditure as contained in the Integrated Financial Management and Accounting System (IFMAS) report is summarized in the table below:"

"Purchase of vehicle...

De-bushing of the Le Repentir Cemetery – \$52,163,000;

Restoration of Georgetown – \$241,637,000.

Listen to the findings of the Auditor General:

"f) two hundred and sixty-one Payment Vouchers for expenses totalling \$247.558M were submitted. This was \$5.921M more than the... (\$241.637M) paid over to the Council;

g) expenditure totalling \$182.610M were not certified by the relevant officer;

h) the City Treasurer's approval was not evident on seven Payment Vouchers totalling \$8.304M;

i) the Finance Committee's full approval was not evident on twenty-one Payment Vouchers totalling \$30M;

j) there was no evidence of acknowledgement from payees for payments totalling \$12.816M;"

This means that you paid someone and they *ent gat* no signature to *seh de* person collect *de* money or a receipt to *seh de* person collected *de* money.

"k) the correctness, accuracy and validity of five payments totalling \$4.890M could not be verified;

l) six payments totalling \$15.7M were made on six contracts that were above the \$1.5M contract ceiling for the clean-up programme;

m) payments totalling \$42M could not be validated in respect of 27 contracts;

n) we could not ascertain whether a transparent system was used for the awarding of contracts;

o) twelve contracts totalling \$21M were awarded to one contractor, contrary to the apparent stipulated maximum of four contracts to one contractor;

p) there were eleven instances that indicated contractors may have provided false addresses to satisfy the criterion of having to reside within the area where the work was [being done];

q) applications were not seen for 25 contracts amounting to \$37.500M; ...

r) the contract register was not properly written up. Moreover, not all contracts were recorded [in the contract register]. Key information including payments on contracts was also not recorded."

I can go on and on. This is the record of the Auditor General of Guyana – 2017 – that was discussed in the PAC, which the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, is the Chairman, while my good colleague who made lots of fanfare and noise, Mr. Mahipaul, is a very active and aggressive Member. Now you come to this House in a year when there is an election – where the people of Georgetown have been consistently rejecting you, of which the Hon. Member Mr. Charles Ramson has shown the progression of how we have moved and where we will end up – seeking to endear yourselves back to them. You know what, the people need to know that when you control central government and city government, you fail the people of Georgetown, and not only the people of Georgetown but the people of Linden as well... [Dr. Singh: That's correct. And the people of New Amsterdam.] ...and the people of New Amsterdam and Bartica. That is why we are here discussing this.

I also want to correct some things. Hon. Member Ms. Volda Lawrence, my upbringing has taught me not to be very harsh or rude with my seniors out of respect of age, but I will answer your question politely and factually. Why is the Ministry of Public Works collecting money for billboards in the city? It is simple. In the city there are declared, gazetted public roads... [Dr. Singh: ...by law.] ...by law. It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Public Works to maintain those roads and have full control of them. The City Council has not provided a dime to patch a pothole in this City between 2020 and 2024 – not a dime; not even crusher run in a hole. All the road maintenance work in the City of Georgetown, whether it is gazetted as main roads or roads that fall under the control of the Mayor and City Council, Chapter 28:01, was done by the Ministry of Public Works, Special Projects Unit, totalling more than \$1 billion. That is the answer, Hon. Member. I want to move on. It seems that Members of this House do not have an appreciation – on that side I should say, except the Deputy Speaker – of central government versus local government. City Hall has always been controlled by the PNC/R from independence until now.

5.07 p.m.

You are coming to this House to blame central government for the failure of a local government that Congress Place presides over. The logic is... [Mr. Jones: (Inaudible)] All right, Hon. Mr. Jones. You say the central government did not allow you to do your thing. You were in central government from 2015 to 2020, and I just read what you did with the money that central government gave to Georgetown. I want to give some information to the House

and the people of Guyana, so that there will be no excuse. Everyone in Guyana knows that if you deduct moneys from the salaries of workers to pay for the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) and the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and you do not, it is a criminal offense. Mr. Speaker, NIS is owed \$196 million by the Mayor and City Council. The Guyana Revenue Authority is owed \$2.731 billion by the Mayor and City Council. The Guyana Power and Light Corporation (GPL), Minister Indar, they do not pay for their streetlights. They owe GPL \$3.5 billion for street lighting.

Mr. Speaker, you know a little earlier... [Mr. Jordan: (Inaudible)] Keep shouting. It is going to help. They stood up in this House – and I guess because the doctrine of the paramountcy of the party has indoctrinated them they do not know the difference between party and government – and said that the PPP/C owes \$13 billion. When we are accusing them that Congress Place owes \$6.4 billion in rates and taxes the rebuttal was that the PPP/C Government owes \$13 billion. I have, because I requested, that I can provide to the House, that came *via WhatsApp*, the demand notices. As a matter of fact, City Hall owes the PPP/C \$2,000 because we paid \$2,000 more. Where is the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, on this particular matter? That is why the Standing Orders allow for this right of reply to correct misinformation that is out there. Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Minister, are you going to lay over that receipt? We have to *put this to bed* officially, once and for all.

Bishop Edghill: They must apologise and withdraw. Mr. Speaker, one of the biggest issues that has to be addressed in Georgetown – and the Hon. Member, Ms. Lawrence, when she spoke to the motion raised the issue – is drainage. I heard, with the usual *big tent fanfare*, where we spin narratives about how Georgetown was not flooded. I want to tell you about the drainage. I know that the time is up because the truth is being told. In 2024, just last year, we spent, putting local people to work in their own communities for the cleaning of drains and desilting of alleyways. That is apart from the machines that were engaged by the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) to deal with the big canals. The Ministry of Public Works spent \$1.101 billion to execute drainage works in Georgetown. In 2023, we expended \$1,020,000,000; in 2022 – \$425 million; in 2021 – \$800 million; and in 2020 – \$390 million.

The people of Georgetown are there to see that, even though we are in central government and the Mayor and City Council has neglected to carry out their functions,

Georgetown is not starved. The PPP/C is making the necessary interventions to improve the lives and livelihoods of the people in Georgetown. That is why we could stand up here and boldly debate a motion like this, and we could represent our interests anywhere. The National Drainage and Irrigation Authority added to this. We do not *sit on our hands*. South Ruimveldt, Festival City, North Ruimveldt, that entire area is a basin. The Hon. Member, Mr. Christopher Jones knows that rain *ent* fall for the whole week, but the place still *gat* water *pun de* roads. We did not *sit on our hands*. We went into the area – the President himself and Minister Zulfikar Mustapha – and we did the drainage work. Do you know what we did? We put in a brand-new pump at Liliendaal that will help to drain that entire basin – two pumps. Go to the Auditor General's report and find out what happened under the APNU/AFC. The APNU/AFC bought pumps for drainage, but do you know what they bought? They bought fire engine pumps, not drainage pumps. Was it not fire engine pumps? It was fire engine pumps. It is in the record.

I want to also address this issue of the garden city versus the garbage city. We will find out here in this House this afternoon, and the people of Guyana need to listen and judge for themselves. The PPP/C Government, under the leadership of my distinguished colleague, Minister Deodat Indar, the Minister within the Ministry of Public Works, with the full support of the Cabinet, has conducted several cleanup exercises – ten so far. Different ministers work with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), Men on Mission (MOM), the military, the Guyana Police Force (GPF), the Guyana Fire Service, the private sector, and we have moved hundreds of truckloads of garbage from one area, just one area. Do you know what happened? We had to go back again and clean it. Something is happening.

We have cleaned this City – Merriman's Mall, Bourda Market, Stabroek Market, Lombard Street, Sussex Street, Independence Boulevard, Cummings Lodge, the Sea Walls – by hundreds of truckloads. Then they come to this House and say that it is a garbage city under the PPP/C. We have to find out if there is some orchestration, that every time there is a cleanup there is a re-dumping. We have to find that out. So, please, if *yuh don't own de dogs, yuh can't call off de dogs*. If the *dogs were called off* in 2015 to 2020, then we know who owned the dogs. If it was clean and there was no dumping from 2015 to 2020, then we know who owned the dogs. I hope someone could deny and say they do not own the dumping dogs.

The Hon. Member got up and spoke about the various projects that were done. I was asking them to name the projects that were done for the enhancement and the beautification of Georgetown. They named Kitty Market. The Auditor General had something to say about Kitty Market. The sum of \$70 million cannot be accounted for. Is Kitty Market done? Could anyone advise me if Kitty Market Phase One and Phase Two is over and it is now usable? We have to put the facts out there.

My colleague, the Hon. Sonia Parag, has already indicated to this House what is our position as it relates to this motion with the amendments that we are making. Do not let us come here and *pull wool over people's faces* as if to suggest that there is some big neglect in Georgetown and the PPP/C hate the people of Georgetown, and we are not doing anything for the people of Georgetown, so it is the PNC that has to come now and force the PPP/C to clean up the cemetery because they are neglecting Georgetown. Georgetown has never looked as beautiful as it is right now, whether it is North Georgetown or South Georgetown. I know you are going to go around. I anticipate people being *In the Ring* tonight to show some garbage here or some road that *gat* a pothole, because that is what the ring is all about – sensationalism and taking minuscule items and magnifying them and creating optical illusions. For us in the PPP/C, the people who walk, drive, shop, park and engage, they know the reality of what is happening in Georgetown.

Mr. Speaker, I know you have lots of sentiments and you have said it already in the House about your attachments to the area. I could assure you, all the other people of Georgetown, and all the people of Guyana, this PPP/C that is here now, and the PPP/C that will come after the next election – because the people will put us back – will not neglect Georgetown.

5.22 p.m.

Just like we have transformed other areas, you will see the Le Repentir Cemetery being transformed into what is a place where everybody could appreciate that we are doing something that is making sense. People could visit their loved ones. Also, because we are a Government that believes in equity, it is not only Le Repentir, it will be cemeteries across the length and breadth of Guyana. I thank you very much, and God bless you all.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Members. While we are speaking about all of the physical work, I want to also implore that we look at the records because those who maintain the burial records have done an excellent job, the

old-time way. They can locate those graves within hours if you go there.

Ms. Ferguson: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: I see you visit often, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, we have two amendments. The first amendment by Hon. Minister Parag is that we insert an additional whereas clause after the last, and that reads:

“AND WHEREAS the Government has initiated a plan to upgrade cemeteries across the country, including Le Repentir Cemetery in 2025;”

I propose the question that we accept this proposal, Minister Parag. The Standing Order says we have to propose and then put, but if there is nothing, no one wants to speak, we can put...

Ms. Parag: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I do propose that the amendment tabled in the House be passed as put.

Amendment put and carried.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the second amendment proposed by the Hon. Minister is a reworded resolved clause. It states:

“BE IT RESOLVED

That this National Assembly supports the Government in its efforts to upgrade this historic facility and to implement the plan for its maintenance, including drainage infrastructure, thereby elevating it to the status of a national memorial.”

Amendment put and carried.

Motion as amended agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: The motion as amended now forms part of the resolutions of this House. Thank you very much, Hon. Members. Hon. Members, we will now move to the Financial Institutions (Amendment) Bill 2024.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, maybe I missed it, my apologies if I did. I think we have to put the first reading of the new Bills. Did we put those with Mr. Robeson Benn? Yes, we did. Sorry about that.

Mr. Speaker: Yes, we had them, Hon. Minister. Amply moved by the Hon. Minister Manickchand and the Hon. Member, Mr. Robeson Benn. Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service, you have the floor.

Government's Business

Bills – Second Readings

Financial Institutions (Amendment) Bill 2024 – Bill No. 22/2024

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Financial Institutions Act.”

[*The 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 rise, Sir, this afternoon, to move that the Financial Institutions (Amendment) Bill 2024 – Bill No. 22/2024, which was published in the *Official Gazette* of Guyana on 18th December, 2024, be read the second time.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill seeks to amend its principal Act, the Financial Institutions Act, found in chapter 85:03 of the Laws of Guyana. It is, in fact, a relatively simple amendment, but nevertheless, and notwithstanding its simplicity, an extremely important and profound amendment. Simply, it inserts into the principal Act after section 19 – the extant section 19 – a new section 19(A). That new section 19(A) provides for the establishment in Guyana of representative offices by foreign financial institutions, as defined in the said section 19(A) – now being inserted – with the prior approval of the authority vested with responsibility for supervision and regulation of the financial sector, that is to say, the Central Bank of Guyana.

It would be recalled, Sir, that, over the course of the years, we have been taking a succession of steps aimed at establishing the legal and institutional prerequisites for a stable, sound, and strong financial system, including legislation to establish relevant regulatory and supervisory authorities, including and, perhaps, most prominently, new central banking legislation in the form of the Bank of Guyana Act and successive amendments over the years thereto, which now, when consolidated, provide a sound and strong basis for central banking in Guyana, including the vesting of responsibilities for regulation and supervision of the financial sector with the Central Bank of Guyana. We have also enacted legislation to provide for the licensing, regulation, and supervision of the financial sector, and, in particular, of financial institutions in Guyana. In particular, here I would highlight the Financial Institutions Act – the Principal Act – that we are now today seeking to amend, and, of course, the successive amendments thereto, which

together have provided a strong basis for the licensing of financial institutions, their regulation, and their supervision.

Pursuant to the mandate given to the Central Bank, we have been issuing, over the years, supervisory guidelines. We now have a wider range of supervisory guidelines which provide for the regulation of the sector. We have also enacted anti-money laundering legislation, starting, of course, with the original Money Laundering Prevention Act (MLPA), enacted in 2000, under which the Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) was originally established, and then, subsequently, successive anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) legislation. I believe the first Act, if my memory serves me correctly, was enacted in 2009, and we have enacted successive amendments to that AML/CFT Act, including in the current session of Parliament.

Not so long ago, we enacted further amendments to the AML/CFT Act in response to recommendations coming out of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF) processes, the processes under the International Financial Action Task Force and the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, recommendations that would have come out of their successive reviews of our AML/CFT architecture, which led, of course, most recently to our successive completion of the latest Mutual Evaluation Round, which saw our financial system being found to be in compliance with international standards and norms, much to the commendation of all the relevant authorities operating in this sector, and responsible with respective mandates under which they are charged for regulation and supervision of the financial sector and other sectors that fall under the ambit of the AML/CFT legislation, and, in fact, the operators under that sector, all of whom have reporting and compliance obligations.

We have enacted a number of other legislation. I recall bringing to this House in a previous term of Office legislation to license money transfer agencies for the first time, the Money Transfer Agencies Licensing Act. We brought to this House legislation to provide for the Credit Reporting Act. We brought to this House, of course, legislation in relation to other aspects of supervision, including legislation in relation to the real estate sector, legislation in relation to hire purchase, legislation in relation to unregulated sectors that would need to comply with AML/CFT standards, *et cetera*. The list goes on. Our supervisory guidelines, to which I have alluded, deal with all aspects of supervision, including things like branching, credit exposure review and classification provisioning, limits

on large loans and on related parties, acquisition of control, corporate governance of financial institutions, risk management, public disclosure of information, *et cetera*, including in connection with technology.

I make these points really to say, Mr. Speaker, that the effort to build a strong, robust and well-regulated financial sector has not been an effort of yesterday. It has been an effort that has involved work, including work in previous sessions of this House and previous Parliaments of Guyana, to ensure that we have a robust legal architecture in place. Beneath that, or within that, having legislated, we have, of course, also been establishing and progressively strengthening the institutions tasked with the respective mandates granted under the legislation. This amendment, as I said, is really very simple because it provides for this insertion, and its simplicity is also reinforced by the fact that it is not different in any material respect from similar legislation that exists elsewhere. Financial institution legislation in a number of other jurisdictions have very similar, almost identical provisions. Here I will cite just one example, the Financial Institutions Act of Trinidad and Tobago, but similar legislation can be found elsewhere in the Region and the world.

5.37 p.m.

Having offered those remarks on the simplicity of these provisions, I will very briefly make the point that, notwithstanding as I said earlier, the simplicity of the insertions, I would like to emphasise the significance, importance and profundity of the section that we are seeking to insert into the Principal Act today. Given where our economy is today, given the rate of economic growth that we are observing on which matter I spoke earlier today, given the rate at which international investors' interest is growing in the Guyanese economy today, this investor interest is not confined only to the non-financial sector but large financial institutions worldwide, also have an interest in establishing a presence in Guyana and potentially doing business in Guyana and doing business with Guyanese and, indeed, international companies operating in Guyana. We have already received indications of interest by a number of international financial institutions. I hesitate to say international financial institutions because that is a term of art that has a particular connotation. We have already received indications of interest from foreign financial institutions, which is the term used in the Bill, and some of the largest foreign financial institutions in the world, interested in establishing a representative office in Guyana,

similar to those they have in other jurisdictions whose legislations provide for such establishment.

We see this as an extremely welcomed step. It is a first step to the establishment of a full presence. It allows them to acquaint themselves with the Guyanese economic landscape in a more direct manner. It allows them potentially to identify opportunities for doing business in Guyana and explore those opportunities. It really is an important first step because it lays the foundation, ultimately, for the establishment of a fuller presence. Be that as it may, they are subjected, of course, to an initial round of regulatory supervision because they still require, as this section provides, the approval of the Central Bank before they are able to establish this presence. Worthy to establish a full presence, they would require a full-service licence from the Central Bank, and those provisions remain intact and unaffected by the current Bill. It would be my preferred approach to stop there and simply say that this is like, as I said earlier, simple but significant and important. I trust that my Colleagues on that side of the House will appreciate the significance and importance of this Bill and its non-contentious nature and will support it so that we can secure unanimous passage in the House. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker and, at the appropriate time, I will move the required motions. [*Applause*]

Ms. Fernandes: As I sat and listened to the presentations that went before me, I think I was a little amazed by some of what I heard earlier. It would be remiss of me to not say at this time, since I am dealing with Financial Institutions. I heard our Colleague, earlier, the Hon. Bishop Edghill speak about the Auditor General's Report for 2017. I will start by saying that it is amazing that the Hon. Bishop Edghill would come to the House and read word for word, from a 2017 Auditor General's Report, while the PPP/C simultaneously parades the street with the then Mayor, dressed in her red t-shirt, happily united as Colleagues today.

Mr. Speaker: (*Inaudible*) to this Bill? There is only one arbiter with what stands in this Chair.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, I think my point was made and I will proceed. Looking at the Financial Institutions (Amendment) Bill of 2024, I know the Hon. Member, Dr. Singh, did say that he trusts and would appreciate the support. I do hope that Dr. Singh would also appreciate my contribution to this Bill as well. At the end of the day, we are all looking to have a country and a strong financial institutional framework that is attractive to not only the international community but locally as well. I rise today to address the Financial

Institutions (Amendment) Bill of 2024. While the Government presents this as a step forward in financial regulation, I must point out that it spectacularly misses the mark in addressing the real challenges facing Guyana's banking sector today.

This amendment primarily concerns the bureaucratic regulation of representative offices of foreign financial institutions, as Dr. Singh rightly expounded on earlier. While regulatory oversight has its place, we must ask if this is really the pressing issue in our banking sector today or is this what our economy and the people are crying out for right now? Our economy has grown 10 folds in recent years due to the oil sector. Yet, remarkably, the number of licenced banks serving our people remains unchanged. We have created a protected, highly profitable cartel, that serves the interest of few, while extracting excessive fees from the many. Every Member of this House knows the complaints coming from their respective constituents – high fees, limited access to credit and poor service quality. These are the real issues we should be addressing before we move to the amendment that is being debated here today.

The amendment also raises serious questions about its interaction with our laws. I trust that Dr. Singh, in his response, would address such. Under current legislation, an entity registered in Guyana is deemed to be carrying on business here and is, therefore, subject to our tax regime. How does this square with the Bill's definition of representative offices that supposedly do not conduct business? This ambiguity could create uncertainty for foreign institutions considering establishing a presence here. What Guyana needs urgently is not simply more bureaucratic oversight of representative offices. What we need is the licensing of at least two new banks to break up the profitable cartel that is operating today. We need genuine competition that will drive down fees, improve service quality and expand access to credit for our people and not just some of our people, but all of our people, competition that will force our banks to innovate and better serve our growing economy.

At this juncture, it is extremely important that we also question why the Government may be finding it difficult to attract other international banks. I do note that the Hon. Minister, in his opening statement, said that this legislation will be basically a first step. However, there are important issues we must address, and we must be cognisant of the environment that exists today. We must question whether it is the lack of certain legislation that is causing those banks not to be willing to come forward and set up offices, but

rather just wanting to have their toes dipped in the water, to test to see what is going on. An international bank may hesitate to set up operations in our fast-growing economy because our regulations and institutional framework are underdeveloped and are unstable. Our rapidly growing economic environment has outpaced the capacity of our country's financial and legal system to adapt, creating an environment of uncertainty for foreign investors.

For example, these inconsistent regulations, moreover, the weak enforcement of contracts and unclear tax policies increase operational risks and compliance costs for international banks. Additionally, since our banking sector is dominated by a few entrenched players, new entrants may face significant barriers to competition, such as limited access to market shares or difficulty in navigating bureaucratic hurdles. These require direct legislative change to remedy. Without a stable and predictable regulatory environment, international banks may view the risk of entering our banking market, as outweighing the potential reward, despite our economy's growth trajectory. Another deterrent for international banks, is a potential for macro-economic instability in fast growing Guyana. Rapid growth can sometimes lead to inflationary pressures, and we understand fully that we have looked at inflation in Guyana over the last years, from 2020 to now, also currency volatility or asset bubbles, which pose significant risks to financial institutions.

If the Central Bank lacks the tools to manage these challenges efficiently, international banks may be reluctant to expose themselves to such risks. Furthermore, if our economy is heavily reliant on one sector such as natural resources, in Guyana's case, we are talking about the oil sector, it may be vulnerable to external shocks. Much as we are speaking about global oil price changes, this lack of adequate diversification can make the economic outlook of our country uncertain and, therefore, discouraging long-term investment by international banks. While a fast-growing economy presents opportunities, the absence of a stable, well-regulated and diversified financial environment can deter international banks from establishing a presence here.

5.52 p.m.

Further, low Consumer Price Indices (CPI) scores, Sir. In Guyana's case, we know that the 2024 CPI score was 39. The CPI score basically shows that, if it is at zero, the country is experiencing very high levels of deliberate mismanagement and the further away it goes to 100, the less the country is experiencing deliberate mismanagement.

Guyana, with a score of 39 is said to be experiencing high levels of deliberate mismanagement. That score indicting, as I just said, levels of perceived deliberate mismanagement in Guyana can be a major deterrent for international banks considering establishing operations in our country. Such CPI scores speak to the rule of law being undermined; it creates an unpredictable business environment and increases operational risks.

For international banks which are subject to stringent regulations, the requirements from their home countries operating in a country with a low CPI score can expose them to legal and reputational risks. For example, deliberate mismanagement in the form of bribery, favouritism or lack of transparency in government dealings can complicate compliance with anti-money laundering and counter terrorism financing regulations. Banks may fear being implicated in deliberate mismanagement practices, either directly or indirectly, which could lead to hefty fines, sanctions or damage to their global reputation. This perceived risk can make Guyana a less attractive destination for investment, despite its economic potential.

Additionally, a low CPI score, one of which Guyana has, erodes trust in public institutions and weakens the overall financial systems, making it difficult for international banks to operate effectively. An environment with a low CPI score often leads to inefficiencies such as delayed approvals for licenses, arbitrary regulatory decisions and a lack of enforcement of contracts, all of which are being experienced in Guyana currently, hence our low CPI score. These factors include the cost of doing business which creates uncertainty for banks that rely on stable and transparent systems to operate profitably. Furthermore, players in such a system can distort market competition, favouring well-connected local players over foreign entrants. These discourage international banks from entering the market.

A low CPI score signals systemic issues that undermine the confidence of international banks in Guyana's institutional framework, making them hesitant to invest in the market where deliberate mismanagement could jeopardise their operations and long-term viability. The PPP/C Government often speaks about transformation, but where is the transformation in our banking sector? Where are the new licences, where is the competition, where is the innovation? This amendment does nothing to address these fundamental issues that are being experienced in Guyana today. The Principal Act that is being amended here today was passed in 1995 and was subjected to minor amendments in 2015 and 2018. Today, with a trillion-dollar economy, there are more

fundamental challenges facing the sector and the economy as a whole. I, therefore, call on the Government to bring comprehensive banking reform legislation that will address some critical needs in the banking sector in Guyana today.

Firstly, I call on the Government to establish clear criteria for new banking licences. Comprehensive legislation is essential to establish clear, transparent and objective criteria for issuing new banking licences in Guyana. The current system, which has not seen an increase in the number of licenced banks despite significant economic growth, has created a protected cartel that limits competition and innovation. Legislation must outline the qualifications, financial requirements and operational standards that new banks must meet to obtain a licence. This includes capital, adequacy ratio, risk management framework and compliance with anti-money laundering and counter-terrorism financing regulations. The criteria should also encourage diversity in the banking sector by promoting the entry of banks that cater to underserved segments of our population, such as small and medium-sized enterprises and low-income individuals. These are areas that are in dire need of amendments when it comes to our financial institutions' laws.

By setting clear guidelines, the Government can ensure that new entrants are financially sound and capable of contributing to the stability and growth of the banking sector. Furthermore, legislation should mandate the regular review of these criteria to adapt to changing economic conditions and emerging risks. This will create a dynamic and inclusive banking environment that serves the needs of all Guyanese citizens, and not just an amendment being tabled that is only catering to the needs of foreign institutions.

Secondly, I call on the Government to consider strongly setting timelines for licence application reviews. Delays in the review approval of banking licence applications can discourage potential entrants and perpetuate the existing monopoly. Comprehensive legislation must include strict timelines for the processing of licence applications to ensure efficiency and transparency. For example, laws can mandate that regulatory authority complete their initial review within 90 days and issue a final decision within, for example, 180 days of receiving a complete application. These timelines should be enforceable with penalties for regulatory bodies that fail to meet them. Legislation should also establish a clear appeal process for applicants who believe their applications have been unfairly denied or delayed. This would provide a mechanism for accounting and ensure that the licensing process is fair and impartial. By setting an enforcing timeline, the Government can demonstrate its

commitment to fostering a competitive banking sector and attracting investment from both domestic and foreign institutions. This will ultimately benefit consumers by increasing access to financial services and driving down costs significantly.

Thirdly, I call on the Minister to strongly consider creating a competitive banking environment by bringing such legislation to this National Assembly. A competitive banking environment is essential for driving innovation, improving service quality and reducing costs for consumers. Comprehensive legislation must address the structural barriers that currently limit competition in Guyana's banking sector. This includes breaking up the existing cartel by issuing new licences and promoting the entry of small *niche* banks that can cater to specific market segments. Legislation should also prohibit anti-competitive practices such as collusion between banks to fix fees and divide markets. To further encourage competition, laws should mandate the publication of key performance indicators, we know that as the key Portfolio Investment Scheme (PIS) for banks, such as the interest rates, fee structures and consumer satisfaction score. This will enable consumers to make informed choices and incentivise banks to promote their services. Additionally, legislation should promote the use of technology, such as a digital banking platform to increase access to financial services in remote and underserved areas. By creating a competitive banking environment, the Government can ensure that the sector evolves to meet the needs of a growing and dynamic economy.

Fourthly Sir, I am asking for the Government of the day to strongly consider looking at legislation and bringing it to this National Assembly that protects consumers from excessive fees. Excessive fees are a major concern for consumers in Guyana's banking sector. Comprehensive legislation must include the provision to regulate fees and ensure they are fair, transparent and commensurate with the service provided. For example, laws could cap fees for basic services such as account maintenance, automated teller machines (ATM) withdrawals, wire transfers, and require banks to disclose all fees upfront in a standardised format. Legislation should also establish a regulatory body to monitor the fees' structure and investigate complaints from customers. This is in dire need today in Guyana. In addition to regulating fees, the law should mandate the provision of low-cost or no-cost banking options for low-income individuals and vulnerable groups. This could include basic savings accounts with no minimum balance requirement and limited transaction fees. By protecting consumers from excessive fees, the Government can promote financial

inclusion and ensure that all Guyanese citizens have access to affordable banking services.

Fifthly, I am requesting that the Hon. Minister look at ensuring our banking sector grows with our economy. Guyana's economy has grown significantly in recent years, and I alluded earlier to this being directly with regards to our oil sector, but the banking sector has not kept pace. Comprehensive legislation must ensure that the sector evolves to support the needs of a modern diversified economy. This includes promoting the development of new financial products and services, such as green financing for sustainable development projects and venture capital for innovative startups. Legislation should also encourage banks to expand their lending to key sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing and tourism, to drive economic growth and, more importantly, job creation. To support the growth of the banking sector, laws should mandate regular assessments of the sector's performance and its alignment with national economic goals. At this point, I want to segue and say, that is something that is lacking in our country today.

6.07 p.m.

We should have a system in which we have national economic goals – goals that our citizens have seen clearly defined by the Government and goals that can be monitored as they go along. This could include requiring banks to report on their contributions to economic development, such as lending to small and midsize enterprises (SMEs) and investment in infrastructure projects. By ensuring that the banking sector grows with the economy, the Government can create a financial system that is resilient, inclusive and capable of supporting long-term prosperity for all.

My sixth ask, when it comes to the legislative framework that is being tabled, is that our Minister, the Hon. Dr. Singh, consider strengthening the legislation for cashless transactions. Enacting strong legislation for cashless transactions is crucial for Guyana, as it seeks to modernise its financial system and align with global economic trends. A robust legal framework for cashless payments would provide clarity, security and confidence for both consumers and businesses, encouraging wider adoption of digital payment methods.

Legislation can establish standards for electronic transactions, protect against fraud and cybercrime and ensure that financial institutions and payment service providers operate transparently and responsibly in this environment. This would help build trust in cashless systems, which is essential for their success in a country where cash has

traditionally been the dominant mode of payment. By creating a secure and regulated environment, Guyana can attract investment in financial technology, better known as fintech, and foster innovation in its banking sector. Strong legislation for cashless transactions also promotes financial inclusion, a critical goal for Guyana's developing economy. Many citizens, particularly in rural and underserved areas, lack access to banking services. In this regard, a cashless payment system, supported by clear laws, can bridge this gap by enabling mobile banking, digital wallets and other accessible financial tools. Legislation can mandate that financial institutions and fintech companies provide affordable, user-friendly services to low-income populations, ensuring that no one is left behind in the transition to a digital economy. Additionally, laws can address issues such as transaction fees, as I alluded to and expounded on before, data privacy and consumer rights, making cashless payments more equitable and appealing to all segments of society. As I go on, enacting strong...

Mr. Speaker: In order to go on, you will need an extension of time.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, I do move that the Hon. Member be given 15 minutes to continue to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Ms. Fernandes: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As I continue, I will just rehash the beginning of this statement. Enacting strong legislation for cashless transactions is vital for Guyana's economic growth and competitiveness. A cashless economy reduces the costs and inefficiencies associated with cash handling, such as printing, transportation and security. It also improves transparency, making it easier to track transactions and combat illicit activities like money laundering and tax evasion. For businesses, cashless systems streamline operations, enhance consumers' confidence and open up new opportunities for e-commerce and cross-border trade. By positioning itself as a leader in digital finance through comprehensive legislation, Guyana can attract foreign investment, strengthen its financial infrastructure and integrate more effectively into the global economy. In a world where we have increasingly driven digital innovation, strong legal frameworks for cashless transactions are not just an option; they are necessary for sustainable development. The most recent data from the Bank of Guyana, in its 2023 report, stated:

“The number of Mobile Money accounts at the end of 2023 increased by 5.3 percent from 58,241 to 61,495 while the value of payments increased by 39.4 percent ... at end-December 2023.”

The very report stated that:

“The value of transactions settled through the VISA switch increased from G\$5.5 billion in 2022 to G\$8.5 billion in 2023.”

Those numbers are clear indicators of the willingness and readiness of our citizens to move from cash transactions towards cashless transactions. Such legislative focus should be prioritised in this regard, as opposed to the current legislative amendments being discussed here today. A clear example of our dire need to enact strong legislation when thinking about finance and the movement of currency in Guyana is the distribution of the \$100,000 cash grant. That system highlights the challenges of implementing large-scale financial initiatives in the absence of an efficient and inclusive financial structure. One of the primary difficulties lies in the logistical hurdles of reaching all beneficiaries, particularly those in remote and underserved areas. Without a robust digital payment infrastructure, the Government was forced to rely on physical cheque distribution, which is time-consuming and prone to inefficiencies – inefficiencies that are being reported daily. Long queues, transportation challenges and the need for extensive manpower to manage the process have slowed down the distribution, leaving many citizens waiting for extended periods to receive their grants. This has not only frustrated the intended beneficiaries but it has also increased the risk of error and mismanagement.

Another significant challenge is a lack of widespread access to banking services and digital payment platforms, hence the need to have a parallel system to change cheques to cash in rural areas, as was experienced in Guyana recently and is still being experienced today in that distribution process. This reliance on cash exacerbates the problem, as it limits the Government's ability to track and monitor the distribution process efficiently. An efficient financial structure includes a well-developed digital payment system that could have streamlined the process by enabling direct transfer to beneficiaries' accounts or mobile wallets. This would have reduced costs, minimised delays and ensured greater transparency and accountability. The difficulty faced in the distribution of the \$100,000 cash grant underscores the urgent need for Guyana to invest in modernising its financial infrastructure to support inclusive and efficient economic

initiatives urgently, and this amendment does not address these issues.

As I wrap up, I want to say to the Members here today that we are operating a trillion-dollar economy with an architecture designed for a multi-billion-dollar economy. This poses a significant risk, including systematic inefficiencies and vulnerabilities. The existing infrastructure – whether financial, regulatory or logistical – may lack the capacity, scalability and sophistication needed to handle the complexities of the vastly greater economy that we are operating in today due to oil and gas. Moreover, the mismatch between economic scale and institutional architecture can exacerbate inequality and hinder inclusive growth. A multi-billion-dollar economy's infrastructure may not have the mechanism to ensure equitable distribution of wealth, access to resources, or opportunity for all its citizens. As the economy grows, the gap between those who can navigate or benefit from the outdated system and those who cannot will widen, leading to social and economic disparities.

Additionally, critical sectors like healthcare, education and transportation, which were designed for a smaller population and economy, may become strained, failing to meet the demands of a larger and more complex economy. Without comprehensive reform to align the economic architecture with the new scale, this risk of inefficiency, inequality and systematic failure would only grow, jeopardising long-term prosperity. I would hope today that I have had the attention of the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance and the Public Service. These are grounds that I am hoping that we can see common ground on. While I did not present objections to the Bill as was presented here today, I am saying that the urgency in this Bill does not outweigh the urgency in the legislation that is well needed today.

I am urging the Minister with responsibility for finance to establish clear criteria for new banking licences, to set timelines for licence application review, to create a competitive banking environment, to protect consumers from excessive fees, to ensure our banking sector grows with our economy, and to strengthen our legislation for cashless transactions. Sir, I thank you and this honourable House for giving me the opportunity to make this presentation here today. I hope that we have crossed some paths with some favourable ideas today, Dr. Singh. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Senior Minister, Dr. Singh.

Dr. Singh (replying): Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. There is a well-known and frequently used saying that one should not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. Essentially, what that saying means is that we should not reject a good initiative solely on the grounds that it is not the most comprehensive and perfect solution to all of the problems, ills and challenges of the world. This is because, were we to await the perfect solution, we might never arrive at the point where we have that perfect solution, but we are working on it to address every problem in the world, while good solutions might be languishing, going to waste, and awaiting attention.

6.22 p.m.

That, in essence, captures not only the presentation that we were just regaled with, a presentation that essentially identified all of the things that the Hon. Member believes need to be fixed, all of the things, the perfect and ultimate solution while, in fact, grudgingly avoiding endorsement of what is evidently a good thing. That, in essence, actually captures the whole of what the A Partnership for National Unity and Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) represent. They spent five years in the Government doing studies to define the perfect solution while they did nothing at all. They spent five years doing exactly that, seeking perfect solutions while failing to implement any good solution whatsoever. Pipe dreams, nice-sounding words, fancy words that can stir up emotion. Removed from reality. Completely devoid of any sense of reality, but nice-sounding words, because that is all that the APNU/AFC is good at – nice-sounding words and no action whatsoever. That is all that they are good at.

Mr. Speaker, what should have been a completely uncontentious debate was reduced to a level of absurdity that struck me dumb. I listened in awe to the irrelevant absurdity that I heard, which... Mr. Speaker, the Hon. Vice-President, as Leader of the Opposition in 2015, said something extremely important. He said then that the People's Progressive Party/Civic, in Opposition at the time, would have supported any initiative that benefitted the people of Guyana. Time after time, he repeated that commitment – that if the APNU/AFC would simply implement their own manifesto, he would support it from the Opposition benches. Alas, Sir, they did not implement their own manifesto. Instead they were seeking perfect solutions – a study on how to solve the problems of housing, a study on how to solve the problems of the healthcare system, a green paper or a white paper, whichever colour paper of the day, to study the problems of the health care sector and implementing nothing at all.

The Hon. Member who spoke just now is so removed from reality. Just to illustrate the abject incompetence of the APNU/AFC, she, first of all, said that there is no architecture for electronic transactions, and that we have no framework for electronic transactions and for promoting a cashless economy. Then, in the same speech, she turned to the Bank of Guyana report and cited the phenomenal growth that has been achieved in the number of Mobile Money Guyana (MMG) transactions and non-cash transactions. She then said this proved there is an appetite for cashless transactions. It not only proves that there is an appetite for cashless transactions, but it also establishes the phenomenal growth in cashless transactions. In the same speech, she lamented the absence of an architecture and then quoted from the Bank of Guyana report that tells you how rapidly cashless transactions have been growing. Such is the abject incompetence and the absurdity with which the APNU/AFC continues to regale this country.

The Hon. Member spoke about the absence of legislation for cashless transactions. Let me remind the Hon. Member that in this House, we passed, on 3rd August, 2023, the Electronic Communication and Transactions Bill. That law was assented to by His Excellency the President and gazetted as an Act enacted by this House on 16th August, 2023. But the Hon. Member came here with nice-sounding words and said there is no legal framework. Well, the very growth that you, Hon. Member, reported in non-cash transactions is being achieved by the robust legal framework we have put in place.

Mr. Speaker, it is interesting how language can be used. The Hon. Member spoke about the CPI. We are transmitted live all around the world, and there are verbatim transcripts produced. On more than one occasion, she said that a low CPI rating...and she is smiling because she knows the sleight of hand that she tried to pull on the people of Guyana...Repeatedly said from a written script, which means that it was premeditated and designed to mislead...From a written script, because you know they do not stray from their written script. Even if they talk for 10 minutes, they then say, and I now rise. She talked for about 10 minutes, and then she went to her written script and said, and Mr. Speaker, I now rise. She had risen for about 10 minutes at the podium already. They cannot depart from their written script, the speech that is written for them and given to them to read. In the written speech, which after about 10 minutes she rose to deliver, she talked for about 10 minutes, and then, when she turned to her written speech, she said, and Mr. Speaker, I now rise. When she turned to the written speech that was written for her and handed to her, a

premeditated attempt to mislead the people of Guyana, Mr. Speaker, on more than one occasion...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, we should not accuse an Hon. Member of misleading, but twice you have.

Dr. Singh: Sir, the Hon. Member has said on more than one occasion that a low CPI score indicates that the country concerned experienced deliberate mismanagement. There is a word, a big word in the middle of CPI called perceptions, and the Hon. Minister, Gail Teixeira, issued a lengthy and factual release explaining the basis on which the CPI, a perception-based index, is prepared. But in a clever use of words, the Hon. Member, Juretha Fernandes, who is smiling because she knows what she attempted to pull on the people of Guyana, comes here and repeatedly says that the CPI indicates that the country experienced – and I wrote the words down on the second occasion that she repeated them, not removing her eyes from her written script in front of her – deliberate mismanagement. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Mr. Speaker, if you study her speech, there were many sentences – like I said, language is a funny thing – like if the central bank lacks so-and-so, then banks may so-and-so. She is smiling. She knows what she tried to do. I could say if the sky falls tomorrow, this is what will happen. Half of the Hon. Member's speech was comprised of sentences that said, if such and such a condition exists, then such and such may happen, or can happen, or might happen, and the record will reflect it. We can all engage in speculation and speculative statements.

Let me say definitively that over the years, we have established an extremely strong legal and institutional framework for regulating the financial system. I have often said, there are young Members of Parliament (MPs) over there, including the Hon. Member, Juretha Fernandes, who is a relatively young MP, probably not the youngest, but a relatively young MP.

[**Mr. Mahipaul:** She is the youngest.]

I thought Mr. Mahipaul was younger than her. Whoever is the youngest, I believe she would not be offended if I said she is one of the younger Members of Parliament. On many occasions, I have said that the younger Members of Parliament have to understand why they are sitting on that side of the House. The world is watching. When we stand up here to speak, the world is watching. The international investor community is watching and listening. What will the Opposition spokesperson on finance say? The local private sector and the local financial sector, and, obviously and most importantly, the citizenry of our country

are all watching and listening. What is the Opposition spokesperson on finance saying? To come and say that the financial sector has not been growing is just completely absurd. Apparently, the Hon. Member measures the growth in the financial sector by the number of banks.

Mr. Speaker, let me share some numbers. When we returned to office in 2020 – and I have the year-end numbers – at the end of 2020, total deposits in the commercial banks amounted to \$513 billion. At the end of 2024, total deposits in the banking system amounted to \$967 billion, meaning the total deposits in the commercial banks had almost doubled in four years. Credit to the private sector: At the end of 2020, total credit to the private sector was \$259.7 billion. Let us round it to \$260 billion. Credit to the private sector moved from \$260 billion at the end of 2020 to \$451 billion at the end of 2024.

Let me elaborate. Let me contrast the abject mismanagement of the economy under the APNU/AFC with the People's Progressive Party/Civic's record of good stewardship. Let us compare and contrast. In the four years from the end of 2015 to the end of 2019, total private sector credit grew by a paltry \$39.1 billion, or only 18.2%, at a time when oil had been found, and the entire economy was preparing for production. Everybody was investing because everybody was expanding in preparation for oil production. That was the period from discovery to first oil. Private sector credit expanded over that four-year period, from the end of 2015 to the end of 2020, by \$39.1 billion, a mere 18.2% at a time when the economy was ramping up for first oil.

6.37 p.m.

From the end of 2020 to the end of 2024 – a period of similar duration, a four-year period – the total private sector credit grew by \$191 billion or 73.4%. Let us compare that. During the APNU/AFC four-year window, 2015 to 2019, it was \$39 billion. During the PPP/C, from 2020 to 2024, it was \$191 billion. Let us compare it in percentages. During that four-year period when they were in Government, it was a mere 18.2%. For the People's Progressive Party/Civic – that is in Government for its current term in Office – over a four-year period, it was 73.4%.

Sir, look at the sectors. Let me break down sector by sector to show how credit to the private sector changed across different categories. Credit to business enterprises: from 2015 to 2020, under the APNU/AFC, it grew by 18.5%; and from 2020 to 2024, under the PPP/C, compared to APNU/AFC's 18.5%, it grew by 87.2%. Within that, there is agriculture. As evidence of how they strangled agriculture,

during the four-year-period from 2015 to 2019, credit to agriculture grew by a mere 4.2%. During the four-year period, under the People's Progressive Party/Civic, credit to agriculture grew by 128%.

Let us examine mining and quarrying. They claim to love the mining industry. During the four-year period from 2015 to 2019, credit to the mining and quarrying sector contracted by 9.5%. Imagine credit to the mining sector reduced from 2015 to 2019. With the return of the People's Progressive Party/Civic, compared to their negative 9.5%, credit to the mining and quarrying sector has grown by a positive 22%.

Let us look at manufacturing. Let us look at what they did to manufacturing, which is a sector heavily dependent on electricity. You would recall that they scuttled the Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. Credit to the manufacturing sector under the four-year period, 2015 to 2019, when the APNU/AFC was in Government, contracted by 14.2%. Under the four-year period from 2020 to 2024, credit to the manufacturing sector grew by 103.7%.

Let us look at the services sector. Under the four-year period from 2015 to 2019, credit to the services sector grew by 40.2%. Under the People's Progressive Party/Civic from 2020 to 2024, credit to the private sector for services grew twice as fast at a rate of 80.3%. It was twice as fast. Of course, it is growing from a bigger base.

Let us look at credit to households. Over the four-year period that we are speaking about under the APNU/AFC, credit to households grew by 16.9%. Under the People's Progressive Party/Civic, it grew by 41.6%.

Sir, let us look at real estate mortgages. Under the four-year period with their stillborn housing programme, their duplex houses that never got off the ground, credit for household mortgages... Under their stillborn housing programme, reflective of their abject incompetence through their failure to distribute house lots, their failure to grant titles, and their closure of the Ministry of Housing and Water, real estate mortgages grew... Guess by how much it grew. Credit for real estate mortgage loans grew by 22%, a mere \$15.7 billion. Under the People's Progressive Party/Civic from 2020 to 2024, real estate mortgage loans grew by a staggering \$65 billion or 71.9%. That is lending to real people for real investments in real houses. The list goes on.

We could also speak about the cost of borrowing. In December, 2017 and 2018, the average prime lending rate was 13%; today, it is 8.38%. The New Building Society's (NBS) interest rate under the APNU/AFC, which had no

concern for homeowners and borrowers for housing loans, was 6.4%. Today, it is 4.73%. The non-performing loans and the quality of the loan portfolio... They are running; they cannot take it. For the non-performing loans and the quality of the lending... Mr. Speaker, do you know what the ratio of non-performing loans to total loans was? They are running; they cannot take it. The truth hurts. Look at them. The truth hurts. Sir, the truth hurts; look at them running. Look at them running; they cannot face the truth. Turn the cameras and look at them running. Look at them running and scurrying. They cannot face the truth. They cannot face the truth.

[Some Members of the Opposition withdrew from the Chamber.]

Ms. Ferguson: You run.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, you are on your feet and you are shouting across at the Minister. When you spoke, I did not see him – well, he is a little short, but I have a good view – but he did not stand and shout at you.

Dr. Singh: They claim now to be so concerned about borrowers. They sat in Government for five years, two of which were completely illegal. They made not a single change to the ceiling of the low-income housing window. For five years, they made no change. They made no change, but they are now concerned about homeowners. They are concerned about citizens. They are concerned about ordinary and average households getting loans. They spent five years in Government and made not a single change to the ceiling for low-income housing loans. Since our return to Government, we have increased the ceiling from \$8 million to \$20 million. They sat in Government and made no change to the NBS ceiling. Since we came into Government, we increased the ceiling from \$12 million to \$20 million, allowing more people to take loans and borrow more to be able to build or acquire their homes.

They claim to be concerned about borrowers. When we left the Government in 2015, the ceiling on loans eligible for Mortgage Interest Relief was \$30 million. Do you know what they did? They came and found it at \$30 million. Do you know what they did? They slashed it in half from \$30 million to \$15 million. But they come now and claim that they love the Guyanese people, and they are so concerned about borrowers. The Hon. Member would have you believe that she and her party are so concerned about borrowers and the cost of borrowing. They slashed the ceiling on Mortgage Interest Relief by half. This is something that they had put in place, which we were affording without producing a single barrel of oil. They found it there; we were financing it

without a single barrel of oil. They found it there and maliciously, recklessly and callously because they have no concern for the Guyanese people...*Find the thing deh good, good* and they cut it by half to reduce the benefits enjoyed by the Guyanese people. They find *it deh good, good. It deh good, good*. You did not need oil money to finance it. *It deh good, good. They find it deh good, good; they come in, bruk it up and cut it by half*. Now, they are coming and claiming to be so concerned about the Guyanese people, access to credit and borrowing.

The people judge you based on your track record. They judge you on what you actually do. All these brilliant ideas that the Hon. Member had about what needs to be done with the law, what needs to be done with this and that... With all these brilliant ideas, apparently, the Hon. Member does not remember that her party was in Government for five years. None of these brilliant ideas – licensing, new banks... Let her show me which new bank they licensed in the five years they were in Government. Let her show me what legislation they passed. There is all this fancy thing about time for this and time for that. They were in Government for five years. Her party was in Government for five years, Sir. They did nothing at all, but they are full of ideas. They are full of ideas. They talk beautifully; they are full of ideas; and they do nothing. I should not say that they did nothing because they came in and did a lot of damage. *They find it good, good and they bruk it up.* [Bishop Edghill: *It bin deh good, good.*] *It bin deh good, good – tek um and bruk it up.*

I listened to all these nice-sounding words. They, perhaps, provide good soundbites, but they are meaningless and insincere, and they are reflective of the abject incompetence for which the APNU/AFC has now become notoriously famous. We are not professing that this Bill solves all the problems of the world. We are not professing that this Bill is the last amendment that we will bring to the Financial Institutions Act. Sir, we are not going to defer one good thing because we are waiting to find the whole universe of good things to put all in one Bill and then come to the House with a comprehensive Bill that solves all the problems of the world. We are not going to defer a good thing because we are awaiting, infinitely, the perfect thing. That, in essence, is what contrasts the People's Progressive Party/Civic with the APNU/AFC. They will regale you with all that is needed to achieve perfection. That is the one thing that they are good at – big and grand promises and fancy-sounding words. That is their niche; that is their core expertise – grand and lofty ideas and fancy-sounding words. Where they fall short is in their

ability to actually get anything done whatsoever. There is no substance; sheer fluff. That is all you get from them – fluff.

Mr. Speaker, I submit to you, Sir... I think I started to speak about portfolio quality. I started, and I want to make that point. I spoke about the rapid expansion in credit to the private sector. I do not recall if I did, and forgive me if I am repeating. Sir, when we left Office – I am using end-of-the-year numbers... I spoke excessively about the growth in lending. I started to speak about the quality of lending. The ratio that you usually measure portfolio quality with is non-performing loans as a percentage of total loans. In our financial sector, at the end of 2014, the non-performing loan to total loan ratio was 8.64. This was at the end of 2014.

6.52 p.m.

By the end of 2020, it went up from 8.64% to 10.83%. This means that more than one-tenth of the total loans on the books of commercial banks were nonperforming by the time the APNU/AFC destroyed and decimated the Guyanese economy. For every \$100 that was lent, more than \$10 was nonperforming.

[An Hon. Member: (Inaudible)] Everywhere they go and everything they do, there is destruction. Since our return – I want to quote the number – the nonperforming loan to total loan ratio has been brought down from 10.83%, as I said earlier, to 1.75%. The Hon. Member can come here with all of her *grandiose*, plaintive words appearing to be concerned about the people of Guyana and all of their *pie in the sky flights of fancy*, but we will continue to do the things that are important in the interest of the Guyanese people. This Bill represents yet another important step in this direction. It will not be the last amendment that we will make to the Financial Institutions Act (FIA) but it is an important amendment. It merits the strong support of this House without all of that *mumbo jumbo* and *pompasettin* that the world was just treated to by the lead spokesperson for finance, on behalf of the APNU/AFC.

I am glad because, as I said, the world is watching. The world has the opportunity to compare and contrast the *mumbo jumbo* we hear from the APNU/AFC and the *pie in the sky mumbo jumbo* that we hear from them day after day. What was so difficult about simply coming and saying, “this is a good thing and we support it”? What was difficult about that, Sir? Once again, today, they did the only thing they know to do and, that is, to oppose for the sake of opposing. We will continue to deliver for the people of Guyana. That is what will keep them on the opposition benches and keep us on the government benches; as I have said on previous

occasions, for a very, very, very long time. Mr. Speaker, I wish, if now is the appropriate moment, to move that the Financial Institutions (Amendment) Bill 2024 be read a second time. Thank you, very much, Sir.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Clauses 1 to 2

Clauses 1 to 2 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported without amendments, read the third time and passed as printed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, this is a good time to take the suspension. Let us see if we could get back here at 7...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, may I?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you have the floor.

Ms. Teixeira: We would like to close off the Sitting because as the Opposition seems to have almost all gone. We just want to go on record with the next two Bills, in terms of the Minister saying what they would do with the two Bills.

Mr. Speaker: Let me put them so the Ministers could respond.

Ms. Teixeira: Could we put those two Bills? Then, we can close this Sitting if that is all right with you.

ENGINEERS BILL 2024 – Bill No. 21/2024

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the registration and regulation of persons in the practice of engineering in Guyana and for related matters.”

[Minister of Public Works]

Bill was withdrawn.

At the behest of the Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip, the following three Bills were deferred.

GUYANA HORSE RACING AUTHORITY BILL 2024 – Bill No. 23/2024

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to provide for the regulation of the horse racing industry; to establish a Horse Racing Authority, and for connected matters.”

[Minister of Culture, Youth & Sport]

INTERNATIONAL MEASURES FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN (HAGUE CONVENTION) BILL 2024 – Bill No. 15/2024

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to give effect to the Convention on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Co-operation in respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children, and for other related matters.”

[Minister of Human Services and Social Security]

APOSTILLE BILL 2024 – Bill No. 19/2024

A Bill intituled:

“AN ACT to implement the Convention Abolishing the requirement of Legalisation for Foreign Public Documents done at the Hague on the 5th day of October, 1961 and for connected matters.

[Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation]

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to a day to be determined.”

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

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, very much. We would like to adjourn to a day to be determined, Sir.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: The House stands adjourned to a date to be fixed. Thank you. Have a good evening home.

Adjourned accordingly at 7.01 p.m.