



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

102ND Sitting

Monday, 28TH April, 2025

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.46 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)

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+ Hon. Bharrat Jagdeo, M.P.,
*Vice-President,
Office of the President,
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[Absent – on leave]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs (1)

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

+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Speaker**

Senior Ministers (16)

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

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(Region No. 3 – Essequibo Islands/West Demerara),
Minister of Education,
Ministry of Education,
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+ *Hon. Brindley H.R. Benn, M.P.,
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+ **Cabinet Member**

* **Non-Elected Minister**

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Ministry of Agriculture,
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+ Hon. Pauline R.A. Campbell-Sukhai, M.P.,
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Ministry of Amerindian Affairs,
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South Cummingsburg,
Georgetown.

+ Hon. Joseph L.F. Hamilton, M.P.,
Minister of Labour,
Ministry of Labour,
Brickdam,
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+ Hon. Vickram Outar Bharrat, M.P.,
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+*Hon. Oneidge Walrond, M.P.,
Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce,
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+ Hon. Collin D. Croal, M.P.,
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Ministry of Housing and Water,
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+ Hon. Vindhya V. H. Persaud, M.S., M.P.,
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+ Cabinet Member

*** Non-Elected Minister**

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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.

Hon. Warren Kwame E. McCoy, M.P.,
Minister within the Office of the Prime Minister,
Office of the Prime Minister,
c/o Colgrain House,
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Georgetown.

+ **Cabinet Member**

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Central Rupununi,
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Mainstay Lake, Essequibo Coast,
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Hon. Dr. Bheri S. Ramsaran, M.P.,
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South Cummingsburg,
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41 Robb Street,
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* Hon. Ms. Sarah Browne, M.P.,
*Parliamentary Secretary,
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MEMBERS OF THE OPPOSITION (32)

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Leader of the Opposition

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[Absent]

Hon. Mr. Roysdale A. Forde, S.C., M.P.,
*Lot 410 Caneview Avenue,
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[Absent]

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[Absent]

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East Coast Demerara.

Hon. Ms. Beverley Alert, M.P.,
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West Bank Demerara.
c/o Lot 13 A, New Providence,
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Hon. Mr. Richard E. Sinclair, M.P.,
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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.,
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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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Audio Technician

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Audio Technician

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents Page

102ND Sitting Monday, 28TH April, 2025

Presentation of Papers and Reports 15773-15775

Oral Question Without Notice 15776

Questions on Notice For Written Replies 15777-15780

Questions on Notice For Oral Replies 15781-15786

Request For Leave To Move The Adjournment Of The Assembly - On Definite Matters Of Urgent Public Importance
..... 15787-15794

Introduction of Bills and First Reading 15795

Public Business – Government’s Business 15796-15818

BILLS – Second and Third Readings - Guyana Horse Racing Authority Bill 2024 – Bill No. 23/20244 15797-15814

BILLS – Second and Third Readings - Court of Appeal (Amendment) Bill 2025 – Bill No. 3/2025 15815-15820

Adjournment - 15821-15822

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND REPORTS

The following Papers and Reports were laid:

- (1) Deferred Payment Agreement dated 14th January, 2025, between the Ministry of Finance acting on behalf of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, represented by the Finance Secretary, and the China Road and Bridge Corporation for an amount of US\$162,657,139.00. The purpose of this Deferred Payment Agreement is to finance the Upgrading of the Palmyra to Moleson Creek Highway, Lot 2, which covers Bloomfield to Number 54.
- (2) Government Notice No. 2/2025, regarding Notification Receipts of all petroleum revenues paid into the Natural Resource Fund during the period 1st January, 2025 to 31st March, 2025.
- (3) Financing Agreement Credit No. 7717-GY signed on 1st April, 2025, between the Co-operative Republic of Guyana, and the International Development Association (IDA) for an amount of SDR5,400,000.00. The purpose of this Agreement is to finance the Guyana One Health Project.
- (4) Loan Agreement No. 11/SFR-OR-GUY dated 4th April, 2025, between the
- (5) Co-operative Republic of Guyana, Guyana Water Inc., and the Caribbean Development Bank for an amount of US\$76,249,000. The purpose of this Agreement is to finance the Water Supply Improvement Project.

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

- (6) Annual Report of the Public Utilities Commission for the year 2024.

[Prime Minister]

- (7) Audited Financial Statements of the Ethnic Relations Commission for the years ended 31st December, 2015 to 2023.
- (8) Audited Financial Statements of the Rights of the Child Commission for the years ended 31st December, 2015 to 2022

- (9) Audited Financial Statements of the Institute of Applied Science and Technology for the year ended 31st December, 2020.

- (10) Annual Reports of the Public Service Appellate Tribunal for the years ended 31st December, 2020 and 2021.

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: On the Order Paper states: “Audited Financial Statements” but it is incorrect. It is the Annual Reports of the PSAT for the years 2020 and 2021.

- (11) Audited financial statements of the Public/Police Service Commission for the years ending 31st December, 2017, 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2023.

- (12) Annual Reports of the Public/Police Service Commission for the years 2022 and 2023.

- (13) Audited Financial Statements of the Environmental Protection Agency for the year ended 31st December, 2019.

- (14) Audited Financial Statements of the Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission for the years ended 31st December 2018, 2019, 2020 and 2021.

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

10.53 a.m.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Audit Office of Guyana which was able to bring these Reports up to date. A number of them were outstanding for quite a number of years as constitutional bodies. There are more that we would be tabling at the next Sitting. I wish to express my appreciation to the Auditor General for bringing this up to date, on some very important constitutional bodies in particular. Thank you, Sir.

- (15) Audited Financial Statements of the Demerara Harbour Bridge Corporation for the years ended 31st December, 2021 and 2022.

[Minister of Public Works]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Walton-Desir, proceed.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I noted that on the Order Paper there is the item for Presentation of

Petitions. As you are aware, there is a Petition placed before the National Assembly in the name of the Guyana Human Rights Association and other concerned citizens.

Mr. Speaker: Let us be technically correct at this point. It is not before the National Assembly. A Petition was supposed to have been submitted to the Clerk. You can continue but I just wanted to correct you.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. A petition was submitted to the Clerk of the National Assembly pursuant to his guidance. It is accompanied by a motion moved by yours truly and seconded by the Hon. Member, Ms. Fernandes. The petition from the Guyana Human Rights Association and other concerned citizens is specifically addressed to the National Assembly of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana. It is intitled in the matter of the tragic death ...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I take notice of what you have mentioned. I just want to reaffirm the National Assembly of the process for petitions. The message I received from the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir, was that she was going to present a petition on behalf of the Guyana Human Rights Association. The Standing Orders relating to the position states that petitions should come to the Clerk of the National Assembly who will review them against the criteria which he has and then forward a recommendation to the Speaker for them to go on the Order Paper. The physical petition, I should say not only the physical, but I consider the electronic transmission submission to me, came in at 9.32 a.m. At that time, the Clerk was on his way here, like most of you, tied up in the congestion that we have had. When we met, the Clerk had not had an opportunity to review that petition, so it was not able to make it onto the Order Paper. Just to reaffirm, a petition was submitted to the Clerk but no submission to the Speaker for onward transmission to the Order Paper. This is one of the reasons there was a little delaying in calling [*inaudible*].

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, thank you, for that clarification. I am confirming therefore that you are saying that the petition filed by the Guyana Human Rights Association in the matter of the tragic death of Ms. Adriana Younge ...

Mr. Speaker: We are talking here of the process of petitions getting onto the National Assembly.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, I am aware of what we are speaking of and I am confirming that this is before the Clerk for his review. Respectfully, I ask, when could we, as Members of Parliament, the Guyanese public and the

Guyana Human Rights Association receive a response from this honourable House on this matter, given that this is something of significant national importance?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, with respect to petitions, the Standing Order is quite clear. When a Petition is presented, there are three options – it could be read; it could be circulated to Members; it could be moved to go to a Special Select Committee. Am I in order, Mr. Clerk?

The Clerk: Yes.

Mr. Speaker: We await the Clerk's review and his recommendation to us. Thank you.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: We had an oral question without notice submitted by the Hon. Member, Ms. Walton-Desir.

ORAL QUESTION WITHOUT NOTICE

Ms. Walton-Desir: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question is for the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs.

Mr. Speaker: I am not asking you to push. I just want you to put the question. I just wanted you to relate what you sent because I have to rule on the submission.

Ms. Walton-Desir: I had submitted to you, for your attention, a question to the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs. It is couched in the context of the private security services at particularly at Section 17 (1) which regard the use of uniforms by private security agents. My question to the Hon. Minister was, in the context of that provision, whether permission, because section 17 (1) requires that permission for uniforms and identification, *et cetera* must be given by the controlling authority, was given particularly with reference to special uniforms and special tasks, and the outfitting of private security agencies, whether permission has been given to any security agencies for the wearing of ski masks or balaclavas?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I received the question and I read it against the Standing Orders which says such questions for oral questions without notice should meet two criteria – importance and urgency. I felt that this question would best be presented as a question in written form regularly, while I do not see the urgency of it at this time.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge your guidance, but I want to add very briefly that I am not sure how this cannot meet the requirement of urgency. The entire Guyana saw, over the last few days, particularly on the West Bank Demerara, a confrontation between a crowd of

protestors and a private security firm. The members of the private security firm, armed to the teeth, were all wearing ski masks and balaclavas. They were unidentifiable. We are in a time right now where process abounds. How are we to understand who these people are? They are not law enforcement. For me, it is a question that is very simple, and it is a yes or no answer.

Mr. Speaker: While it might be simple, its importance and the urgent criteria, at this point, in my view did not make it qualify for this. Thank you, very much, Hon. Member. We need to move on.

Ms. Walton-Desir: Mr. Speaker, I want to put on record one more issue. I wish to put on record that if tomorrow [inaudible].

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, please. Mr. Clerk, please.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

[For Written Replies]

Hon. Members, there are nine questions on today's Order Paper. Questions one to five are for written replies and questions six to nine are for oral replies. For written replies, questions one to three are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson and are for the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs. Question four is in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson and is for the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce.

Ms. Teixeira: Sorry, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Minister Teixeira, proceed.

Ms. Teixeira: The Hon. Minister has asked me to defer as she is not in the country.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Question four's answers will be deferred until the Hon. Minister is able to submit those when she returns. Question five is in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson and is for the Hon. Minister of Housing and Water. The answers to these questions, except question four have been received and have therefore circulated in accordance with our Standing Orders.

1. Name and Background Information of the Company Constructing Beterverwagting Police Station

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

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]: The name of the contractor that was awarded the contract for the reconstruction of Beterverwagting Police Station is Alliance Construction and General Supplies. This contractor has worked for the Ministry on one other project in recent years.

2. Construction of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Headquarters

Ms. Ferguson:

- a) Could the Hon. Minister inform the National Assembly of the total project cost for the construction of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) building, Camp Street, Georgetown?
- b) Could the Hon. Minister state the percentage of works with costs paid out as of 25th October, 2025, on the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) building?
- c) Could the Hon. Minister state when the project commenced and is likely to be completed as per the contract agreement?
- d) Could the Hon. Minister lay over to the National Assembly copies of the contract agreement between the Ministry of Home Affairs and the contractor for the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) building project?

Mr. Benn:

- a) The total project cost for the reconstruction of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) building is \$198,236,062.
- b) As of 25th October, 2024, the percentage of work completed for the project was about 60%. A total of \$91,817,500 was paid on the project as of 25th October, 2024, which included a 15% advance payment of \$29,735,409 that was paid in 2022.
- c) The project completion date according to the contract is 9th August, 2024. An extension of time was granted to 30th August, 2024. This contractor is currently in liquidation.
- d) This contract can be viewed at the Ministry of Home Affairs.

3. Name and background information of the company constructing the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) Headquarters

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

Mr. Benn: The name of the contractor that was awarded the contract for the reconstruction of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) building is Avinash Contracting and Scrap Metal, Inc. This is the first project the contractor is executing for the Ministry.

4. Monitoring and evaluation of grants issued to small businesses

Ms. Ferguson:

- a) Could the Hon. Minister indicate to the National Assembly, from 2020 to October, 2024, how many small businesses that receive grants still exist. If none, what are the pitfalls?
- b) Could the Hon. Minister state what mechanisms are in place to ensure that these businesses remain viable?

Question deferred.

5. List of works completed on the new Headquarters of the Central Housing and Planning Authority and the Guyana Water, Inc

Ms. Ferguson: The National Assembly has approved some \$1.3 billion for the construction of a new Headquarters facilitate and accommodate staffers of Central Housing and Planning Authority and Guyana Water, Inc. Minister Collin Croal and TEAM made a visit to the construction site on 12th March, 2024. During his visit, he reported his satisfaction of the project and stated that the project will be completed by the end of 2024.

Could the Hon. Minister provide the National Assembly with a detailed list of works completed as of 31st October, 2024, and the costs associated with each completed activity for both projects?

Minister of Housing and Water [Mr. Croal]:

a) Detailed list of works completed on the New Headquarters of the Central Housing and Planning Authority as of 31st October, 2024 (Phase One).

No.	List of Works Completed	Cost	Percentage Completed
1.	Preliminary Works	\$19,700,000	98%
2.	Excavation and Earth Works	\$36,503,600	
3.	Structural Foundation Works	\$135,965,460	
4.	Concrete Works	\$126,549,040	
5.	Steel Superstructure	\$237,729,120	
		\$556,447,220	

b) Detailed list of works completed on the New Headquarters of the Guyana Water, Inc as of 31st October, 2024

No.	List of Works Completed	Cost	Percentage Completed
1.	Structural Foundation Works	\$51,113,500	100%
2.	Concrete Works	\$18,082,000	55%
3.	Structural Steel Works	\$89,701,500	70%
4.	Interior and External Works	\$46,909,000	56%
5.	Perimeter Revetment	\$10,328,800	40%
6.	Concrete Front Parking Over Drain	\$2,065,500	

7.	Construction of Southern Box Drain and Parking Lot	\$7,995,100	
	TOTAL	\$226,195,400	

[For Oral Replies]

Mr. Speaker: For oral answers, questions six, seven and eight are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley and they are for the Hon. Minister of Labour. Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley on question six, you may ask the Minister your question.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Could I indulge this National Assembly by asking that we take one minute of silence for Adriana Younge, following what has transpired over the last few days? Is that something that we can do, please?

Mr. Speaker: Unfortunately, I need to have you ask question six of the Minister. We are going to get to that matter later on.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

6. Collaboration between the Ministry of the Public Service and the Ministry of Labour for a Needs Assessment on (Current and Future) Skills for the Public Service

- (a) Could the Hon. Minister state whether there has been any collaboration between the Ministry of the Public Service and the Ministry of Labour to conduct a formal (study) needs assessment of the current and future skills needed for the Public Service and the country?
- (b) If yes, could this study be made available to the public and be laid in the National Assembly as early as possible?

11.08 a.m.

Minister of Labour [Mr. Hamilton]: Thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker. The answer to the specific question is no. I can say to the National Assembly we have a consultant in-house at the Ministry of Labour who is presently working with all government agencies and ministries to assimilate the

necessary information, as regard to the public service and its present and future staffing.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Hon. Minister please state what was the timeline given to the consultant to deal with this particular issue and when should we expect some sort of result from that?

Mr. Hamilton: The consultant is at the Ministry on a three years contract. I think the contract will be up next year; two years of work has already been done. As in regard to a definitive timeline, I will have to get to the National Assembly after consultation with the consultants and the senior functionaries of the Ministry of Labour.

Mr. Speaker: Ms. Halley, you can put question number seven.

7. Number of Registered Venezuelans

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: This question number 7 is for the Minister of Home Affairs. Could the Hon. Minister state what is the number of registered Venezuelans in Guyana, as of November, 2024?

Mr. Benn: I want to thank the Hon. Member for her question. The number of Venezuelans registered for the period of 1st October – 30th November, 2024, amongst the 15,157; by Regions: Region 1 – 7,507; Region 4 – 23; Region 7 – 1,101; and Region 8 – 65.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Could the Hon. Minister please confirm Region 4's number? I did not hear clearly.

Mr. Speaker: We are looking at the volume, I just signalled them because I did not hear properly either.

Mr. Benn: I said 23... [Interruption]

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, he spoke when you spoke; I did not hear him.

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker, I was specifically asked for a period and I gave it by region for the total of 15,157. I can share with the Hon. Member the reply to satisfy her with what I said was the number for Region 4.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I am really not trying to be facetious; I am really trying to understand the information I am receiving from the Minister. The question stated as of November, 2024, which means 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023 to November, 2024... That is when the question was submitted. Is the Minister saying that as of November, 2024, there are 15,000 registered Venezuelans in Guyana?

Mr. Benn: The answer as I gave it and I read it, as of 1st October, 2018, to 30th November, 2024, – I repeat – by Region: Region 1 – 7,507; Region 4 – 23; Region 7 – 1,101; and Region 8 – 65; totalling 15,157.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, those numbers do not add up to 15,000, but I am just supposed to accept it because he said it. The world heard that apparently the Minister cannot add. Let us move on. Could I go on to question number eight please, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: You may put the question number eight.

Mr. Patterson: Could I ask a follow up? I heard the Hon Minister saying that from 2018 to 2024, a six years period that we only have 15,157 registered Venezuelans in the country. Then, he disaggregated them and add them, which comes up to 8,596. That is the numbers he gave us, Regions 1, 4, 7 and 8. Could I ask the Hon. Minister, where the other 7,000 Venezuelans reside?

Mr. Benn: Let me apologise for some inadvertence in the numbers, I will confirm the numbers and submit them as a printed reply.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Halley, question number eight, please.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, maybe this question will help us to clarify what we were not able to get at question seven.

8. Number of Venezuelans Who Arrived in Guyana

Could the Hon. Minister state what is the monthly number of arrivals of Venezuelans in Guyana from January, 2024, to present and their points of entry?

Mr. Benn: Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the National Assembly's leave to review and confirm these numbers again before making further reply on these questions.

Question deferred.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we can move to question number nine. The Hon. Member, Dr. Karen Cummings, you may ask your question.

9. High-Risk Mothers in Guyana

Dr. Cummings: Could the Honourable Minister inform this National Assembly whether High-Risked mothers in Guyana can rely on the emergency care available and delivered at the health facilities in the ten Administrative Regions?

Minister of Health [Dr. Anthony]: Let me thank the Hon. Member for her question. The short answer can be yes. I want to also say, the way we determine whether a mother is of high risk or not is when we look at the maternal age; so that is whether someone is below the ages of 16 or above 35. We also look at the obstetric history. There are lots of different things that we will look for which include: whether someone had either five or more deliveries; whether someone will give birth for the first time; whether someone had a previous still birth or a neonatal death; whether someone had previous miscarriages, preterm birth or low birthrate baby; whether someone had a previous Caesarean section, a history of postpartum haemorrhage, or a history of preeclampsia or eclampsia. Of course, we take into consideration the current pregnancy, whether it is multiple pregnancies, whether there was bleeding in the current pregnancy, whether they have a suspected or confirmed abnormal foetal growth, a breach presentation and whether there is severe anaemia. There are some other conditions too that we would look for.

We would also assess the mother to see whether she has hypertension, which is probably chronic or due to the pregnancy; diabetes, a pre-existing condition or gestational diabetes; whether she has heart disease; kidney disease; sickle cell; asthma; human immunodeficiency virus (HIV); sexually transmitted infections (STIs); history of tuberculosis (TB); or any mental health conditions. Infectious diseases, we also screen for malaria and dengue fever. We also look at social and nutritional factors – social being either substance use including alcohol, tobacco, drugs and so forth. Using this as a way of screening, one of the things that all of our health facilities look for is early identification. We also do timely referral if we find somebody at risk. If at risk, we will do the referral and the mother gets continuous specialised care and we ensure that this mother delivers in a hospital. We do comprehensive post-natal follow ups.

Over the last couple of years, we have been able to do a number of things that would enhance the quality of care that we have been delivering. For example, in most of our regions we have added new theatres, where, if necessary, we can do Caesarean section and delivery. These theatres include Region 1. We have added a new theatre in Mabaruma, in Kumaka and Port Kaituma. We also have added here on the East Bank, a theatre at Diamond, in Region 5 a new operating theatre at Mahaicony, at Kamarang, Mahdia, Aishalton, Annai, Karasabai and Sand Creek. We are soon to complete one at Kwakwani. This does not include the existing theatres we have in our existing

regional hospitals such as Suddie; West Demerara; Georgetown Public Hospital, which is our tertiary facility; New Amsterdam; and Linden Hospitals. In addition to all that I have just said there, in terms of theatre capacity, very soon during this year, we will be opening up another six new hospitals at Lima, De Kinderen, Diamond, Enmore, Bath Settlement and Skeldon. Each of these will be a birthing suite and, if necessary, there are also three operating theatres that would be there. In terms of facilities, we have adequate facilities. Those places that I mentioned, the theatres were built in the last two to three years, were open and have been in operation.

11.23 a.m.

In addition to that, we also have built a number of maternal waiting homes, so persons who are at risk would come to these waiting homes and wait there until they go into labour and then they come across to the hospital. We have waiting homes now at Mabaruma – that is a 14-bed facility – and Kumaka, where we have a 20-bed facility. We have a waiting home at Long Creek, a five-bed facility; one at Kato, which is 16 beds; a facility at Lethem, which is 40 beds; and one at Annai, which is 20 beds. We are going to continue this to add waiting homes to our various regional hospitals. In addition to that, in terms of the personnel that we have at these sites, across the region, we have 17 specialists supported by registrars and the General Medical Officers (GMOs). We have another 30 persons who specialise in obstetrics care, but obstetrics care is not just about the mother. It is also about the neonate, and one of the things that we have done over the last couple of years is to improve neonatal care across the country.

We have set up a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at Mabaruma Hospital. This was started in 2023. We have also set up one at Kumaka, which was also started in 2023. Another one is at the Public Hospital Suddie. Another one is at the West Demerara Hospital. At the New Amsterdam Hospital, we have expanded the NICU there. [Mr.

Mahipaul: We did not ask you all of that. (*Inaudible*) This is part of what the question entails, whether we can provide emergency care. If you do not understand the thing, I can explain that to you. Bartica, we have also added an NICU; Lethem, we have added another NICU there. These places did not previously have NICUs; and we, of course, have one in Linden. To look after these children, we have 13 consultants that are spread across the different regions, and they are supported by an additional 33 registrars and GMOs. I hope that answers the Hon. Member's questions. Thank you very much.

Dr. Cummings: I just want to thank the Minister for what may appear as a comprehensive answer. I just want the Minister to know that that is all well and good. We were there. In our term, we started waiting homes and so forth, which is good, and you have continued it, but the point is the monitoring part. It is the monitoring part that really accounts for some of these deaths, which are preventable. You cannot be sending home what you should be keeping and keeping what you should send home – just to tweak those areas. I know you are making an effort.

The Department of Maternal Child Health, I know they are trying. Just focus on that particular area because when you ask and interview the patients, the parents and the relatives of those who would have gone to, for example, the New Amsterdam Hospital and so forth, those are some of the things – the attention was not there; they were not properly monitored. In all that you are doing in terms of infrastructure and trying to maintain, the training, but the monitoring you need to spend some time on. Thank you very much.

Dr. Anthony: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Again, I am not too sure what the Hon. Member is referring to there. Let us have something very clear. Indeed, in the last Government, there was an Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) programme that looked at maternal and child health. These were borrowings that they had from the IDB.

One of the components of that programme was to look at the development of waiting homes but, under the last Government, not a single waiting home was developed with that money. It took the People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C) to come into Government and the first one we opened at Lethem. So, I am not sure what waiting home you are talking about because zero was opened under the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC), and we should recognise that. You had the money, but you did nothing with it – zero was opened. Let us get that very clear.

The other thing in terms of monitoring: every single mother that comes to us for care, during their nine months, we at least want to ensure that every mother has at least eight visits – the first visit in the first trimester, three in the second trimester and the rest in the third trimester. If they are at high risk, we would encourage them to come even more often and we make sure that we monitor them. I have a whole list here. I can go through this – all the things that we do and every single test that we do for every single mother that comes through our system. We should be proud of this system

because this is helping to keep women safe during pregnancy. We should be proud of it. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

REQUEST FOR LEAVE TO MOVE THE ADJOURNMENT OF THE ASSEMBLY ON DEFINITE MATTERS OF URGENT PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Establishment of a National Child Emergency Notification System

Mr. Speaker: [*Inaudible*] relating to a request to move the adjournment of the Assembly on definite matters of urgent and public importance from the Hon. Member, Mr. Jermaine Figueira. I will ask him to state his issue.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your accommodation. I am about to present a motion for the establishment of a National Child Emergency Notification System, but Mr. Speaker, it would be remiss of me if I did not seek your permission in asking that all Members of this House stand with me for a minute of silence for the tragic and horrendous loss of lives in such a short span of time in Guyana – for our two Lindeners, Ronaldo Peters and Keon Fogenay, and for the recent 11-year-old Adrianna Younge which this motion I am about to present seeks to honour.

Mr. Speaker: I concur with you. Let us stand for a few moments.

[*A minute of silence was observed.*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Figueira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you to all Members of this House.

Mr. Speaker, this motion reads:

WHEREAS the tragic and brutal abduction and murder of 11-year-old Adrianna Younge has shaken the collective conscience of the people of Guyana, transcending all ethnic, religious, and social divides;

AND WHEREAS there is a national outcry for urgent reforms to enhance child protection and strengthen public safety mechanisms;

AND WHEREAS the experiences of other jurisdictions, including the United States, Canada, and the European Union, have demonstrated the effectiveness of child emergency alert systems such as the AMBER Alert in facilitating the rapid recovery of missing children and saving lives;

AND WHEREAS the swift dissemination of critical information to the public through mobile devices, media outlets, and public networks has proven to dramatically improve child recovery rates and deter criminal activities against minors;

AND WHEREAS Guyana, as the fastest growing economy in the world, must proactively implement security measures to protect its most vulnerable citizens, especially its children, amid increasing exposure to criminal elements;

AND WHEREAS the establishment of a national child alert system would not only improve law enforcement's ability to respond promptly to child abductions but would also empower the general public to actively participate in safeguarding our children;

AND WHEREAS the implementation of the National Child Alert System would stand as a lasting and meaningful tribute to the memory of Adrianna Younge, ensuring her life and untimely passing serve as catalysts for lasting national protection reforms;

BE IT RESOLVED that this National Assembly calls on the Government of Guyana to immediately begin consultations with stakeholders, including the Guyana Police Force, telecommunications providers, civil society organisations, and child rights activists, to design and implement a national child emergency notification system;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that, within six months, the necessary legislation and regulations be drafted and tabled to establish the operational framework, responsibilities, and protocols to govern the national child alert system.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the system be named the “Adrianna Alert System” in honour of Adrianna Younge, to symbolise Guyana's commitment to the protection of every child within its borders;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that annual reports on the system's activation, effectiveness, and outcomes be laid before the National Assembly to ensure transparency, accountability and continuous improvement.

Mr. Speaker, I am usually a strong emotional person, and I have witnessed death. I have buried family members dear to

me, close friends and associates, and on few occasions I seldomly shed a tear publicly. I saw, like many Guyanese, and I am confident that you and all of us here in this House equally witnessed the emotional anguish of those parents who lost their child in such a barbaric manner. What got me in an emotional state, Mr. Speaker, was when I saw like you, when I saw, like many Guyanese, Adrianna's father – a man who, without doubt, loved his daughter – jump into the pool and grab his lifeless baby girl. The cry he cried out is a cry of only who feels it knows it. That got to me. I want to believe it got to you too. I believe it equally resonated with you as with other Guyanese, home and in the diaspora.

The tragic abduction and murder of 11-year-old Adrianna Younge has profoundly shaken the consciousness of this country. Again, I say, it transcended ethnic, religious and social divides. This grievous loss demands not only solemn remembrance but decisive action for justice. It is in her honour that this motion is being proposed for serious consideration – that Guyana adopts a national emergency response system for missing children, modelled after the United States of America's 'America's Missing: Broadcast Emergency Response' (AMBER) Alert, aptly named the Adriana Alert System.

11.39 a.m.

Mr. Speaker, such a system would significantly enhance child protection mechanisms, foster public vigilance and deter potential predators. In the context of Guyana's rapid economic growth and increasing attractiveness to both investors and criminal elements, the implementation of an Adriana Alert System is not merely necessary but most urgent. It is in this regard that I put it to you, I put it to this House, that there is urgent need for immediate reform and legislation. The gruesome murder of Adriana Younge underscores glaring gaps in Guyana's current child protection and the Guyana Police emergency response framework. It did not go unnoticed that while this proposed motion was made public, it resulted in the Office of the Commissioner of Police of the Guyana Police Force putting out a statement of its standard operating procedures (SOPs) with regard to missing children and persons, which essentially said, they do have ways and means of dealing with this already.

Mr. Speaker, it is with the greatest of respect to the efforts of the good men, our good men and women in the Guyana Police Force (GPF), it should be known that what this motion seeks to promote is not to compete with the Guyana Police Force, but to complement and improve its efforts for greater

effectiveness and reliability. The police must come to the consciousness that their present efforts and actions, with this very sad circumstance, have resulted in the loss and death of a Guyanese child – a niece, a student, a friend, a neighbour, a daughter. The people of Guyana demand more from our people in uniform. Clearly, the reliance solely on traditional investigative techniques used by the Guyana Police Force is insufficient in a rapidly digitising and expanding society. Most will agree that there are too many loopholes in this 'Babylon system', where trust and confidence in the police have to be restored. The Guyana Police Force has to do more to be considered professional, independent, and it has to rid itself of some individuals. Criminals, in uniforms, are given shelter under the Force's umbrella.

Mr. Speaker, as the fastest-growing economy in the world, Guyana's infrastructural, technological and legislative advancements must be paralleled by much-needed reforms in public safety as in the developed world, particularly when it comes to the safety of our most vulnerable – our children. This proposed idea, which embodies this motion, is nothing new. It already exists. In the United States, the AMBER, America's Missing Broadcast Emergency Response Alert System has proven instrumental in saving thousands of lives since its inception in 1996. Thousands of children have been successfully recovered as a direct result of the system. The AMBER Alert operates by broadcasting in real-time information about abducted children across all communication platforms, including smartphones that almost every citizen has. It is the cell phones of ordinary Guyanese that foiled the continuation of the plotters of that wicked and devious plan, and I want to publicly thank our women and all the people who stood their ground and fought for answers.

Additionally, this system also utilises radio, television, and highway signs, within minutes of confirmed reports. This massive immediate dissemination empowers the public, the citizenry, and our ordinary Guyanese to become active participants in child recovery efforts, vastly expanding the eyes and ears available to law enforcement, who most certainly need help. Guyana, with its steadily increasing mobile phone penetration and growing access to internet services, is in a strong position for us as a country to leverage similar technology. An Adriana Alert System would serve to immediately notify citizens nationwide of child abductions, sharing critical information such as descriptions, suspected vehicles and last known location. It would transform the entire population into potential first responders. Significantly increasing the odds of recovery during crucial early hours following a disappearance.

Countries like the United States, Canada and in Europe, such alert systems proved very effective in their recovery rates of children and missing persons. In each of these contexts, the existence of an immediate alert system not only aids in rapid recovery but also acts as a deterrent. Criminals are aware that any abduction triggers a nationwide alert system, drastically reducing their opportunities to evade capture. Beyond practical outcomes, the institution of this Adriana Alert System would have a profound societal impact. It would send an unequivocal message that the safety of the children of this country is a national priority, reinforcing communal responsibility and moral vigilance. Moreover, it would honour the memory of Adriana Younge by ensuring that no other child falls victim to similar horrors without an immediate and powerful collective Guyanese response. Such a system also cultivates trust between the public and law enforcement. In an era where police reform is both necessary and increasingly demanded by our citizens, fostering collaborative engagements through an Adriana Alert System would rebuild confidence and strengthen public safety partnerships.

Mr. Speaker, we are of the firm view that Parliament, this House, must enact specific legislation authorising the creation and management of a system, setting criteria for issuing alerts. Further, telecommunication providers must facilitate automatic mobile notifications, as well as integration with radio, television and social media platforms. Law enforcement and emergency responders must receive specialised training. Simultaneously, public education campaigns must prepare our citizens to understand and respond to alerts appropriately, and we must ensure the system is verified with regard to child abduction, to prevent the dissemination of false information and more so to maintain public trust.

As I conclude, I must reiterate that the implementation of the Adriana Alert System could immortalise Adriana Younge's memory, not through words alone but through concrete, life-saving action. It would symbolise the nation's collective commitment to safeguarding its future, the children of Guyana, and demonstrate that from tragedy can arise transformative progress. Guyana is at a pivotal moment. Its unprecedented economic growth brings new threats, and without proactive measures the most vulnerable will pay the heaviest price. Again, I say, by instituting the Adriana Alert System, Guyana, our country, would play a leading role in the Caribbean and Latin America in child protection innovation, setting a powerful example of how a nation can and must unite in defence of its children. I thank you. *[Applause]*

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, thank you. All of us want to get to the bottom of this occurrence that led to the death of little Adriana Younge. While together we mourn as a country, we have already taken action as a Government to facilitate the independent inquiry. Today, as all of us know by now...

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: ...that we have in progress the post-mortem being conducted by independent...

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker. *[Ms. Teixeira: (Inaudible)]*
No, we have gone into the debate.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker. I wish to...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, let us hear the Opposition Chief Whip.

Mr. Jones: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My apologies, Prime Minister. Just for clarity, has the motion been accepted and are we now into the debate?

Mr. Speaker: As a matter of clarity, this is not only a very sensitive matter, it is one that we all need to put our positions. Normally, such presentations from the mover of the motion take about two minutes, and I allowed the Hon. Member, who has proposed the motion, to make a full presentation. It is only fair that I allow the Prime Minister to say what has happened.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, I applaud you for allowing the Member to go beyond the two minutes. That being said, he presented a motion and in order for us to continue, it has to either be accepted or denied.

Mr. Speaker: We have done this before. I have a number of years' experience in this House and all items under the Standing Orders. Hon. Prime Minister, you may continue.

Mr. Jones: Mr. Speaker, this is unacceptable and we will not party in this.

[Members of the Opposition withdrew from the Chambers.]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Prime Minister, you may continue.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, I wish to bring to the attention of the House a document dated 25th April, 2025, prepared and disseminated by the Guyana Police Force, handling reports of missing children and persons – standard operating procedures. In this document, all the changes that are necessary are incorporated in this document. For the purpose of the House, I shall state the important aspects, the

key provisions of this new policy that is prepared by the Guyana Police Force. Immediate response: all missing person reports must be acted upon without delay. This is a major change from before, where we had a mandatory 24-hour waiting period. Now, all missing person reports must be acted upon without delay. Activation of red alert: a red alert will be immediately issued for any report involving a missing child, triggering a national coordinated response.

11.53 a.m.

Risk classification: special attention will be given to children, elderly individuals and persons with disabilities, or vulnerabilities, who would be classified as high risk, warranting immediate deployment of additional resources and inter-agency coordination. The Force will continue to work collaboratively with the Childcare and Protection Agency (CPA), immigration department, health institutions, shelters and other critical partners to ensure a comprehensive and effective response.

Public awareness: the Corporate Communications Unit (CCU) of the Force will disseminate timely and accurate public notices regarding missing persons upon the authorisation from the Office of the Commissioner.

Senior oversight and accountability: Divisional Commanders and the Missing Children/Persons Unit (MCPU) will maintain daily oversight of all active investigations and provide regular updates until each case is resolved. Additionally, the heads of services, including the Chief of Defence Staff, the Chief Fire Officer and the Director of Prisons will be notified promptly by the Commissioner of Police in all cases involving missing children or vulnerable individuals. This new SOP will be gazetted on 29th April, that is tomorrow. I wish to remind this House that, even before these changes, we already had a Childcare and Protection Agency that falls under the ambit of the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security, that has already been exercising the responsibility for the protection and welfare of children throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. Its actions are governed by the 2009 Protection of Children Act.

Within the last four years, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security launched the 'Every Child Safe' programme which continues and encompasses the following to develop safer communities: training of civil society and the children in all communities on keeping children safe by recognising the signs of abuse and having a low threshold for reporting instances of abuse; directly working with children to apprise them of the laws and also to encourage

reporting; the addition of the 914 hotline, in addition to a dedicated child protection hotline to increase reporting of cases of child abuse; the removal of children to shelters or state care to offer protection; the provision of socio-economic and psychosocial support to all children who experience abuse, including trauma-focused counselling; and the continued training of CPA personnel to deliver services to children in all the support areas including grief and resiliency. I am aware that such action is taken where today a unit from the Ministry of Education is at the school attending to this whole issue of grief and are offering counselling to the students at the school which little Adrianna Younge attended.

There is a parenting programme to work with parents on the care of children to prevent abuse across communities; the training of persons, across all regions, who run daycares, on child protection in addition to early childhood development; collaborative work with the Sexual Offences and Domestic Violence Policy Unit to tackle violence in schools – going into schools and working with children; the increased subventions to the non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to establish child advocacy centres in all regions; the passage of the Family Violence Act, which also protects children; the Street Light Programme, which removes children off the street and offers protection and care; through the Family Enhancement Services Unit, a development programme with support and training from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to work with at-risk youths and their families to prevent delinquent behaviour and intervene where juveniles are most vulnerable; the development of a rapid response programme to respond immediately to reports of child abuse; the Community Clean Sweep Programme to go into communities and address all cases of child abuse with a dedicated team; the anti-bullying and anti-body shaming programmes and campaigns; the expansion of the Foster Care Programme to place children in home environments to have safety, security and love; the training of the police and persons in other agencies in a dedicated effort under the Protection of Children Act; and the teen pregnancy and prevention programmes. These are all initiatives geared towards protecting our children.

Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to remind the House that our Government has been making policies and implementing programmes throughout the length and breadth of Guyana to safeguard our children. From an economic standpoint, we have the 'Because we Care Cash Grant'; we have the payment for newborns; new schools are constructed, new children advocacy centres are being constructed, and hope and justice centres; hotlines to report child abuse and

domestic violence; new Family Violence Act; new Combatting of Trafficking in Persons Act; the Family Court; the health programme for eye glasses. These are all measures aimed at helping our children. There are new hospitals and the upgrading of equipment and services at health facilities across the country, including telemedicine; training of police officers to handle children of domestic and sexual abuses reports. These are all aimed at improving the welfare and the protection of our children. Mr. Speaker, this is my response in regard to the Hon. Member's motion. Thank you. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Members, what I have done here this morning, with respect to allowing the mover of this motion and a response from the Government, is not unique in this House. We have had it before. The matter of the death of Adrianna Younge, as the Hon. Member Mr. Figueira mentioned, touches all of us. We still have to come to the crux of his motion which calls on the Government to do certain things.

After I read the Standard Operating Procedures that were first released by the Guyana Police Force on Saturday, even before I received his notice, I felt that the Government did move with urgency on this important issue of dealing with missing children and alerts being made. I want to highly commend the Government for the swift action in establishing these new Standard Operating Procedures. I trust that we will have to do more. Public pools will have to have even more regulations. Once you are opening your swimming area, and having come from that sector, we will have to deal with lifeguards permanently, and a number of other safeties, not only for children but for the patrons using it. Specifically with respect to the resolution of the Hon. Member Mr. Figueira, the Government has acted and is acting. In this regard, it will be difficult for me to allow the motion to be discussed at this sitting.

Motion denied.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND FIRST READING

The following Bill was introduced and read the first time:

Oil Pollution Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Responsibility Bill 2025 – Bill No. 7/2025

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to make provision for preventative, restorative, and compensatory measures in relation to oil spill incidents in the national territory, particularly, the prevention of pollution from oil, oil

spill preparedness, response, cooperation, and financial responsibility; the establishment of the Competent National Authority; and for related matters.”

[Prime Minister]

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT'S BUSINESS

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, let us take a suspension at this time and be back in one hour.

Sitting suspended at 12.05 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.39 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we suspended at the point of Public Business and Government Business. I now invite the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport to present the Guyana Horse Racing Authority Bill 2024 – Bill No. 23/2024 for a second reading.

BILLS – Second and Third Readings

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 and Sport]

Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport [Mr. Ramson]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move that the Guyana Horse Racing Authority Bill 2024, Bill No. 23/2024, published on the 18th December, 2024, be read for the second time.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill has been in the thoughts of many and within the intentions of many for decades. For all who are lovers of horse racing, horseracing is quite arguably the second or third largest spectator sport in Guyana and finds its origins going back to our colonial period in the 1800s. Over a period of time – almost 200 years, or 200 years going – it developed into a mainstream sport that was enjoyed by everyone even before we became independent. This Bill that we have prepared, circulated, and tabled, seeks to regulate the horse racing industry and to establish a Horse Racing Authority in Guyana. I know that there are many persons who are connected to horse racing. They have been

interested in and are paying attention to the passage of this Bill.

1.42 p.m.

They welcome it, hopefully with unanimous support. What is important, Mr. Speaker, is knowing that it is such an important spectator sport and also examining where Guyana can have its benefits be seen. We have to examine carefully what the global position is too. Horse racing, you may or may not know, for Members of the House and Members of the public who are tuning in, as of 2025, it is a US\$127 billion industry, and it is projected to grow by 2030 to US\$182 billion. That is the global market for horse racing. I do not need to make comparisons in this situation, but it is important, just as a point of reference, that Guyana's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is probably about US\$25 billion. If you were to add the entire wealth on our productive value basis, including our oil exports, not all of which comes back to us, it is probably about US\$25 billion. Our Government's budget is between US\$6 billion and US\$7 billion. Right now, we have a very important global industry, and because of the absence of regulation, Guyana is not participating in a way that we can receive the greatest value for its participants, spectators, as well as the Government.

The industry must grow. It must move out of the stage that it is right now, where there is a *laissez-faire* kind of arrangement, and where races are organised and rules are prepared for that race, but there is no universal application of the rules. At the same time, the industry is not connected to what happens globally. That is an important factor because the industry has evolved significantly over the last 200 years. It used to be a very localised spectator type of revenue-generating industry, which for us is still the same way. A lot of it now has moved its revenue stream into online betting and simulcast, where it can be transmitted instantaneously around the world and be part of a global betting environment. That is one part. Another part too is based on the horse racing enthusiasts, competitors and investors who want to get involved in Guyana's market. However, they look at the market and see that it is not regulated like the rights, rules, *et cetera* not protected or enforced. Then they are reluctant to take any deliberate action to get involved in the market. I will make some analogies here when it comes to the investors in the country, and these are not just persons who are connected to horse racing, but just investors generally.

The first question that investors ask when they are going into a new territory or examining the prospects of moving into a

new territory – and Guyana is no different – is do they have a legal system that protects property rights? That is probably the most important question they would ask themselves. Luckily, in Guyana, we have had that for over 100 years, but we do not have the same kind of situation for horse racing. That is why you find that the industry is still stuck at this rudimentary and basic level, where it has not really moved and transformed in any significant way over the period of time.

There is huge money in the industry, the global market, for the regulation of the sport. It is very important for us to get an opportunity to expand our revenue base. That is one. There is a beneficial outcome for the country, but there are also some very important factors or benefits that come with regulating the sport. For example, the integrity of fairness in the sport, needing to have fair competition. The establishment of rules – rules meaning rules for the races. There are different rules for different competitions that currently exist, but that is not the way it functions in other places.

Another really important example is drug testing on horses. In fact, drug testing on horses in regulated environments is actually one of the most important ingredients or elements for the regulation of the sport. In Guyana, there is very little of that and it is not done in an environment where it is the standard that is acceptable. Another important factor for the regulation is the dispute resolution. In instances where you would have persons not doing what they are supposed to do or deliberately doing something that they are not supposed to do, this Bill allows for the establishment of a dispute resolution mechanism, which I will go into as we get into the Bill.

Another important factor is the global integration and internationalisation of the sport. That is extremely important. When you have the opportunity to broadcast your races globally, it means that you become attractive as a regulated sport. It means that it becomes attractive for online betting in other betting shops across the world, where there is an opportunity for revenue generation, both for the licensee as well as the government. It also gives us an opportunity for broadcasting. You would not find broadcasters broadcasting our competitions and our races, because it is not a regulated environment. Broadcasters do not want to get themselves involved with that. That is an important benefit, as well as global integration and internationalisation.

Then there are also the economic benefits. Economic benefits in the sense that it allows for international investors

to be a part of it. When they look at our environment and see that is nascent and the environment is capable of growing, it allows them to inject capital, expertise and bring their horses into the races or even their breeding techniques. You do not have a lot of that happening in the country. That allows for investors and investing to be more attractive and the industry to be more attractive. It also allows for better facilities from the investment side, but also on the government's side in a much more regulated environment where it is legalised, licensed, *et cetera*. It gives the government the opportunity to see how the investment can catalyse into more economic benefits and spin-off benefits for the country. There are also additional job creation opportunities as a result of this.

There are also some areas with specific benefits regarding the regulations. You all know when there are horse racing events, or any big events happening at the National Stadium or at one of the horse racing venues – let us take the South Dakota Circuit as another example – anytime you have bigger international events, the spin off economic and business opportunities that come from having those events and activities there, makes a difference. Even smaller community activities, when they have them in their communities, are beneficial.

Last but not least, one of the things I wanted to point out about why this regulation is important is the welfare of the horses too. That part is understated and many times overlooked. The rules and regulations that emanate from the powers contained in this Bill allow for the safeguarding, protection and treatment of veterinary care, safe training practices to reduce neglect and abuse for horses. All of that now gives a better opportunity and requirement coming out from this Bill that we are presenting once it is passed.

For decades, many persons contemplated and had the idea of having this Guyana Horse Racing Authority Bill, including previous iterations of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government. This was something that was under our radar, even though under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) government, they never even had discussions about this. Leadership requires that we must give direction. As policymakers, it must not be the mantra that if it is not broken, we do not fix it. Many times, for many persons who are involved in an activity or an industry, they may not even know that it is not broken. It is you, as the person who is trusted with the leadership that must be able to say there is a bigger opportunity that you are missing. The good news is that this was not something the Government had to force on anyone. The stakeholders had already moved to the point where they realised they were not

getting anywhere fast without having the industry regulated. Even with horses that were looking to come into the country to participate in races, they could not. They could not participate in those races and then go back out. The stakeholders had already moved in that direction, where it was not a difficult transition for us.

The Government of Guyana, through our Ministry, established a committee. During that time – I am just laying the background of how we got to this point – after having established the committee, I chaired about 40 meetings. Forty meetings examined and contrasted the different styles of legislation and the features they had in different jurisdictions and cherry-picked what was important for our environment and to make this a bespoke model. This was not a cut-and-paste type of situation, where many times persons may just choose the easy route or route. Over those 40 meetings that we held, we painstakingly went through provision by provision, examining what would be good for us and then finalising that along with stakeholders from the Government.

1.57 p.m.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank my Colleague, Mr. Anil Nandlall, and the lawyers from the Attorney General's Chambers, along with my other Colleagues from the Cabinet subcommittee – Minister Gail Teixeira and Minister Ashni Singh – who all contributed towards this. Now, I want to just go through the structure of the Bill which is easily explained in the Explanatory Memorandum. The First Part, which deals with, as normal, the Short Titles and definition of key terms. The Second Part establishes the Horse Racing Authority, and it also establishes that it would be governed by a governing board. It sets out the constitution for that governing board, including its functions.

Part III sets out the licensing procedures, which I will go into as we examine some of the important clauses. Part IV establishes the Disciplinary Committee that I referred to a moment ago, and its procedure as well. Then, finally, Part V has a General Powers section, which is reposed in the Minister to deal with rules and regulations, *et cetera*, which I will give a bit of an explanation on. What I propose to do, Mr. Speaker, is just to take the House through some important clauses in the Bill, without going into too much of the detail, because, as you can see, the Bill is framed in a very general way that is designed for the stage of the development that we are in, which is getting this industry regulated for the first time.

Clause 3 establishes the Horse Racing Authority, and it says that it will be administered by a governing board.

Clause 4 establishes the governing board, which is appointed by the Minister with no less than five persons, but no more than seven, who hold a three-year term, and they are eligible for reappointment. This board must be published in the *Official Gazette* of Guyana.

Clause 5 states what the functions of the Authority are, and I will just give you a summary of that: To

“...make all rules as are necessary;”

To

“...issue such licenses as may be necessary;”

To

“... hear all disputes arising out of the rules of racing;

To

“introduce, implement, assist...or undertake the implementation of any scheme for the development of the horse racing industry; and”

Then

“administer and enforce regulations and rules made under this Act.”

Clause 7 says that the Authority will have a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and other authorised officers to carry out the functions of the Authority.

Clause 8 explains how the meetings would be conducted. It says that the meetings should be held at least once a month, and the quorum will be a majority of persons appointed and present, and they may invite, importantly, anyone who they desire to attend the meetings, but will not have any voting rights.

Clause 10 allows that, in circumstances where there is a conflict of interest, whether direct or indirect, it requires disclosure of that conflict of interest, and it allows for the recusal of the person or persons so that they do not participate in that specific issue.

Clause 11 refers to the funds and the resources of the Authority, and it is important that I explain that too. The funds will consist of:

“...funds appropriated by Parliament; ...any fees collected in respect of the...”

Issuing

“of licenses under this Act; and... all other sums or property as may become payable... or vested in the Authority in respect of any matter incidental to its functions.”

Mr. Speaker, here is where the first amendment, as circulated on Friday, will come into an important operation. You have several amendments which will be raised at the appropriate time, but the funding of the Authority, Clause 11, Clause 13, and Clause 15, bring it in line with other agencies which require Government funding. Also important, Mr. Speaker, Clause 14 speaks to all of the books of accounts of the Authority

“...shall be subject to the examination and audit at any time...

Of

“... the Auditor General.”

Also, that these books must be made available to the Auditor General. Part III of the Act, which deals with licensing, says here that the racecourse itself must be licensed. The racecourse, first of all, must be licensed. This is an instance where the license, though granted by the Authority, must also receive the approval of the Minister. All other licenses that the Authority issues do not require the approval of the Minister. In this situation, only because there may be bigger development objectives of the Government, the racecourse itself would receive the approval/approbation of the Minister.

However, it goes through a process that is conducted by...well, first of all, engaged and triggered through the Authority, and then goes through an investigation process, *et cetera*, and that allows for the Authority now, once it is licensed, to set the standards that are necessary for that premises. This is because a lot of people attend these facilities, and because they attend these facilities, safety is an important part of the standard that has to be met. The last thing you would want to see is that, because of the absence of standards, thousands of persons in a stand, and the stand collapses, God forbid, or there is a stampede, and persons are run over and injured because those standards are not in place.

I will just use, by analogy, why those governing arrangements are important. A few years ago, there was a condominium (condo) that collapsed in Miami, and because those condo buildings did not have any regulations in

relation to their maintenance, several people died in that collapse. I do not remember the number out of my head, but scores of people died in the collapse of that condo. Recently, the leadership of Miami, the State of Florida, passed condo regulations that require the maintenance of those buildings. In the absence of that, some of these buildings did not have the required maintenance regime, and subsequent to the passage of that legislation, an assessment was done, and many of the buildings were found in a state that required immediate maintenance.

Safety is the Government's responsibility, and once the Government is going to regulate an industry, a sector, a sport, whatever, we are also responsible for its safe development. In a situation where there are thousands and sometimes tens of thousands of persons going to a premises, it also means that there is a requirement for those safety measures to be implemented – that is one. Two – it also allows the Government to say, we are interested in the welfare of people, and we see the benefit of this location becoming an important location for all kinds of local and international tourism, and the Government may then see the sensibility in making that investment.

Now, Clause 18, which is the requirement for the racecourse to be licensed, imposes a fine. It creates an offence and imposes a fine of \$5 million. It is high; undoubtedly, it is high, but why was this decided at this level? A person who is not or may know that it is an offense to have a race or to disregard the requirement to have a license, they may go and hold the race, make \$5 million out of the race, and if the penalty is only a hundred thousand or five hundred thousand dollars, they would have netted \$4.5 million. Thus, they are not incentivised to be compliant in this situation. Not only do we have a strict penalty on the racecourse itself for a fine, but we also have an imprisonment option as well for one year. This is not inconsistent, incidentally, Mr. Speaker, with other jurisdictions in the world.

Clause 19 establishes the requirement for licensing for trainers, jockeys, and all of the other persons and professions, work-related persons, and personnel to receive a license as well.

Part IV establishes that the disciplinary committee that I was referring to, and it allows for a process to be triggered where complaints are made to the Authority, and for the Authority to set up this disciplinary subcommittee, and for the findings of that committee, or report, to be submitted to the Authority, before which they can then act on that report. The Authority itself is the one that acts on the report, whether they are

going to revoke a license, suspend it, fine a person, or whatever. Once persons have their license suspended, they can reapply for a license, but not before two years.

2.12 p.m.

There is a period of what I call tawing-off, where you lose your license, where you do not get an opportunity to be involved again at an official level for two years, should you have your license revoked. For this, of course, you can have redress from the court too. It establishes it in the Bill. If you are dissatisfied with the ruling that comes out of the Authority, it states it in the Bill, but there is a general power in our law, anyway, under Judicial Review.

PART IV – speaks about that general power that is given to the Minister in relation to the establishment of rules, specifically racing rules. More importantly, it also creates for the establishment of what is called a stud book. I see Bishop Edghill paying keen attention when he hears this term 'stud book'. The stud book is the book that is important at the global level. There is an international Stud Book Committee (ISBC). It is necessary, having established that, where all horses that are bred in Guyana and those that are imported from outside of Guyana, must be registered in accordance with the rules of the stud book of Guyana. When implemented, horses bred in and registered in Guyana, in accordance with the ISBC rules, will be able to go abroad. If we did not have this stud book, our horses would not be able to leave the country and be accepted to the normal or acceptable standard. They can race and then return with the authentic Stud Book, Export Certificate issued and approved by the stud book authorities.

This part of horse racing is an important part that was missing. It almost prevented any further development in a serious way for the horse racing industry. It gives the Minister the general power to create the rules. It also gives the Minister the power to put in place the regulations as well. Some of it is in relation to payment of fees, prize money, when they are paid. Many people have a big problem with that. In fact, in other countries you have seen where the industries have declined, some of our neighbours, in relation to horse racing, I would not say some of it had to do with when prize moneys are paid and the availability of those funds. It gives the Minister the authority to create both the rules and the regulations to govern the sport.

This Bill that we are presenting here is a Bill that was in the figments of our thoughts for many decades. Many countries, some of our neighbours, have had this since the 1970s. They have benefited tremendously as a result of that. We have to,

not just catch up, but we have to leapfrog. You took the words out of my mouth, Mr. Speaker. We have to leapfrog and move this into a sphere of altitude because we have a lot of catching up to do. The good news is that the stakeholders are already there. It is not something that government has to force them to do. I have had a very productive engagement with all of the stakeholders. That is why the meetings went on. I had so many meetings, as well as the fact that they would last for so many hours. It was painstaking work, but it was also important work. This is an important step for the transformation of the horse racing industry through its regulation.

Around the world we would never have been able to benefit. We would never be able to benefit from the global industry if we do not regulate the sport. By regulation, this is the important step that is needed to move us into that regulation. There are tremendous opportunities. I would not say I am too *au fait* with horse racing. I might have attended a few races. Even though I may not have been particularly interested in horse racing itself, I had other interests in attending, but I was not too *au fait* with the *nitty gritty* of the sport. Along the way, I took the time because I needed to make sure too that what was included was important for its development in Guyana. It is with a sense of both satisfaction as well as accomplishment that we are presenting, and I say we and not just the Government, but all of the stakeholders. I want to take the opportunity to thank them because many of them came from Berbice and Region 5. They came just for these meetings. They spent hours and gave extremely valuable information, as well as input, to its development. They are following this right now. They are following its passage. They have been on me with the expectation that we would have had it passed since late last year. It is better late than never.

I think today there is an extremely important tipping point for horse racing in the country. It will unlock tremendous benefits for not just the horse racing industry, but for the entire country. I am particularly pleased and privileged to take the opportunity to have this Bill tabled and go through its presentation, so that we can see its successful passage shortly. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister. I know many persons have been, as you correctly said, for decades looking forward to this move. Horse racing goes back a long time in our country, particularly dominated by Georgetown and Berbice and the famous Kings Bounty. I see the Hon. Minister, Mr. Mustapha, remembering that name, that his father would know about. Our next speaker was supposed to

be Ms. Nima Flue-Bess - calling once, calling twice, calling thrice for the Hon. Member. I now call on the Hon. Member from the east, Mr. Faizal Jaffarally to make his presentation. You could talk about Jockey Sunich, whose son is the owner of Trophy Stall, today.

Mr. Jaffarally: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. First, let me say that I am so disappointed, looking across the other side of this House, where important discussions are being held about the people, the Opposition Members find it necessary not to sit in this House and make their contributions. I am greatly disappointed that they are not here to discuss the people's business.

I rise to fully support Bill No. 23 of 2024 – Guyana Horse Racing Authority Bill 2024. This Bill is presented in this honourable House after a series of consultations with various stakeholders. It brings horse racing across Guyana under an umbrella body, which will be responsible for the management and efficient regulation of horse racing and, at the same time, will be responsible for disputes that may arise. I wish to acknowledge Mr. Amar Kawall who is from Anjou, Mahaicony. He is willing and waiting for the passage of this Bill to invest in another horse racing track at Mahaicony. I also want to state that only recently, myself and the Hon. Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs met with over 100 horse racing enthusiasts at Bush Lot. They are awaiting the passage of this Bill to invest US\$20 million. Am I correct, Hon. Member?

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: That is correct.

Mr. Jaffarally: Over US\$20 million. While horse racing in Guyana began in the 18th Century, here in Georgetown, the mecca of horse racing is in Region 5. My Colleague will mention Region 5 and Region 6. We have three known horse racing grounds in Region 5 – Bush Lot racetrack, the Rising Sun racetrack and the No. 6 racetrack. As I said earlier, soon Mr. Kawall who is here with us in this House, will establish another racetrack at Anjou. In any calendar year, there are about 15 to 20 national meets in Region 5 alone, attracting hundreds of thousands of spectators to these meets. Therefore, while horse racing was started here in Georgetown by the colonial elites in the 18th Century, the planter class and other classes were allowed only as spectators to these events. Eventually, horse racing has caught on so much that it moved across the country.

This Bill, the Guyana Horse Racing Authority Bill will eradicate many of the disputes as the Minister spoke about, such as classification, confusion regarding the classification

of imported bred horses, particularly from the West Indies, instances of where F-class horses were allowed to compete in G-class races, on-going issues with track administration and organisation oversight. Of course, we will want to create horse owners and trainers' associations, jockeys' association and things of that nature.

This Bill marks a historic milestone in horse racing in Guyana, bringing structure and governance and international recognition to a sport that has been a passion for our people for generations. It is a moment of pride for us as Guyanese, especially those directly involved in the industry, owners of horses, trainers, jockeys, breeders, *et cetera*. In Region 5 alone, we have more than 300 active racehorses in that region. This Bill will formalise and expand the industry, leading to more investments, an increase in the number of horses, owners and racing events. Currently, each racehorse supports multiple jobs, including trainers, groomers, jockeys, veterinarians, feed suppliers and stable hands. Each horse supports an average of five to 10 jobs. It means, one to 2,000 persons are directly employed in this industry or leading to the industry, with potential for expanded growth.

Indirectly, the industry creates opportunities in the hospitality, tourism, media, security, transportation, and local businesses, benefiting thousands of Guyanese across our country. The official recognition and the passage of this Bill will open doors for foreign investors, sponsors and breeders to participate in this industry.

2.27 p.m.

Guyana will now be able to host international standard races, attracting participants from across the Caribbean and beyond. It will enhance tourism and bring revenue to hotels, restaurants and local markets. The structured industry will generate tax revenue for the government through regulated betting, race sponsorship and licensing fees. These funds can be reinvested in infrastructure, youth programmes and community development. This Bill will create pathways for young Guyanese to become professional jockeys, trainers and horse care specialists. With proper training and regulations, our athletes can compete on the global stage, representing Guyana at international races.

This Bill, which was presented here today in this honourable House by our Minister of Culture, Youth and Sport, will have clear rules, ensure fair play, transparency, animal welfare, and make racing safer for horses, jockeys and spectators. Veterinary standards and breeding regulations will improve the quality of Guyanese thoroughbreds, making them competitive internationally. Horse racing has been a unifying

sport for our people, cutting across all social and economic backgrounds. At any race meet, you will see people from all walks of life, all ethnic backgrounds, and all social statuses enjoying a good horse race meeting.

This Bill strengthens our national identity and celebrates Guyanese talent, resilience and sportsmanship. With this Bill, we are taking a bold step in making Guyana a recognised force in the global horse racing industry. This is indeed an opportunity for every Guyanese, whether directly in the industry or benefiting from the economic impact, to be a part of something historic. Therefore, it is important that all of us in this House, those of us who are listening and our colleagues who have walked out of this House to fully support this Bill, because it will benefit all Guyanese. I extend my full support to the National Horse Racing Authority Bill, Bill No. 24 of 2024. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. The next speaker was supposed to have been Mr. Jermaine Figueira. Mr. Figueira, once, twice. I now call on the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, to tell us about that glorious tradition from Region 6 – Crawford, Kennard, Bush Lot, Port Mourant.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I will be very short because I thought the Minister would have come back here to finish the Bill. Since Region 6 is an important region, and we have a number of horse racing tracks and a number of racehorses, I think it is good that I speak on this Bill. Today is a very important day, a very transformative day, as we heard the Hon. Minister say. Today is a day that we are creating history in this House and the Guyana sporting landscape will be changed because this sport, horse racing, is as old as cricket in our country. We have a structure for cricket. Today, under the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government, we are putting a structure to a sport that has been enjoyed by many Guyanese in the countryside.

The introduction of this Bill is not just a legislative milestone but a commitment to the future of our nation's sporting heritage. This is a critical piece of legislation that aims to bring structure, oversight and sustainable development to a sport deeply rooted in our culture and communities across our country. In Guyana and particularly our rural regions, horse racing is far more than entertainment. It is a source of livelihood, a tradition passed through generations and a symbol of community pride. So, this Bill, as I said, seeks to address longstanding challenges

in the horse racing industry. While it may not be the final solution, it opens a gateway of opportunities for all stakeholders who are involved – jockeys, trainers, groomers, course workers, and handlers – to be more involved in this industry.

We must recognise the effort and commitment, over the years, of the owners and promoters who have spent their money, millions of dollars, to promote this sport. They have risked their fortune, financially, to upkeep this sport that never had a structure. That is why, today, we are putting a structure to this sport.

We heard that regularising this industry will bring transparency and transformation, both socially and economically, for our people. We know for a fact that horse racing in our country, especially in Regions 5 and 6, is a rich tradition amongst communities. We can go back, as you rightly said, to the past when we had jockeys like Sancho, the Rahamans and a number of famous persons, not only in Guyana, but across the Caribbean. Horses from Guyana competed and still are competing in the Caribbean. We are putting a structure in so that Guyana will be a destination to be reckoned with. We heard that places like Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados have legislated this legislation long ago and they have industries by themselves, but we must also, as I said, recognise the role of our local owners and trainers.

This regulation will help to regularise the sport, align us with international standards, and help to control and legalise all activities relating to this sport. Racecourse infrastructure, which is another important part of it that we need, will be rehabilitated, and it will facilitate the free movement of horses from various regions in North and South America and the Caribbean to compete in Guyana. One of the most important aspects of it is that it will enhance our tourism appeal. It will create new employment opportunities across the industry. As I said, in Region 6, just like cricket, horse racing unites our people. It transcends ethnic and social boundaries and strengthens our national identity, celebrating Guyanese talent, sportsmanship and heritage. Supporting legislation and regulations will accompany this legislation in ensuring that its promises are fully realised.

I also want to say that in this industry, when we regularise this sport, when we put a structure to this sport, we will see a lot of economic growth and employment opportunities. Over 1000 persons are now employed in this industry, I can remember that many persons who were placed on the breadline when the estates were closed in Region 6 found

economic or employment opportunities in this industry. As I said, each horse supports a number of persons. You have to have trainers, groomers, veterinary officers, feed suppliers, stable hands, *et cetera*. All of these persons will find economic opportunities or employment opportunities with this legislation. As I said, we expect exponential growth in these professions.

Also, this industry must be seen as a part of a broader tourism package. With structured support, it will strengthen our economy and elevate Guyana as a regional hub for sport tourism. We know for a fact that there are a number of sporting events in this particular sport, for instance, the annual events such as the Guyana Cup Race of Champions, Easter Meet, Boxing Day Meet and the President's Cup, which already attract thousands of Guyanese from the diaspora and international enthusiasts. This legislation also facilitates the participation of international jockeys and horses to come to Guyana, strengthening competition and reputation. The ripple effect is clear. Beneficiaries will include local hotels, restaurants, bars and other businesses, and a lot of other economic opportunities will be created.

As I said, today is a landmark day for us. There were many successive Parliaments in which this idea was mooted – to legalise horse racing in our country – and today we are doing that. We are doing that to legislate to make horse racing legal, to make it more competitive and to ensure that we develop the horse racing industry in our country, eventually developing our tourism industry and creating more employment for our country. I want, in short, to say that today is a proud day for all Guyanese, especially the trainers, jockeys, breeders, owners and workers who have kept this sport alive against all odds. We have some over there, I know for a fact.

Also, when the Hon. Member spoke, he talked about this activity being controlled because right now, there are serious challenges facing the racing industry. For example, through betting, you have unfair competition. I know for a fact that the veterinary officer attached to the Guyana Horse Racing Authority works with the Ministry of Agriculture, and he can tell us that there are a lot of challenges in terms of thoroughbred horses with lots of potential not winning races. Only today I was talking to some people. We see people using all kinds of methods to win races – shocking horses, doping horses. These things, I hope, will be a thing of the past when this legislation is passed.

So, I say let us invest in the future of horse racing and unlock its full potential as a driver of economic growth, rural

employment, tourism and cultural preservation. With this Bill, we will take a bold step towards making Guyana a recognised name in global horse racing. This is our moment; every Guyanese has a role to play, whether directly involved or benefiting from the wider impact. I hope that, very shortly, when this legislation is passed and becomes law, the Guyana Horse Racing Authority, which will be set up with the direction of this legislation and the blessings from the Hon. Minister, we can ensure that we have fair play at these race turf clubs, we can have better thoroughbreds coming to Guyana, and Guyana can be one of the premier racing destinations in the Caribbean and this part of the world. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

2.42 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister and I do share your comment about the sacrifices made by those persons who are currently engaged in this sport because after D'Urban Park was closed, they had to take up the mantle. Minister, before I invite you, I want to put a few names on record from my time in the sport. I think it was Roshan Habibullah who first introduced starting stalls at Rising Sun. The best-kept racecourse was Kennard's Memorial and the late Chancellor and his family. I pay special attention to the Luckhoos, who used to do all of the white hat betting in those days. St. Sidwell's School was a famous place where the horses used to jump over the St. Sidwell's turn. Uli Hanoman had a famous horse, Hurlingham, in those days and my late father-in-law was one of the better owners at D'Urban Park. Black Power was a very famous one, too. Thank you.

Mr. Ramson (replying): Do not forget D'Urban Park, but Mr. Speaker...

Mr. Speaker: When Governor Benjamin D'Urban dedicated that, it was a long time before you and I, and your father.

Mr. Ramson: It was a long time before Guyana came into being. Mr. Speaker, it is not usual that I get a presentation with the support of the Speaker, so I just want to thank you. It just shows how important the Bill actually is. There is just one point I want to establish for the record because it allows us the opportunity to place on record when it matters most. There are a lot of people who will say that they either will do a good job or that they can do a better job, but when the time comes, it actually turns out to be the opposite.

I am not surprised that the Opposition is not here today, a point raised by my Hon. Friend, Mr. Jaffarally. Government is hard work. It is extremely hard work, and it is not for

unskilled persons. The problem that we have, generally, is that people profess to say that they will do a better job, but when the opportunity comes, nothing occurs. In the five years prior to the People's Progressive Party/Civic coming back into Office in 2020, while my colleagues, Minister Teixeira and Minister Anthony, made significant steps to move this forward and to help build the industry, *et cetera*, nothing significant transpired in that period, 2015 to 2020. The discussion did not even occur.

We are going to get down... **[An Hon. Member (Government): (Inaudible)]** Well, many times I forget that because of how established we are now, but the Ministry was relegated to losing its voice. I am extremely pleased that we were able to accomplish this. As I said, it took 40 meetings of painstaking, hours-long work, and it was supported by many members of the Cabinet and their respective ministries. It is a great pleasure and a privilege, Mr. Speaker, to be able to pilot this Bill through the National Assembly. I am pleased to know that, come what may, the industry of horse racing – the sport – will be in better hands and will be on a better footing moving forward, and it will allow for the development and transformation of the area. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, the question is that the Guyana Horse Racing Authority Bill – Bill No. 24 of 2024, be read a second time.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Members, we are now in Committee. We have a number of amendments that the Minister has tabled and I will go through the clauses of the Bill, and when we reach those clauses that are to be amended, we will put them. The Bill, Hon. Members, has 31 clauses and two Schedules.

Clause 1

Clause 1 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have an amendment, right?

Mr. Ramson: That is correct, Mr. Chairman. There is an amendment to clause 2 in one of the definitions. Shall I read that out, or is it appropriate to leave it as it is?

Mr. Chairman: We can leave it as it is because it states that you submitted it in writing, and we have it before us.

Mr. Ramson: Yes, we can circulate it. There is an amendment to clause 2. I am putting that now.

Mr. Chairman: Thank you.

Amendment put and carried.

Clause 2, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 3 and 4

Clauses 3 and 4 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 5

Mr. Ramson: I have an amendment for clause 5. I move that clause 5 be amended by the amendment that was circulated.

Mr. Chairman: Thanks, Minister.

Amendment put and carried.

Clause 5, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 6 to 10

Clauses 6 to 10 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 11

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have an amendment there.

Mr. Ramson: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I have an amendment to clause 11 and I move that this amendment be considered.

Amendment put and carried.

Clause 11, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 12

Clause 12 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 13

Mr. Ramson: Mr. Chairman, I move that clause 13 be amended to be part of the Bill.

Amendment put and carried.

Clause 13, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 14

Clause 14 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 15

Mr. Chairman: Hon. Minister, you have an amendment.

Mr. Ramson: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I move that clause 15 be amended and be part of the Bill.

Amendment put and carried.

Clause 15, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 16 to 18

Clauses 16 to 18 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 19

Mr. Ramson: I move that clause 19 be amended and be part of the Bill.

Amendment put and carried.

Clause 19, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 20 to 30

Clauses 20 to 30 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 31

Mr. Ramson: I move that clause 31 be amended and be part of the Bill and this is the last amendment.

Amendment put and carried.

Clause 31, as amended, agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clauses 32 and 33

Clauses 32 and 33 agreed to and ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Schedules 1 and 2

Schedules 1 and 2 agreed to and ordered to stand of the Bill.

Assembly resumed.

Bill reported with amendments, read a third time and passed as amended.

2.57 p.m.

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]

The Bill was deferred.

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]

The Bill was deferred.

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

A Bill intituled:

“An Act to amend the Court of Appeal Act.”

[Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]

Mr. Nandlall: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I rise to move that the Court of Appeal (Amendment) Bill 2025 – No. 3/2025 now be read a second time.

Mr. Speaker, I saw a post circulating on social media that the National Assembly continues as usual. Those who are saying so have the luxury of being able to say so. We, as a Government, are grieving like everyone else in this country. We are parents. We have families. We have children. We have brothers and sisters. We are grandparents, too. We know what tragedy is. Like all those who are genuinely grieving, we are grieving. Our President has led from the front on this matter and has made a commitment that we are demonstrating that we are delivering on, that every effort

will be made to ensure that this matter is properly investigated and that the law takes its natural course.

At the beginning of these proceedings, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the House, our Prime Minister, made a statement and outlined our position for the official record of this National Assembly. National security is a matter of utmost importance in this Parliament, and what is under question, as a result of this unfortunate tragedy, is also national security. We have some very crucial legislative intervention here today that is intended to bolster our national security apparatus and capabilities. Rather than be in this House, serve the people's interest and demonstrate their commitment to, in a real way, making a contribution to improve the national security apparatus of our country, those on the other side, elected by the people, choose to be elsewhere and to abandon their responsibility to the people of Guyana on these important matters – these important Bills. They have gone to play politics on the streets of this country, to abuse emotions and to exploit emotions for political ends. Mr. Speaker, we must recognise these things. In Government, we do not have the luxuries of that. We have to be here, and we have to do the Government's business because, at the end of the day, the people of Guyana deserve a better life and a better country, and we are committed to delivering that to the people of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, against that backdrop, I want to speak on the Court of Appeal (Amendment) Bill, a Bill that is small in size but significant in its impact. The justice system of our country is one of the cornerstone institutions of our democracy. It is one of the crucial institutions that will ensure that justice is delivered in our country. Many today who are calling for justice should have been here today to speak on this Bill, but they prefer to be elsewhere, doing something that will not have any real impact other than advancing their narrow, political causes. Our Government has shown its commitment, over and over again, in partnering with the judiciary, in resourcing the judiciary, in providing the legislative framework for the judiciary and in every form and fashion, enabling the judiciary to perform its constitutional role and functions efficiently. Today, we are tabling, and we are putting forward another initiative in this regard.

The Court of Appeal of Guyana is one of the important upper echelons of the hierarchical structure of our judiciary. It is the court that is immediately below the highest court in our system. It is a court that, for many years, served as our apex court. It was established in 1966. Since its establishment, by Section 34 of its enacting statute, it has had a quorum of not

less than two judges and not more than five. That has been the composition of the Court of Appeal from 1966 until 2023, nearly six decades. Litigation has increased many, many folds in six decades. Many decades ago, the constituent composition of the Court of Appeal required adjustment to enlarge the complement. We only did so in 2023, when we moved and passed an amendment in this House on 24th April, 2023, to move that figure from five to nine.

Mr. Speaker, we have had, historically, a backlog of cases in our judicial system. That problem has assumed national notoriety. We spent many decades crafting new initiatives and innovative measures. We introduced technology, all designed to address this issue. Yes, I am pleased to report that we have made significant changes – significant improvements. Some of the measures, just for the record, that we have implemented over the years with funding from many institutions like the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). We had financial measures that paid judges a particular incentive, in addition to their normal remuneration package, to dispose of backlogged cases.

Then we had a measure whereby we used the rules of court to weed out thousands of cases that remained in the system but were ineffectively abandoned by operation of court at the time. Then we introduced a new civil procedure rules system, and they have worked wonderfully. Those civil procedure rules singularly have managed to bring our backlog, at least in the High Court, to a level where we have a fairly efficient way in which cases are now being dispatched. We also introduced technology whereby in all of our courts, even in the Magistrates' Courts, we have appliances and apparatus that allow for evidence to be recorded in real time and for lawyers to get the transcript within a few hours after the day's proceedings. Just a few years ago, anyone who had a fleeting engagement with our court system would have known of the arduous task of judges and magistrates having to write in longhand every word that came out of the witness's mouth and every word that came from the lawyers as [*distortion in audio*] nations.

Mr. Speaker, just to implement that system, we had to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on equipping the courts. We had to air-condition them. We had to ensure that the equipment was [*distortion in audio*] because [*distortion in audio*] the vernacular in our country. We had to ensure that we got a type of equipment that translates our language and our accent and the vernacular of our people in their normal

speaking terms, get that to be absorbed and replicated back in words. These things took years and took a lot of money and training to have it done, but we did it. It was largely the People's Progressive Party/Civic's successive administrations that have done all of this. When Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) came, we established virtual courts across this country. Again, President Ali led this initiative almost singularly. He met the Chancellor and said that we have to have these virtual courts that were then being used in other countries, and we brought them into Guyana. Today, we have virtual courts in every part of the country, in particular, at all of our major prison centres, where the prisoners do not have to go to court. They can stay in prison, and in very close proximity to the prison centres are containerised courts. They go there and they patch into the magistrates and the lawyers, *et cetera*, and the cases are heard.

Mr. Speaker, we have built courthouses all across the country. Almost every two or three months, you would see in the public domain the opening of a court or the turning of a sod for the construction of a new magistrates' court. I do not know of any part of Guyana where we do not have an almost new magistrate's court building. As I have said elsewhere, the High Court building in Georgetown and the High Court building in Berbice are historical sites.

3.12 p.m.

They are part of the National Trust of Guyana; they are celebrated historical architectures in our country. They are old but they have been renovated and are all in pristine condition. At our Court of Appeal, we extended the edifice there. Now, we can have – I believe – three courts sitting at the same time. It is against that backdrop that we are increasing the complement of Judges. Just to put on the record also, in the High Court for decades, we had only 12 High Court Judges. In 2013, we expanded that to 20 High Court Judges. Today, I believe, for the first time in the history of our country, we have 20 High Court Judges.

Mr. Speaker, as I said, we increased the complement of our Court of Appeal Judges from seven to nine. The judiciary has informed the executive that number is still not sufficient. The backlog has moved significantly away from the High Court and is now at the Court of Appeal. We now have an accumulated number of cases. This measure of appointing 11 Judges now to the Court of Appeal is expected to bring great reprieve to that court and will allow several sittings of the Court of Appeal or quorum as it is called. When a court is fully constituted, it is called a quorum. With 11 Judges now,

there could be three quorums of Judges. This will be nine Judges at any given time, assuming there will still be two more who may be on leave or who could perform the functions of a chamber Judge.

This means that three sets of appeals can be heard right here in Georgetown. Better yet, the court can become itinerant and sit one quorum of Judges. The Court of Appeal can go to Essequibo, spend a month, hear all the cases and appeals pending there. Another quorum can go to Berbice and sit there continuously until it addresses the major number of important cases that are pending in the appellate system there. Of course, the National Assembly nor the Executive can dictate or direct how the business of the judiciary is conducted. The judiciary is very much independent. I do not think that the judiciary would be opposed to sensible ideas and recommendations. Afterall, it is a public institution.

This small but important measure, as I said, will bring to the Court of Appeal a number of Judges who can tackle some of the very important cases that are pending in our country. This, as I said, is an intervention that the public would welcome greatly. On any given day, I get nearly 10 or more messages, either on my *WhatsApp*, in the form of letters or on *Facebook*. The President, I know, received a large number of letters. All of us here – Ministers and Members of Parliament (MPs) – when we go out to meet members of the public, we are bombarded with complaints about sloth in the judiciary. We are bombarded with complaints about persons' cases not being heard in a timely manner or appeals not coming up in time for hearings.

In Berbice, two Land Court Judges have been appointed since – I believe – March, 2024. Granted there was a vacancy in Berbice for a while but since March of last year, two Land Court Judges have been appointed and assigned to Berbice fulltime. Up to just yesterday or the other day, I kept getting messages that there are no Land Court Judges in Berbice. There are two Land Court Judges who have been sitting since – I believe – March, 2024. I hope that those who are listening to me would know that there are two Land Court Judges. They need their lawyers to get their cases up. Obviously, there is a backlog and once we are able to appoint more Judges, we will do so but the request must come from that important and independent institution. We cannot dictate to the judiciary what it should or should not do. With this brief remark, I commend this Court of Appeal (Amendment) Bill 2025 to the House. Thank you very much. *[Applause]*

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Attorney General.

Question put and carried.

Bill read a second time.

Assembly in Committee.

Bill considered and approved.

Assembly resumed.

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

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we now move to the Advance Passenger Information and Passenger Name Record Bill 2025 – Bill No. 4/2025, published on the...

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, may I?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, yes.

Ms. Teixeira: I believe that we are moving in the direction of an adjournment to another day. Having done the Court of Appeal (Amendment) Bill, we would like to now...

Mr. Speaker: Are you deferring this Bill also?

Ms. Teixeira: I beg your pardon.

Mr. Speaker: Are you deferring this Bill?

Ms. Teixeira: We will defer the other two Bills as well.

Advance 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 Advance Passenger Information and Passenger Name Record in respect of persons travelling to, departing from and transiting through Guyana and to operationalise the CARICOM Advance Passenger Information System and other related matters.”

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.”

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.”

[Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs]

Bills were deferred.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to a date and time to be fixed.”

[Prime Minister]

Motion put and agreed to.

Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips: Mr. Speaker, with your leave, I ask that we adjourn the Sitting to a date and time to be fixed.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, thank you for today's sitting. We now stand adjourn to a date to be fixed.

Adjourned accordingly at 3.22 p.m.