



**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*

21ST Sitting

Wednesday, 24TH February, 2021

**PARLIAMENT OFFICE
HANSARD DIVISION**

The Assembly convened at 10.16 a.m.

Prayers

[Mr. Speaker in the Chair]

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER

Addressing Technical Difficulties Regarding the Input and Output of feed from the Microphone System.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, we have quite a few announcements this morning. First, we have had quite a number of comments with respect to the input from Members into the microphone system and also the output. A number of options are being considered. We had mentioned raising the microphones, which was one option. The second thing we are looking at deals with Members who are having a problem when speaking with their masks on. The suggestion is that we put two podiums, one on either side, and the persons who have to speak would go to the podium and take their masks off. So, we are looking at that as another option. Of course, we would have to amend the Standing Orders to allow that to happen. So, those are with respect to inputs, for some clarity.

Second, is the audio feed. My apologies for starting late this morning. We were meeting with the technical team and were dealing with this issue. Apparently, two of the monitors that feed to the lower level of the Dome were off. They are now on, so we might hear a little better. A backup option is the headphones on your tables. If you plug the green jack into your headset, you will also hear the feed directly through an earphone. If you have problems listening, this is an immediate solution that the technical team has come up with not so long ago. That will help with the quality of the feed coming in and your audio going out this morning.

Concerns about the behaviour of the Media

I want to address a few other concerns. First, I have given permission for the media to have two representatives in the Dome, whether they be the video/camera men or the reporters. That will happen sometime this morning, if it has not already taken place.

I want to give a special caution to the media with respect to reporting on the procedure/proceedings in the National Assembly. In the Dome, the Speaker hears the persons speaking. The media is

allowed in, but to personally assign comments and heckles to Hon. Members of this House, I feel, the media opens itself to being sued. Had I been sitting at the bottom and see in the press a comment being attributed to me, I would ask that press person to find the evidence. Standards change. I think that it was the Hon. Sanjeev Datadin and the Hon. Attorney General, who said that the law is a living thing and that society and lives and change. I remember in the 1950s when a certain popular singer held a certain part of his trousers that it was considered very vulgar, but when Michael Jackson did it everybody followed.

To the media: I spoke this morning with the President of the Guyana Press Association, and I made known my concerns about the reporting of what is happening in the National Assembly, and about responsible reporting. In my history of covering and visiting parliaments, there was a big issue when the Parliament of Canada first opened itself to being televised live. In 1988, while conducting a Youth Parliament in Bermuda, no cameras were allowed in the Chamber. None! The Parliament of Bermuda had given us permission to use the Chamber, and had to pass a special resolution in that Chamber to allow us to use a camera in that House. That was in 1988. I have visited almost every Parliament in the English-speaking Caribbean, and I have seen responsible reporting and I have seen also how Standing Orders have changed.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we will continue to monitor what is happening. We want to ensure that we can listen to your concerns and, in this temporary home that we have, continue to implement some of your rational decisions, so that we all can feel a little more comfortable and efficient.

With that, let me ask the Clerk to continue.

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE [For Written Replies]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, there are six questions on today's Order Paper, and they are all for written replies. Questions one to five are in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Geeta Chandan-Edmond and are for the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs. Question six is in the name of the Hon. Member, Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir and it is for the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs and National Cooperation. The answers to all of these questions have been received and circulated in accordance with our Standing Orders.

Police Performance

Ms. Chandan-Edmond:

- (a) Could the Hon. Minister say what methods are used by the Ministry in monitoring and evaluating police performance in relation to crime solving?
- (b) Could the Hon. Minister also provide the results of the monitoring and evaluating of the said performance in the last three (3) months?

Minister of Home Affairs [Mr. Benn]:

- (a) The Ministry has Crime Observatory, Statistical and Research units which examine, track and assess, both directly and independently, GPF data and performance. A Strategic Monitoring and Evaluation unit evaluates achievements against key performance indicators. Computer routines, surveys and mapping are employed in the assessments.
- (b) An examination of the data for the past three months shows that the GPF was able to reduce serious crime by 21.9 %.

Complaints Made by Prison Inmates

Ms. Chandan-Edmond:

- (a) What is the investigation process for complaints lodged by prison inmates on mistreatment in prison?
- (b) How many of such complaints have the Guyana Prison Service received since the 2nd August, 2020?
- (c) Of these, how many are repeated complaints and how many have been found to be justified?
- (d) In the justified cases: what action has the Guyana Prison Service taken?
- (e) What independent avenues are there for prison inmates to lodge such complaints?
- (f) Has the Government considered setting up independent oversight mechanisms to investigate and address these complaints?

Mr. Benn:

- (a) Complaints are made to Duty Officers who then refer those unresolved to the Officer-in-Charge. This is done on a daily basis. On the formal weekly visit of the O-i-C, or as necessary, individual concerns are addressed. During quarterly formal visits and hearings by the Director of Prisons matters are further reviewed. Requests to meet and raise matters with the Prison Visiting Committees for interventions are made and accepted. There are, also, Inmate Complaint Committees, comprised of Orderlies, who meet fortnightly with the O-i-C. The Prisoners Welfare Officer is constantly available to address prisoner's concerns, additionally.
- (b) Four hundred and thirty-seven (437) complaints were received for the period.
- (c) Complaints were not repeated but similar in some cases. Few complaints were said to be justified.
- (d) Departmental or criminal actions were undertaken against those accused.
- (e) The Prisons' Visiting Committees are available for lodging of such complaints.
- (f) The Director of Prisons or the Minister can appoint special committees to investigate complaints. Members can be drawn from the Prisons Visiting Committees, the Inter Prisons Visiting Committee, the Agriculture Board, Training Board, Recruitment Board or the Sentence Management Board. These considerations are underway.

Trafficking in Illegal Drugs

Ms. Chandan-Edmond:

From 2nd August, 2020 to 31st December, 2020:

- (a) How many persons were arrested for trafficking in illegal drugs?
- (b) How many have been prosecuted?
- (c) How many resulted in convictions?

Mr. Benn:

- (a) Thirty-five (35) persons were arrested for trafficking by the CANU.
- (b) Thirteen (13) of these persons were charged and prosecuted.
- (c) Four (4) persons have been convicted thus far.

Solemn Crimes

Ms. Chandan-Edmond:

- (a) What is the number of serious crimes that have been investigated since 2nd August, 2020?
- (b) How many persons have been prosecuted for the aforementioned period?
- (c) What is the number of convictions broken down by the different types of crimes reported from 2nd August, 2020 to present?

Mr. Benn:

- (a) Three hundred and seventy-three (373) serious crimes were investigated.
- (b) Two hundred and sixty-seven (267) prosecutions were undertaken.
- (c) The number of convictions remain a work in progress awaiting judicial reviews.

The Guyana Police Force Strategy on Road Safety and the Road Traffic Legislation

Ms. Chandan-Edmond:

- (a) What is the Guyana Police Force strategy to raise greater public awareness of road safety and reduce traffic accidents amongst both road users?
- (b) Are there plans to review and strengthen the present Road Traffic legislation?
- (c) If yes, what are the timelines for the review and strengthening of the Road Traffic legislation?
- (d) If no, why not?

Mr. Benn:

(a) The Guyana Police Force has an ongoing education program through the print and electronic media, lectures to drivers of private and public transportation, lecture to schools. Working with the Ministry of Public Works, the National Road Safety Council and other stakeholders to erect traffic signs, road marking etc. Placing speed humps where necessary and maintenance of roadways, enforcement is done on a 24- hour basis with mobile and foot patrols with focus on hotspots through spotting exercises, driving under the influence of alcohol (DUI) exercise and speeding to reduce accidents on our roadways.

Answers to Questions (b) and (c):

New legislation is needed, a revised of the Motor Vehicle and Road Traffic Act Chapter 51:02 needs to be done immediately to amend and introduce new laws to curb traffic lawlessness and adjust to the changing society. Statistics had shown an increased number of vehicles imported into Guyana and increase in accidents due to inattentiveness, speeding and driving under the influence of alcohol. This is caused because fines and penalties are small and ineffective hence fines on all categories of offences should be increased by 100 percent being ticket and charge offences.

Agreement with Cormac Group LLC

Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir:

The Government of Guyana through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation on December 28, 2020 entered into a six-month Agreement with Cormac Group LLC to provide lobbying services on behalf of the Government and by extension the people of Guyana. The Contract was signed by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Ms. Elizabeth Harper.

In this connexion:

- (a) Can the Hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs provide the criteria used for the selection of the Cormac Group LLC?
- (b) Can the Minister map the various foreign policy scenarios that informed the choice of the specific firm?

- (c) Can the Minister indicate the procurement process utilized to hire Cormac Group LLC?
- (d) Can the Minister indicate whether other firms/groups were considered, the names of those groups/firms and indicate also the considerations which gave Cormac Group LLC the competitive advantage over the other firms/groups?
- (e) Can the Minister indicate to what extent will there be overlap with the functions of foreign service personnel, particularly personnel in Washington D.C?
- (f) Can the Minister state whether our Mission in Washington D.C is equipped to adequately represent Guyana's interests? If it is so, why did the Government deem it necessary to hire Cormac Group LLC? If not, what are the actions being taken to equip the Washington Mission with the required resources?
- (g) Given that the terms of the contract indicate that representation is being made on behalf of Guyana, can the Minister say what reporting mechanism has been established to inform the people of Guyana on the progress with the tasks assigned (save those with national security implications)?
- (h) Given that the Legislature is a branch of Government, what mechanisms are being put in place to ensure that the Opposition Parties in the National Assembly are engaged in this process with Cormac Group LLC?
- (i) Can the Minister undertake to update the Foreign Relations Sector Committee on Quarterly basis on the progress made by the Group?

Mr. Benn:

- (a) The firm has a credible track record and is well known for its expertise in understanding and navigating the political processes in Washington.
- (b) Among the primary roles of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation in advancing the national development agenda are the promotion of Guyana's trade and economic interests and the pursuit of foreign investment. In this regard, the Government is focused on securing markets for its productive sector, encouraging joint venture partnerships and attracting investment in the traditional industries of rice, sugar and bauxite

to enhance the sectors and to improve our agricultural potential as well as to infuse capital into our social sector. With its advantage of bipartisan government and business contacts, the Cormac Group is well placed to provide openings for Guyana in the key areas of its developmental focus. These include information technology, international trade, transportation, energy and the environment, as well as healthcare and financial services.

- (c) The Government utilized the single source procurement method to hire Cormac Group LLC.
- (d) Other groups and firms were initially considered. It is not appropriate to provide those names here. Suffice it to say that the Government utilized the option of a precedent adopted by all previous administrations of Government to contract the services of one company above others given the particular purpose to meet its requirements.
- (e) There will be no overlap with the functions of the foreign service, particularly those in Washington D.C.
- (f) Guyana's Mission in Washington D.C. is staffed with extremely competent diplomats who more than adequately represent Guyana's interests. The Cormac Group LLC will consult closely with the Embassy in the conduct of its work.
- (g) The Minister reports regularly to the National Assembly and also issues statements to the press on the work of the Ministry. The Ministry's outputs which will include results of the activities of the Cormac Group LLC will as necessary, form part of those reports and statements.
- (h) The activities of the Cormac Group LLC fall under the authority of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. The Opposition Parties in the National Assembly have various mechanisms with which to gauge the results of the Ministry's Work Programme.
- (i) It is established practice that the Minister is invited to update the Foreign Relations Sector Committee on matters pertaining to Guyana's foreign policy. If the Minister is invited by the Foreign Relations Sector Committee to brief that Committee on aspects relating to its Work Programme in which the Cormac Group LLC is involved, he remains ready to do so.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Motion

MOTION FOR THE APPROVAL OF THE ESTIMATES OF EXPENDITURE FOR 2021

WHEREAS the Constitution of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana requires that Estimates of the Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for any financial year should be laid before the National Assembly;

AND WHEREAS the Constitution also provides that when the Estimates of Expenditure have been approved by the Assembly an Appropriation Bill shall be introduced in the Assembly providing for the issue from the Consolidated Fund of the sums necessary to meet that expenditure;

AND WHEREAS the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana for the financial year 2021 have been prepared and laid before the Assembly on 2021-02-12.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That this National Assembly approves the Estimates of Expenditure for the financial year 2021, of a total sum of three hundred and fifty three billion, eight hundred and thirty three million, six hundred and twelve thousand dollars (**\$353,833,612,000**), **excluding twenty nine billion, two hundred and forty seven million, and seven hundred and forty six thousand dollars (\$29,247,746,000)** which is chargeable by law, as detailed therein and summarised in the undermentioned schedule, and agree that it is expedient to amend the law and to make further provision in respect of finance.

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

Assembly resumed budget debate.

Mr. Ramjattan: I must say that I am very happy to be here again. I think this might be my 29th budget speech or thereabouts. I have been here a very long time.

I want to make the opening that is a normal orthodoxy in these parts, and to say that the Budget has been brought in time and in accordance with the law. I congratulate the Hon. Minister. In accordance with the orthodoxy of the times, too, I will make a criticism. That is, in the content and the context of what we have as the Budget, we see a lot of disinformation and, quite frankly, half-truths and untruths. I will deal with them very specifically in the latter part, but allow me, Mr. Speaker, to deal with some generalities and, also, what I call matters that are preambular.

First of all, the thing about a budget that will have tremendous borrowings funding it... At the time when the upping of the limits of external loans and domestic borrowings came, I did not anticipate that, at the very commencement of the first budget, after the upping of these limits, we would have so much borrowing. I was brought up on a diet, especially from one of my political mentors, Dr. Jagan, who is also a big mentor for the People's Progressive Party/ Civic (PPP/C), that one has budgets that are balanced and not to get into this habit of undisciplined borrowing. Last year's Budget, emergency as it was, saw the extent of the borrowings being almost \$90 billion, which is kind of a deficit; a huge deficit Budget. If you would like to hear, what we did in five years was to control and have the discipline to ensure that, within a five-year period, the borrowings only came up to \$90 billion. One year, the PPP/C, against all the odds, stated it loves a balanced budget, and that one must get the taxes and the non-tax revenue base and that is how one must spend one's money. We, today, by virtue of the passing of those limits, have seen this kind of borrowing that will be a burden.

I will like to say that, although there was criticism of taxing and spending by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) Coalition Government, you are now borrowing and spending. That is your mantra. Do you know what borrowings do? Borrowings mean that you will have to tax the future generations, yet unborn. You seem not to appreciate that, and that is why of this year's Budget, a similar ilk to last year's Budget, \$109 billion will have to be borrowed so as to execute spending the amount of \$353 billion. [**Mr. Hamilton:** How did you arrive at that?] That is inside the Budget. I know that you would not comprehend it yet. You have another five years to comprehend it. You play your role by heckling speakers here all the time, notwithstanding, the little introductory remarks by the Speaker this morning.

I want to indicate, too, that this borrowing is going to create huge debts for the future generation. And the debts are going to be paid only by virtue of having taxes brought to higher rates at that time, if one wants to pay off those borrowings.

10.31 p.m.

That is a major fundamental error that I found here, because in five years you tried your best to keep the discipline and ensured that you received from the taxes. The enforcement passages under Mr. Statia who administers the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA). It brings the money in from those who avoids any evades but, no, take off those set of taxes and whatever.

There is also another preambular point that I want to make which has to do with the fact of disinformation that we did a lot more taxes. It was the same set of taxes that you are governing the country with that we had in Guyana. There was not one more tax that was ever applied anywhere; it was our enforcement that ensured people pay up.

On that preambular point, I want to state that I recently bought a book, *THE TRIUMPH OF INJUSTICE How the Rich Dodge Taxes and How to Make Them Pay* by Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman. These are top-notch Economists who had to deal with it. We know that when people do not pay their taxes, they then cause inequalities in society. They will start getting rich, start getting big houses – four and five houses – and all manner of things. For those who have to pay their taxes will be left with nothing but that which they are left with. The [*inaudible*] is saying there is one thing that causes runaway inequality, it has an engine and that engine is the tax system.

We have a Government that wants to bring that engine back into play when we try to cut the ferocity and the momentum of that injustice by virtue of the tax.

This Government has an attitude like Mr. Donald Trump. It does not want to pay taxes because it is smart. That is what it is trying to do and that is what Mr. Saez and Mr. Zucman talk about in their introduction. They stated that any civilization or culture that wants to indicate that they will go in that direction will have inequalities in their society.

This is what they said on that part. These persons here who have a very Trumpian characterisation, they would have nothing without the infrastructure.

He states on page seven:

“Trump himself would be nothing without the infrastructure that connects his skyscrapers to the rest of the world, the sewer system that carries their waste, the teachers who taught his lawyers how to read, the doctors and the public research that keep him healthy, let alone the laws and courts that protect his property. What makes communities thrive is not...”

[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, I do not mind the heckling but, the shouting across the Dome bothers me.

Mr. Ramjattan:

“... any unfettered free-for-all, it is cooperation and collective action. Without taxes, there is no cooperation, no prosperity, no common destiny – there is not even a nation in need of a President.”

That is what he said. Of course, he also indicated that the triumph of tax injustice is above all, a denial of democracy.

“If taxes enacted by our elected officials keep boosting the income of a privileged minority, who will keep faith in democratic institutions?”

It is important then, but I will come to it when I deal with the issue of those farmers at Mahaica Mahaicony Abary/Agriculture Development Authority (MMA/ADA). It was boastfully pronounced in this Budget that \$1.36 billion will go back to those farmers because they do not have to pay but, out of the treasury, \$289 million subvention will have to go there. That is an injustice, because you are taking back moneys that you would normally receive as rates and taxes and now giving it a subvention. They were doing it for two years under our Administration...

[Interruption]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, Mr. McCoy, I am hearing you quite clearly.

Mr. McCoy: *[Inaudible]*

Mr. Speaker: Except that I could do something about you.

Mr. Ramjattan: That is very important, we must live within our means, not go above it, trying to hang our hats where we cannot reach. Even if this is a populist in approach, even if everybody likes that, we could have a society that becomes dysfunctional because we are not spending within our means.

It is important that the Hon. Member, Mr. Kwame McCoy, gets a copy. I will get a copy for him. **[Mr. McCoy: Inaudible.]** I, certainly, will get a copy for him because I know he likes to read.

Another preambular critique that I would like to make has to do with environmental issues. The environmental issues that is in consonance with our international obligations means that we have to ensure that we do not do the massive flaring that goes on out there. Do you know that I am very saddened to hear from the Vice-President and the Hon. Minister, Mr. Vickram Bharrat, that we cannot get ExxonMobil Cooperation, up to this stage, to bring those pieces of spare parts that can make that compressor. This very important set of equipment that it has and it is part of the regulations that are now being violated or the terms of the contract is not good for Guyana. It talked a lot about the Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS) and it has an international company – multinationals which it hates plenty. It used to say that they are imperialists.

Now, in the Constitution of the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C), communist is still there and imperialism is a big word. It still allowed those bodies to deal with it as if it is a foot rag. When you put a soldier there, like Dr. Vincent Adams, to get the capacities and capabilities to deal with them, you shoved him out. Who do you have there now? You have no one with that capacity who could deal with these people. He came with the Mr. Barak Obama's Administration qualities and characteristics. He was almost a Deputy Secretary of Energy in the Obama's Administration. Out he goes and you, now, have an Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that is literally a poodle. It is very important, for the sake of our country and its commitments, under the Paris Agreement that we make sure we do the environmentally sound things. It will also be in accordance with the Low Carbon Development Strategy that you talked about. It will also be in accordance with not ensuring that fisheries and gas emissions are to the extent of affecting and making hazardous the lives of the people of Guyana. These preambular points are very important.

I wish, now, to proceed to what I heard from the Hon. Ministers, Mr. Joseph Hamilton and Mr. Sanjeev Datadin, who gave the impression like the impressions given in this document. I will read

a passage from it under agriculture. It is as if nothing was done under the five-year period of the APNU/AFC Government. At paragraph 4.34 the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance stated:

“Mr. Speaker, over the past five years, the agriculture sector suffered callous neglect, being left in complete decay as if the intention was to consign it into complete non-existence.”

Then he went on to say what the PPP/C will do. It is important that I deal with some of these matters now. I will deal with them just like how the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance dealt with them under the various titles under rice. If we did nothing, how do you account for the period during the last five years. A technological upgrade has been with the commissioning of brand-new seed clearing facility for the rice industry. That seed clearing facility, along with some other things that I will mention, ensured that production of rice yield increase from five point five tonnes per hectare to five point nine one tonnes in 2019. That is why, in 2019, we had the highest export earnings from rice US\$222 million. It is an increase that was far superior to anything you did in your 23 years – marginal. We also ensured that Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) engaged new markets in the rice industry. The new markets were from Mexico, Benin and Ivory Coast. We went to get the new markets and we got them. It saw an increase to 526 tonnes of paddy from a previous year when it was 470 tonnes. It was in the rice industry the International Organization for standardization (ISO) certification. We started to make the central laboratory at the GRDB and it was accredited for international best standards. It is called the ISO/IEC 17025 standard. That is what was done.

In 2019, that central laboratory transitioned laboratory operations across the country too. It helped... [Mr. McCoy: *Inaudible*) the rice farmers?] Of course, the rice farmers were proud of us too. [Mr. McCoy: Which rice farmers?] All of the rice farmers were glad. I hope that you would start the process to talk to them, so that we could see millions of tonnes and more this year. Let us see that.

Under sugar, we had a situation where, Mr. Speaker, you know it just like I do, the Guyana Sugar Cooperation (GuySuCo) incurred a debt of more than \$82 billion. Again, we come to what is debt. We must not enter into the valley of debt; we must try to avoid that valley.

The Kwame McCoys' of this country would want us to enter the abyss; we are not going to go there. That is why we did what we did with GuySuCo and brought down the projections to 97,000 tonnes after four or six months in Government. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** *(Inaudible)*] We called it rightsizing. You already spent \$9 billion and that is the only thing that you are talking about now.

It is important to know that when one goes to speak to the sugar workers across the country... They indicated that just like how the PPP/C closed estates [**An Hon. Member (Government):** *(Inaudible)*] The PPP/C had closed estates, you would get the impression from the disinformation that it did not close any. You will get the impression that it closed nothing but, it did close estates in the sector. We did, but we did it after a Commission of Inquiry (COI). That Commission of Inquiry indicated that we have to rightsized and we did that.

The dismantling of this policy, so that you can have sectarian interest benefit is not going to be the right thing for this country; I maintain that point. I rather suspect that hesitantly, I understand, you budgeted \$2 billion this year when GuySuCo asked for \$20 billion.

10.46 a.m.

You are well aware that it might not have a future with that sort of spending that ought to have gone by virtue of the opinion of the GuySuCo officials. I am happy but I am still sad that \$2 billion more is going there. It should not be.

It is important that we understand what was done at the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA). In the NDIA that functions as Guyana's apex organisation, dealing with all public matters pertaining to management and improvement of extension services, irrigation, flood and so on, we know what it is. This is what we did. Do not ever say that *yall ain't do nothin. Oh God, yall ain't do nothin.* You carried that line to certain gullible constituents, and they believed it. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** Are you calling the people gullible?] Absolutely, because they believe the lies. The NDIA installed pump stations across Regions 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 worth 2,921,000,000. The areas include Lusignan, Beterverwagting, Good Hope, Friendship, Vigilance, Buxton and Herstelling. In Region 2 we have Lima, Reliance, Land of Plenty, Aberdeen and Colombia. In Region 3 we have Trafalgar and Windsor Forest. In Region 5 we have Bengal, Gangaram, Eversham and Joppa in Region 6 which sums it to almost \$3 billion in pump stations alone. Does that mean that you do

not have anything that we did here? Bagotsville sluice and Thierens sluice were designed to drain in the vicinity of almost 2,000 acres of land. Over \$100 million were spent there.

There was an amphibious excavator. The National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) commissioned the country's first amphibious excavator on 24th May, 2019. The machine was obtained through certain funds from the Government of Japan and from Government's funds. The excavator is capable to work in waterways as deep as 16 feet (ft.) and it is fully self-propelled. [**Hon. Member (Government):** Where is it?] It is there. You have enjoyment of it now – *nothin we ain't do, nothin*. Misinformation is your top vocation these days.

The state-of-the art cutter suction dredge was acquired by the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority in January, 2019. For the cutter suction dredge, a lot of the drive units and the spot legs were installed in a pontoon constructed by the Guyana National Industrial Company Incorporated (GNIC). It cost \$329 million. *Nothin we ain't do*, that is what you are saying. Over the past five years of these interventions, what is called the drainage coefficient of coastal Guyana has been raised from 1 ½ inches to 1 ½ inches in 24 hours, so that considerably reduced the risk of flood in coastlands for both agricultural and housing areas. Georgetown has also seen that capacity with the NDIA which is to ensure that the flood it used to get for days, now that has come to a halt.

In the Hinterland too, a huge set of things were done. There are eight water harvesting systems – three in Massara, two in Annai, two in Ruperti and one in Aranaputa which contributed to providing irrigation and continuous supply during the dry season of water for agriculture. These Hon. Members would never appreciate all of that and, to a large extent, they want to dismantle that.

The decentralisation of the NDIA activities saw offices opened in a number of regions. It was in keeping with our policy of realignment, just like the Guyana Police Force (GPF), to ensure that the regional divisions are in accordance with the political divisions. We had a number of those things happening so that there would be direct contact with the NDIA officials within these regions.

The Pesticide and Toxic Chemicals Control Board has done wonderful things to ensure that Unit moves on with its work. The Board achieved the following: commissioning a state-of-the-art Chemical Storage Facility at Mon Repos. There was plenty money spent on that. *Nothin allyo ain't do, wuh y'all do?* It then went to its support base and said that *nothin dem bai dis ain't do*.

The rehabilitation of the Chemical Residue Laboratory was to allow for the accreditation and international certification. It is very important in this modern world. We commissioned the newly equipped Pesticide Chemicals Residue Laboratory which now ensures international recognition. [Mr. McCoy: It is incomplete.] Even if it is incomplete, it still works. You had a deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) laboratory for the Police for years. You could ask Mr. Clement Rohee. We completed it but I gave him some kudos because he had started it. *We na do nothin, Mr. Speka, nothin we na do.*

We go now to Hope Coconut Estate. Again, the Coalition from 2015 to 2020 built a whole set of bridges in that Estate. They were replaced. We had 50,000 coconut seedlings, annually, as a result of the new seedling unit.

The National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI)... [Mr. Charlie: He has to read it. He does not even understand.] I have to read it because I want to keep within the script. To keep within the script means to talk accurately into what was done and not from your head. You would go... How did he pronounce the word again? [Mr. Mahipaul: He said, 'batty lion'.] If you had stuck to your script you would have pronounced it properly.

It is important too that crop diversification is a big thing. In the non-traditional crops for the first half of 2019, it stood at 704 metric tonnes of production, whereas in 2014 it was 438,000 tonnes. Is that not almost as doubling it in a five-year period? *Nothin we ain't do bass, nuttin.*

Pepper production in 2018 approximately 16 metric tonnes of pepper were produced compared to 9,000 tonnes in 2014, which is 69% or 70% increase. That is why we are saying that this is as a result of what NAREI and the Guyana School and Agriculture did. The gingers and onions are the same. Today, Guyana's production of ginger is 27,900 metric tonnes, with an export value of some \$18 million. [Mr. McCoy: *Inaudible.*] Yes. It simply feels that was nothing done.

Turmeric, now, has gone into commercial production when the first ever turmeric factory was commissioned in 2017. [Mr. Charlie: The word is pronounced tuh-muh-ruhk.] Tuh-muh-ruhk factory, sorry. Whatever the pronunciation is, turmeric has gone up in production. Nothing has been done. We are saying that it is important that so many things were done and it is in the...

Aquaponics training in Secondary schools was done. Very importantly, the aquaponics in the Satyadeow Sawh Aquaculture Station has helped to ensure that a number of farmers diversify into aquaponics. Observations, monitoring and control were done in the Fisheries Department by the acquisition of \$99 million boat which monitors the activities out there. This vessel is used to ensure that fishing boats are working within the regulations all across the Marine section of Guyana. *Nothing we ain't do, nothing we ain't do.* I do not need to go on to...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have done a lot in the last 30 minutes. To continue to do so you will need an extension.

Opposition Chief Whip [Mr. Jones]: Cde. Speaker, I do move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may continue towards your conclusion.

Mr. Ramjattan: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. This is page 58. There are lots more, but the five minutes will curb me now.

We all know that governance was severely trampled upon in the last session. There was no Special Select Committee. If there were some studies done, we would have seen that inside of this National Assembly that we went to the Special Select Committee for two Bills, namely: the Food Security Bill and the Animal Welfare Bill. I do not understand how you can just have a flip out and not see that indeed this thing is important to have accurate information inside. A budget document from a Minister of Finance is an important document for the records. It must have truths in it and not misinformation. The Government went and said that we never sent the two Bills to a Special Select Committee. We had the Juvenile Justice Bill and there were some other Bills too that were sent to the Special Select Committee. Do not come here and give the impression that these facts are not accurate.

I want it to be understood and, I think, I had mentioned that we have to go back on a number of things in relation to what was done at the Mahaica Mahaicony Abary/Agriculture Development Authority. We did the farm-to-market roads there, rehabilitation of De Edward Sluice and we ensured that we got from the farmers the modern rates and very reasonable rates. Unfortunately,

the PPP/C Administration has reversed these new charges and has reverted it to be a liability to the Government and a burden on the Treasury.

The Government should also bear in mind that subsidising of agricultural commodities by Government is frowned by the World Trade Organization (WTO), since it introduces unfair competition on world trade. If challenged by others, trade in Guyana's rights could be placed in jeopardy with severe consequences to the nation's foreign exchange earnings. I now understand that Belize has questioned that sort of things happening at the MMA/ADA. Belize has raised this issue already. Then, it is important that we be very cautious as to what we do.

These are some of the points that are very valid, in the context of a Budget debate, that gives the impression that nothing was done. I would like the Government to do what I now make as a simple demand of them. I propose that there be a wage increase of 10% across the board, retroactive to January, pending the final negotiations with all stakeholders in Government, in the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU), in the public service and other unions in the public service.

11.01 a.m.

It is in recognition of the hardship faced by public servants, today, in this COVID-19 period. Please, if there is any heart ensure that happens. We would like lots more, but 10% minimum is what we seek at this stage.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. former Vice-President.

Let me apologise to the viewers online and to the Hon. Members who joined us online, we had a horrible feed this morning. Everything is back up-and-running. I want to assure the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, that we will upload your presentation, in its entirety, shortly.

Hon. Member, the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha, you may proceed.

Minister of Agriculture [Mr. Mustapha]: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I wish to commend my Colleague, the Hon. Dr. Ashni Singh and his team, for bringing a comprehensive, a visionary and a transformative Budget to this National Assembly. A Budget that will be touching the lives of every single citizen and every single sector in a positive way.

I listened to my Colleague over there, Mr. Khemraj Ramjattan. If a person was here for the first time to listen to his speech, he/she may say that this man is full of virtue and honesty. That person must remember that, right here in this hallowed hall, not so long ago, this building became a monument to the preservation of our democracy and freedom. The Hon. Member and his Party tried to steal our freedom and democracy from the Guyanese people. To come here and to ask for a 10% wage increase for public servants, when his Government dismissed more than 35,000 people, how ironic is that? The Minister of the Public Service already indicated in her presentation, at various forums, that there is money in the Budget for increase in wages. It is very cheap politics to come here and try to play on the emotions of people.

As I said, just over six months ago, we were here in this National Assembly, in this hallowed hall, to prevail over attempts by the Hon. Member and his Party from trampling on our Constitution. I am here, proudly standing, just over six months, right here in this building, to support a budget that will improve the lives of every Guyanese and every sector in our country.

The Hon. Member spoke about debt and the fact that his Government did not borrow when it was in Government. It received a healthy treasury. The economy was healthy when the People's Progressive Party/Civic left Government in 2015. It did not have to borrow; it did not have the cause to borrow money. What we received in August of last year, the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance will tell you – he already answered the question – that the treasury was in a deficit and that the treasury was bankrupt as a result of no funds being in the country. That is the reality. He aptly described the period in his budget speech, speaking from 1966 to 1992, speaking from 1992 to 2015 when there was economic renewal, when the country saw progress. He, then, spoke from 2015 to 2020 when there was a regression, when there was economic collapse and when our rights were denied by the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government. [**An Hon. Member:** *Inaudible*] The other period. I hope when the Minister responds he talks about the next period, from 2020 way beyond into the future, where we will move this country, make it the envy in the Caribbean and in this hemisphere.

To come here after it was rejected less than seven months ago, by the electorate, to talk about cheap politics, to speak about misinformation in the Budget, to speak about half-truths... We heard a lot of half-truths and we heard a lot of misinformation just now. It has come to a position where it has boxed itself in a corner. It is being isolated, today, in this country, because people go to every

corner of the country... [**An Hon. Member:** When will you talk about agriculture?] I will talk about Agriculture just now, but I have to respond to the misinformation being brought to this House. ... people are speaking about the positive programmes in our 2021 Budget. I just want to quote a few. In the *Stabroek News* 16th February, 2021, edition, the Central Corentyne Chamber of Commerce stated on the \$383.1 billion:

“...cited no new taxes, ...”

The Central Corentyne Chamber of Commerce ‘cited no new taxes’, Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan. Taken with the reversal of key taxes in the 2020 Budget will once again:

“incentivise the private sector, motivate the general populace and bring relief to the ordinary man.”

The Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry Guyana hailed the Budget as transformational. In the *Stabroek News* 17th February, 2021, editorial the Guyana Council of Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (GCOPD) stated:

“(GCOPD) wishes to congratulate the Government of Guyana for comprehensively addressing the needs of the disability community in the 2021 national budget.”

The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Guyana (FITUG), is the Union with the largest block of workers. Do you know what it said? In the *Stabroek News* 15th February, 2021, edition, FITUG stated:

“The Guyana Federation of the Independent Trade Unions of Guyana (FITUG) after considering the 2021 The National Budget is pleased with several measures proposed. We believe that the policies and programs outlined by the Government through the Budget will rediscover for the benefit of Guyanese from all backgrounds.

FITUG has taken note of the many initiatives to put more money into the hands of our people and alleviate the burdens placed on their backs by the former Coalition Ministry.”

Small political parties are happy to see inputs reflected in the Budget and I can go on and on. The Georgetown Chamber of Commerce, the American Chamber of Commerce (AmCham) Guyana,

the Guyana Manufacturing and Services Association Limited and everyone have complimented this Budget except for the APNU/AFC and the 32 of *dem* over there.

Mr. Speaker: Correction: 32 of the Hon. Members over there.

Mr. Mustapha: Pardon me, it is 31 because the other Hon. Member has partaken in this Budget discussion.

The Hon. Member said just now that the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance said that there is no tax or that there were no taxes in its programmes and that we are claiming taxes on the Guyanese people. We came here in October to reverse drainage and irrigation (D&I) charges, land rental, value-added tax (VAT) and a number of commodities in this country. What is the Hon. Member saying? I do not want to take all of the time to rebut him but, I think, that he has spoken a lot of misinformation. He came here prepared. I thought that I was in a *gaff* shop passing around like the boys on the street corners or in the rum shop *gaffing* all the time – something like that. Hon. Member, you must come here with facts.

Barefacedly, the Hon. Member referred to the Report of the Commission of Inquiry Guyana Sugar Corporation Volume 1. He never quoted it, but he referred to it. He said that the COI said to rightsize the sugar industry. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you what the COI states. Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, listen. This is what the COI stated about the way forward:

“The Sugar Industry remains vital and important to the economy of Guyana and its people, many of whom have had their lives touched by the Sugar Industry.

The Sugar Industry must be given an opportunity not to just survive, but to be revitalized and to become a vibrant, efficient and profitable business where employees have a sense of security and optimal use can be made of resources...”

The COI states, again:

“GuySuCo needs a significant injection of funds combined with competent management teams and leaders to go forward.”

I am still looking for the word ‘rightsized’ which is the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan’s, word. The Commission of Inquiry then went on to state:

“ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

6.7 Every government has an obligation and a commitment to all the people of the country.”

That is what we are doing; we have a commitment to the people of this country. There is one other part that I want to quote from the COI. Listen to this Hon. Member Mr. Ramjattan, since you are speaking about rightsized. The Commission of Inquiry states:

“...THE COI DOES NOT RECOMMEND THE CLOSURE OF ANY ESTATE AT THIS TIME.”

This is what the COI states. I will provide the Hon. Member with a copy of the COI because he probably never saw it. He talked off the top of his head. The Hon. Member, then, came to this House, a little while ago, and spoke about the performance of the sugar industry. I mentioned it before and I am mentioning it again. In 2015, when we left Government, the Guyana Sugar Corporation was on a path to recovery. When one comes to this House, one must not come with street corner *gaff*, rum shop *gaff* or market *gaff*. One must come with facts and I will state the facts.

In 2015 when we left Government, because of the work we did in the sugar industry the production was 231,071 tonnes. Members, listen how it goes after the Coalition took over. In 2015 – 231,000 tonnes, in 2016 – 183,000 tonnes, in 2017 – 137,000 tonnes, in 2018 – 104,000 tonnes, in 2019 – 92,000 tonnes and last year – the lowest ever in the history of GuySuCo – 88,000 tonnes. That is what it did in the sugar industry. Do you know why it did that? It set up a Commission of Inquiry hoping that the COI will conclude for the entire industry to be closed. When the COI said that it should not close any of the estates; it said that it is not gospel. It will close it. It will go ahead and close it.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, was leading the Government team when it had the consultation. It did not ask the subject Minister at that time – the Minister of Agriculture – to help the team nor the Minister of Finance. Mr. Ramjattan who was normally used by the Coalition, went and led the Government delegation. When the Guyana Agricultural and General Workers’ Union and the Opposition asked that ‘look, you are closing down the factories in these areas, let us go and do economic impact studies.’ Do you know what the gentleman said? He said that we are not doing

an economic impact study, if you want you can do it. The Hon. Member, Mr. Seepaul Narine who is here could testify to that discussion.

11.16 a.m.

They had all the time to close the sugar industry and that was the way they wanted it. Before I go further, I would like to state that I am very disappointed... [*Interruption*]

Attorney General and Minister of Legal Affairs [Mr. Nandlall]: Mr. Speaker, if I may? Minister, one minute.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, is it a Point of Order?

Mr. Nandlall: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to listen to the Hon. Minister.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much. Minister, you may continue.

Mr. Mustapha: As I said, last Monday, I was not in the National Assembly for some parts of the debate. However, when I learnt what took place and what was said, I was very disappointed. There is an Hon. Member, or who calls himself honourable, who is supposed to set the example and who is the Chief Whip of the Opposition, that called the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo) a bloodsucker on the backs of the taxpayers. I am asking the Hon. Member to apologise to the workers of this country. Anyone who has decency and anyone who supports the workers must condemn that blatant wicked statement. That is the sort of way they treated workers and that is why they are over there. They tried their best to rig the elections to stay in power because they knew that people would not have voted for them. And so, now, they have started to degrade and use all sorts of derogatory words to describe the sugar workers and to describe the workers of the country. And Mr. Ramjattan has the gumption to come and support it. Today, he had the opportunity of redemption, to condemn his fellow Member, but he failed to do it. He supported them because he was used as a pawn by the Coalition Government to close the sugar industry.

If I did not know better that there are people from all walks of life ... [*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Duncan, I can hear you too, please.

Mr. Mustapha: ...who are employed by GuySuCo, then I would have said that the Hon. Member's statement was racist. But I will not say that. I will say that they *take their eyes and pass* the sugar workers in this country.

The only right prediction the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, ever made, in the history of this country and that came to pass, was that their party, which is now under the mask of the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) would be a dead meat party. And today, your prediction is true, the Alliance For Change (AFC) is a dead meat party. Today, your prediction has come to pass; that is the only true prediction you have ever made. When the People's National Congress Reform (PNCR) was sucking the life out of GuySuCo by the sugar levy, was that not a bloodsucking activity? When the previous Government rented a small *bottom-house* as a drug bond, was that not a blood sucking activity? I think that every right-minded Guyanese and every decent person must call on the Hon. Member to retract his statement and make a public apology to the workers of this country.

I will now turn to the agricultural sector. [**An Hon. Member of the Opposition:** (Inaudible)] It is because of the misinformation and half-truths that are being peddled here that I have to set the record straight. If I do not have time to finish my presentation, I will go, but the Guyanese people will know and see the reality of what this Government would be doing for them. It is important that we correct the misinformation that is being peddled in this House.

Agriculture, as the Hon. Member would have stated in his budget presentation, contributes 27.1% of non-oil Gross Domestic Product (GDP). I want to say that over the last five years the entire agriculture sector was in a state of hopelessness. Again, when one is speaking about agriculture, he or she should use facts and figures.

In 2014, the last year... our budgetary allocation for agriculture was \$9.7 billion, excluding non-rice and non-sugar. In 2016, the budgetary allocation, under the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance for Change (APNU/AFC) Government, dropped to \$8.6 billion. Is that the way you wanted to improve agriculture, by reducing the expenditure over the years on agriculture? From 2016 to 2021, the allocation in the agricultural sector has been increased by more than 100%.

Budget 2021 builds on what was put forward in the 2020 emergency budget. It provides the catalyst for the revitalisation of the agriculture sector and laying the groundwork for the recreation of

Guyana as the breadbasket of the Caribbean and the agriculture powerhouse of this part of the hemisphere.

The agriculture sector is no longer suffering from poor management, but rather, we have once again taken up our position as the leader of agriculture in the region. That position was surrendered when it was taken up by Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and crafted a food policy for the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). I had a meeting, and not so long ago, His Excellency presented a document to the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) Committee and that document will come up for discussion.

Every time the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) is in Government, Guyana has leaders who have vision. We have had the Jagdeo's initiative adopted by CARICOM and, now, we have our young vibrant and energetic President who will once again lead our nation in the CARICOM arena. One must have vision and, as I said, it is not our fault if they do not have vision over there. When one looks at the vision we have, I have summarised it in five points. We want an agriculture sector that encourages investments and where agriculture producers operate profitable businesses. That is the first aim. We will build an agriculture sector that is market driven with a clear focus on the transformation of raw materials into healthy processed product. We will build an agriculture sector that consistently contributes to the national food security and nutrition.

The Hon. Member spoke about the Food Safety and the Animal Welfare Bills. Do you know why those Bills are not in existence yet? It is because of the draconian laws in those bills. Those bills will have to come back for amendments to ensure that we are with the other parts of the world.

We want an agriculture sector that enhance rural communities through employment and livelihood generation and an agriculture sector that builds resilience to vulnerability, shocks and stress, with emphasis on adaptation to climate change. These are our objectives for the agriculture sector in this country. They probably cannot comprehend the summary of a vision and this is why they are over there. The only thing they can do is to heckle. They cannot listen and learn. That is why they are over there and will continue to be there. *Empty barrels make the most noise.* They cannot listen and learn, but an *empty vessel makes the most noise.*

I would like to turn to the rice sector. The Hon. Member spoke about rice, but which Government coined the term "rice is private business"? It was the Hon. Member and his Coalition Government.

In my 2020 Budget presentation, I said in my speech that rice is Guyana's business; rice is the people's business. We will work to see the rice industry flourish. We assessed the rice industry and found that our rice farmers were enduring many challenges and we have brought the solutions.

The Hon. Member has said that he is criticising the kind of intervention which we have made. It is a stated fact. One could go into the communities and areas and would know that the energy level is very high. Once again, we are seeing a new interest in the agriculture sector because of the measures that we have put in place. We have reduced land rental and drainage and irrigation (D&I) charges. The previous Government had increased it by over 600%. Now, a farmer who used to pay \$15,000 annually for one acre, is now paying just \$3,500 per acre; thanks to our Government. And the Hon. Member is criticising those policies.

He is talking about the World Trade Organization (WTO), but if he did not know, that over the years, it is the United States of America (USA) that has been subsidising the agriculture sector in those countries on an annual basis. Every year, the Government of the United States supports and subsidise the agriculture sector.

We as a Government recognises the potential in the agriculture sector. We are not like them *to put all our eggs in one basket* and when work is asked to be done, only to be told to wait until the oil and gas revenue come on stream. We are, once again, seeing the contribution to our GDP by this important sector. Agriculture is here to stay; we will continue to invest in the agriculture sector of our country.

Although, the APNU/AFC placed high increases on these areas, almost all the infrastructure was neglected. Last year, I remember when I took over this position, I had to go to Cabinet for emergency funds to do work in the D&I system at Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary-Agricultural Development Authority (MMA/ADA). We had to expend over \$90 million, over time. If one goes now to the MMA scheme, one could see the entire waterway; thousands of miles of canals are cleared, and proper infrastructure is now in place.

As Minister of Agriculture, I heard in one budget speech that drones were sowing seeds. I am still looking for the drones. The APNU/AFC is probably a fan of flying items and they put it like that. As I said, we have reduced land rental and D&I charges. We have taken out the value-added tax (VAT) on agriculture input, machinery, and pesticides. As a result of that, farmers are now getting

these items at a cheaper cost. They are now saving, as the Hon. Minister would have stated in his budget speech – \$1.3 billion is being saved by the rice farmers. Those moneys have now become disposable income and is being used in the community to enhance the life of every single citizen.

I would like to speak on some of the programmes that we would be doing. The Guyana Rice Development Board (GRDB) have been providing the necessary support to our rice farmers. For last year and for this crop, we have provided 25,902 bags of seeds to farmers. We have provided five mechanical sprayers to bring relief to the farmers from the paddy bugs. In 2021, we will be procuring another five long reach sprayers to aid paddy bug control for \$7 million, which would reduce the damage caused by the paddy bugs and reduce the high cost of spraying the paddy bugs by 60%. Nationally, there is a lack of capacity to dry paddy during the peak season of harvesting. Accessibility is a challenge due to the limited number within each region and the cost to transport paddy is high due to the distance of farm to drying floor. This year we will be constructing six new drying floors in Regions 2, 3, 4 5 and 6 at a cost of \$80 million. This will see an additional 50,000 bags of paddy being dried for crop.

11.31 a.m.

We will continue to do construction on farm-to-market roads. As a matter of fact, as I am speaking here, not so long ago, my Hon. Colleague, Dr. Ashni Singh and myself went to West Berbice and we signed a contract for \$229 million for the Onverwagt all-weather access road.

This year again, we would see, within the Numbers 52 and 74 areas, new farm-to-market roads being constructed there. We would see new land being opened in those areas. Over 20,000 acres of land will be opened. Those are the sort of things we are talking about.

The Hon. Member would have talked about markets. What we have done over the last few months is to secure new markets in Hungary and Latvia. We have increased our quota to Brazil. We will now be supplying 34,000 tonnes of rice instead of the 24,000 tonnes that was normally supplied before.

The Hon. Member did not talk about the Panama debt to Guyana's rice millers because they signed a contract and the rice millers were left alone. Today, the Panamanian authority would have owed the Guyanese rice millers over \$2 billion, all thanks to the APNU/AFC Government. We are

working to resolve that issue. The Hon. Member did not talk about that. He conveniently left that out.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I am working to give you some more time. So, could someone move an extension?

Minister of Parliamentary Affairs and Governance and Government Chief Whip [Ms. Teixeira]: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that the Hon. Member have five minutes more to conclude. Thank you.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Mr. Mustapha: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We will continue to invest in the various sectors in the agriculture sector because we have recognised the importance of agriculture to the GDP of our country. We are now seeing more and more people getting involved in this activity. We have almost double the budget for the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA). The sum of \$12 billion will be expended this year in the NDIA to do infrastructure for new pump stations at Adventure, Cotton Field and Montrose. Over 54,000 acres of farmlands will be serviced by these pumps. We will have new excavators to distil channels and to continue to build the bank at Pomeroun. This year we will procure a pontoon with two excavators, specifically, for the Pomeroun area. The farmers there will have a lot of relief.

The National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) will have \$1.2 billion expended this year. Last year, the sum of \$15 million was spent to procure shade house material.

The previous Government wanted a green state economy and the Hon. Member just spoke about a Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). What was their green state economy? It was to paint everything in green and not put anything in place to resolve climate change. They were painting everything in green. They painted buildings, fences and everything else in green. They even wore green shirts.

Last year, we procured \$15 million in shade house materials. Those materials are now being made available to farmers and 100 shade houses will be built. And again, this year, that will continue. That is the smart way of doing agriculture.

The Hope Coconut Industries Limited (HCIL) – the Hon. Member spoke about many bridges. I am challenging the Hon. Member to take me there and point out those bridges. When I took over the Ministry of Agriculture, there was one halfway built bridge. I had to go and do remedial work to get the bridge done properly. This year, we will be expending \$70 million at the Hope Coconut Industries Limited. Last year, we would have built two new nurseries – one at Kairuni and one at Charity. This year, we will be building another four new nurseries – one at Leguan, one at Wakenaam, one at Number 63 Village in Corentyne and one in Region 5 at Fort Wellington. We are setting up the sectors within the agriculture sector to be in a state where we could take Guyana forward because we have recognised that more and more people – not only from Guyana, but also overseas – are coming to Guyana to invest in agriculture.

Gone are the days where people have given up hope. Today, the enthusiasm is very high. The energy levels are very high among farmers. Today, we have a Government that is responsive to the needs of the farmers. Every single day, since August of last year, I would have visited hundreds of communities and interacted with thousands of farmers, unlike those Hon. Members over there, who hid in their offices and behind their desks and did agriculture. Myself and my staff would normally go into the fields and listen to the plight of the farmers. That is the way one deals, practically, with the problems faced by the farmers.

I could go on and on, but as I said, the agriculture sector is about to take off. This year, the agriculture sector has seen an increase by 23%. We have moved the spending from \$18.5 million to \$22.6 billion – a 23% increase in the budgetary allocation for agriculture. And that will catalyse the agriculture sector to move Guyana forward. The Government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, has started and will continue to actively involve our partners – the farmers, fishers, agro-processors, exporters, producers' associations, chambers of commerce and developmental agencies – to ensure that we work together to fulfil our vision to be the agriculture powerhouse in this part of the world.

Today, the journey has started. We had the blueprint when we went to the election campaign. This is the blueprint – the manifesto of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. I will use a term to coin this as the engineer’s estimate to take us forward, prepared by the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh. This will move us forward this year. The journey started last year and it is an exciting time now in our country. Many people are coming on board. Almost the entire country is rallying around the Government because they want to see progress.

Mr. Speaker allow me to end where I started, this Budget is transformative, it is visionary, and it is comprehensive. I want to extend, rather than to come here and rant, rave and behave like we are in a *gaffing* session, I want to invite the Opposition to come onboard and join us in this exciting journey to take Guyana forward into the future.

I, now, commend this comprehensive budget to the honourable House. Thank you, very much.
[Applause]

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

I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Dawn Hastings-Williams, to make her contribution.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Before I properly speak to *Budget 2021*, I would like to respond to Hon. Member Mr. Mustapha’s invitation, of inviting us on this side of the House, to join in passing the Budget. I would not have had a problem if myself and Colleagues were consulted at the beginning of this Budget. Surely, I would have been very happy to pass this Budget.

I wish to acknowledge the hard work of the staff of the Ministry of Finance in putting together the estimates for the public sector for the year 2021. Congratulations to you. We surely admire your commitment and determination; an effort that you continue to give as our public servants. However, disappointingly, the documents that has been compiled has nothing significant to offer the public servants. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] If you listen, you will learn. Therefore, my question to the Hon. Minister with Responsibility for Finance is, what percentage increase in wages and salaries is this Government prepare to give to our public servants and our Joint Services? What was wrong in making that announcement during the more than four-hour budget speech? Does the Minister not have the authority to pronounce on such matters? Is there someone else who

is designated to make such a pronouncement, or are we telling the nation that there is another substantive Minister of Finance, in waiting?

Secondly, I wish to place on record of how sadden and embarrassed I am, as a Member of this honourable House, to see the descending and deteriorating standards of this august House. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, all of this is happening under your watch.

Forget for a moment that we are all politicians and place ourselves in the shoes of a parent. How many of you sitting in this National Assembly will appreciate or accept a high school debate that allows such comments and explicit adult toys being used, which we witnessed during the first day of this debate? What are we saying to the nation's children? I say no further.

The fundamental pillar of national development is political and economic inclusivity. It is above inclusive democracy and pluralism – qualities that this Administration lacks and surely does not exemplify. It is public knowledge that we live in a society of various religious, ethnic and political groups that should and must be consulted in putting together such an important document as the national budget. But what we have seen emerging as of 2020 is that the main Opposition political party, the APNU/AFC, was not consulted. In fact, the APNU/AFC was not even given the courtesy of an invitation. And if you say that is not true, I challenge the Government to bring to this House the evidence of the invitation extended to this side of the House; bring your evidence. The result of this is that this Budget presented in its present form is nothing but a spineless budget. I say that to say this, if we are to examine the economic growth from 2015 to 2019, one would clearly see that the then Minister of Finance, none other than Mr. Winston Jordan, was an astute steward of the economy of this country.

11.46 a.m.

I would say without a doubt, as the numbers have revealed themselves, the economic growth this nation experienced in the following years were: in 2015, 3.1%; in 2016, 3.4 %, [**Mr. Dharamlall:** What does it mean?] You figure it out. In 2017, 2.1% economic growth; in 2018, 4.4% economic growth and in 2019, 4.9% economic growth. That is the trajectory of economic growth that the APNU/AFC Government left and no matter how you twist it and turn it, the fact remains the same.

We laid the foundation for sustainable growth and development. We governed as a Coalition for all Guyanese. So, when one comes to this House and ask questions like, what did you do for the African decedents in Linden, or the Indigenous people in the hinterland? That, in itself, is sending a negative message. We in the APNU/AFC when we were the Government, we governed for all Guyanese.

What I would like to place on record is that our Administration's policy when we got into power was to never knock off or send home persons whom we deemed to be affiliated to a certain political party. I could personally attest to this; I could personally attest to the fact that I did not employ any new person as my Personal Assistant or my personal driver. I took persons who were already employed at the Ministry of Local Government then. Likewise, I am sure many of my other Colleagues did the same. I wish to also inform this House that in 2015 I inherited a Toyota Fortuner – PPP58 – when I was assigned as a Minister within the Ministry of Communities. In August, 2020, I handed over the keys of the Toyota Fortuner – PPP58 – when I left. I am saying this to say that our priority as a Government then was not getting ourselves new fancy vehicles as soon as we got into power, or to put on all the fancy lights and sirens on them, as we could now see moving in our streets. Our priority was to craft policies and programmes which were people centred. Unlike the PPP/C that splurged \$95 million in 2020 on luxury Toyota Land Cruisers and gave crumbs for the frontline workers in the form of a half-month bonus. Shame on you! I have no doubt that Guyanese, from all walks of life, were looking forward for the formation of a new economic paradigm – one that espouses inclusiveness, resilience and pro-growth – and certainly, one that would have taken us one-step closer to the 'good life' in a diversified economy. What we have been regaled with in this spineless Budget is contrary to the expectation of the average Guyanese. The measures and policies outlined in this Budget is far from removing poverty amongst the vulnerable and definitely not in sync with the needs of the people at the critical juncture with the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) on the rise.

I will now touch on the Amerindian and hinterland development. It is disturbing to see how this Administration has politicised almost everything. The COVID-19 relief – using their activists to distribute the COVID-19 relief. What could we expect? The households in the Upper Mazaruni, the Middle Mazaruni and the Lower Mazaruni, which I hail from, and I am quite sure throughout the hinterland regions, some of the households were bypassed. Some were even told, 'we do not

have time with APNU/AFC supporters for now; they are going to wait on the second tranche'. My Colleague put it very well, the pink slip. Until this day, as I am talking, there are still many households waiting to receive their \$25,000 relief cash grant.

My ancestors... [*Interruption*]... Mr. Speaker, I beg for your protection so that I could continue speaking.

I was thought by my ancestors that silence is power, and silence is a weapon when used in the right context. If my Colleagues, on the other side, could sit, listen and learn, then silence could be seen as a powerful weapon. But I would not stay silent when our Indigenous brothers and sisters are being left out of developmental programmes. I say this because, I could recall in 2020, when we were perusing the estimates, the hinterland development was allotted one hour to be questioned. I, myself, as a representative, was not granted that time to ask questions. And because we asked for a division, many of my Colleagues, on the other side, went running to say that Member of Parliament (MP) Ms. Hastings-Williams voted against the Amerindian development fund. It is misinformation and misrepresentation, but I am thankful to God that I could speak my mother language, which none of them, on the other side, could go and speak to my people in. I was able to go home and go to the other communities and tell them in my Akawaio language why we had a division on the Amerindian development fund.

Where was the transparency and accountability?

I would like to speak a little about the Hinterland Employment Youth Service (HEYS) programme before I come to the Community Service Officers (CSOs) programme that has been budgeted for in 2021.

The Hinterland Employment and Youth Service – our HEYS programmes was made up of almost 2,000 hinterlands youths throughout the length and breadth of Guyana and 63% of the participants were females. That is how serious we were in empowering the young women in the hinterland. Each participant was given \$30,000. The package had six months of training, skill development and the other six months, after teaching the young people literacy and numeracy skills, the participants were to present a project proposal which after analysis, they would have been given another cash grant of \$50,000 to start-up their small businesses. So, what is that? It was \$30,000

by 12 months where each participant was able to gain \$360,000, plus the \$50,000. Therefore, a HEYS participant was able to acquire \$410,000.

What were the results? I proudly stand to say to this House that we empowered the young people; we educated the young people and we created employment for the young people. Today, if one goes to Imbaimadai – Mr. Robeson Benn was there some time, if I am not mistaken, and the Prime Minister himself – there is a young woman that has a growing small boutique which she acquired through the HEYS programme. If one goes to Region 8, there are poultry farmers. When one goes to Region 9, there are swine farmers, people who are involved in agriculture, gardening, fuel shops...*[Interruption]*

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Henry, you will get a chance to speak.

Ms. Hastings-Williams: ...grocery shops, variety shops and we have testimonies from these young people. They had written to the Minister of Indigenous Peoples' Affairs – probably Minister Campbell-Sukhai could find the record of that – thanking the Government for the opportunity granted unto them where they could be their own bosses and they were looking forward to the expansion of their small businesses. That was the testimony and the result of the HEYS project that fell under the APNU/AFC.

Let me give you a little history about the CSO programme prior to 2015. The CSO programme, note too, that when we launched the HEYS programme, the CSOs participants whom the Government claimed that we fired unceremoniously, were also invited and granted opportunities to join and apply to be trained under the Hinterland Employment and Youth Service (HEYS) programme.

12.01 p.m.

We did not exclude them. They were all included, most of them, under the HEYS programme. That is the Government for the people.

Prior to 2015, there was the Community Support Officers (CSOs) programme. I can attest to it, because I was... [**An Hon. Member:** *(Inaudible)*] Listen, I was the Headteacher of Jawalla Primary School. Two of the CSOs were attached to my school. For more than two years, I could recall asking the Hon. Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai to train those two persons to at least be a

Librarian and an Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Officer. Speak of what you know. They had no training. I cannot take my time that I would use to teach the children, to teach a CSO who was employed by the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs. That is unfair. Still, they collected their stipends. But, because of my commitment, I had Staff Development Sessions (SDSs) with those two CSOs. They were not qualified. I could not put them to supervise a classroom without the teaching skills. There was no terms of reference (ToRs) stating that the... All the ToRs stated, was that I, as the Headteacher where they were attached, should supervise and make a report to say what they were doing.

I would be very happy if the Ministry of Amerindian Affairs could at least take the proposal that the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) had in place for the HEYS programme. You can change it to the CSO programme, I do not mind, but go forward using that project because the young people in the hinterland would be very happy to [*inaudible*].

It was under the APNU/AFC that the first ever Green Institute was established in Bina Hill. The feasibility studies were done, and the documents should be there Hon. Member Ms. Pauline Campbell-Sukhai. Feasibility studies were done so as to replicate same in Regions 7 and 8. I am very happy that, for the Bina Hill Institute, its objective and goals were to teach young people to help develop their communities in accordance with the Village Improvement Plans (VIPs). [**Mr. Dharamlall:** (*Inaudible*)] I am not talking about the VIPs that you are thinking about. VIPs simply means Village Improvement Plans.

I want to recommend to this House that, when we talk about youth development, which is very important to national development, we have to be very wise and careful in crafting our policies and plans to empower the young people. This is not only for young people but for our vulnerable women in the hinterland areas.

We did a lot for old people and they are very happy about it. We increased their pensions. We made them comfortable when they were going to receive their pensions at the post offices.

Today, when one can come to this House and say that this Budget has so much to offer for the people in this country, we stop to ponder. I went through the Budget speech to see what exactly there is for hinterland development. What I have seen, however, is a package that was being handed over to communities with a \$10 million cash grant. On the envelope was written, 'Coronavirus

disease (COVID-19) relief, job creation and infrastructural development'. That is an eye pass to the Indigenous people. How many jobs can \$10 million create in a population of 500, 750, or 1000 people. There is COVID-19 relief, job creation and infrastructural projects, how is it...? [**Mr. Dharamlall:** Why did you take the \$25,000?] I did not receive a \$25,000 COVID-19 relief cash grant, so please be careful with what you are talking. I am saying... [**An. Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] You would not.

I now come to the region which I hail from, Region 7. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** (*Inaudible*)] I do not speak on behalf of Kako; I speak on behalf of all Guyanese. I am a Guyanese and I will continue to speak on behalf of all. Whether you live in the hinterland or on the coastland, we are all Guyanese and development belongs to all of us. Hence, I wish to highlight to this House that questions were asked: what did you do for Kako and what did Brigadier Granger do for Regions 1, 7 and 9? If you have not seen, I can attest to it. Even a blind man, when he lands in Mabaruma or Port Kaituma and stops on the concrete road, can know the difference between a concrete road and a mud [*inaudible*] road.

As a Government, we did so much for our hinterland brothers and sisters. I agree that we may not have done enough. I agree it was because of the challenges that we were met with. I can say to this House, we had, from 2015 to 2018, full budgets that we worked with. It was until 2019, when the no-confidence motion was brought to this House, that became a challenge. Despite of that challenge, we were able to deliver to the people of that community. How did we deliver? We continued to increase salaries and wages for our public servants, consistently. What else did we do so that the people in Guyana could have more moneys in their pockets?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, so that you could have more time, we need an extension.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

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

Ms. Hastings-Williams: Thank you Mr. Speaker. What we did was also to increase the threshold rates on chargeable income. That allowed our public servants to take home more moneys so they

could have started at least to live a 'Good Life'. It does not matter how many value-added tax (VAT) you may reverse today, as long as the people – the public servants, our joint services and the Guyanese people – do not have adequate moneys in their pockets, that will make no difference in their lives.

As I began, it is difficult for me at this time to approve this Budget and to lay it in this House in its present form, when our Guyanese are still eagerly waiting to see and hear what is in this Budget for them.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for your attention and I reserve my approval for the Budget, based on how it is presented and what it has for the people of Guyana. I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, before we take the suspension, I have a few announcements.

Security searches of Members of Parliament

We have had to address an issue of Hon. Members being searched by the security. We have asked the police that Hon. Members of this National Assembly not be searched. There are two cautions. Those Hon. Members who want to bring their firearms will have to lodge them, so just let the security know. We have a strong box where you can lodge your firearm.

The instructions that we gave on Monday about searching Members of Parliament (MPs) were not executed today. We have also just sent a message directly to the Commissioner of Police on this issue. I will tell you, please, do not subject yourself to the search.

New timings for afternoon suspension

The second issue is, we will take the suspension for the afternoon break at 5.00 p.m. Many Members requested that it's too much to eat at 1.00 p.m. and eat again at 4.00 p.m. Outside of that, there is a good momentum that builds up just around 3.30 p.m. and we want to continue that. So, 5.00 p.m. will be the break for the afternoon suspension.

Conduct of MPs while a Member is speaking

We will continue to work on the audio system. There will be some improvements shortly. Again, I want to urge those persons who want to make comments while Members are on the floor speaking, to be very mindful that the acoustics in the Dome were designed for people to speak even without a microphone, so we are getting double amplification. What might be a constructive heckle, turns out to be a lot of noise. Let us be mindful of that too.

Hon. Members this is a good time to take the suspension.

Sitting suspended at 12.14 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 1.27 p.m.

Update on audio

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before I call on the next speaker, I have a few updates. We have tried to improve the audio output at the lower level of the Dome. I trust that the audio might be a bit better. If you notice, there are some monitors just at the bottom.

Dress code

Secondly, I have had to send notes to two Members about the dress code. I want to say to the National Assembly that, the relevant committee dealing with the Assembly matters, the Parliamentary Management Committee (PMC), will deal with the dress code and security issues as soon as we reconvene, after the Budget Debate.

1.29 p.m.

In the meanwhile, let us obey what is the convention, in the rulebook and in the Standing Orders. Thank you.

The Hon. Member, Mr. Charlie, Sir, you could make your contribution.

Mr. Charlie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Kaimen wachipun Meyarimang Achii wa mii -kedowahay. Mr. Speaker, tiiki konaikan kawan daa aa.

I bring greetings to this National Assembly from the people of the geographic Region that I represent, Upper Takutu-Upper Essequibo, Region 9. I wish to join my Colleagues on this side of

the House in asking the National Assembly to approve *Budget 2021* which was eloquently presented by the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, the Hon. Dr. Singh. Tons of thank you are also in order for the staff of the Ministry of Finance who had worked assiduously to have this Budget ready. Thank you.

Mr. Speaker permit me to rebut some utterances made by the Opposition Members earlier. To the Hon. Khemraj Ramjattan, who seemingly do not know and is very confused about taxes and had forgotten, unfortunately, that, in 1992, the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) Government inherited debts which took 152% of revenues to service the country, versus 5% when the PPP/C left Office in 2015. This clearly shows that the people of Guyana, in 2020, over 50% of the electorate, voted in favour of the PPP/C because they have full confidence in the PPP/C. The PPP/C Government is the only Government that could manage this country's economy.

The Hon. Hastings-Williams, again, the Hon. Member seems to be confused and jumped from one limb to the other, confusingly. Ms. Hastings-Williams forgot that she served as a Government Minister and did not utter a word to her Government when the Coalition Government took their eyes and pass the Amerindian people.

Serving as Minister Responsible for Water in the Ministry of Communities under the Coalition's tenure, she did absolutely nothing for the Amerindian communities in terms of water supply. She served as Minister of Public Affairs and sat in the National Assembly to hear Coalition Members calling the Amerindians "avaricious". She sat quietly and come to this House with the audacity of telling the PPP/C that all was well with the Coalition Government. Shame and total nonsense coming from the Coalition Opposition.

The PPP/C also inherited a \$30 billion loan for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). The Opposition Members should tell this House what happened. The good news is that the PPP/C Government is now in Office and we will fix GuySuCo. The Budget theme, a theme that fits; a theme that is relevant at this time. The Budget theme alone speaks for itself. A Budget that will transform the lives of the Guyanese people, a Budget that is inclusive, a Budget that is not a 'pink slip' budget, but one that will take the Guyanese people to prosperity, including you, Hon. Member Mahipaul.

This Budget will strengthen the Guyanese people's compact. Guyanese people will also have equal opportunities. This Budget caters for everything. The Opposition Members said that the Budget does not have anything in it. They must check the Budget book, under Parliament Office, your salaries and allowances are taken care of there.

To the public servants, do not let the Coalition agents and Opposition Members fool you because they do not know. They do not know what is in the Budget for you, but we have the answer from the People's Progressive Party/Civic. Check under the Ministry of Finance, under line item 6141—Salaries and Wages revised, there \$10,094,000,000 for the public servants. To all the public servants, the People's Progressive Party/Civic has budgeted for you and you will receive your salary increase in 2021.

In 2015, the Coalition parties promised the Guyanese people, the public servants, a 20% increase. In their 100 days, they failed the public servants. This is your track record. You like to be dishonest to the public servants, but we on this side of the House will take care of all public servants across Guyana.

The dismal track record of the Coalition party has gotten them on the other side of the House. They came to this House and proclaimed everything they did well, but what you did not do well with was, you squandered the country's economy. That is what you did. Extravagance was paramount in the Coalition Government. Check your budget where you budgeted hefty sums for food, transportation and flying over Guyana. You were living the 'Good Life', while the normal Guyanese people suffered and gave you what you deserve at the 2020 polls.

Budget 2021 is the answer for Guyana. The Amerindian People will benefit from *Budget 2021* in many ways. Already, there are qualitative changes across the hinterland regions. Amerindian and hinterland residents have already received their \$20,000 household cash grant. An initiative now being criticised by the Coalition Opposition. What did they give the Amerindian and hinterland residents during their tenure? Your track record is delivering boats to your supporters, shoes that grows, boots that grows and all the five Bs, but it was only to your supporters. Yet, you went into the Amerindian communities and preached social cohesion and, right in this Parliament, you are not practising what you are preaching – you are not practicing what you are preaching Opposition Members. You were dividing the people when you were preaching social cohesion.

The CSO programme is well and alive in the Amerindian communities at this time. The Hon. Member Hastings-Williams came to this House and said that the HEYS programme was a better programme, but failed to tell this House that the HEYS programme was a blatant failure with the non-accountability of \$860 million. Check the 2017 Report of the Auditor General. When you come to this House, come with facts. Do not come to mislead people – you bare the facts. The HEYS programme was a dismal failure, beginning with the head. Although \$1 billion was budgeted annually for that programme, yet it limped.

The Hon. Member claimed that the youth was trained in whatever field, but when we visited the Amerindian communities, it was far from reality, far from what the HEYS programme was intended to be. Here comes the CSO programme that you disbanded. You fired 172 Amerindian youths, but all are on board now. Your supporters...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, that “you” could include me. Say Hon. Members over there.

Mr. Charlie: All right. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. One thousand nine hundred and seventy-two Amerindian youths, the Opposition in Government at that time had dismissed. Total disregard for the Amerindian youths, but they are all back and are employed under the CSO programme.

The \$15,000 Because We Care Cash Grant was what the Coalition Government scrapped. They scrapped the Because We Care Cash Grant, denying the nation’s children across the 83,000 square miles of Guyana. But what? The PPP/C Government would bring back the Because We Care Cash Grant in 2021 and every school child in the public schools will be receiving \$15,000. What did you give them? What did you give them? You disbanded the programme; you scrapped the programme. That is your track record for the children of this country. Our future of this country deserves something but you denied them. The PPP/C will deliver on its promise and pay every school child \$15,000.

Amerindian Land Titling was of no interest to the Coalition Government. They scrapped the Land Titling project. Scrapped it, although they promised the Amerindian Communities in 2015 that Land Titling was paramount for their Government, but did absolutely nothing. [**Mr. V. Henry:** (*Inaudible*)] All right, Mr. Sled.

1.44 p.m.

They did nothing. In 23 years, Amerindians alone gained 14.6% of Guyana's land mass. That is our track record. How much did you give them? When you come to this House, come with facts. The People's National Congress (PNC) had thirty-three years, twenty-eight plus five, and what did you do? A dismal track record, that is your legend.

The land titling programme was of no interest to the Coalition Government, but we on this side of the House, the PPP/C Government, through its budget, catered for \$630 million. We will get off the Amerindian Land Titling programme and Amerindian villages will receive their titles, absolute and forever.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you are entitled to a five minutes extension, but someone has to ask for it.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I ask for five minutes for the Hon. Member to conclude. I wish I could give him more, but I am restricted by the time factor, so, five minutes, Comrade.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member of Parliament (MP), again, remember that you speak to the Speaker. When you say "you" and "your", I get a little agitated that I am involved in all of these things that you are alleging. Continue, Hon. Member.

Mr. Charlie: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The COVID-19 cash grant was disbursed already to all the Amerindian communities across Guyana. Two hundred and twenty Amerindian communities benefitted from the COVID-19 cash grant. A timely intervention by the People's Progressive Party/Civic Government. The villages are now enjoying this intervention, stimulating the village economy and creating jobs for our people in the Amerindian communities. I can go on and on to say what we did, what the People's Progressive Party/Civic did for the Amerindian people and what the Coalition Government failed to do.

As in my opening remarks, the people of Guyana know where they were and where they are. As I said before, 50% of Guyana's electorate voted for the PPP/C because they trusted the PPP/C Government. Based on this track record, we of the People's Progressive Party/Civic is able and capable of moving Guyana forward.

I ask that this honourable House supports this Budget, a Budget that you will benefit from, Opposition Members. You will benefit from this Budget and your supporters will benefit from this Budget. Although it is the taxpayers' money, at the end of the day, it is the Government that will control the taxpayers' money and ensure that you and your supporters' benefit. This Budget must be commended in this form because it will transform the lives of the Guyanese people; it will transform the country's economy. I would like to tell the Hon. Members, do not be confused. You are confused with the figures because you do not know Mathematics. Sorry, Mr. Speaker. The Hon. Members are poor at Mathematics, are poor at English, and they are poor to comprehend what the Budget is. The Coalition Opposition Members are here with the intention to score pro-poor political mileage, using this opportunity in the National Assembly. We come here with a plan and we will deliver and execute the plan for the people of Guyana.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that this Budget be commended, and I put it now to the House to be adopted by the National Assembly. With this, I thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Members. Hon. Members, another note of caution. Earlier this morning, I saw someone in a grey jacket came down and had a conversation just over the left shoulder of the Sergeant-at-Arms. He then appeared a few moments before the Hon. Member started, standing next to Hon. Member Mr. Rajkumar and signalling someone on the front bench that they wanted to see him. I do not recognise that person as a Member of Parliament or a staff. I want to say to those who are visiting, please, where you are assigned to sit, you should be sitting there. No cheering, no knocking the desk, and if you want to communicate with a friend, a colleague, or your representative, there are other means than violating the sanctity of the floor of the National Assembly.

Hon. Member Mr. Shurwayne Holder, please for your contribution.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to address the last presenter, the Hon. Mr. Charlie. He said that 50% of the nation supported the PPP/C because they trusted them. Equally, 50% of the nation did not vote for you because they do not trust you and your policies, your discriminative policies.

I rise to express my disgust, disapproval and even anger with this 2021 Budget. It is a huge disappointment. Given the country's status as an oil producing nation and the fact that this Government now has access to oil revenues, we honestly thought that the PPP/C would have matched or would have exceeded what the Coalition presented during our term in Office. Instead, they produced what my Colleague, across the floor, dubbed a 'pink slip', promising something but delivering nothing. Useless and worthless.

The Coalition was able to transform this country and offered a better package to the citizens of this land with a smaller budget and without the proceeds of oil. During the Coalition's term in Office, which ensured increased growth, economic and social stability for all Guyanese, there was a plan in place to ensure that development was equitable and fair. We had a national Green State Development Strategy (GSDS); we had a vision for connecting all our regions, hinterland to coastland, and to correct the developmental disparity that exists. We provided real increases in people's personal income and ensured that more money was in their pockets, not that bluff that the Hon. Ashni Singh is currently spreading. The people of this country were on a path to the 'Good Life'.

While 2020 was a tough year, given the COVID-19 pandemic and absence of a budget for the greater part, the APNU/AFC Government prepared a comprehensive plan and managed the COVID-19 plan on a one-twelfth budget and still managed to keep our citizens safe, while ensuring that the economy was kept afloat. The PPP/C must stop misleading the people.

For the Hon. Dr. Vishwa Mahadeo to state in this House that more people died from COVID-19, but we do not know because there was limited testing. He admitted it himself that they were not tested. So, how then can he definitively state that more persons died? How? He must bring the evidence to this House instead of putting propaganda out in the public domain in defence of their poor handling of the pandemic, although they had all the funding and resources at their disposal.

After reading the 2021 Budget, one cannot help but question the real intention of this PPP/C Administration. Once again, in the space of 5 months, they present another budget filled with deceptive and divisive rhetoric in an attempt to brainwash the population with the notion that the previous Government did nothing. Yet, in the same breath, this conniving Administration is trying to steal progressive plans, policies and projects initiated by the Coalition. This is the type of

deceptive tactics that is being used in this Budget to keep this nation divided, while families, friends, and cronies of the PPP/C reap the lion's share.

I heard the talk of mature politics from the Government, specifically from the President in his address to this House. Let me advise the President that a good place to start would have been to recognise the constitutional Office of the Leader of the Opposition. Recognise the fact that at least half of the nation voted for this Coalition, and extended an invitation for the main Opposition to have an input in this Budget. Mature politics would have been to acknowledge the progress and development under the previous Government and to present your own plans and programmes to build on those gains, rather than regurgitate a bag of misinformation about the state of Guyana more than 50 years ago. Why continue to preach this? How will this nasty political trickery benefit our country? How does it aid in unifying our country and this 'oneness' campaign that the President now speaks about?

I think I speak for every youth in Guyana when I say that we expect better from our political leaders. Our population, first and foremost, expects to hear about a strategic plan to lead us out of the COVID-19. We expected to see a critical plan to address the school dropout situation and to ensure that every child goes to school. We expected the Budget to be equitable and fair. It should have been one that provided real increases in income and elevation of the core. Instead, the population was fed with a political speech on a budget which largely constitutes a slush fund for the PPP/C that will breed corruption at unprecedented levels; a budget that caters largely for a small elite group; and a budget that has absolutely no balance between income and expenditure that will most definitely lead to unprecedented borrowing and a drastic increase in the cost of living.

The honeymoon is over. It is over for this Administration. They had six months in Office, and this is their second budget. They should have been able to bring something in line with what an oil producing nation should be providing for its citizens.

I would like to turn my attention to energy and mining. I would like to look specifically at the energy and mining sector. In the 2020 Budget, this Government boasted about hundreds of millions of dollars to be spent on energy projects, like the mini-hydropower plants for Moco Moco and Kumu. They boasted about solar systems per households under the Hinterland Electrification

Programme, all of which were initiated by the Coalition Government. It is now shocking to know that after six months in Office, they have failed. You have failed as a Government to spend one single dollar on many of these projects that you had budgeted for in 2020.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, remember that you speak to me when you say, “you have failed.”

Mr. Holder: Sorry, Mr. Speaker, ‘the Hon. Members’. This begs the question of whether the Government has the technical capacity and the administrative will to execute projects of this magnitude, or is it the effect of firing so many competent public servants with the requisite knowledge and experience?

1.59 p.m.

Under the Energy Expansion and Diversification sub-heading on page 37, the Budget states that it has long been recognised that the biggest impediment to accelerated economic growth and development is the absence of adequate, affordable and reliable energy. This is nothing new. The A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC) agrees with this to the extent that, one of our key policies we embarked upon, in the last five years, was an energy mix of wind, water, solar and hydropower along with natural gas to advance growth and development, and to create jobs all across this country in an equitable and fair manner. All energy projects listed in this Budget, under hinterland electrification and sustainable energy projects, were already on the books before this Government took Office.

We are happy that they have opted to continue these projects so that we can have common agreement on this. What we will not agree with, however, is the Government’s attempt to lay blame on the Coalition for the failed Amaila Falls Hydropower Project. That project was marred in controversy, secrecy and corruption and it failed *like a jet without a pilot to take off*. Any sensible government would not even mention such a project, but I guess there is a puppet master in the background with an ego bigger than that of Mr. Donald Trump.

Mining – on page 21 of this Budget speech, the People’s Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) seeks to paint a picture that, during the past five years, there was only doom and gloom in every sector, especially in mining. Youths are tired of this type of deceptive politics. The facts show that mining continued to be a key sector and continued to drive growth and development in our country over

the last five years. Due to the Coalition's policies and prudent management of the sector, the industry saw huge increases in gold declaration by small miners, which frequently offset the inefficiencies of large-scale miners. In 2019, declarations increased by more than 25% and, again, in 2020 by 8.3% higher than the previous year. So, it is very clear that small miners were on the rise under the Coalition Government. It did not matter whether one was an APNU/AFC supporter or a PPP/C supporter. All had equal opportunity.

On page 21 of the Budget speech, at paragraph 4.18, the Government speaks about greater transparency in the allocation of lands for mining. I must say that this is a very pretentious and hypocritical Government that says one thing to the nation but does something totally opposite. Since this Government took Office through the back door, it has managed this sector with sheer spite and vindictiveness. As recent as last week, in a clear case of corruption and cronyism, the Government moved, without proper cause, to take away the prospecting licences of several small miners to give them to a known friend of the PPP/C. These small miners have taken loans and invested millions upon millions in clearing lands and cutting roads just to lose everything in the end. This assault on small miners must come to an end. They are clearly not a Government for all Guyanese, as is being touted, ever so often, by the President with his 'oneness' campaign.

Quarrying – this Government conveniently compares the 2019 stone production with that of 2014 in an effort to justify doling out what is dubbed the largest quarry in Guyana and the entire Caribbean, to a very close and personal friend of the Hon. Vice President, Dr. Bharrat Jagdeo.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I just want to cite a Standing Order for you. Three times in your presentation you have alluded to the President. I do not think you have been slandering, Sir, but I just need to read this to you. Standing Order 41(8):

“The conduct of the President or any other person performing the function of President, Members of the Assembly and judges of the Supreme Court of Judicature or other persons performing judicial functions shall not be raised except upon a substantive motion moved for that purpose.”

That is Standing Order 41(8). I remember sitting where you are and when the President came, we had a substantive motion to debate the presentation by His Excellency. I am just cautioning you, Sir, and I will give you back the minute. Thank you very much.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am guided. They deceptively make the claim, and this is in the quarrying sector, that production declined. So, with the expected growth of the construction sector due to oil, a company that can satisfy greater demands would be needed. This is the bare faced cronyism by this Administration. The old corrupt dinosaurs have been re-employed and have obviously not changed their ways one bit, as the population is quickly finding out. To top it off, they announced on page 23, at paragraph 4.26, that another three quarry licences are to be approved shortly. The Opposition is well aware of the illegality surrounding those licences and to whom they will be issued. It would be a good thing for there to be a commission of inquiry (COI) into the granting of mining permits and prospective licence by this Government and their disregard for small miners.

The staff of the Guyana Geology and Mines Commission (GGMC) dealing with licences are now instructed to disregard the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), existing regulations and conventions and to suspend the International Standards Organisation (ISO) quality process to facilitate the corrupt and illegal act of granting these licences to friends of the Government, and to disregard applications by small miners perceived to be Coalition supporters. This is the same Government that preaches daily that it will reduce corruption. As the saying goes, *a leopard never changes its spots*. Under this Government, corruption will continue to grow to extraordinary levels. The rich will continue to get richer while the poor will continue to suffer. From all indications, there is absolutely nothing in this Budget to ensure that the mining industry continues to enjoy the growth and development it enjoyed under the APNU/AFC Government.

I now turn my attention to the regional aspect of the Budget. Education – given the Coalition’s vision for this sector, plans and policies were developed and executed to address critical issues such as ensuring that every child goes to school; addressing the key problem of school dropouts; transportation for students in hinterland and far-flung communities; and issues relating to the general pass rate, specifically in the core subjects

The massive turnaround of the education sector under the Coalition Government is well known. No matter what picture the PPP/C tries to paint and no matter how crude their attacks on the previous Minister of Education, the indisputable evidence is there to prove, without *a shadow of a doubt*, that the APNU/AFC Government did resoundingly well when compared with the years prior to 2015.

As the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) became known to the world, the Coalition in 2020, prior to 2nd August, organised the education system for maximum teaching and learning at all levels. An action plan was rolled out which saw continued learning take place, while the schools were cleaned and sanitised. As Guyana recorded its first case of COVID-19, the Government had no other choice but to close all schools for the safety and wellbeing of our children.

Since this Government took Office, they callously re-opened schools without a comprehensive plan to deal with COVID-19 and placed our children at great risk, many of whom actually contracted COVID-19, but luckily survived without serious implications for their health. This Government had five months to prepare to be in Government, plus another six months in Government. Yet, they seem clueless after 11 months have elapsed.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, international experts have warned that, should schooling not resume in the near future, there will be generational setbacks. Yet, this Government chooses to stay in its slumber and not wake up to the reality that the handout system will not work for a wide range of children for obvious reasons. Rather than pumping billions upon billions into the failed sugar industry, the Government could have easily used those moneys to ensure that each child has access to the internet, and that regular real-time student-teacher classes are held. Instead, when one looks at the provisions made for the information and communication technology (ICT) hubs and information technology (IT) devices, one knows that it is grossly inadequate to serve the current needs of our school children in this COVID-19 pandemic.

Further, given the desperate need for internet in this pandemic, it is quite difficult to understand why this Government, during the last six months it has been squatting in Office, has refused to maintain the existing ICT hubs installed at so many schools and public buildings across the region. Instead, the Minister of Education is occupying her time on social media, trying to spread propaganda that there are no smart classrooms.

A careful examination of the capital works for education in Region 2 reveal the sad tale that there is actually nothing new or transformative to build on the gains made by the previous Administration. I am aware that submissions were made by the technical institutes to construct new science and technology laboratories, in an effort to prepare our youths of the region for the budding oil and gas economy. However, to the dismay of those institutes, the Government rejected

this idea. Proposals and much pleading were made to place, in the Budget, initial plans for a branch of the University of Guyana (UG). This was also rejected by the PPP/C Central Government. Could you believe that? The single positive project in the Budget under the education programme is the construction of a new modern Abram Zuil Secondary School, which will feature smart classrooms, representing a continuation of the Coalition's initiative. I must say that this school was designed and approved to commence construction in late 2019, but because of circumstances beyond our control, the Coalition was not able to commence that contract.

I now turn to health. Despite the fact that, during the period January to July, 2020, the Coalition was under the constraint of a 1/12 budget, our health providers, facilities, drugs and medical supplies were things we celebrated. However, after 2nd August, the entire health delivery programme became a nightmare in Region 2 and, I must add, in most of the other regions. This Government boasted about huge sums allocated for healthcare, while they lambasted the Coalition over minor glitches and swore to the nation that they would manage the health sector in a more prudent manner. Just five months later, the nation is treated to one of the worst drug shortages in the last decade. It is a shame. To *add insult to injury*, they have, amongst them, not one but three Ministers of Health being paid astronomical salaries. Yet, a simple thing like ensuring the nation has adequate supplies of basic drugs they cannot get right. What a shame. On the contrary, this Government has spared no time in ensuring that this country is over supplied with narcotic drugs, which only serve to increase murder, rape and other heinous crimes and destroy our nation's children.

What is the purpose of allocating huge sums in the budget then failing to properly utilise those sums to provide basic relief for the people? What is very damning is that health facilities in Region 2, completed and commissioned by the Coalition, were again commissioned by this Government.

2.14 p.m.

They recommissioned a spanking facility, which was already commissioned as a maternity waiting home for pregnant mothers, but was later converted to the main COVID-19 isolation centre in the region.

They are even trying to take ownership of our flagship project, the modern operating theatre at the Suddie Public Hospital. They recommissioned a new health outpost at Onderneeming as their own,

but that very outpost was constructed and commissioned by the Coalition Government. I do not understand where this Administration is going with this. On the very day that project was commissioned, six other projects were commissioned in two communities. There was a playfield in Riverstown, a road, a bridge and a park, which makes four. We then moved to the Onderneeming area where we commissioned another playfield, an extension to the nursery school and this very project which they recommissioned. If that were not shameful enough, they then fired the Sweeper/Cleaner, a single mother of Amerindian decent, all because she was perceived to be a supporter of the APNU/AFC. They did not care that she was a single mother; they did not care that she was the sole breadwinner of her family; all they cared about was how she voted in the 2020 elections. That is not acceptable. Regardless of our race, religion or perceived political affiliation, all must be treated fairly and with equity.

I turn my attention to agriculture. Residents of Region 2 would have recognised that, during our tenure in Government, the Coalition was able to transform the entire agriculture programme. This includes the upgrade of numerous farm-to-market roads and the creation of a very effective drainage and irrigation system, through focused maintenance of the drainage network and much capital investment in a number of new pumps and sluices, and through our address of the many issues and demands made by our farmers.

What is sad is that during the period August to December, 2020, there was a massive decline in the quality of services provided and a complete disconnect between farmers and the Government. Sending a Minister every week to Region 2 to appear on television and spread propaganda is a waste of taxpayers' money and does not benefit the farmers in the region in anyway. Comprehensive plans need to be put together, and the necessary actions taken thereafter.

The farmers of Pomerook just suffered from a severe flood, which totally decimated their crops and even items in their homes. One would have expected that any caring government would have allocated a reasonable sum to assist those farmers, carry out major revetment work along the riverbank and provide better drainage for these poor farmers. The Minister visited the area only after the APNU/AFC Members of Parliament (MPs) pooled their COVID-19 cash grant and donated some hampers to those struggling farmers. The Opposition pleaded with the Government to send in the Civil Defence Commission (CDC); we pleaded with them, but they refused. In the end, due to public pressure, they visited the area and gave those suffering farmers a pink slip full

of promises and some expired fertiliser. Go and ask the farmers. They have been complaining to me.

Instead of allocating moneys to build and revet the riverbanks as requested by the people, this Government is dictating that the Neighbourhood Democratic Council (NDC) divert those funds toward the installation of streetlights. This is not the local democracy, as envisioned by the Coalition Government when President David Granger signed away the powers of the Minister and placed it in the hands of the people. This Government does not have the moral authority to utter a single word about good governance and democracy.

During the Coalition's period in Office, the Opposition PPP/C made every effort to undermine progress in the region, rather than find common ground and endorse our progressive plans. The secret agents in the National Drainage and Irrigation Authority (NDIA) used every trick in the book to do little or no work to assist the Regional Administration with drainage. Shockingly, Mr. Speaker, as soon as PPP/C came to power, the NDIA has been voluntarily doing the work of the town council and that of all the NDCs. This is the level of dirty politics one gets from the PPP/C. They are an unprincipled group that would rather see the country burn to ashes rather than cooperate with us for the development of our country.

Under the public works programme, the Coalition was able to provide, without discrimination of any geographical or political boundaries, much needed facilities through consultation with the different communities. As for it to be recorded, every bridge we built, every road constructed, every building that we built or repaired was all done following due process and following the Procurement Act. Thus, providing a very high level of quality service to the people. Mind you, Mr. Speaker, every project that was undertaken thus far in the region by this Administration, and I can literally count them on my fingers, gives us an opportunity to witness and benefit from works of the most substandard level. In the last few months, I have seen contractors being allowed, by this Government, to corruptly disregard and violate clear specifications laid out in their contracts and deliver extremely poor service to the people of Region 2.

While the Hon. Minister of Public Works is busy preaching his sermons across this country, seeking to pursue members of the previous Administration with spite and vindictiveness, and making ostentatious statements about corruption and quality of works, massive corruption and

substandard works are being done right under his nose. Then, again, this has always been the *modus operandi* of the PPP/C Government whenever they are in office. We saw rampant corruption and substandard works for 23 years and as soon as they returned to power, they assumed that same position, quite boldly and barefacedly, after being in office just a few months.

The Hon. Member, Bishop Juan Edghill, should return to Region 2 and visit the Rivertown Bridge that they had a big “*pomp and scene*” over during the commissioning. By the way, we built the bridge; they build the road, but we built the bridge. They had a big “*pomp and scene*” trying to pretend as if it was their project. He should return to that very bridge and examine the road that he was “*pomping scene*” over. It has sunk at least four inches; the people of Region 2 will tell you that. He should go and check Church street, Queenstown, where they have just completed a road. Instead of four inches thick asphalt, it has one and two inches in some sections. He should check bus shed road in Paradise Village. It is one of the worst we have ever seen in the history of this country. He must return to that region and recognise those...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I have checked your time, and you need an extension.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker, I do move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, you may continue to conclude.

Mr. Holder: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I am very disappointed that the mainstream media seem to be giving a free pass to this Administration on every single thing; they have got to do better than that. This Administration must be held accountable for whatever it is doing.

I ask this House that, as we set aside allocations for the public works programme for Region 2, and as a matter of fact all the regions, the Auditor General be engaged to carry out a strict audit of the works done for 2020.

In their 23 years in Office, the PPP/C did little to nothing for the people of Region 2, a region where their loyal supporters continue to give them majority control.

When the Coalition took Office, we embarked on a policy of national development in a fair and equitable manner. Notwithstanding that Region 2 is a PPP/C stronghold, in the last five years, the region has seen massive development in every single sector like no time before in our history. The Coalition addressed the poor road network and introduced the region to top quality asphaltic roads. We raised the bar in the health sector by placing doctors at every health facility. We addressed the delivery of education and school dropouts. We renovated all schools and constructed new ones, provided free transportation for the children and breakfast for them in many hinterland areas. The previous Government addressed the blackout situation with the construction of a new power plant. We addressed the extremely low price of paddy and the situation of millers owing farmers huge sums for prolonged periods. We have done it for the people of Region 2. Now, we are witnessing a total retrogression in the region. Rather than this Government acknowledging what was done by previous Government and putting forward its plans to build and improve on them, this Government sends a Minister every week to the region to create a false narrative that the Coalition did nothing.

I was sickened to my stomach when I listened to the Hon. Attorney General's falsehood at a meeting held in Jib, where he desperately attempted to ignite the flames of division. He was there to address a fishing group who were fearful of Venezuela's aggression. He ended up apologising at the end of the meeting when it was brought to his attention that he did not say a word on the Venezuela situation.

Instead of putting forward their own plans for development, after six months in Office, they are busy trying to erase the road to the 'Good Life' that the APNU/AFC offered, much similar in a way that Mr. Donald Trump tried to erase the Obama Presidency.

God is good. I say again, God is Good. He will not give the people of this country more than they can handle and bear. Our petition is on its way, and we are confident it will vindicate the Coalition and give the population a clear choice of whether to continue on the path of economic hardship and discrimination or the path of the 'Good Life', where there would be unity, peace, stability, fairness, justice and equity in the distribution of our country's resources to all of its people.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Just to note to the Hon. Chief Whips. We have a number of Shadow Ministers appointed, and they were given times like a Minister. I was expecting, from

at least two, to hear about the sector they are shadowing. Hon. Chief Whips, I think you may need to look at that again.

The next speaker is the Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, the Hon. Member, Ms. Oneidge Walrond. Hon. Minister, you may proceed.

Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce [Ms. Walrond]: I rise to add my voice to those in support of this Budget presented by my Hon. Colleague, the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, under the theme, *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*.

Before I deal with the substance of the Budget measures, I wish to confront something that I warned against in my maiden presentation to this House during the 2020 Budget debate. I speak about the incessant radicalising and racialising of the policy debate by some Members on the other side of this house.

The connections of my family to the People's National Congress (PNC) are well-known. Yet, the leaders of the PPP/C, when considering their Government, what their Government would look like and who would have a say in defining and implementing their policies, chose me, despite the political connections of my family, and despite the fact that I had never before even dreamed of being involved in politics. This speaks to the core and the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) of a President, a party and a philosophy that cannot credibly be held out to be racist and non-inclusive.

This is not just window dressing. Take a look at the portfolios that have been assigned to those of us whom the hundreds of thousands of [*interruption*]

2.29 p.m.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker...I am sorry Minister Walrond. I think that we have had enough of Mr. Duncan accusing Members of this House in the most disrespectful manner.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member...

Ms. Teixeira: He cannot be allowed, Mr. Speaker, to continue in this manner.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I do not see the Point of Order. I did not hear Mr. Duncan. He was not on his feet. I want to, again, caution Members about their comments. Thank you.

Ms. Teixeira: It goes both ways, Mr. Speaker. It will go both ways.

Ms. Walrond: I want you to return the Guyana Chronicle moneys that you took, if you are talking about dishonesty. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] Yes. Never before was I ever accused of taking anybody's money. Mr. Speaker, take a look at the portfolios that have been assigned to those whom the Opposition would dismiss as tokens. Labour, accounting for hundreds [*Interruption*] ...

Mr. Mahipaul: Sir, I rise on a Point of Order.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul...

Mr. Mahipaul: Standing Order 45(d). I recognise that the Hon....

Mr. Speaker: What is the Standing Order on the point that you are making?

Mr. Mahipaul: It is Standing Order 45 (d).

Mr. Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Mahipaul: I recognise that the Hon. Member, Mr. Charles Ramson, is out of his seat and is behaving in a manner that is very much not fit and proper.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, that is not a Point of Order. A Point of Order is the person standing in the passageway who has been violating the sanctity of the Assembly. You either take a seat, Sir... The person who is at the western end of the auditorium... Hon. Minister, I will give you back your one minute that has been lost.

Ms. Walrond: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I repeat that this is not just window dressing. Take a look at the portfolios that have been assigned to those whom the Opposition would dismiss as tokens: Labour, accounting for hundreds of thousands of employees and their rights; foreign affairs, home affairs and the portfolios of energy generation, telecommunication, civil defence and others assigned to the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mr. Speaker, people could examine for themselves how portfolios were assigned under the APNU/AFC Government. I do not have to delve into their records. It is there and it speaks for itself. Suffice to say, as a person new to politics, my responsibilities are far in excess of those that the previous Administration sought to confer on their Prime Minister, and people noticed.

I wish to turn to another term some Members on the other side are throwing around with reckless disregard for the social cohesion which they profess to embrace. That term is “ethnic cleansing”. Mr. Speaker, as you know, this term was coined from the unspeakable brutality of the Balkan Wars of the 90s, where over 100,000 persons were killed and over one million people were forcibly removed from their homes using devices such as threats of rape, torture, sexual assault and deportation, among others. This is the history of the term that is now so recklessly trivialised by those on the other side in their pursuit to gain political advantage. This is shameful. The Members on the other side have doubled down with chants of ethnic cleansing with respect to separations in the public sector. I want to confront this, since I have had the privilege of serving in the public sector and I think I know what is expected of us therein. Mr. Speaker, I want to remind you that in the heady days after the 2015 elections, Guyanese were promised a neutral and professional public service.

That was the promise. What did we, in fact, get? In the aftermath of the elections of 2020, several persons in the public sector openly indicated that they were adamantly opposed, under any circumstances, to President Ali and to any PPP/C Government. They openly said so. Some took to social media; some took to the mainstream press; and some even took to the streets. Some of these public servants were captured on camera praying and referring to anyone outside of their chosen political circles as devils. Some said that the PPP/C was rigging the elections. Others said that any PPP/C Administration would be illegitimate under any circumstances. Some of these public servants even said they had no intention nor inclination to work with a PPP/C Government. These sentiments were not hidden. They were openly and bluntly expressed and, in some cases, unrelenting in their frequency.

Then, after five long months during which these very people were encouraged, emboldened and, ultimately, abandoned by those now on the other side, after some of those very public servants, who were educated enough, old enough and senior enough to know better, stepped squarely into the political affray, instead of doing the right thing and resign, they continued to occupy office.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, you did say ‘your side’ and, again, I am involved.

Ms. Walrond: I do apologise, Mr. Speaker. That was not the real problem, Mr. Speaker. The real problem was that, having opted to remain in office, some were not content to buckle down and do the job. Many were determined to be obstructionists and engaged in behaviour that could not reasonably be interpreted as anything other than obstruction, given their stated sentiments. Some came to this very House and refused to assist in providing information in response to questions asked during consideration of the estimates by the peoples’ representatives on the other side themselves. Some of these public servants were observed celebrating their obstruction in the precincts within which this honourable House meets. That is the half that has never been told.

The Budget presented by my Hon. Colleague, like any other budget, represents the implementation of the policies of a government. What choice does a government, which is determined to deliver a programme for the people have, but to part ways with those who resolutely and demonstrably oppose the government itself, regardless of its programmes, to the point where some of them demonstrated a willingness to obstruct that Administration? How could such people be relied on to implement an agenda they openly profess to be against?

Let me make this clear. I am not saying that all persons that were separated from the public service were obstructionists. This is not the case. I say, however, that when the Opposition takes to social media and lumps the good, the bad and the ugly in their quest to pursue a narrative of racial discrimination, it does so at a disservice to those who are separated from the public service with dignity and with no wish other than to give the Administration space or to pursue other opportunities. Some of them, indeed, did. I am personally aware of some who did so. The record is there. Many of these people had to take to social media to refute allegations of the Opposition of circumstances of their termination and had to publicly request to be disassociated from the reckless race-mongering that was being pursued.

I know that many of the Hon. Members on the other side know these things. Our Friends on the other side, having nothing else to sell to their supporters, have typically descended into full hyperbole and accused the Government of ethnic cleansing. They did not use that term when they fired over 1,500 Indigenous workers from the Community Support Officers (CSO) programme, within one week of taking Office in 2015, or sent home thousands of sugar workers. That was not

ethnic cleansing then. It appears as these are the only goods our Colleagues have to sell, and I will tell you why.

On 12th February, 2020, a mere two weeks before the 2020 elections, the former Minister of Business, the Hon. Member, Mr. Rajkumar, launched:

“The Belvedere Business Incubator”.

There was a grand opening ceremony. A ribbon was cut, photographs were taken, speeches were given, and news articles were written. Mr. Speaker, listen to the reality, the Belvedere Business Incubator, which the Hon. Member claimed to have launched, had no equipment. The six pods were all unoccupied. The incubator had no manager or staff and, worst of all, the building was without electricity.

However, there was a ceremony saying that the incubator was launched. If this is their record, it is not hard to see why the only thing they could bring to the people is accuse the Government of being racist. Today, I am pleased to report that, in November, 2020, electricity was restored to the Belvedere Business Incubator. All of the relevant equipment was procured and will be delivered to sites shortly. We will then be able to truly and fully operationalise the incubator in a matter of months and its facilities will be made available on an equitable and non-discriminatory basis, in an open and transparent manner. We estimate that around 120 jobs will be created through the projects that will utilise these facilities.

I will give you another example – the Lethem Industrial Estate. On 14th March, 2019, the then Minister of Business, Mr. Gaskin, hosted a media tour of the Lethem Industrial Estate. A Department of Public Information (DPI) article was published with the headline:

“Lethem Industrial Estate for May completion”.

The article went on to state:

“According to Minister of Business, Dominic Gaskin, the media tour was organised because the facility is close to completion and the ministry wants to be transparent with information which relates to the application process, through which persons can acquire rights to use the facility, will begin shortly”.

What was and is the state of affairs, Mr. Speaker? Allow me to quote the Auditor General on this project. On page 122, paragraph 272 of the Report of the Auditor General for the fiscal Year 2016, the following is stated regarding the Lethem Industrial Estate:

“As a result of poor supervision of the works, various sections of the finished road surface were not completed to the required thickness as per contract; and the carriageway and shoulders; however, our physical verification revealed that the thickness of the finished asphalt layer was inconsistent, with variances ranging from areas. There were areas where the asphalt layer was spread very thin and the sub base of the road could be seen through the aggregate in the asphalt mix.”

Moving on to 2019, paragraph 619, page 213 of the said Auditor General Report, in respect to the same Lethem Industrial Estate, state:

“A physical verification on 29^h July 2019 revealed that the works were incomplete and the completion date for the works expired on 31 May 2019”.

This report also mentioned:

“As outlined in the 2019 Capital Project Profile the benefits of the Project were to improve infrastructure for business development. Hence, the delayed in implementation of the Program’s activities may lead to the intended benefits of the programme not being achieved as planned”.

There you have it, Mr. Speaker, not in my words but in the words of the Auditor General, an unbiased and non-partisan opinion on the stewardship of our Friends on the other side. Once again, considering the record of this Administration, is not surprising that their game plan is to scream race at every move we make.

It gives me no pleasure to say it because it is the citizens of Region 9 who ultimately suffered. When we took Office in 2020, the Lethem Industrial Estate had no lessee, construction works were still incomplete and not a piece of equipment that was needed had been procured.

2.44 p.m.

As a Government, we commit to ensuring that the intended benefits of the estates are achieved – that is, improved infrastructure for businesses – in order to spur economic development and job creation. That is why, in *Budget 2021*, we have allocated \$100 million for the procurement of equipment to operationalise and furnish the Lethem Industrial Estate Business Incubator. Since taking Office, we have continuously engaged the contractor of the Lethem Industrial Estate Business Incubator, thereby, developing a no-nonsense, no-excuses policy. Moreover, expressions of interest (EOIs) for the leasing of plots at the Estate were already published and applications were received and are currently under review. We will soon see the Lethem Industrial Estate Business Incubator serving its intended purpose and all Guyanese, without regard to class, race, gender, orientation or whatever lines they may come up with to divide us, will have a fair opportunity to benefit from this inclusive Government. I will not dwell on these policy failures for they could take up my entire time allotment.

I wish to therefore look forward and examine some of the measures that we are implementing, which will demonstrate the inclusive development philosophy of this Government. With respect to industrial development, in 2021, we will commence feasibility studies for suitable industrial estates in Regions 2 and 10. These additional sites and their associated projects would provide scores of good-paying jobs to the people of these regions, thus, improving their standard of living. Mr. Speaker, in the selection, particularly of Region 10, you can see that we are not concerned with whom one may have voted for. Our mandate is to deliver development across the board. Tell me where is the discrimination and racism there?

We view the construction sector as critical in building Guyana. We have been concerned about the high cost of building, not only to businesses but to ordinary Guyanese seeking to build or improve their homes. To bolster the sector, in 2020, we removed the 14% value-added tax (VAT) on several construction materials. In *Budget 2021*, we are proposing to extend the zero-rated status, until further notice, for stone imported from the Caribbean Community (CARICOM). We are also removing VAT from locally produced pre-stressed concrete piles, locally fabricated mild steel beams and locally manufactured roofing, together with polyvinyl chloride (PVC) products for building construction. In making construction cheaper, we have not done it for people in Region 6, Region 3 or Region 2 alone. Its effects will be felt across the board in every region. Where, I ask, is the discrimination in that?

With regard to registering a business, we understand the plight of our citizens in many regions outside the Demerara-Mahaica area. Among other things, they lack a commercial registry or sub-office and, thus, find great difficulty in registering their business or renewing their registration. In the past, they would have had to travel, at great cost, time and money, to Georgetown to have the relevant processes completed. To alleviate the burdens on businessmen and businesswomen and to ensure that their businesses in these regions do not fall into the informal economy, the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce has set up several registration hubs in Regions 6, 8 and 9 and, more recently, in Regions 1 and 7 through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Commercial Registry Guyana. Already, hundreds of businesses from these regions have benefitted from this convenience. Once again, Mr. Speaker, you can see how our programmes are designed to benefit all Guyanese. Moreover, as a Ministry, we are committing to exploring other avenues to ensure that there is a seamless process for registering a business. I will spend some time on that topic a little later.

In relation to business support, former Minister, Mr. Gaskin is quoted in this House as saying:

“...our Government...”

Referring to the APNU/AFC.

“...is committed to the development of a sustainable and successful small business sector and will ensure that small operators are given a space in the public procurement pipeline.”

What is the reality? The reality is that the former Administration reduced the ceiling for small business grants. It reduced the amount by 60% from \$500,000 to \$200,000. The most cited concern for such small businesses is their ability to access finance, with high rejection rates from commercial banks and other lending agencies. How can someone commit to the development of a sustainable and successful business sector whilst reducing their access to finance? Let me remind you and the Members of this honourable House that, in October 2020, our Administration made the decision to restore the ceiling to a level that can be truly beneficial to small businesses. Small businesses can, once again, receive up to \$500,000 in grant funding from the Small Business Development Fund to expand their operations or assist with start-ups. Restoring the ceiling is not the only thing we have done for small businesses. We have also, through allocations in this Budget,

increased the total envelope available to \$250 million, thereby, expanding the amount of support for that sector.

On this note, permit me to briefly respond to the first speaker in this debate, my Learned Friend, the Hon. Member Ms. Amanza Walton-Desir, who described our allocation to the Small Business Development Fund as paltry. I remind this House, including my Hon. Friend Ms. Walton-Desir, that, in five consecutive APNU/AFC Budgets, the most that was ever allocated to the Fund, at any juncture, was \$100 million. Contrast that with the fact that, in a mere six months of our Administration, we have already allocated \$350 million to the Fund. The people of Guyana can certainly decide which allocations are paltry and which are substantial.

On a final note, on record, regarding small businesses – As you know, the Procurement Act requires that all procuring entities produce a procurement plan within three weeks of the passage of the budget. Mr. Speaker, you may recall that, just a few weeks ago, this House passed an amendment to the Small Business Act. This tightened the definition of a small business in order to level the playing field and, critically, allow for 20% of Government procurement in the area of works to be set aside for small businesses. On the passage of this Budget, we will now, finally, have the framework through which the setoffs can be included in the procurement plans. That is an initiative which ought to be supported by all Members of this Honourable House. This year we are poised to see, finally, small businesses truly benefit from this critical facility. I urge the Members on the other side to persuade their constituents to take advantage of these facilities of the Small Business Bureau where Guyanese of all persuasions, with a viable business plan, are welcome. [**Mr. Hamilton:** Oh, barbershops.] Yes, barbershops too.

Under tourism development and support: I will now turn my attention to the tourism sector, a sector which has long been integral to the Guyanese economy. Before I report to you some of our initiatives, allow me to answer one criticism which we appear to be hearing from the APNU/AFC. It is a criticism which I believe to be alarming for its lack of vision. It has been heard from the former Minister of Finance, Mr. Jordan, and for which seems to be embraced by some Hon. Members on the other side. They are saying that we are building hotels when no one is travelling. I find that particular criticism alarming because it appears as though some of us are afraid to dream big dreams for Guyana. It appears that they would forever have us remain a poor and impoverished nation, *hewers of wood and drawers of water*. Guyana is one of the ‘hottest’ destinations on planet

Earth right now. The fact is that, even in the midst of the pandemic, our higher end hotels do not even have enough rooms. We cannot wait until the demand is realised to start building the hotels. We are not speaking about haberdashery or sweets that we can just go around the corner and purchase. We cannot go around the corner and purchase 2000 hotel rooms and walk out with them. These things take years, from mobilising of financing to construction and finishing. Therefore, what is required is vision, foresight and the ability to see beyond the horizon in order to plan for bright future for all.

An example of this vision was the original conception of our eco-tourism product. I am advised that, way back in 2013, almost a decade ago, under a project secured by the President Ramotar Administration, the Rewa Eco-Lodge was built. The Rewa Village established a catch-and-release project that provided much needed jobs to secure the livelihoods of many in that community and helped to stem a wave of outward migration that was threatening the very existence of that village. It is initiatives that were borne out of visions like these that, eventually, resulted in Guyana being adjudged the number one ecotourism destination in the world. I dare say, had our Hon. Friends been in Government in 2013, with the potential of eco-tourism requiring foresight, no such investments in our future might have been made.

I urge my Colleagues not to be lost in time, in that time when we were described as the second poorest country in the Western Hemisphere. We, the PPP/C Government, dream of being the richest country in the world; if not in dollars, certainly in the quality of life of all our citizens.

It has been almost one year since the world's tourism sector was ravaged by the restrictive measures necessary to contain the spread of COVID-19. Despite this ever-present threat, I am happy to report that *Tourism Guyana* is showing signs of revitalisation due to the measures that our Government has taken to responsibly recover from the pandemic. Our Government inherited a sector that was devastated by the effects of the Coronavirus disease pandemic. Revenue had plummeted by almost 50%, thousands were left unemployed or on unpaid leave, and businesses were unable to manage operational costs. It appeared, at that time, that the APNU/AFC Government was uncertain of what strategic intervention was required to ensure the sustainability and recovery of the sector. However, we were not daunted by the magnitude of the pandemic. Being cognizant of the fact that thousands of Guyanese and their families depend on the sector for their well-being, our Administration was proactive. Six months later, I can state categorically,

Guyana's tourism is on the road to recovery and, undoubtedly, will make a full recovery in time to come.

We are clear in our approach to the recovery of the sector. First, there was a need to ensure the safety of our tourism workers and their families. To do this, employees within the tourism sector needed to be adequately trained in preparation for the reopening of the sector. Thus, training was conducted across the country and, as the Minister responsible for tourism, I am confident that we are much more prepared to safely welcome visitors to our tourism destinations.

Speaking of training, more than \$30 million has been allocated in *Budget 2021* for training within the tourism sector. This will better position us to keep abreast with evolving trends within the sector and ensure that we meet the increasing expectation of our guests. In this regard, I would mention that this *Budget 2021* provides an allocation of \$185 million for the establishment of a tourism and hospitality institute, which will provide much-needed instruction to persons who wish to pursue a career in the industry. Our efforts did not stop there.

2.59 p.m.

The Guyana Tourism Authority (GTA) has been working closely with stakeholders to ensure the implementation of the health and sanitisation protocols, which are prerequisites for receiving conditional approval from the COVID-19 Task Force for safe reopening.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, your efforts may stop here if you do not get an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: I would like to ask for a five-minute extension for my Colleague to conclude.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Minister. Hon. Minister of Tourism, Industry and Commerce, you may continue.

Ms. Walrond: Thank you. In direct support to our Amerindian communities and stakeholders within the tourism sector, the Ministry of Tourism, Industry and Commerce embarked on the distribution of sanitisation supplies with the objective of equipping those directly involved with the necessary tools to ensure their safety. In 2020, approximately \$47 million was spent on preparedness supplies, for 39 Amerindian communities in regions 1,2,3,4,5,7 and 9. Another \$12

million will be spent in 2021 to support 10 more communities with their recovery plans as tourism reopens to the international market. This is part of our direct intervention, one built of empathy, concern and foresight. A decision premised on the fact that the first step to recovery was to determine a way to remain safe.

Our second approach to recovery was to target and develop domestic tourism. This plan was delivered through the strong working relationship the Ministry developed with the regional tourism bodies. Regional tourism committees and other stakeholders were encouraged to develop niches within their respective communities. We began a campaign to encourage Guyanese to explore various areas across the country, while adhering to the COVID-19 guidelines. This initiative breathed life into the sector as Guyanese responded and began to travel.

Mr. Speaker, as you know it has been the cry of many Guyanese that local travel can be expensive. In direct response, we removed value added tax (VAT) from hinterland travel, making it more affordable for the average Guyanese to experience the beauty and splendour of our country.

Building an economy that is dynamic and resilient requires us to make Guyana easier to do business, it requires modernisation through the use of technology and innovation, and it requires policies that encourage businesses to invest. With these requirements in mind, I turn to some of the transformative plans, policies and programmes that we intend to pursue for private sector development and growth.

As you may know, Guyana ranks 151 out of 190 nations and territories for trading across borders. I want to be clear that we do not propose to be slaves to the rankings which, in many respects, are not suited to our realities. But there is no denying that we must reduce the costs and time associated with trade across borders if our local businesses are to compete in regional and global markets. Therefore, the Electronic Single Window system for trade has long been recognised as one of those key transformative projects which will radically reduce time and costs for conducting business.

Last year, we allocated \$10 million to complete reviews to facilitate implementation. For 2021, we budgeted \$135 million with which we will be procuring the goods and services. By the end of this year, implementation of the Electronic Single Window project will be well advanced, such that, in 2022, we will be closer to completion of this initiative.

With all of the initiatives that I have outlined in this presentation, I put it to you that our Friends on the other side cannot credibly contend that this Budget lacks vision and delivers nothing for the people of Guyana. Quite contrary, what we see is a coherent and coordinated set of programmes which place us on a firm trajectory of inclusive and sustainable growth and development. If our Hon. Friends, on the other side, are honest with themselves they would agree and support the measures in this Budget.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. Hon. Members, we have a very serious development in the Dome. I will give the Hon. Member Ms. Hughes an opportunity to say what happened to her.

Ms. Hughes: I packed up my laptop and my files. I put them in my briefcase and left it here and went to lunch. I opened my briefcase to take out my files and my laptop is not there. I find this totally unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Members, this is most concerning. We have been allowing a few persons in the Dome and all of us in this Dome are now worried. We expect that the Hon. Member's files and Apple laptop... If not, we would have to close down and search everyone, literally.

Ms. Hughes: Mr. Speaker, there are cameras here...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, could you allow me to continue? We have checked the cameras. Apparently, the two cameras in the Dome may not have been recording anything. They may not be operable. We have to get it fixed immediately. Nevertheless, there are other 'looking' devices in here. We have asked the police along with the staff to start that investigation. This is, certainly, very disconcerting. Normally, I leave everything on the desk here, too, and I am worried.

Hon. Member, we are going to spare no efforts in trying to locate the missing items from your briefcase. Someone had to open it. It is not just picking up something accidentally. I would say someone had to case the Hon. Member.

I have another observation. Could our friend from the media, Mr. Crooker, ask the person to his right to go down so that you could be socially distanced on that side?

Hon. Members, I now call on the Hon. Member Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley to make her contribution.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. First of all, before I get into the actual content of my presentation. I find it quite ironic that an Hon. Member who had to be dragged before the Chief Justice (ag) to be told that she was illegally sitting in this august House find it in herself to speak about honesty. It has not gone unnoticed that the Hon. Member Walrond has just admitted to this House that public servants were fired because they did not support the PPP/C in the lead up to elections. The Hon. Member has proudly endorsed the firing over 1000 public servants because the PPP/C deemed them APNU/AFC supporters. Shame!

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I may have to go back to the transcript because I did not hear that. So, for the time being, could you refrain until we clear it up.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: No problem, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you. Hon. Member Ms. Teixeira, you may have the floor.

Ms. Teixeira: Standing Order 41 (6),

“No Member shall impute improper motive to any Member in the National Assembly”.

The Hon. Member began by quoting what she said was from the Chief Justice (ag). The matter was resolved, and we are in keeping with the Constitution. The Opposition Members continuous assault on the Hon. Minister is unacceptable and not in keeping with this Standing Order. I am asking you as Speaker to ask them to withdraw, to ask the Hon. Member Ms. Tabitha Sarabo-Halley to withdraw that comment about Minister Walrond.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister. Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo Halley, I actually was going to raise that issue about imputing improper motive. I think this is another comment I think you need to correct. You spoke about imputing honesty and what happened?

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Mr. Speaker, just for the sake of clarity, the Hon. Member was saying that we were not honest. I am trying to understand at what point honesty comes into play.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley, we could discuss this after but there is a ruling.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: No problem, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Chief Whip of the Opposition, earlier we spoke with respect to another Member from your side.

Mr. Jones: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley, please continue. The Member will get back her time.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: No problem, Sir. It is all good to make glowing, well put together speeches about what the PPP/C perceive itself to be. But, the men and women in the street and the citizens of this country had to live 23years under the PPP/C, and they know the truth.

As I rise to present to this House my contribution to the Budget debate, as is usual, there is a group of public servants who worked long days and nights to ensure that we are presented with a Budget document that has minimal errors, be they grammatical or numerical. To those public servants we say thank you. I would like to reiterate what my Colleague, the Hon. Walton-Desir stated and that is that there is no indication, in the written document before us, of the Hon. Member Dr. Singh thanking the staff who assisted in putting this Budget together. If other Members see any such words of appreciation in the document, please kindly inform the House of the page and paragraph. What is saddening is the fact that neither those public servants, in particular, nor the working class, in general, have anything significant to gain from the proposed budget.

I cannot fail to say thank you to the Hon. Ashni Singh, not for the Budget he presented...

Ms. Fernandes: Mr. Speaker, if I may I am not standing on a Standing Order, but I think it is highly...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have to stand on a Standing Order. If not, you could come and whisper to me.

Ms. Fernandes: Sanding Order 40 (a).

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley, please continue.

Ms. Fernandes: I will write. Thank you.

Ms. Sarabo-Halley: I cannot fail to say thank you to the Hon. Ashni Singh, not for the Budget he presented but for setting an example by returning to Guyana to serve. Alas, the Hon. Member must consider if this reflects the quality of service he intends to offer the people of Guyana. After listening to the first group of speakers from the other side of the House, I am left to wonder if they were directly involved in crafting what supposed to be policies for their Ministries or if they were given talking points that they are obviously having great difficulty articulating.

The Hon Members on the other side are taking so much of their speaking time to spew rancid rhetoric, turning this house that deals with national issues into a never- ending episode of *Wild'N Out* while placing little attention to three critical Ps – their policies, plans and projects – for the all-important people of this nation.

As I rise today to add my perspective on *Budget 2021*, it would be remiss of me not to reflect on what has transpired in this session of Parliament. Our constituents and supporters have expectations of us. On this side of the house, we are aware of and take cognisance of the fact that the way we behave, the way we act and the words we speak impact an entire country. We saw how the attitudes, the total disregard for the laws and the squandering of public coffers, between 1992-2015, had a negative impact on the culture of our entire society. Many of the ills we continue to deal with today come from the trickle-down effect of the behaviours of those in the highest office.

On Monday, we on this side had no choice but to leave this House because of the loud, relentless, visceral onslaught emanating from one Hon. Member of the other side. We had already suffered through and endured the disgusting behaviour of many of the previous Hon. Speakers on the other side, but we were not prepared to endure further, the denigration of this House.

I had hoped for a comprehensive; insightful; and, frankly, honest Budget speech. However, this was not offered by the Hon, Dr. Ashni Singh, in his reading of *Budget 2021*, which is titled: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. To achieve all or any of that, short, medium, and long-term plans should have been developed to inform the nation of the path to recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, which should be our major objective.

3.14 p.m.

Five months ago, the 2020 Budget gave no suggestion that the PPP/C had any idea how to deal with this pandemic and, in the 2021 Budget speech, it does no better. The reality is that the 2021 Budget speech, just like *Budget 2020*, which was erroneously dubbed an emergency budget, outlines no clear policy, no clear plan or no clear programme that would help Guyanese recover from the effects of the pandemic.

Budget 2021 constantly refers to the so-called emergency Budget of 2020, which completely lacked the elements of what would be required in an emergency. It only catered to ensuring landlords and some private sector entities benefit. The idea that the woefully inadequate \$25,000 would be enough to make a significant difference to Guyanese who are struggling and suffering through this period is ludicrous. This pandemic has already lasted over a year, with no clear end in sight. There has been no real consideration for earnings lost over these months, resulting in the inability to pay rents and meet the range of other standing commitments, plus new ones which include the purchase of computers and monthly internet costs for students required to attend online classes.

There are thousands of eligible Guyanese who have not yet received their \$25,000 but, the Hon. Members on the opposite side are so caught up in their grand scheme of destroying any and all potential wealth in the black community to care whether the neediest of our society were able to receive the meagre \$25,000. A recovery is being touted and there is no discussion of whether the \$25,000 cash grant was adequate and whether the measures, had the intended impact, is atrocious. Too many of our fellow Guyanese were given pink slips or told that they were not catered for because they were squatters or were just simply bypassed. At the same time, the number of COVID-19 related deaths continue to increase and the number of detected positive cases keep climbing. No one is required to adhere to the supposed curfew nor the guidelines, and many do not. So, the PPP/C took the decision to do what it does best, fiddle, while Guyana burns.

The fact is: The PPP/C has been and continues to be an abysmal failure in managing the spread of the COVID-19 crisis and, as a consequence, it continues to spiral out of control. The Hon. Member, Dr. Frank Anthony and his battery of advisors seem to be clueless. An unofficial reopening of the entire country has occurred, placing all citizens at risk. What is their plan? It is a vaccine.

The PPP/C has practically given up on managing the spread of the COVID-19, leaving Guyanese to fend for themselves. The PPP/C awaits a vaccine. What is most ironic is that, even though they have played lip service to placing all their eggs in the vaccine basket, there is no reference to the purchase of vaccines in the 2021 Budget. They could not find moneys to purchase the main thing that they are hinging the path to recovery on – a vaccine. Instead, they are waiting for donations and freeness, while boasting of a \$383 billion Budget.

If we look at the five major vaccines that are currently available, globally, with our total population of approximately 747,000, the cost for vaccines would range from between \$1.2 billion to \$10.2 billion. Imagine, they boast about a \$383 billion Budget for 2021 but cannot find \$1.2 billion for vaccines to protect and safeguard Guyana's most precious assets – our people. While there is total dependence on vaccines, apparently, we are waiting on aid, rather than ensuring that our population is vaccinated. Even the dependence on vaccination seems to be a farce.

It is my considered opinion that those currently managing the economy are stuck in an International Monetary Fund (IMF) World Bank 1980s macroeconomic stability model time warp, where the Government was required to take extreme measures to deal with burgeoning deficits, most of which included significant reduction of Government spending on the public sector and public services.

It appears that the PPP/C's only understanding of fiscal policy and how to manage an economy is by utilising this outdated structural adjustment formula, which the world over has recognised as unsuitable for the development of a developing country. Further, this may be the reason they are attempting to dismantle the fiscal policies implemented during the APNU/AFC's tenure. The tax base was widened and laws already on the books were enforced, thereby increasing our revenues and allowing us the ability to meet the additional human resource needs of our public service. In three and a half years, we saw a 77% increase in salaries for the public service and the increased investment in the health, education, agriculture, telecommunications and other sectors. All of this, with real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth every year, culminating with a 43.5% growth in 2020.

The PPP/C's desire to keep Guyana's fiscal policies in the 20th century runs counter to Guyana's current status as an upper middle-income country. Though this status should impact the PPP/C's

approach to its fiscal policy measures, *Budget 2021* and the prior Bill passed to further raise the debt ceiling, proved otherwise. Mobilising our own development finance and forgetting or, at least, reducing our dependency on aid and even concessionary financing on a regular basis, must be our goal.

This brings us to three other major questions: How does the PPP/C define development? What does the PPP/C see as good governance? What exactly is its development policy?

One of our illustrious sons, Dr. Walter Rodney, described the concept of development in the following way:

“Development in human society is a many-sided process. At the level of the individual, it implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being.”

“At the level of social groups society, therefore, development implies an increasing capacity to regulate both internal and external relationships”

If we were to agree on this, and I hope we can, then we could agree that development has to be greater than the brick and mortar budget that we have before us. It must include a commitment to creating a society where civil liberties and human rights are protected. Instead, these have been eroded, daily, since 2nd August, 2020.

I now turn my attention to the area of critical importance to the development of this great country of ours, the public service. One of the main areas that should receive Government spending and support is the improvement in the delivery of public services by upgrading management skills that improve efficiency in the delivery of services as well as accelerating the digitisation of e-government services. The World Bank recently found that foreign direct investment was increased when investors could access Government services online. Very little, if any, emphasis was placed on the foregoing, but this component is so important for the development that the Guyanese public expects and deserves.

In 2019, for the first time in the history of our public service, an award ceremony was held in appreciation of our public servants. Mr. Ralph Welcome, Field Auditor, was the longest serving employee at the Ministry of Public Infrastructure. He had an unbroken service record of 49 years

and was among 51 public servants honoured on Monday, 24th June, 2019 by the Department of the Public Service as part of Public Service Day 2019 activities.

This was just one of the number of initiatives that began during the APNU/AFC Administration to demonstrate to our public servants that they are valued. I find it necessary, at this point, to mention this as I believe that our public servants are going through a harrowing period with the questionable return to Office of those on the opposite side of this House. Guyanese continue to witness the annihilation of the public service and all associated agencies and organisations since August, 2020.

In 2015, when the APNU/AFC rose to Government, there were continuous cries from the citizenry that the public service was inefficient and archaic. Individual Ministries as well as public agencies worked as silos and were unable to properly provide the services that the public expected and deserved.

Some of the major issues we confronted were decades long vacant positions in critical departments and persons holding positions for which they were woefully unqualified, all affecting the ability to efficiently serve the public. Mountains of paper greeted us in some agencies as computerisation was a foreign concept and decision-making was so centralised that almost every move required some Minister's consent. Gatekeepers were placed in all agencies to ensure that the will of the Minister was carried out at the expense of professionalism and ethics. Vindictiveness and discrimination permeated the public service. It was a culture deliberately developed over 23 years and it was not easy to change. Those days have returned in full force.

In the last six months, we have seen the dismissal of highly qualified and experienced public servants through the non-renewal of contracts – for the former Executive Director of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the qualified Commissioner of Guyana Lands and Surveys Commission, the General Manager of the Guyana Marketing Corporation and even for staff at the National Data Management Authority (NDMA) – when so many other agencies, presumably poised to become digitised, required their skills. The inhumane and racist treatment of staff at the Guyana Forestry Commission (GFC) and the innumerable number of public servants who have chosen to resign rather than continue to work under the PPP/C, and not to forget those who continue to work in complete fear and anxiety, daily, not knowing whether they will be next without an income...

There are a few lines I will read that I believe aptly speaks to the motivation and the actions we see from the PPP/C. This is my version of a quotation taken from George Orwell's writings. The PPP/C:

“... seeks power entirely for its own sake.”

They are:

“... are not interested in the good of others;”

They are:

“... are interested solely in power, pure power. What pure power means you will understand presently.”

They:

“... are different from the oligarchies of the past in that they know what ... doing. All the others, even those who resembled ..., were- cowards and hypocrites. The German Nazis and the Russian Communists came very close to ... in their methods, but they never had the courage to recognize their own motives. They pretended, perhaps they even believed, that they had seized power unwillingly and for a limited time, and that just around the corner there lay a paradise where human beings would be free and equal.”

The PPP/C:

“... are not like that. We know that no one ever seizes power with the intention of relinquishing it.”

For the PPP:

“Power is not a means; it is an end.”

The PPP:

“... does not establish a dictatorship in order to safeguard a revolution;”

The PPP/C:

“... makes the revolution in order to establish the dictatorship.”

For the PPP/C:

“The object of persecution is persecution.”

For the PPP/C:

“The object of torture is torture.”

For the PPP/C:

“The object of power is power.”

That is the PPP/C in a nutshell.

Public servants of our dear country are yet again left to wonder what this second Budget, under the PPP/C Administration, has in store for them. In all of the 77 pages, there was one mention of public sector employees and one mention of public services.

On page 4 of the Budget speech, it states that the PPP/C plans include:

“v. Improving the quality of public services...”

The Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, however, did not see the need to elaborate on how this will be accomplished. What is it that they will do, now, that they did not do in their previous iteration that would ensure a noticeable improvement in services provided by Government agencies? In 77 pages, there is not one paragraph on the importance of public servants to the development of the country. There is no recognition of the important role public servants must play to ensure the implementation and execution of Government plans; none. This statement comes days after the said Administration saw it fit to close the Bertram Collins College of the Public Service, which was an educational institution that was created to resolve one of the myriads of problems facing the public service prior to 2015.

The Hon. Member, Ms. Parag, in a recent interview stated that the Bertram Collins College was training 56 persons who entered the public service at a clerk III position. She then said:

3.29 p.m.

“...the intention of whatever this College or what the public was being led to believe, was not so at all. The College was not accomplishing what they were telling the public, they wanted to do”

The fact is, training persons to enter the public service at the Clerk III position, just as stated by the Hon. Member, was one of the mandates of the colleges. I do not know what the Hon. Member was objecting to. I doubt she knows either.

Improving the quality of public services requires a systematic approach. It requires looking at the 2016 Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service and utilising the findings and recommendations to properly plan for the short, medium and long term. The policy changes required and the programmes to be implemented must be clearly identified. This is necessary to create the enabling environment we must have to ensure that the quality of public services improve across all Ministries and all Government agencies. Thus, while it may seem good enough to the People’s Progressive Party/Civic to make mention of improving public service *en passant*, right thinking Guyanese, who heard or read the Budget speech, would or should have many questions regarding the statement, and question what exactly it means for public servants, for the citizens and for the much touted investors who would have to utilise the public services on a regular basis.

Again, from the insightful interview from the Hon. Parag, I quote:

“The manifesto was crafted in such a way that you listen to the persons on the ground. You know that there is a need for certain technical skill sets that do not exist and so, based on that needs assessment, this idea was born and so the \$1 billion allocated will transform the public sector.”

During the 2020 Budget debate, I spoke briefly of the need for a human resource needs assessment survey. I am now convinced, based the statement above, that I need to provide further guidance on exactly what a human resource needs assessment is and the reason why it is necessary. An assessment of the human resource needs of a country cannot be done by merely speaking to persons on the ground. This must be conducted by professionals with the requisite skill set to analyse the current construct of our public service and our economy and, based on these, project the competencies required into the future. Such an approach would ensure efficient spending on education and training. Regular and prompt release of labour market information and education to

our youth on how to use the statistics to make career choices would lower the mismatch between the supply and demand for skills labour. Wastage and mismatch induce the exodus of people with skills and talent.

As it stands right now, persons who are awarded scholarships are mandated to work for the Government for a period of years. There are a number of unanswered questions as it relates to the target of 4,500 scholarships of the Ministry of the Public Service for this year. I would now put to the floor: Are the 4,500 persons expected to join the public service upon the completion of their scholarships? Are there 4,500 vacancies in the public service? Have there been consultations with the private sector to inform this number? Has the Ministry of the Public Service determined the services needed to decide on the areas of training? Are these scholarships for persons already in the public service? What system is in place to ensure that these 4,500 scholarships are given out equitably? It is all good to tout \$1 billion. If systems are not put in place, those dollars could be spent and, at the end, the country would not have benefited.

During the reference interview, also, Hon. Parag made mention again of the fact that I benefited from a scholarship in 2016, and I just heard it again from the floor. Because the Hon. Member never misses the opportunity to remind whoever cares to listen of this fact, I am inclined to comment. In December, 2010, out of a desire to serve my country, I returned home after graduating in law with a Bachelor of Science Degree from the Arizona State University in just three and a half years. If I might add [**An Honourable Member:** (*Inaudible*)] No, no, you did not pay for it. Thank you very much. If I might add, after my first year at the University I became a member of the Golden Key Honor Society which recognised my achievement of being in the top 10% of my class. In case anyone wishes to check, feel free to take a quick flight and with the help of Google maps and a Global Positioning System (GPS) one would have no problem locating the Arizona State University where one could readily verify my information.

As a Guyanese, out of a desire to serve, I became a lecturer at the University of Guyana (UG), and it was during my tenure at UG I accepted a scholarship from the Government of Guyana. I, therefore, have no apologies for the said scholarship. In fact, I am thankful to the APNU/AFC Administration for the opportunity, one that I would never have been granted under a PPP/C Regime, regardless of how deserving. I do hope that interview was the last time Hon. Parag would suggest that as a Guyanese citizen I was not deserving of a scholarship.

With my teaching experience in mind, I am more than willing to offer Theory and Practice of Politics (POL1100) classes, free of cost, to the Hon. Member and, by extension, to all the Members on the other side of the House because we care, and because no MP or Minister must be left behind if we are truly to work towards one Guyana. I would repeat if for emphasis: because of my training and teaching experience in mind, I am more than willing to offer POL 1100 classes to the Hon. Member Parag and, by extension, to all the Members on the other side because we care, and because no MP or Minister must be left behind if we are to truly work towards one Guyana.

Since the Budget speech was read, there have been several statements made about whether the Budget includes moneys for salary increases for public servants. To this issue, during the 2020 Budget debate the Hon. Member Parag's response to the question of salary increase for public servants was simply that a process of collective bargaining must be conducted before increases are announced. Five months later, in her 2021 Budget Focus interview, the Hon. Member Parag stated the following:

“Making an announcement for an increase in salary and a percentage... is contrary to collective bargaining. It's not the norm. You take away the right of collective bargaining if you do that. So, you cannot be contradictory and want a percentage in there and you're taking away the rights of collective bargaining under which you have an agreement to do.”

I have not heard of any engagement with the union between September to now, to facilitate a conclusion of that collective bargaining process in time for *Budget 2021*. Maybe it was, and the union has chosen, not only to remain silent on this important matter but, also, not to inform the persons whom they represent. So, yes, there may be \$10 billion allocated and, yes, collective bargaining is indeed necessary, but only time would tell whether these are all smoke screens or, maybe, they would be pressured into announcing a salary increase to our deserving public servants by the end of this Budget debate. We can only hope for the latter. On that note, Mr. Speaker, I would like to join my Colleague, Hon. Member Ramjattan, to demand that the public servants receive a 10% across the board increase in their salaries.

I was quite taken aback by two specific statements made by the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, that I must highlight. On page 13 and into page 14 the Hon Member said, and I quote:

“Additionally, while some countries around the world reduced working hours and associated salaries for their workers as part of their pandemic response, this Government retained all public servants at full pay while allowing a rotational work system and work from home systems, where applicable, to mitigate disease transmission.”

This statement, I believe, to be far from the truth in two ways. On 8th April, 2020 a *News Room* article was titled *Salaries for public servants, pensions guaranteed for rest of 2020 - Finance Ministry*. In this article, the full statement from the Ministry of Finance reads as follows:

“The Ministry of Finance notes the concern raised about the continued payment of salaries to public servants. We wish to categorically state that the salaries of public servants, and pensions, are guaranteed for the rest of the year. We urge you to reject any rumours to the contrary. Salaries and pensions will be paid as scheduled for 2020.

The Ministry is appalled at the insensitive and cowardly attempt by persons to incite public panic, at a time when we are grappling with national and global challenges. We urge that such persons be held accountable, and that they refrain from making incendiary and ill-informed statements. We invite you to seek out the Ministry with any questions that you may have, so that you can be appropriately informed.”

This shows that it was APNU/AFC that gave the commitment to all public servants that their salaries were in no way threatened by the pandemic or the political impasse at that time. Indeed, at the Department of Public Service, Permanent Secretaries were sending notes requesting advice on how to deal with many public servants who were stuck out of Guyana, during the pandemic, due to the closure of the airports, disallowing public servants from reporting for duty when they were due to be back at work. Under normal circumstances their salaries would have been cut. However, instead, we made a decision that we could not hold public servants accountable for circumstances beyond their control.

It was under the guidance of His Excellency President David Granger and Prime Minister Moses Nagamootoo, that a national Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) plan was conceived so that there would be an across Ministries and Government agencies approach to this pandemic. The Department of Public Service on 27th March, 2020 issued a circular to the entire public service, with the subject *Public Service Response to COVID-19*, where the following was stated:

- “2. Heads of Agencies should identify all staff that are considered to be critical or non-critical. Critical employees, in the context of COVID-19 situation, are defined as anyone whose job function is necessary for the effective daily operation of their agency or authority and who must be physically present in the office to execute their duties.
3. Heads of Agencies, in consultation with their senior staff within their agencies, should determine rotational or other arrangements for all critical and non-critical personnel, and the capacity of the agency to enforce and monitor such arrangements. Where rotation is being considered it must not exceed one-week, and officers are expected to be ‘on call’ and be prepared to work on short notice, should the need arise.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may need an extension.

Ms. Fernandes: Sir, with your leave, I respectfully beg that the Hon. Member be given five additional minutes to complete her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

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

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

After consultation with Permanent Secretaries and Heads of Agencies on 23rd April, 2020, a public administration work scheme was developed to document the various measures implemented to maintain Government operations during the public health crisis and beyond. These included staff rotations, work from home, appointment scheduling and Government portals. A news article by *News Room* on 25th September, 2020, days after the PPP/C assumed office, was titled, *All Office of the President staff to return to work full-time; Mr. McCoy says citizens are demanding services*” The article stated:

“In a departure from the rotation arrangement in which public servants have been working in recent months, the Office of the President has issued a memo asking for all of its staff members to return to work on a full-time basis.

This comes even as Guyana has recorded its deadliest month for COVID – 19 with a major spike in the number of COVID – 19 cases and deaths for September.

The memo is also flouting the Government’s own gazetted COVID-19 guidelines which clearly state that all persons employed within the Public Service, a semi-autonomous agency, statutory body or State-owned enterprise shall work on rotation.”

This is the truth, Mr. Speaker, that the Hon. Member, Dr. Ashni Singh, stood here, with a straight face, to tell this House that the PPP/C Government retained all public servants, at full pay, during this pandemic, when every other day since the 2nd August we hear of another group of public servants being sent home. That the Hon. Member Dr. Ashni Singh would stand in this honourable House and falsely claim that the PPP/C allowed a rotational work system and work from home systems, where applicable, when staff of semi-autonomous agencies could only whisper that they were still on rotation because the instructions were for all staff to go back to the office and that there should be no rotation, I wonder if the statements of the Hon. Member on this matter, in this House, are so far removed from the truth that he is deserving of a visit to the Committee of Privileges.

3.44 p.m.

Let me register that what we do here is no puppet or clown show, as we are responsible for determining the very livelihoods of those who elect us to these offices. We must learn to tackle the issues and leave the arrogance at the door.

In closing, I cannot in good conscience give my approval to this Budget. Finally, I would like to say to the Members of the House that, during the next break, when we all go to partake of what our wonderful caterers have for us today, Members on the other side could register for the free POL 1100 class I offer.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member.

I now call on the Minister of the Public Service, Ms. Sonia Parag, to make her contribution.

Minister of the Public Service [Ms. Parag]: Thank you Mr. Speaker.

Permit me to, first and foremost, express my deepest gratitude to my Colleague, the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, and his very hard-working team for putting together and presenting an exceptionally remarkable Budget, despite the challenges and amidst a COVID-19 environment. A presentation I daresay, is impossible to be rivalled by any Member of the Opposition.

As I sat here, I have heard the Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, gave her take on *Budget 2021*. First, I would like to respectfully thank the Hon. Member. I am very flattered that the Hon. Member listens to me while I speak. Secondly, while I thank the Hon. Member for raising her voice for this Budget – in the last budget, I could not hear what the Hon. Member said clearly – I wish to respectfully request that the Hon. Member improve her arguments.

The Hon. Member sought to offer me assistance. While it is great to have a cut and paste speech, it was unhelpful. *Budget 2021* comes on the heels of an emergency budget approved in September, 2020, which kick-started relief measures aimed at unburdening our nation's people. These burdens were every bit as oppressing and suffocating, as those of the 1970s and 1980s. It is amazing that, up to today's date, it has escaped the Opposition's mind how it lost the 2020 General and Regional Elections; it was voted out for everything it held on a chokehold for this nation. I have listened to a lot of nonsense coming from the mouths of the Hon. Members of the Opposition for the last day and a half. The Members of the Opposition, since the commencement of this Budget, have been attacking it for being visionless and oppressive.

This nation must never forget what oppression from the Opposition is. It must never forget that people were taxed up to their necks from 2015 to 2020. It must never forget that thousands of jobs were lost; 7,000 sugar workers and 2,000 Community Support Officers (CSOs), lost the ability to earn an income. We must never forget in this honourable House, in this very Arthur Chung Conference Centre (ACCC), my Colleagues and I, on this side of the House, were oppressed and prevented from using our cellular phones during the recount. We were oppressed and repressed from giving a response to nonsensical allegations that were raised and orchestrated by the Members who are now on the Opposition; that is what oppression is. *Budget 2021* cannot be associated with the words, oppression or failure. [**An Hon Member: (Inaudible)**] I go on the very word that the Hon. Members continuously use, oppression.

I will never forget that on the 13th March, 2020, as I left the Headquarters of the Elections Commission (GECOM), in Kingston, I was nearly beaten by supporters, while the APNU/AFC Members stood right there. That is oppression. That is why they were voted out – for their bullyism, strangulation of the economy and racism.

Budget 2021 seeks, again, to build on the rule of law and democracy. Members of the Opposition should never come to this honourable House and put it in disrepute by even mentioning the word, democracy. They tried to steal a whole election and suffocate the will of the people, yet, come here and say that they had 50% of Guyanese – they did not. As a matter of fact, just two days ago, His Excellency, the President of the United States of America (USA), Mr. Joseph Biden, congratulated the President and Guyanese on achieving the 51st Republic Anniversary, and stated that Guyana has a strong democracy, no thanks to the Opposition.

While a portion of Guyana is being threatened to be unhinged, the Opposition continues to carry a narrative that wants to divide our country. In addition, we have witnessed something that is unprecedented in the world, which was the Hon. Member, Dr. Cummings, revoking accreditation for international counterparts.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, is it, “revoking”? I was around...

Ms. Parag: I beg your pardon, Sir?

Mr. Speaker: You may need to withdraw that.

Ms. Parag: Threatening to revoke... I apologise. In any event, it is unprecedented.

I have also heard, in this honourable House, in the last day and a half, that there was no invitation extended to the Opposition for consultation on *Budget 2021*. I will say this, the truth is a foreign concept to Members of the Opposition and we continuously see that. While we come here on a highly consultative process with every relevant stakeholder, the Members of the Opposition wish to sit at Stabroek and have a people’s Parliament, without people. Instead of coming to have meaningful consultations, they did that. How can Guyanese take the Members of the Opposition seriously when, in fact, they are a clown show? They have been showing this country that all the time.

I am going back to the days of pre-kindergarten as well. I want to extend a good hand to the Opposition. [**An Hon. Member:** Now?] Yes, right now. There are two things; I am seriously considering in the lovely budget that I have for the Ministry of the Public Service, scholarships for Mathematics and Comprehension which will assist. I will also point the Hon. Members of the Opposition to the Hon. Minister of Health's budget that carries a good portion for mental health. It includes pathological, dot, dot, dot. The Opposition had stated, His Excellency Dr. Mohamed Irfaan Ali, had invited Mr. Granger to have a consultation of past Presidents and that was refused. Then again, from all accounts, it seems that the Coalition has a serious leadership crisis; one is a Chairman, one is the General Secretary (GS), one is the Head of the Party and the AFC is disintegrating on a daily basis. So, logically who is to be consulted? Nevertheless, Mr. Granger was invited to a consultation and he refused.

This is Elementary language. Logically, again, how are you supposed to consult with someone who cannot recognise – when the world recognises – the President as the legitimate and democratically elected President of Guyana? [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** Bharrat Jagdeo never recognised Granger yet (*Inaudible*)] [*Interruption*]

There have been a lot of bantering about the COVID-19 cases being on the rise and the health sector not being able to put a handle on it. I wish to draw your attention to the fact that two of the Hon. Members on the Opposition, while tested positive for COVID-19, sat amidst us in this very honourable House and, recklessly, put all of us at risk. Now they have turned and said that the Government does not have a strategic plan. I point the Hon. Members to page 44 of the *Budget 2021* speech, and I wish to quote:

“Government has made a provision of over \$750 million to support the rolling out of COVID-19 vaccines from February and for the rest of the year, in a phased approach, ...”

So, Mr. President, there is an allocation in this Budget...

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much.

Ms. Parag: I am sorry, Mr. Speaker. There has been a sizeable allocation in this Budget that will see the rolling out of vaccines to take care of the Guyanese population. I wish to say, again, that

the Opposition needs to stop with the pathological untruths, just to gain any cheap political points that may come their way.

3.59 p.m.

I wish now to rebut the Hon. Member Ms. Sarabo-Halley's speech. There are several things in her speech; inaccuracies as a matter of fact. The Hon. Member comes to this House and thinks that it is justifiable and honourable that she granted herself a scholarship. A scholarship which, I might add, cost the sum of £10,080, that should have lasted two years, and up to today's date, we do not have a record at the Ministry of Public Service that she has ever completed it.

It is one thing to come to this House and say, there is nothing wrong with me being granted a scholarship. There is something very wrong with you giving the Hon. Member, Dr. Henry a scholarship; there is something very wrong in sitting in a public office and giving the Hon. Member, Ms. Ferguson, a scholarship; there is something very wrong with giving the Hon. Member, Ms. Simona Broomes and her children scholarships that amounted to US\$25,000, that could have been given to those who are in need and who are financially unable to support themselves to go to the University of Guyana. When one takes public office, it is not to help oneself, it is to serve the Guyanese people. Do not come here and try to justify that one has helped oneself instead of helping the nation.

It is not justifiable that there is a backlog of 70,000 applications sitting in the housing sector and the former Minister of Public Service, the Hon. Sarabo-Halley, applied for a house lot in June and was given a house lot in one month. That is what is called 'self-serving' and 'not service to your country'.

I have heard so much about public servants being terminated and being fired. I say to the Hon. Members of the Opposition, that when they fired 7,000 sugar workers they did not look back. The workers had to go to the courts to get their moneys. When they fired 2,000 CSOs what was their justification? The Hon. Member, Mr. Jones, said that 1,500 public servants were fired. If one is to take a look at the *Estimates of the Public Sector Current and Capital Revenue and Expenditure, Volume 1*, one would find the staffing details there and one would find that will amount to just about five or six entire ministries. The Hon. Member pulled and plucked numbers out of the air without knowing what he is talking about. That is completely untrue.

I have heard about the termination of the Staff College but let me set the record straight today. The Hon. Member, Ms. Sarabo-Halley, stood at the Staff College and said that it is a ‘premier institution that would allow for entries into all levels at the Public Service’. The reality is that the Government gifted itself the Staff College from the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo); that is one. It spent \$80 million refurbishing one building at Ogle when a Training Division existed for many years and still exists today in the Public Service Ministry that deals with the induction and development courses in the public service. It spent \$80 million on that; \$87 million was spent for one year on the staffing; \$87 million was spent on the contacted employees at the itself, 50% of who, were retirees. How could that be juxtaposed to firing 7,000 sugar workers and putting them on the breadline? How would you justify that? This Staff College did not promote fair recruitment practices. The Hon. Member quoted me incorrectly when she said that I said, “56 students”. It is 60 students per a year who were produced to enter in a Clerk III position, jumping a Clerk II position. The Clerk II, who was getting less money had to, in turn, train the Clerk III. How could that have been fair practices? Whatever the intention was for this Staff College it did not produce or give that intention; it did not. I wish to place this on record, that the Ministry of the Public Service struggled, but found placement for all 60 of those persons who were trained in 2020.

I am excited to have *Budget 2021*. The Ministry of the Public Service has the largest budget that it has ever had at \$3,065,000,00; that will see the improvement across the board. One billion dollars, \$2 billion and in excess of \$800 million is allocated for training – human resource development. One billion dollars would go towards the initiative of the 20,000 online scholarship that was promised in the PPP/C’s manifesto. Let me say this, the manifesto was crafted from numerous consultations with all relevant stakeholders and, as a result of that, it is reflected in the 2021 Budget. The billions of dollars allocated to the Ministry of the Public Service will go wider than just an induction course into the public service. This is for national training and will see a higher tier of education being spread equitably across Guyana, starting with 4,500 online scholarships in 2021.

The Ministry of the Public Service is also heavily allocated in the usual ‘Scholarship and Training’ departments. Sir, if I may, not to *toot my own horn*, but I would do so on this occasion. In 2019, Region 1 was allocated four scholarships; in 2020, Region 1 was allocated 14 scholarships. In

2019, Region 2 was allocated 10 scholarships; in 2020, in a short space of time, in the midst of the COVID-19 environment, 21 scholarships were granted.

In Region 3, 30 scholarships were granted in 2019; in 2020, 51 scholarships were granted in Region 3. In Region 4, 158 were granted, and 226, in 2020, with an equitable spread across the sub-areas of the East Coast and the East Bank, rather than being centralised in Georgetown. In 2019, in Region 5, there were 13 scholarships granted; in 2020, that went to 23 scholarships. In Region 7, there were four scholarships in 2019; in 2020, there were seven scholarships. In Region 8, there were zero scholarships for 2019; in 2020, there were seven scholarships. In Region 9, there were four scholarships in 2019; in 2020, there were 10 scholarships. In Region 10, there were 33 scholarships in 2019; in 2020, there were 45 scholarships. In that short space of time, the PPP/C Administration was able to deliver and not leave the hinterland behind, as we promised. In 2021, that would invariably improve. The budget allocation from the emergency budget was well spent on the people of Guyana by the Ministry of the Public Service.

Might I dare say, the Hon. Member said that, when they entered Office, in 2015, everything was archaic, and nothing was computerised. Might I say, when I entered Office on 6th August, 2020, it was the same way. I am now computerising all the data for every department.

The Ministry of the Public Service is not only doing that, but it is increasing training in technical skills by not only granting scholarships and financial aid to the Georgetown Technical Institute (GTI) but, also, to the Linden Technical Institute (LTI), the New Amsterdam Technical Institute (NATI) and the Essequibo Technical Institute (ETI). It would be extended this year to all of those areas as we are very aware that technical skills are necessary. The Centre of Excellence in Information Technology (CEIT)... \$15 million has been allocated in the budget for the Ministry of the Public Service to improve on information technology. This would be done in collaboration with the Government of India, which will fund that Centre as well. The country could look forward to a modern age of information technology. The Hon. Member when speaking... it is great that she could cut and paste. However, she must speak from a point of success. There was a failure to do anything by the Hon. Member, in her time in office at the Ministry of Public Service; a complete failure to do anything. The code of ethics remained the same, the rules from 1987 remained the same and there was absolutely no performance management system. All of that is being

implemented by the Ministry of the Public Service. With the assistance of *Budget 2021* the Ministry would be able to do all of that.

Software is being installed and will be installed. Thanks to the Budget of 2021 that would be installed to have a shorter turnaround time in the processing of documents within the Public Service. That would see the *wheels of Government turning faster*. That is something that was not done.

4.14 p.m.

In all sectors in this country, *Budget 2021* is financially able to manage and bring this country back to stability. Every right-thinking Guyanese has come out and has applauded *Budget 2021*. Every right-thinking organisation has come out and has applauded *Budget 2021*, because they realise that the former Government was not doing anything from 2015 to 2020. Now, the country will be pulled out of debt, because the People's Progressive Party/Civic (PPP/C) has done it from 1992 to 2015 and it will do it again. Not only will it pull the country out of debt, but it will stabilise the economy and make this country great, as it should be. *Budget 2021* is just the commencement of that and all of that amidst a horrific pandemic that is affecting the entire world.

With those words, I give my full support and put my full weight behind *Budget 2021* and its implementation in the development of our country.

Thank you. [Applause]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Minister of the Public Service. I now call on the Hon. Member, Ms. Natasha Singh-Lewis, to make her contribution.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: *Alhamdulillah*. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to present my thoughts to this honourable House on this short-sighted Budget, presented to us under the theme: *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. It pained me to listen to Dr. Ashni Singh speak of dynamism in this Budget when we all know that the political directorate who dictates the policy of this Budget emanates from that of the dark triad.

I say this to let you know, Mr. Speaker, that as I read the Minister's Budget speech the tone extracted was that of a draconian one. We know that only the one-man band is capable of same. I

do not believe for one moment that, like the Attorney General, Dr. Ashni Singh has the testicular fortitude to pull a Machiavellian stunt like this to present a backward and visionless proposal as a macro financial policy.

However, I believe that if the Hon. Member, Mr. Deodat Indar, is given his rightful place, he would do a better job. That way Dr. Singh could go back to Dubai, since he appears to be jet lagged or still feels that he is on a beach sipping champagne and feasting on steak. [Mr. Dharamlall: Listen to how shameless you are.] Hello, my father did not rape my cousin, that is shameless.

My mind tells me that this Budget is a reflection of Dr. Ashni Singh throwing a tantrum and making a spectacle of himself so that the one-man band can play a different tune. For whatever reason, Dr. Ashni Singh's performance is diminishing; the Guyanese people need to be aware that this Budget is unrealistic and hypocritical in nature. This People's Progressive Party/Civic Budget is hypocritical and visionless. It is an assault on poor people of this nation. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you and the Guyanese people about the hypocrisy of this Budget.

Dr. Ashni Singh, in his Budget Speech on 12th February, 2021, said that the vision for Guyana is stated in the 'oneness' and the one Guyana corridor speech by his President on the infamous day, 11th February, 2021. I recognised that the vision of any strategy or programme is the heart or the live wire that gives it life so I will spend a few minutes looking at the 'Oneness Guyana' concept. From the onset, let me make it clear that the 'Oneness Guyana' is a plagiarised concept of Mr. David Arthur Granger concept of social cohesion for Guyana written and published in September, 2015. I have the evidence right here. This is the social cohesion concept. This booklet, titled *Social Cohesion and Political Inclusion: Strengthening Society, Forging National Unity*, articulated – let me tell you a few things of what it stated – inclusionary democracy, elimination of extreme poverty, elimination of inequality, promotion of political inclusion, employment and social protection, equal access to education and a cohesive society for all. This was my first set of evidence when I refer to the speech as a cohesive one. This, as I put forward, is the A Partnership for National Unity/ Alliance For Change (APNU/AFC's) five-stage strategy to establish a cohesive society.

I honestly believe that because Dr. Ali has recently been through the rigors of being a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) student. He would not plagiarise the writing of President David Granger.

Plagiarism is an academic fraud. I do not believe that Dr. Ali will do that. I think that he should fire the person who wrote that speech for him. Mr. Speaker, if you do not believe me, you could ask Dr. Opadeyi, former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Guyana (UG) who is a known writer of these theses.

Mr. Speaker: I did not hear you properly with the last few words, “A known writer ...”. It came out a bit muffled.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Dr. Opadeyi, former Chancellor of the University of Guyana who is a known writer and supervisor of a few theses.

Mr. Speaker: Did you say, ‘of a few theses’?

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Yes, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: That is all right.

Mr. Singh-Lewis: The author of the ‘Oneness Guyana’ concept, even though we know that it is a plagiarised document that mirrors Brigadier David Granger’s concept, it did not provide a background for Guyanese to contextualise what the concept really speaks to. Mr. Speaker, let me provide a background. In 2011, the A Partnership for National Unity (APNU) campaigned throughout the length and breadth of this country on the promise of a better life. Sir, I believe that you were a PPP/C Minister of Government then, so you would know. Is that right? You would know that the principle underpinnings were living together in love, harmony, working together and being our brother’s keeper. Mr. Speaker, does this not sound like the ‘Oneness Guyana’ speech? You would know better than I if it sounds like the speech.

Mr. Speaker, I have shown you two pieces of evidence that demonstrates that the PPP/C stole the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change’s concept of social cohesion and rebranded it to ‘Oneness Guyana’. I give it an ‘F’, a failing grade for the people of Guyana because plagiarism is deemed as an academic fraud. Fraud is fraud; it should not be in this House. When one plagiarises, he/she is unable to expound because it is not your thing, by that I mean, what would it do, at this point of implementation, that would really determine the impact that Dr. Ali is speaking about. Here we see that there is a clear contradiction or dissonance between that vision outlined in the ‘Oneness Guyana’ speech and the Budget that was presented to this House.

My Colleagues, on the first day of the debate, have shared a few clear contradictions in different sectors. More pointedly, I want to ask Dr. Singh, what the programmatic structured approach outlined in this Budget to address the ‘oneness’ referred to as the vision for Guyana? What are the measures put in place to respond to the challenges of this country, specifically noting that the people of this great country, Guyana, has gone through so much during the 2020 Elections? Some people think that we are brave and strong, so we will survive.

The damage done to the people of Guyana like Aunty Suckie is irreparable. Do not tell me anything about Ethnic Relations Commission (ERC), because that is the self-proclaimed Bishop’s claim to fame and, in the opinion of one of the Commissioners, it is a white elephant. My opinion of the ERC is farce, – Yes. It is a farce – which is embodied by the Prem Chopra of the PPP/C, the one and only one-man band.

I asked about the structure for the implementation of the ‘oneness’ vision because it was missing, like the recent situation of the missing boat in the Atlantic. However, while you are unable to articulate the implementation plan, I have recognised that it is the social cohesion concept that was plagiarised.

Let me put forward, to this Administration, what the David Arthur Granger Administration had in place. We articulated that if one wants people to live in a cohesive community and to build a harmonious Guyana, the budget has to be crafted in such a way that it promotes inclusive growth and reduces socio-economic inequalities. It had to be crafted, in such a way, that it promotes integration, inclusion and equitable benefits in development processes. It promotes social inclusion and acceptance of diversity. It enhances citizen and community safety and security. It should be written in such a form that it enhances citizen participation in political processes and decision-making. It had to be written in such a way that the budget is crafted to promote a culture of peace, reconciliation, harmony and trust. I believe that the ‘Oneness Guyana’ concept speaks to all of that. I am going to stop here at this lesson on building a harmonious Guyana and ask that, for homework, the PPP/C does some research on this framework and revisit the ‘Oneness Guyana’ concept.

To come here and to stand for however long and speak boisterously about nation building is not going to cut it. Mr. Speaker, permit me to quote one hilarious part of the ‘oneness’ speech. It states:

“We must move nation building from abstraction to action. And lose, not one more moment in doing it. Let us stand up for our one nation, our one Guyana. Let us stand up for what we know in our hearts and in our minds to be right. Let us stand up for our one identity – the Guyanese identity!”

What is that? What is the author talking about when he moved from abstraction to action?

4.29 p.m.

Dr. Ashni Singh did a wonderful job by painting a picture of a glorious PPP/C. I forgave him, because while he had frolicking fun with the sultans in Dubai during the period action was taking place in Guyana – 2016 to 2020 – we were doing what the people wanted. The action that I referred to from 2016 to 2020, the A Partnership for National Unity/Alliance For Change Government established an entire department for social cohesion. We developed a five-year strategic plan for the implementation of social cohesion in Guyana. That was the action taken; That was the action that David Arthur Granger and the APNU/AFC implemented already in this country. What was he talking about when he mentioned “abstraction to action”, because the writer did not research the concept? I give this PPP/C installed Administration an ‘F’ grade, a failing grade for this utter nonsense. If you do not know the impact of a failing grade you could ask the Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports, Mr. Charles Ramson, about his experience at the University of Guyana. [**An Hon. Member (Government):** (*Inaudible*)] Mr. Aubrey Norton gave him an ‘F’.

The writer of the ‘Oneness’ concept stated:

“The people of Guyana are waiting to see what we will do with their affairs.”

I do not know why he believes that the people of Guyana will wait to see. Let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, what he meant by ‘waiting to see’. From August, 2020, to now, we are here, and we are seeing. We saw the contempt to which innocent and qualified public servants were fired wantonly; we saw all the Boards of Guardians being replaced by only the PPP/C Members across this country; and we saw the discriminatory manner in which the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) cash grant was distributed. I am a qualified professional. I do not speak without verifying the evidence. I have it here, Sir. Mr. Speaker, I have here a list with 1,336 persons who received pink slips and some who did not receive anything at all. Some of them are from the 1,000 persons who were ignored

by the PPP/C activists who shared the money. I give this Administration an ‘F’, a failing grade for doing that to the people.

We saw a backward shift from the Green State Development Strategy (GSDS) to a Low Carbon Development Strategy (LCDS). This is backwardness. I wish to quote Ms. Walton-Desir:

“...since the installation of the PPP/C Administration, we have seen a series of missteps, mistakes, miscommunication and all out mamaguying in the international arena.”

The mamaguying continues. Listen to what a senior citizen sent me, he said that President Ali went on to describe the essential character of this Government’s vision as ‘inclusion’ and emphasised that he was anxious to pursue partnerships with representative bodies in the governance of one Guyana. He said he wanted ‘regular high-level consultations’ with them and to address key issues, as well as ‘directly engage communities and community leaders across every village in building trust and deepening relationships.’

A senior citizen sent that to me, Sir. The quote that I just read is the exact process followed by the David Granger Administration led by the Hon. Amna Ally, the former Minister of Social Cohesion, when we had 32 consultations across this country. You could ask the Hon. Ms. Gail Teixeira. The *Hansard* will show that in the last Parliament, Ms. Teixeira questioned the Hon. Member, Ms. Amna Ally, on the number of consultations and the locations. It is attempting to do what the APNU/AFC had already crafted and implemented for four years. The PPP/C is ashamed to use the word ‘social cohesion’ because it dismantled the entire department and had the mandate to build a harmonious Guyana. [*Interjection*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if you are going to quote the President again, do not quote from what somebody said outside but from what he said in here.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, it is from the ‘oneness Guyana’ speech.

Mr. Speaker: I thought you said that somebody sent it to you.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: The quote I just read is what a senior citizen sent to me.

Mr. Speaker: That is all alright.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: The fact that it cannot use the word ‘social cohesion’ is a shame. I said in my previous Budget contribution that fluff would not cut it. I say it here, again, that fluff, lip service and grand speeches are inadequate to create the sort of impact that is needed to address our society that is already divided and hurting.

Mr. Speaker, I realise that even though I have been granted more time today, it seems insufficient, so permit me to deal with one more issue.

I now turn my attention to the disingenuous manner in which Dr. Ashni Singh attempted to glorify the periods of the PPP/C corruption, and to demoralise and rewrite history with untruths for other periods of our history. On page two, paragraph 1.6 states:

“The first phase from 1966 to 1992 was an era of state domination and economic decimation and left our country bankrupt.”

Then, he spoke of the second phase from 1992 to 2015 and the third phase from 2015 to 2020. I, honestly, believe that our Chief Whip, on Monday, whipped Dr. Ashni Singh enough on the second phase of our history – 1992 to 2015. Opposition Chief Whip, I am grateful for that. Now this wept boy will listen to the history of lesson on the first phase, from the period that is from 1966 to 1992. Of that period, 19 years, is considered the legacy of the late Mr. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham. He is the co-founder of the People’s Progressive Party/Civic. Sir, to speak to the legacy of this great leader, let me share from the *Kaieteur News* on 8th August, 2010. It states:

“...Founder Leader of the People’s National Congress and first Prime Minister and first Executive President of the Co-operative Republic of Guyana.

Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham played a significant role in the political social and economic development of Guyana. It was under his Leadership that Guyana attained political Independence and Republican status. It was under his leadership, in collaboration with other Caribbean Leaders, that CARICOM was initiated and developed. It was under his leadership that CARIFESTA became a reality.”

These are hard facts that form part of our history. We will not allow the dark triad of the PPP/C to deny us a reflection and the truth of our history.

To attempt to rewrite the history of Guyana as reflected in paragraph 1.6 of the Budget speech is tantamount to barbarism.

Let the record show that the PPP/C is not only guilty of dividing this nation by practicing divisive politics, but it is guilty of barbarism for attempting to rewrite our history in a one-sided passion. This we will not allow. It will receive a failing grade for doing this.

Mr. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham's legacy is self-explanatory as it is evident and it does not require me to come here and remind us of it. I cannot be fair to myself being a Member of this House and allow for a National Leader in the form of the Deputy Speaker, Mr. Lennox Shuman, to spew hate on the 98th birth anniversary of our founder leader. Notwithstanding the PPP/C's incitement on page two, at paragraph 1.6 of the Budget Speech, the *Facebook* rant by the irresponsible behaviour of the Deputy Speaker is deemed as racist and disrespectful.

One of the Queen's College (QC) scholars in the alumni, I believe his name is Mr. Stephens, described the Deputy Speaker, on this matter, as misguided. I do believe so. He stated that as for the Deputy Speaker, if it was up to you and your cheap political gamesmanship, you would have Mr. Burnham cast into some dark void to be ignored and forgotten. Do you actually think that you can succeed in such pursuit? I certainly hope Mr. Stephens gets a respond to his questions. Mr. Deputy Speaker, Mr. Shuman, knows that when situations like these causes him to spew hate in the open world, as he did on that day, it is a true reflection of what is going on inside of him.

We acknowledge that many of the haters are burned with envy and jealousy when an objective review of the 60s –70s period of Guyanese and Caribbean history is done. I believe, Dr. Ashni Singh is one of those haters. That is the only reason, I can assume, he left out such an important part of our history from his Budget Speech. So, go ahead and spew hate. You would never be able to escape the breadth of vision and the depth of the contribution of Mr. Forbes Burnham.

Let me share a bit more of LFS Burnham's legacy that Dr. Singh refused to capture in his Budget. He, himself, spoke of a period of time and refused to acknowledge the truth. Mr. Burnham established the institution of the Newly Independent Guyana, and later the Cooperative Republic of Guyana. In the Region he was the forefront of the Caribbean Integration Movement. He successfully advocated for breaking the United States (US) embargo. The Caribbean states

maintained the diplomatic relations in Cuba. Also, his support for Freedom Fighters in Southern Africa is well documented.

4.44 p.m.

Mr. Shuman, being in the House forces me to refer to you as Hon. Member, but that is not how I feel. At the moment, I do not feel that way having reflected on your *Facebook* post. How in God's name could one person be so cheap to sell his/her decency for a titular post.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, I allowed the first part when you said Mr. Shuman and that you are forced to call him honourable. Now, you are imputing. Could you please withdraw the entire section?

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I am so guided, Sir. More so as an Indigenous leader, it is the ungratefulness in this matter that bothers me. Are we not aware that it was Mr. Linden Forbes Sampson Burnham who named the international Airport, Timehri, in recognition of the Indigenous people? Was it not Mr. Forbes Burnham who gave recognition to the Indigenous people when he said that we must create equal opportunities for bridging the coastland and the hinterland? It is a shame that the PPP/C plays this situation like a puppet. Is anyone not aware that it took away that said recognition that Mr. Burnham gave to the Indigenous people when it renamed the Airport after its leader?

Mr. Speaker, I am disgusted by the *Facebook* post the Deputy Speaker made. I must point out that he is a part of the Opposition and you have not found it necessary to call him out on his racist *Facebook* post I wonder, why?

Our history will not fail us...[*Interjection*]

Mr. Speaker: You are now imputing on the Speaker. You will have...

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I wonder, why? Sir, it is a question.

Mr. Speaker: I do not have *Facebook*; I do not know what you are talking about. I cancelled my *Facebook* since 2010.

Mr. Duncan: Mr. Speaker, you know what is on my *Facebook* page though.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, I wonder, how is it you monitor the Hon. Member, Mr. Sherod Duncan's page?

Mr. Speaker: Please, withdraw that.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: All right, Sir.

Mr. Speaker: All right.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Sir, I am not here to fight with you.

Mr. Speaker: I am asking for you to withdraw that imputation of the Speaker.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: I am so guided, Sir.

Our History will not fail us, but it will certainly be the judge of us, all.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you will need more time to conclude.

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

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Member, you may continue to conclude.

Ms. Singh-Lewis: Mr. Speaker, I heard that you made mention of Members who were given more time and you did not hear them speak about their portfolio. I have made my point. I have spoken to the 'Oneness Guyana' and I have spoken to paragraph 1.6.

Our young girls are being raped by people who are hired to protect our society and keep us safe. The most recent situation was in Region 1, Mabaruma and Moruca. We are still awaiting an update from the Minister on this issue.

A large portion of our society, especially the young people, are engaged in rampant alcohol abuse. We are all aware that this is also a contributing factor to the single greatest social ill in this country, domestic violence. On the issue of domestic violence, I wish to tell the Guyanese people that the Minister of Human Services and Social Security spoke a lot about the Spotlight Initiative and that

is a wonderful thing. What she has not been saying, is that the \$1 billion the Government received from the European Union (EU), on this project, is as a result of the dedicated and hard work of the APNU/AFC Government.

Our very young brothers and sisters in Baraita are committing suicide every week. Our young people are left to wonder what is going to happen to their education. As we speak, 153 promising minds from the Sophia Training Centre (STC) are abandoned by this Administration and more than 300 were left abandoned from the Kuru Kuru Training Center (KKTC). Where are we going if we continue to abandon our young people? One would think that the campaign is over and that serious work programmes would be implemented but, we are yet to see what the PPP/C plan will do in 2021.

I have no confidence that the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security will or can look at these matters of social ills in our society. Why would I make such a statement? The said Ministry came to this House and procured the sum of \$7 billion for the distribution of the COVID-19 cash grant relief. The money was taken away from the Ministry days later and given to the Ministry of Local Government to do the distribution. That tells me one thing, that the Vice-President has no confidence in the Minister of Human Services and Social Security to carry out that function. If he has no confidence, why would I even think that the Ministry can attempt to address the social ills of our society in a programmatic, structured and sincere manner?

Come to think of it, Mr. Rawle Lucas said a few years ago:

“The PPP/C thrives in the social and economic chaos that it creates, and the insecurity that emanates from it.”

In a microscopic view, it might very well be the PPP/C’s game plan to punish the poor people of Guyana. I am sure that we have not seen anything in relation to what would be done to reduce poverty.

I can safely say, to conclude, that there was not one single Minister, of this installed Administration, who visited areas such as Plastic City or behind the Embassy of China to see what happens there. This bat and balls Government has no clue of what is going on with our people on the ground.

The Budget in its current form, I cannot lend my support. The Budget in its current form, I will give a failing grade. I cannot betray the people I represent. Thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Member. Hon. Minister of Human Services and Social Security, Dr. Vindhya Persaud, you may proceed.

Minister of Human Services and Social Security [Dr. Persaud]: When I saw the Hon. Member, Mr. Sherod Duncan, pass some papers to the speaker before me, I was hoping that he was giving her the speech she was supposed to present, which relates to *Budget 2021*.

Before I go there, let me first commend and congratulate the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, for crafting a budget that I fully support. I thank the Minister and his staff for navigating the fiscal space and for doing so by presenting a transformative, catalytic, pro-development and people-centered financial blueprint.

This is against the backdrop of the global onslaught of a COVID-19 pandemic. A pandemic that has paralysed the economies of many countries. Here, we are against that by not at all introducing new taxes. Here, we are against that by not at all having measures that could be considered punitive and draconian. Here, we are with a 2021 Budget that touches people in every sector and it ensures that we will have the dynamic transformation of the landscape of this country and engender, in the population the resilience to recover from a ruinous abyss that the last Government put this country into.

I support my Colleague Ministers outstretched offer to Members on that side for scholarships and comprehension. It is important that you understand and relate to financial management in a prudent and strategic manner, because this Budget is for this country. We have been regaled, from the moment the debates started, with fallacious, disingenuous, histrionic gymnastics from that side of the House to justify a surreal world that they have created. Perhaps, they believed that existed under the tenure of the APNU/AFC Government. Let me bring some reality to this, let me bring some realism and let me penetrate that surreal bubble that they have wrapped themselves in. Members, let me tell you.

What is the APNU/AFC Government's legacy? Taxes were increased by \$83 billion from 2015 to 2019. By 2019, tax revenue, on the backs of the people of Guyana, was a whopping \$225.9 billion.

In 2014, it was \$142.9 billion. We saw the contraction of non-oil sectors. We saw the collapse of industry rendering a number of people without salaries, sustenance and putting them on the virtual breadline. That is the reality. That is what Guyanese people lived with and lived under in the five years of the APNU/AFC Government.

To stand here and to lecture about credibility and integrity, first, the Hon. Members, on that side of the House, have to be able to uphold the Constitution of this country and the Hon. Members on that side of the House will have to be able to face the people to say that they were not part of the unmitigated assault on the democratic fabric of this country and the trampling of the Constitution.

We can speak but, our actions speak much louder than what we want to say, to distract from what the People's Progressive Party/Civic is offering this country. There are many exacting expectations from the people of this country. From our manifesto to our budgets that we have presented in 2020 and 2021, we are fulfilling the needs of the people because we are unapologetic about consulting with the people from the grassroot level to all stakeholders. We are not going to apologise for that. If people want to come to the House and say that they were not consulted, then they are not interested in the progress of this country.

4.59 p.m.

Sometimes it is important to state it as it is, and I am here to say exactly as it is. ...7.3% contraction of the sugar industry; 3.7 % ...the fishing industry or sector, contracted by 17% and the bauxite subsector by 41% because this Government was waiting for oil to flow. That is not how you manage prudently; that is not how you manage strategically.

We have seen small businesses in this country crumbling and shutting down because there was nothing for them to invest. There was no kind of capital to expand or to grow their businesses. In five months, we have seen the Guyanese population scarred and probably scarred forever because of the events that transpired. We cannot hide from those facts.

Let us contrast, let us look at the stark contrast of the PPP/C's budget with the legacy that I mentioned briefly. Let me not venture into the sustainable livelihood development programme. I will leave that for another Colleague to tell you a lot more about that. That was akin to a slush fund and one of the most corrupt schemes by the APNU/AFC Government. To try to distract people's

attention from what the PPP/C's budget is offering such as the reversal of taxes – why we reversed them is because you put them there; the removal of tariffs on basic necessities such as: food, household items and what has become so necessary in a COVID-19 pandemic that we need for school, work and to mitigate the effects of distancing data. When we look at all of these measures, we should not look at them in isolation but as cumulative effects...[*Interruption*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member Mr. Duncan, did you not have your chance to speak? You may continue, Hon. Minister.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

These are cumulative benefits for people across the length and breadth of this country. What I could manage to discern from what transpired, before I got up, was a reference to One Guyana. What do we say: *One People, One Nation, One Destiny*, that has been there, enshrined in our motto, and not crafted by the former President, Mr. Granger. In fact, if you want to go all the way back into history, if we are into history lessons, then we only have to look no further than the father of Mr. Robeson Benn, Minister of Home Affairs.

When we come to this august Assembly, we must come armed with facts. We must come armed with the kind of substance that a debate warrants. We, on this side of the House, are looking for intellectual stimulation. We are looking for constructive objectives and recommendations that will better or improve what we are offering. We are looking for the positive contributions from Members, on that side of the House, that will add to the well-being and welfare of people. To want to be part of consultation, we must be receptive to the views of others.

I believe with all my heart that the Members of the Opposition do have a role to play in this land. But first, it is imperative that *they get off their high horses*, be on the ground with the people of this country and work and serve the people of the country, who they purport to represent. To sit, or to be here, as an elected Member of Parliament has with it the privilege of service, the privilege of crafting legislation and the privilege of debating budgets such as these, in a very constructive manner. More importantly, to bring facts and truths to the floor and to not look at this arena for partisanship, cheap salvos, racial invectives that seem to abound from that side of the House, and every other complaint and conjecture to distort and to distract from their dismal performance as Government.

I have heard mentioned several times about this Government taking plans and programmes from the former Government. I will tell you that even the computer on my desk was never turned on. It sat there unused. I visited buildings and the buildings are in a sad state of decay. Moneys was budgeted and returned in large measure because programmes were not happening. Vulnerable populations did not benefit under the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security in the manner in which they should have, so how could the Members in this House, on that side of the House, come here and say that we are trying to plagiarise or take programmes when nothing existed in large measures.

The Ministry of Human Services and Social Security has increased its budget by \$3.8 billion with \$26.2 billion invested in our current expenditure and \$3.3 billion in capital expenditure. There is much to be done. I believe that once the cacophony of shrill emissions from that side of the House ceases, I think the people of this country would like to know what this Ministry has in store for them. Our laser focus is on women, the elderly, children, young people, persons living with disability and we have also done some cross collaboration among ourselves, as Ministers of Government, to ensure that our programmes are efficient, effective and that they get across the length and breadth of this country. When we speak of inclusivity and equal opportunity, we walk our talk.

The sum of \$80 million has been directed towards training of women. We have not seen in any budget presentation, prior to this one, in recent times, that specific allocation – none. The training of women will give them the impetus that they need to move to a state of independence from a state of dependence; to move from skills training into the world of work – vocational training. We are shattering the gender stereotypes and encouraging women to move into the area of different modes of study and work. The Ministry will be offering training in interior and fashion design, graphic design, video editing, information and communications technology (ICT), child and elder care, business and microenterprise development, jewellery making and biodegradable ware manufacture. Those are only some of the programmes that we have earmarked for women in the hinterland and on the coastland. It is because I understand what happens when women are deprived of accessing programmes, maybe because they would have dropped out of school that focus would also be on functional literacy; again, brand new for women.

Emphasis will be placed on leadership training, advocacy, legislation and social issues. You are probably wondering where the hub of this training would be. It will be taking place at a building that has been neglected and that has fallen to disrepair. When I walked in there, the computer laboratory was almost bereft of working computers and the kitchen was in a total state of chaos. That is going to change because the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute (GWLI) will benefit from a spanking state-of-the-art modern kitchen to the value of \$20 million, a computer laboratory and refurbishment.

We will see the transformation of the lives of women not only by getting the training, but by being a part of an extensive programme that moves them from training to investment and to grant access, so that they could start their businesses and be their own bosses. And if they so wish, have the skills that make them more marketable and employable.

This has not come out of thin air. In the short span of governance that we have had, the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security embarked on the Garment and Accessories Cottage Industry Initiative, that benefitted almost 100 women. We saw emerging out of that initiative, 58 business proposals, 14 success stories and they were linked with the Small Business Bureau, Institute of Private Enterprise Development (IPED) and other agencies to ensure that they can do the best that they can with what they were given. We have also launched a brand-new initiative – the mobile street food kiosk. This will open several industries to various Guyanese with skills, from welding to joinery, carpentry, being a part of the supply chain, food preparation and design. This is intended to capture Guyana's cuisine and to also highlight the beauty, diversity and the uniqueness of Guyana.

I am also very happy to tell you that is not the end of the story. The Guyana Women's Leadership Institute will have the first business incubator directly targeting women. They can go to the Guyana Women's Leadership Institute and benefit from training in microenterprise, improvement of the product or skill and linkage to marketing opportunities. Following this, as we move to International Women's Day, we will be launching the 'WE challenge, the fast pitch'. The acronym stands for women's entrepreneurs challenge, the fast pitch. Once that gets underway, women can pitch their business proposals and vie for 10 grants that will get them started on their business. That is not copy; that is creativity, innovation and original.

In addition to that, we are moving to create a digital database and social media platform to ensure that women's products and skills are marketed. I sit very quietly and I listen to the Members on the other side of the House hoping to hear that there is mention of persons out there, who would want to hear that they are considered and that they are represented by that side of the House. I can say that this Budget represents them.

People living with disabilities – never have we had the sum earmarked in this Budget, earmarked at any other time. I would like to thank the Minister of Finance, for paying attention to this population and that is the population of persons living with disabilities. A \$30 million modern building will be constructed in the compound of the Mahaica Hospital and will serve as a hub for training persons living with disabilities. That is original.

We will be working with these groups of persons to ensure that they are trained to join the labour market to be competitive and to also start their own enterprises.

5.14 p.m.

The National Commission on Disability has been allocated \$50 million and \$120 million would have been allocated for vocational training, provision of support prosthetics and equipment for persons living with disabilities.

Violence is entrenched and it is something we should not be impervious to. We live in a country where women continue to lose their lives. The recent one really disturbed me on a deep level and that was of the elderly woman who was raped, battered and brutalised. It should concern every one of us in this honourable House. My heart goes out to all the families who would have lost wives, mothers, sisters and grandmothers; and I extend my deepest condolences to them for their loss. Because we are committed to tackling violence in all its forms, we are building on something that we have launched within the first three months of sitting in Office, it is the 914 domestic abuse emergency hotline. That side of the House can be *blow-blow*, *talk-talk*, *yap-yap* or whatever it wants, but the reality is that within the first six months of this Government's tenure in Office, we have done it – the 914 helpline. It is brand new.

The 914 is an initiative that is intended to benefit people – women, children, men and anyone. I do not know who wants to... anyway, but it is intended to benefit persons who are experiencing

violence. I want to build a culture of reporting. We see it, we hear it, we report it, call 914. It is important that we continue to complement 914, and we are doing so with the Survivors Advocacy Programme, with ensuring that the 914 centre is populated with operators who have been trained in counselling and dealing with crisis management. A lot of our attention will be focused on violence. In addition to launching 914, we have signed on to the Spotlight Initiative. One can see that nothing has been excluded.

We could sit for the remainder of this debate and find or conjure all the faults of this Budget, but I think the people would expect from you, Hon. Members on that side, a contribution that can enable us to continue on this journey of development and progress.

We have done much in the category of old age pension and public assistance. The old age pensioners number is over 61,000 and we have spent a lot of time thinking of how we can improve the quality of service. We are pleased to say that shortly, in the month of March, there will be 40 new locations where pensioners can collect their pensions. That will be at MoneyGram and Western Union locations across the country. We are also advocating for those who have bank accounts to utilise the banking system, so that there is no need to join long lines to collect pensions. If that is not enough, we have delivered on a promise that we made and that was to increase the pension. Pensioners from 1st January, would have moved from \$20,500 to \$25,000. And that, puts \$3 billion back into the pockets of our pensioners, increasing their disposable income, ensuring that goes back into the economy. That is how an economy is stimulated; not by leaving the country's state of finances in an overdraft.

We do not believe in wild, wanton, reckless expenditure. All of what we are doing is geared towards ensuring that people have a better quality of life. Public assistance has a 33.3% increase, believe it or not, it is the highest increase to public assistance. I am aware that there is more that is needed, but this is just the beginning. It took the APNU/AFC Government all of the five years to increase public assistance by \$3,500. We have done that in one year and we have moved public assistance up higher. [**Mr. Dharamlall:** It is six months.] Under one-year, good point.

The Ministry of Human Services and Social Security serves people across this country – people in difficult circumstances. We have been doing that at a rate of 75,263 persons who would have accessed social assistance.

The Member, on that side of this House, spoke about the Local Board of Guardians. If there was chaos, it was there. We reviewed, revamped and increased the numbers of the Local Boards of Guardians, so that they can adequately cover and serve the people across the country.

[Mr. Speaker hit the gavel.]

I always wonder why it is that when we are doing things in a constructive, structured way that there is always the complaint or comment, if it is not political, then it is racist. Good God! Come with something that is a little more original.

Let us talk about our institutions under the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security. I will never forget, on day two, when I walked into the Ministry, one of the persons working there said to me that the former Minister never even said good morning or how are you. When I visited some of the institutions, they had never seen the Minister before. [**Mr. Nandlall:** *(Inaudible)*] I know that the Attorney General misses a few Members, who are very close to his heart from this sitting of Parliament. When I visited those institutions, what horrified me was that all the talk in the previous budgets of fixing and repairing these institutions, in reality, it was not so.

The Night Shelter is undergoing a transformation – a complete overhaul and rehabilitation. It is not only a physical rehabilitation, in terms of tiling, painting and putting in windows. I could not believe that people were kept in a room without windows and parts of the wall – that is inhumane, callous and unacceptable. That is what is happening right now. We will also see the Night Shelter benefiting from a brand new kitchen. Very early on, there were fires at the Palms Geriatric Institution and do you know what the horror of it was? The patients had to be lifted down. The persons who were housed there had to be lifted down because the lifts were not working. Shameful! Stretchers were not there. Shameful! We heard that you cared for the elderly of this country. Terrible!

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Minister, we care for you to continue, so could we get an extension moved please?

Ms. Teixeira: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to seek five minutes extension for my Colleague to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Minister Teixeira. Hon. Minister Dr. Persaud, you may proceed.

Dr. Persaud: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I have heard reference to pink slips. When one hears ‘slips’, one thinks of other slips. I took pains at one of the sittings to explain how the process works. I took pains to explain why the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development and the Ministry of Finance were taking the lead on this because of the number of staff that they have and also the regional structure that exists under the Ministry of Local Government and Regional Development. I also took pains to say that phase one was still happening, and when phase one concludes, the pink slip phase will be in operation. If the Members are honest with themselves, what should concern and bother them, is that they did nothing. Hon. Members, whether you want to say that we are giving \$25,000 or you want to say that people will get a pink slip to later get \$25,000, we are alleviating the hardship of people. We have responded to the needs of the people. What have you done? They did not give a green slip, a white slip or a penny to the people. When one stands in a self-serving environment, be careful what is said about others who are, at least, serving the people of this country. Be careful! We are serving the people of this country, and we are also looking at how people accepted the \$25,000. [**An Hon. Member (Opposition):** *(Inaudible)*] I do not have the list, but Minister Dharamlall probably does. The Hon. Member spoke a lot about the former President, but he took his \$25,000 and appreciated it. *Take that page out of his book.*

In the Ministry of Human Services and Social Security we have been working with the religious communities through its Support and Heal Network initiative working with vulnerable communities launched a programme called the ‘Young Influencers’, working with 25 young persons who will be there to inspire their peers and deal with important social issues like cyberbullying, bullying and peer pressure. Two of them have already presented to the United Nations (UN). That is thinking about people at all levels of society and from every conceivable sphere across this country.

The Sophia Drop-In Centre – oh my goodness! The kitchen is in a horrendous condition; no child should be eating from that kitchen. The Sophia Drop-in Centre will get a brand new kitchen and also, an overhaul. We are catering for the indigent and homeless by refurbishing the Night Shelter and ensuring that there are programmes that can benefit from those persons. Children will also

benefit from a whopping \$892 million that will go towards human resources, capital investment towards transportation to enable us to respond with alacrity to the numerous reports of child abuse, an awareness campaign, parenting programmes and also some of the other areas that I have mentioned.

We are focusing on adoption and we are also encouraging persons to adopt older children. It is not only that, this Ministry is quite expansive, so archaic legislation will be looked at. I am pleased to say that in this Assembly we have already tabled the Adoption of Children (Amendment) Bill to come into conformity with the Hague Convention on the Protection of Children and Co-operation in Respect of Intercountry Adoption (Convention).

Next in line is trafficking in persons, followed by pensions, public assistance and before you know it, we will have legislation that is modern and in conformity with the best international practices. That is development, that is progress and that is only a little bit of what this Budget encompasses.

Finally, I want to say that the people in this country would be listening to what we say and what we do, and this is not the time Hon. Members, on that side of the House, to pick your spot on the Comedy Central reality television or the lunch buffet show. This is a time for serious work. It is not the time for your usual practice of eat, protest and abscond from this House. The people see you; people see the Members on the other side of the House.

And finally, people's perspective out there would be considered the greatest indicator of the merits of a budget and how successful it is. I would just like to mention a few of those. In the *Kaieteur News*, Paws For A Cause – Guyana, applauded the unprecedented nature of the Government's focus on animal welfare and its pledge of direct budgetary support at a public policy level to eradicate cruelty to animals. And I remembered the words of the Attorney General, "taxation from man to beast". Look at the contrast.

News Room Guyana – the Private Sector Commission (PSC) praises Budget 2021:

“To this end, the budget is indeed a people-focused budget which is healthy to facilitate broad-based and inclusive growth of the economy in terms of job creation, encouraging private investments and more entrepreneurial activities.”

5.29 p.m.

The *Guyana Chronicle* – statements from regular people out there, Ms. Govena Deonarine, from Region 2, said:

“As a young person [listening] to the budget was quite refreshing for me, especially to hear of the many plans for the agro-processing sector through the Ministry of Agriculture. I am also pleased with the announcement for the construction of the Abram Zuil Secondary School;”

I love the comment made by Mr. George Chesney, an 85-year-old retired man living in Christiansburg, Linden. He said:

“(The budget is) wonderful, great... the best I’ve ever heard. The assistance for senior citizens, that one was one of the most important parts for me; ...”

Mr. Manly Thomas from Aishalton, Region 9, said:

“As an Amerindian, I am very grateful that the government has given us a lump sum of money to resuscitate certain projects ...”

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may have to give way to somebody else.

Dr. Persaud: Mr. Speaker, I close with this, ‘the voices of people’. What do they say about you? What do you want them to say about you?

I commend this Budget to the House. I support it unhesitatingly and I advise the Members, on that side of the House, to join us, support the Budget and bring this country to a state of prosperity that we could all be proud of. One Guyana. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Minister Dr. Vindhya Persaud.

Hon. Members, just to update you, there has been no progress. While we have done a lot of work in searching for the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes’, items, which were taken from her briefcase, the police are still looking. I know the information technology (IT) persons are trying to use the remote system to locate the unit. If you hear of any leads, during the break, please speak with the Clerk.

The second issue is, the Hon. Member, Mr. Mahipaul was not feeling well and he has been taken to the hospital. I think he has since left because of him having to join the line.

We have quite a bit of issues to deal with. The two Chief Whips and I will meet in 15 minutes to discuss some of these developing issues.

Hon. Members, we shall take a suspension until 6.15 p.m. Thank you.

Sitting suspended at 5.30 p.m.

Sitting resumed at 6.45 p.m.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, just a few announcements. We understand that the Hon. Member, Ms. Catherine Hughes', laptop was discovered in the vacant seat next to her. I have already heard all sorts of conspiracies, but I will tell you that from the moment the announcement was made to the time we left this Dome, the Dome was under surveillance. I am happy that the laptop was discovered. I could attest to the fading of my nimbleness of memory, as I age, but we are happy that the laptop was found. All may not be well, but we are very pleased that aspersions could not be cast on persons within this Dome.

My apologies for being late. The Chief Whips, the Clerk and I, met to deal with some issues that arouse on Monday and today. Hopefully, with the discussions we had, the remaining days of the debate and the estimates could be in a more orderly, decent and exemplary manner.

With this, being said, I call on the Hon. Member, Mr. Devin Sears, to make his contribution.

Mr. Sears: Mr. Speaker, thank you for affording me the opportunity to address this honourable House.

To the Members on the other side, happy post Republic Day. To the winning side, the APNU/AFC family, that I represent, that also represents all Guyanese, despite of race, colour or creed and that will be back in Government, soon, I say, a warm hello to you.

It would be remiss of me, if I did not extend my prayer, today, for mercy, peace and favour for Guyana, and for us to overcome the myriad of challenges, so our people can thrive and enjoy the abundance of God's grace.

To every single person here in Guyana infected with COVID-19, I pray that you will have a full recovery, as quickly as possible. Our hearts go out to their families and the affected communities, as well. I want to reach out to all the persons who are confined in quarantine or in isolation. We know that this is not an easy time for you, as you live each day, with the weight of worry and of uncertainty. To our frontline workers, I salute you.

However, our dear land of Guyana is experiencing another great threat – a disease. I am talking about an infection that stymies progress, breathes corruption, empowers the wealthy and feeds scraps to the less fortunate. Who am I talking about? I am talking about those warming our seat in Government.

As a Guyanese, with proven citizenship, I feel dismayed, hurt and appalled, but not surprised with the Budget presented by the Hon. Member. This Budget will go down in history as one of the worst ever presented. This Budget is perverse, pernicious and precarious. If one recognises, that is a true representation of the PPP/C.

Mr. Speaker, I represent the Upper Demerara-Berbice region. In this Budget, \$4.78 billion is allocated, an increase from \$3.9 billion which was in the so-called 2020 Emergency Budget. It sounds good – an increase is good. Well, the harsh reality is that 48% is allocated for employment cost, 36.9% goes to other charges and 14.3% goes to capital expenditure. If one is to pay keen attention this is not a new formula that is being used by the PPP/C. It is the same formula that was used while it was in Government for 23 years and that has oppressed the beautiful region that I call Upper Demerara-Berbice.

I speak on behalf of my constituency, when I say, we have had enough and it moans that it was on the path to a promised land under President David Granger, at that time. However, there is *light at the end of the tunnel*. The APNU/AFC appreciates the efforts of the PPP/C to continue our proven legacy of some key projects within that region. One of it is the completion of the call centre, which is expected to employ about 300 young people, and if on a 24-hour basis will employ about 900 persons. We thank you for continuing this project. Also, we want to say thank you for continuing the project of the Linden to Mabura Road. We want to also say thank you for continuing the construction of the Christiansburg Primary School. We also want to say thank you for continuing our legacy project for the Linden Synthetic Track. But my people are disappointed with the fact

that in the 2021 Budget, the Linden to Kwakwani road, when it comes to maintenance, it is not catered for. We ask that this be corrected.

When it comes to agriculture, there is an urgent need for a food policy implementation that will transform the sector not only for its food security but one that is sustainable and commercially viable. I am proud to say that just a week ago, the capable and competent councillors started its first monthly Farmers' Market Day which was a success. And I say, kudos to them. Under the theme, '*Grow Local, Buy Local, Consume Local*'. There is much more to be done.

While the Government continues our legacy project, we say thank you for continuing the Millie's Hideout road, but the farmers would like to know, by how many kilometres (km) will this project continue with? It was the vision of the APNU/AFC to bridge the gap from the Berbice River to Linden to ease the transport of goods. The West Watooka road is currently in a terrible state, but we want to know, are we going to put back a single-lane road? If we are serious about farming, we need to ensure that, at least, two tractors could pass on that road. We ask that this be corrected.

Over the last decade, we have recognised that there is an increase in farming activities in the Tacama Savannah especially when it comes to citrus farming, but that road is in a terrible state. The Hon. Member, Brigadier (Ret'd) Mark Phillips, could attest that the soldiers of the Tacama Battle School, who traverse there, have expressed their dear frustration.

Over the period, and as a former Lecturer, I have grown to understand the importance of education and the true concept of no child left behind. It is not to rush students through the system, it is to ensure that key stakeholders – the educators and learners – have the necessary resources to deliver and to receive. I fear that after this global pandemic has left us, the underprivileged in my constituency – 16 Indigenous communities, Kwakwani and Ituni – will be left behind because of this Government's ineptitude to maintain the ICT hubs, to establish stable internet access and to distribute computers to those who need it the most.

The Government claims that it cares about young people, so much, that they have terminated the former Ministry of Public Security's re-education programme which aimed at re-educating potential juvenile delinquents, teenage mothers and school dropouts; they need a second opportunity, as well.

Most recently, we observed that they went after the contractor who was looking at the Linden Technical Institute (LTI) dormitory which would have housed over 200 young people from far-flung communities. We say to you, and we understand, that the PPP/C does not care about the young people.

The speaker before me, the Hon. Dr. Persaud, spoke about the Board of Governors. Now, Region 10 is predominantly of African descent and what we have recognised with the recent appointment of Directors to this Board, it is predominantly Indian. [**An Hon. Member:** (*Inaudible*)] This is the Board of Guardians. I say to you, what we have recognise is that it seems as if the PPP/C is politicising this Board and it comes over as being racist. This is unacceptable and we ask that it be corrected. During the APNU/AFC Government we ensured that all interest groups, even representatives from the religious community, were a part of this Board, so that it could better serve those who needed the assistance the most.

When it comes to natural resources, in April of this year, Linden will complete 105 years of bauxite mining. This very resource has contributed handsomely to this country's Gross Domestic Product. It has survived 14 global recessions, which brought severe economic and financial disruptions, in many countries such as Guyana. And to date, it still maintains the highest employment rate, second to the public sector. I must inform this honourable House that Region 10's per capita, pays the most taxes.

6.57 pm.

The bauxite industry needs attention. There must be a levelled playing field for investors. Currently, we have a bauxite company that is producing value-added products; while we have another company that is just extracting the ore and sending it to a different country for processing, we have a company that is thinking about expanding and employing more Guyanese. Most recently, we had a bauxite company that fired hundreds of our workers. Those communities affected were Hururu, Aroaima, and specifically, Kwakwani. Let me say this, that very company that I am speaking about is RUSAL, which extracted its equipment.

I am saying to this honourable House and to the other side, if it is that RUSAL has no interest in bauxite mining in this country, let them go. But I encourage you on the other side to ensure that

we get an investor that will take over that operation. We cannot afford to play *luck and chance* with people's livelihoods. This is unacceptable.

I make reference to an editorial in the *Stabroek News* newspaper dated 21st February, by renounced economist, Mr. Lincoln Lewis. He said that sugar in Guyana is being produced at US\$ 0.41 cents and it is being sold on the Global Market for US\$0.13 cents. This represents a loss of US\$0.28 cents. Forgive me. It continues to say:

“The disparity in attention and treatment of bauxite and sugar based on economics cannot withstand scrutiny.”

It is time that the Government act and represent the people of Sub-Region 2.

When it comes to local government, my capital town Linden, since when I served as a Municipal Councillor, has always had financial difficulties. A problem that existed during the PPP/C's installed Interim Management Committees (IMC) back in the 1990s. Linden is indebted – over \$100 million owed to the National Insurance Scheme (NIS), the Guyana Revenue Authority (GRA) and other agencies. This debt affects entitled salary increases, employment benefits and a lack of proper services to over 30,000 residents. Hon. Member, Mr. Dharamlall, I ask of you to consider this and make representation to your side.

We need new boundaries in Linden to be regularised. I am talking about from Bamia to Rock Stone Junction and Coomacka. We also would like the revaluation of properties, so that people could pay proper rates and taxes. We also would like the return of the toll booth at the Wismar/McKenzie Bridge to the municipality. Also, this \$18 million subvention is not good enough. We proposed \$50 million because we have a growing town.

Let me also say to you, Hon. Member Mr. Dharamlall, my capital town of Linden is asking for a complete bailout, if you truly care about the folks in Region 10.

The residents of Upper Demerara/Berbice asked that many squatting areas be regularised, similarly to what we had done to Andy's Ville and Prosville. We asked that those areas be regularised.

Listen, we welcome the distribution of 1,000 houses, but my people of Upper Demerara/Berbice have one concern, who will be the beneficiaries of these 1,000 houses? We have for decades a

backlog of people who have applied and have not gotten a chance for a house lot. We asked this question who will be the true beneficiaries? They also want to know: will the necessary infrastructures be put in place, such as proper roads and water?

When it comes to electricity this installed Regime continue to boast of 0% taxes on electricity. This is misleading. I am looking at a specimen of an electricity bill in Linden, and it states that this person pays \$700 VAT on the reconnection fee. Let it be known in this House today, how could a small, man who could barely afford to pay his electricity bill, afford to pay a reconnection tax? This needs to be registered. We are being fooled as Guyanese.

When it comes to infrastructure, the intention of the APNU/AFC Government was to construct a new Wismar/McKenzie Bridge. The feasibility study has already been done. My people are disappointed with the fact that this Wismar/McKenzie Bridge had not been considered in the 2021 Budget. We continue to face a backlog of traffic. If we are making Linden a capital town, and it is the gateway to the interior and the coast, we need a new bridge. And, you are saying that you care about the people. You do not care about the people.

I also want to bring to your attention, Mr. Speaker, that the Linden/Soesdyke Highway is in a terrible state. Most recently, we have had an accident and we continue to get accidents. We have completed the feasibility study and we ask the Hon. Members on the other side to continue that project. In the 2021 Budget, we recognise that there is *patch patch wuk*. We do not want *patch patch wuk*. We need a proper highway. How many more deaths do we need on the Linden/Soesdyke Highway before we actually catch our senses, I ask the other side?

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you could continue along the highway, you will need some time.

Ms. Jones: Thank you, Cde. Speaker, I do hope that the Hon. Member, be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, very much, Hon. Member, Mr. Jones. Hon. Member, Mr. Sear, you may continue to conclude.

Mr. Sears: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. The PPP/C had promise 50,000 jobs and this is a farce. That is another ‘pink slip’. Many projects under this Regime, throughout our region, are being outsourced. We have competent contractors. Why is it that a contractor from along the coast, as far as Berbice, has to go to Linden to complete a job, when we have resources and people who could complete it? This creates a gap in our economy and who is suffering? The small man is suffering.

When it comes to health, I must say that we are in dire need of a dialysis machine. It is not functioning. We ask that the Hon. Member responsible for health to look into this urgently.

But I want to draw your attention to a much more serious issue. One that has to do with the sacking or not re-signing of the contracts of the St. John’s Ambulance Brigade workers. Those women have no means of income. They have children to feed. They have many eyes looking at them in the morning saying *mummy wah we gon eat*. While the Hon. Members on the other side are enjoying the best life possible – big vehicles, staying at hotels and all of these things, the ‘Good Life’ must trickle down to the small man.

You said that you care about young people, but you have fired some of the National Data Management Authority (NDMA) Date Entry Clerks in our Region. What are they supposed to do now? It is a good thing that in Region 10 we live as one. We look out for each other. We help each other. That is how we are getting by. We are a faith-based community. I could safely say this because I do not believe that I am getting through to the Hon. Members on the other side or are they understanding what I am saying. I have to use country terms: *ju-ja, ju-ju, cha-cha and bougie wan wuk to*. We the people of Region 10 need jobs. While you play politics, we have mothers crying and not knowing where they are going to get their next meal from to feed their children. This is unacceptable.

When it comes to financing, the Linden Enterprise Network (LEN) Incorporation, during the APNU/AFC, we had given it \$100 million. This was used to help the small man get on his feet, to start a small business, so that he could be independent. But, let me tell you, in this Budget, there is zero dollar going towards the Linden Enterprise Network Incorporation. What will happen to the small man? This is unacceptable.

I say to you there is no new investment coming to Linden. Yes, the other side will boast about a US\$2 million concrete factory that is coming, but this is abstract. Just like the plan with the rehabilitation of the McKenzie Sports Club Ground. You need to consult the people. That is the only way that we could have collective ideas and work together as one. We in the Upper Demerara/Berbice want new businesses, skyscrapers, four lane highways, super speed internet, modern sports facilities, safe spaces and universities. We want to drink milk and honey. We want to eat prime steak and prawns. We want to have *champagne dreams and caviar wishes*. We want the promised land and we want it now. The same attention that is being given to West Demerara and Berbice, we want the same attention.

As I close, and as I prepare to yield, I posit the quote from Linden's very own poet, Leon Labastide and from his Amazon bestselling book, *We Are One*. I hope that our President pays attention to this:

“The fog will fade eventually and we will appear.

We are no longer strangers anymore.

Nor Black nor White.

Nor Afro-Guyanese nor Indo-Guyanese.

We are simply human beings.

We are living in paradise.

Falling in love with the waterfalls.

Bauxite in our blood, Golden Arrow Head; what a compass?

The evidence I carry; One people, One nation, One destiny.

The fog will fade eventually.”

The APNU/AFC will be back in government to deliver a ‘Good Life’ to all Guyanese. I humbly submit that this 2021 Budget does not care for a small man and I cannot support it at this time.
[Applause]

Mr. Seeraj: Let me wish all my Colleagues a very good evening. I am reminded that we are in February, I think. My Hon. Colleague thinks it is Christmas time – a long wish list. If I was Santa Claus, I would have attempted to hand some of those things over.

Nevertheless, on a serious note, the concerns of health, education, food, agriculture, food security and building of infrastructures like bridges and highways, all those things are of major concern to this Government. That is why, in this Budget, you have seen strategic allocations to these major sectors that are aimed to do exactly what the Hon. Member is looking forward to. To give the ‘Good Life’ to all, without exception. In time to come, I am certain that we will have a modern highway to Linden, a new bridge and food security. There are already major investments in shade houses – the cauliflower, celery, and other crops are doing well. I saw some pictures only this morning of the input that the National Agricultural Research and Extension Institute (NAREI) is making in Region 10 and the results they are getting.

As I reminisce about passed budget debates, I recall a number of our Colleagues, including myself, talking about the efforts that would have gone into the preparation of the Budget itself. I would have done the same in previous budget presentations. Sir, this time, with your permission, I want to quote from what Dr. Ashni Singh said to erase any doubt, whatsoever, that he would have made a contribution in acknowledging the effort that staff of his Ministry would have made to the budget preparation. This because some people are of the view that, if it is not in there, then it was not said. What is written in here is a major part of what Dr. Ashni Singh would have said. I want to quote the part that is of importance to me to endorse it and avoid me making references to the stalwart efforts of the staff of the Ministry. This is what he said in the extract:

“...before I close, permit me only to acknowledge the tremendous efforts made by all of my Colleagues in the Cabinet and their respective staff, who exerted tremendous efforts in preparing their respective budget submissions and yes, I think a round of applause is eminently deserving.

7.12 p.m.

Permit me also to acknowledge the contributions and submissions made by so many stakeholders throughout the length and breadth of Guyana. Some of whom submitted

written submissions and some of whom participated in face to face or virtual engagements, sharing ideas, making suggestions and discussing issues.

Finally, I trust that I would be forgiven for saving the last word for my own team at the Ministry of Finance, who over the past few weeks made it eminently evident to me why on my return to the Ministry, I really did feel like I was returning home. I thank them for the energy that they exhorted in preparing this Budget. It was not easy as you can imagine. They invested tremendous long hours and I trust that all the Members of this House would agree that they did a phenomenal job. With those not so few words, the privilege is mine on this People's Progressive Party Civic (PPP/C) Government's behalf to propose this *Budget 2021* for consideration and approval by this honourable House."

I totally endorse what Dr. Ashni Singh said. I said that I would have quoted this because some people's *head hard* or their *ears hard*. I have heard it more than once that Dr. Singh did not acknowledge the effort that went into the preparation of this Budget by members of his staff. Sir, in making a presentation there are sometimes written notes and then, in a debate, there are things that you add as you go along. Many Members in this House, if you, Mr. Speaker, take a look at what they prepare and then you go to the record, you would see additions to what was said. What is of critical importance is what was said here. What Dr. Singh said here came from the heart. It was how he was feeling.

What is in this Budget is where the calculated mind, the analytical mind, would be studying projections, trends and numbers, looking at our manifesto, what developmental path we would want to take, and put it into this document. This extract demonstrates, clearly, how Dr. Singh felt about members of his staff giving him their support. I think that it was of value that we recognise and we emphasise that, Dr. Singh did not in, anyway, forget the efforts that went into the preparation of this Budget by his staff.

On the 9th February, His Excellency the President gave the keynote address to a consultation that was hosted by the Global Water and Partnership-Caribbean (GWP) and the High-Level Experts and Leaders Panel on Water and Disaster and Global Water Partnership. This consultation was on water and health. In delivering that keynote address, the President said, clearly, that for us to address issues of water, health and disaster, we must build a solid foundation. On the 11th February,

right here in this Dome, where nothing was lost, His Excellency went on to talk about the ‘oneness’ of our Guyanese people and his vision for our development. I think what he spoke about is aptly captured in the Budget presentation made by Dr. Singh. Here, you have the laying of foundation with a vision of ‘oneness’ and the ‘Good Life’ for all, outlined in all its pages. I think there are 77 of them, if I am correct.

As we debate this Budget, all of us would acknowledge that the just over \$383 billion that we are going to spend here in 2021 will go a long way towards fixing that foundation that the President spoke about. No amount of distraction will take us away from that, whether it is in Region 10... I see the Comrade has left.

Electricity - I was quite frankly surprised that the Hon. Member from Region 10, out of Linden, would talk about electricity. They are getting it almost free there. I think that we, as a Government, should try to bring down the cost of electricity for all our citizens, make it comparable. Instead of raising the rates there, what we will do here – and the Budget addresses it, with investment in renewable, investment in the Wales Development Authority and bringing the gas line to shore – is to bring the cost of electricity down. A solid foundation on which our economy could take off. So, we will fix that.

The house lots that he is hammering about, I am certain Colleagues here, Ms Susan Rodrigues and the Hon. Collin Croal ... We, in our manifesto, spoke about 50 thousand house lots. We lagged a little bit last year, but under understandable circumstances. We are going to pick up speed and get rolling and, by the end of the five years, I am certain that we will deliver on that manifesto promise of 50,000 house lots.

What could be more solid than concrete? The Hon. Gentleman who spoke before me spoke about the establishment of a concrete factory in Region 10 and then went on to say it was abstract. I simply cannot understand the logics of making that commitment and then say that it is abstract.

In the days proceeding, we would have listened to some contributions. I recall this morning that Mr. Ramjattan spoke passionately about the issue of loans, repayments, taxes and all of that. We need to be reminded that loans were very much a part of our lives. Indeed, the loans that were taken by the People’s National Congress (PNC) between that period 1964-1992 were like a stone around our necks. By 1992, debt repayment represented 152% of revenues. That is what it was.

To fast forward to 2015, with that big loan around our necks, we the People's Progressive Party/Civic Administration was able to reduce that to just 5% of revenues. Debt in itself is not evil; it is not bad. It is how you manage it. Mr. Ramjattan, a seasoned politician as he was, seems to think that taking debt or raising the debt ceiling is a bad thing. Yet, on the other hand, they are clamouring for credit to our Guyanese people. If debt is a bad thing, why is it that you are clamouring so much for access to loans and so to our people. The Government itself should also have access to loans. That is why, in order for us to grow as a country, what we have done is to establish credit worthiness. Not everybody could borrow. You could only borrow if you are qualified to borrow, if you are credit worthy, if you could pay back. Simply based on our records, people are falling over themselves to lend money to us. That is why this Administration could borrow. That is why we had absolutely no difficulty in raising the debt ceiling for both external and domestic loans. We are confident that we could pay.

Mr. Ramjattan spoke about not borrowing. Sir, they did not borrow. The Hon. Member Ramjattan, said that they did not borrow. What they did was they bullied the Bank of Guyana to cash cheques rather to do the decent thing and borrow. That is why we, as a responsible Government, had to raise the debt ceiling at two levels: at the local level and at the external level. We had to raise the ceiling to regularise the wickedness that was done by the APNU/AFC.

The taxes that he spoke about, when we said that we were managing a huge budget with no new taxes. Mr. Ramjattan spoke about taxes. What we have to talk about is that, between the period 2015-2019, the APNU/AFC Government raked in an additional \$83 billion in taxes in that period from what it was. That takes you to exactly what they were talking about, Mr. Ramjattan, the Hon. Member.

I recall a saying by Author and Poet, Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson. I recall reading this novel in school, *Treasure Island*. He is the author of that book. Mr. Robert Louis Stevenson said:

“Don't judge each day by the harvest you reap, but by the seeds that you plant.”

The APNU/AFC, from 2015, to when they were forced to vacate were only concerned about harvesting. They were not planting anything. That is why I have serious difficulties with the Colleagues over on that side talking about the just over 40% growth in our economy in 2020, which Dr. Singh acknowledged. They failed to go on to say that the non-oil economy retracted by

7.3%. That is what is crucial. If you want to avoid the resource curse, if you want to avoid the Dutch disease, this is exactly what you have to avoid.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, if you want to avoid cutting off at this time, you have to get an extension.

Prime Minister [Brigadier (Ret'd) Phillips]: Mr. Speaker, with your permission, five minutes is requested.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you very much, Hon. Prime Minister. Hon. Member you may proceed with five minutes additional time to conclude.

Mr. Seeraj: Mr. Speaker, is that an apple timekeeper you have there?

Mr. Speaker: No, it is a Mr. Nadir timekeeper.

Mr. Seeraj: Sir, I would have to ask the Hon. Member, Mr. Figueira, who is not here because Mr. Speaker, when one starts out on these things he/she gets caught up with time, like the Hon. Member who cannot even finish that pig pen up to now.

I want to address another issue. Mr. Ramjattan only sat on an agriculture. On the issue of agriculture, he glorified what the APNU/AFC did with rice. Mr. Speaker, let me tell you the true story. Hon. Ramjattan talked about this growth and, when I look at the production, in 2010, production was 556,193 tons. In the five-year period from 2010 to 2015, it moved to 1,058,129 tons. It almost doubled. What happened under the APNU/AFC? From 2015-2020, from 1,058,129 tons, production was 1,057,580 tons. Actually, it represented a decrease of 549 tons from the 2015 figure. What the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, was talking about was comparing one year to the other. What I am comparing is what they came in and reach and at the end of five years. Instead of building on it, they actually produced less. This is replicated in all other administrative areas, especially in the productive sector.

7.27 p.m.

It is really unfortunate that the time seem to have just ran out like that. I wanted to talk more about the development of the agricultural sector and what was done to the GuySuCo, Sugar is the reason why most of us are here today. The Hon. Minister of Agriculture spoke about the sugar levy. When sugar was *king sugar*, it looked after the welfare of this country. It is only reasonable that now the sugar sector is in some problems, the country repays its debt to the sector and allows our people a breathing space.

Their own Commission of Inquiry (COI) into GuySuCo stated, and as the Minister said, sugar does have a future. I would join with my Colleague, the Hon. Minister of Agriculture, and call on the Opposition Chief Whip, the Hon. Christopher Jones, to apologise and withdraw his remark as it relates to the sugar sector. I did not see that sign; I have to put on my glasses.

To settle that sugar issue, I am certain that with the plans that we are making, sugar will once again be viable. The livestock sector will kick off. At the New Guyana Marketing Corporation (GMC), we are investing \$353 million in new equipment and cold storage facilities. For drainage and irrigation that is so critical for the overall development and achieving that solid foundation the President was talking about. There is \$12 billion. We are going to fix the internal canals, sea and river defences, sluices and increase pumping capacity. More importantly, a network of the farm to market roads will be developed so that farmers can have easy access to their farmlands to plant and harvest. In time to come, under this Administration, starting now, Guyana is going to take off. I am highly confident about that. As a starting point, *Budget 2021* is laying a solid foundation for this country to take off to greater heights. Without any hesitation, I commend this Budget to the National Assembly. Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. [*Applause*]

Mr. Jordan: Mr. Speaker, permit me to say special thanks to the hard-working public servants, who have been deprived for two consecutive years of a simple wage increase. They have been able to put in hard work to complete two consecutive budgets, with no reward.

I rise in relation to the Budget presented by the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, on 12th February, 2021 under the theme, *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. A conclusive analysis of this Budget convinces me to coin a much simpler theme to help the Hon. Minister describe his Government's budget, that is: *A Path to ultimate relapse, economic depression and vulnerability*. Sir, ably representing Mahaica-

Berbice, Region 5, I bring the message of the people to this house. They said, this Budget takes us from prosperity to poverty; from a 'Good Life' to a fight to survive; from equity and transparency to disparity; and from the fear of dying from COVID-19 to that of the pressures of the PPP/C.

This Budget seeks to hastily dismantle a high standard of living called 'The Good Life For All' which was set by the APNU/AFC Coalition Government over the last five years, 'The Good Life For All'. One would understand the high standards and that the Hon. Minister could not have seen it from where he was over the last five years. He failed to advise his Colleagues on the other side of the House on the state of affairs of his budget.

It is quite sad for a nation to have been enjoying a 'Good Life' and, suddenly, an uncaring group of people come and change the course of life for the worst. This Budget will not only add frustration and depression to our nation's people, but it seeks to only enrich a few, whilst causing severe hardships on the honest hardworking public servants who strive to maintain a livelihood. This Budget in its entirety stands to be the largest of its kind. Even so, Guyanese would have wanted to see some basic measures such as a committed and agreed wage and allowance increase, of which this Government failed to deliver in two successive budgets. I recommend: that public servants be given a 10% wage increase across the board from year 2020; a reduction in the rate of VAT; and a planned stimulus for the citizens in order to combat the hardships of COVID-19, among others.

The budgetary allocation for the Mahaica-Berbice region lacks vision and progress. It tramples upon fairness and the even distribution of resources. I will now turn my attention to public health.

The Mahaica-Berbice region's health sector is heading in a downhill trajectory with all the health care facilities clamouring for help since none has the basic essential drugs needed for the day-to-day service to the people. The people are grappling for consciousness with two major drug shortages in a mere six months. The X-ray machines are all down at the two major health institutions within that region. It was the APNU/AFC Government that ensured both hospitals had functioning machines to meet the needs of the citizenry; all it called for was simple maintenance. When I look at the budgetary allocation for this sector, I see no provision outlined to bring remedy to these deficiencies. Are we to now say to the people that it is compulsory for them to spend their hard-earned moneys on private medical services?

The APNU/AFC constructed an Emergency Outpatient Unit at the Fort Wellington Hospital and implemented 24-hours of service of that unit, along with four functioning ambulances in the region. To date, the region only has two functioning ambulances. This echoes the sentiments of my coined theme, *A Path to ultimate relapse, economic depression and vulnerability*.

The regional administration failed to accomplish its targeted efforts in the 2020 Budget for health care. It budgeted to purchase two new ambulances, but to date, none has materialised in services to the people of Region 5. Surprisingly, in this Budget, the sum of over \$18 million is budgeted, yet again, to facilitate the purchase of another ambulance. This is the level of failure the people receive from an uncaring group whose mission statement is great incompetence.

Further, two new incinerators were budgeted for in the 2020 Estimates for the Fort Wellington Hospital and Mahaicony Cottage Hospital to the tune of over \$26 million. Again, no works have been done on the sites proposed to house these units. Shockingly, the 2021 Estimates now cater for an additional four incinerators to be constructed at health facilities across the region. Well, as the messenger of the people, I will deliver the message again. We say the Mahaica-Berbice region lacks administrative and political leadership. The questions are: where are the taxpayers' dollars, where is the accountability for the taxpayers' dollars?

Permit me to touch on Agriculture. The Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, in his Budget presentation, speaking on Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery on page 8, paragraph 3.3 stated that the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector has grown by some 4.1%, with improvements stemming largely on account of growth in rice, other crops and the livestock industries. On the other hand, what he failed to mention is that the foundation of the real work and development, which now bear fruits to the Guyanese people, was laid by the APNU/AFC Coalition Government. He stopped shy of giving the praise where it is due.

The *Good Book* tells us:

“render to Caesar, what is due to Caesar.”

As such, I want to state that the budgetary plans for the agricultural sector are no new plans. They are the plans of the Coalition being completed. That speaks of the good governance the Guyanese people received under the Coalition Government. Testimony to my statement is the improved

drainage and irrigation systems across the length and breadth of the rice belt, the Coalition did it. Since 2015, the NDIA has installed pump stations across Regions 2,3,4 and 5. A number of pump stations have been built and rehabilitated across the coastland at a cost of over \$2,921,000,000. The areas benefitting from this investment includes: Lusignan; Beterverwagting (BV)/Triumph; Good Hope and its environs; Friendship; Vigilance; Buxton; Herstelling; Mocha, Providence; Hope and Enmore – in Region 4; Three Friends; Columbia; Aberdeen; Land of Plenty; Mainstay; Lima and Reliance – in Region 2; Trafalgar – in Region 5; Windsor Forest – in Region 3; Bengal Gangaram, Eversham and Joppa – in Region 6, Hon. Mr. Zulfikar Mustapha.

A new sluice was built at De Edward village, West Coast Berbice, the Coalition did that. The introduction of new, high-yielding paddy to the farming market and new varieties of fruits such as citrus, the Coalition did that. The National Drainage and Irrigation Authority commissioned the country's first amphibious excavator on 24th May, 2019, it was the Coalition that did that. The Guyana Livestock Development Authority, (GLDA) commissioned Guyana's first ever Duck Egg Hatchery. The Hatchery produces approximately 8500 ducklings on a hatching day, again, the Coalition did that.

The year 2017 saw the introduction of the Black Giant birds to the Guyana market, through the Hinterland Sustainable Agriculture Development Programme, with the handing over of 100 Black Giant birds, along with the requisite start-up feed and supplies to the Mahdia Secondary School in Region 8. To date, approximately 70 hinterland communities were able to access these birds and a total of 76,000 birds were distributed, again the Coalition did that.

One hundred million dollars was spent to upgrade the access road in Onverwagt, allowing for the direct access to the Mahaica/Mahaicony/Abary - Agricultural Development Authority's (MMA/ADA's) Seed Cleaning Facility, amongst other benefits, such as the transportation of produce and livestock, again the Coalition did that.

Decentralised services of the NDIA with a new regional office constructed at Onverwagt, Region 5 for the first time. Must I say, the Coalition did all of that. The Minister on page 31 in paragraph 4.54 of his budget speech boasted of:

“...the construction of a modern abattoir at Onverwagt for beef and beef products will transform the cattle industry.”

7.42 p.m.

Permit me to let the nation know that it was the APNU/AFC Government that designed and started the construction of that abattoir in 2019, which is located north along the Onverwagt farm road, Region 5, West Coast Berbice (WCB). Again, I say that this sector has no new plans. The Coalition did it all.

Allow me to speak now about the model farm in Region 5 that we once had. The Mahaica-Berbice Region boasted of the model farm, once located at Fort Wellington to Naarstigheid, which provided permanent employment for over 30 persons and benefitted their families by providing fresh vegetables for the region, the hospitals, the Hugo Chavez Centre and as far as Region 10. It is sad to mention that this project was discontinued by this irresponsible Administration and the lands lay waste today. Some staffers were sent home; the others were promised a few jobs; and the lands were promised to a few party devotees. Is this the path to recovery, economic dynamism and resilience?

Permit me to look at the education sector. The education sector of the Mahaica-Berbice Region was deprived of the much-needed capital investment by this Administration. The meagre sum of \$136 million to service some 72 schools between Byegeval to Ithaca and an administrative office is almost \$10 million less than the sum allocated by the Coalition Government in 2019.

When one thinks about education, one thinks of the nation's wealth. Hence, failure to effectively plan for such a critical sector threatens the future and wealth of any nation. It is against this backdrop that I mention that the Government has failed the people of Region 5 by depriving them of improved quality of education and improved conditions of education delivery.

The truth is that, for a number of years, the teachers and children of the No. 8 Nursery School have been cramped at a section of the lower flat of the No. 8 Primary School. It was the Coalition Government that did the feasibility study, sought access to lands and made budgetary proposal for the construction of a state-of-the-art nursery school. When this Administration took Office, it was denied. How, then, can the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance come to this House and to try to sing his out-of-tune line and rhythm jingle about "*A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*" when, in fact, they can look the nation's children and public servants in their eyes and say they just do not care?

Just to remind or enlighten the Hon. Minister of the Coalition's progress in education in Region 5 so he could land from outer space to a path to recovery: The Perth Nursery school, the Coalition built it; the Calcutta Nursery School, the Coalition built it; construction of Information Technology and Science Laboratories at Woodley Park and Belladrum Secondary Schools, the Coalition built them; and the rehabilitation and renovation of a number of schools throughout Region 5, including Bygeval Secondary School, Mora Point Primary School, Karamat Nursery School, Rosignol Secondary School and Belladrum Secondary School, among others that are too numerous to mention, the Coalition did that.

The introduction of the 5Bs initiative...

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, before you could do more of that, you need an extension.

Mr. Jones: Cde. Speaker, I do move that the Hon. Member be given five minutes to conclude his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member Mr. Jones. Hon. Member, you could continue to conclude.

Mr. Jordan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The 5Bs initiative – boats, buses, bicycles, breakfast, books – we did all of that.

Now, how could the Hon. Minister come to tell this nation about a path to recovery? It very well seems like his Government is lost in discovery. As I speak here, a number of children are being tested for COVID-19 at the Belladrum Secondary School, since the discovery of positive COVID-19 cases in the present attendance. What is the financial plan within this Budget to safeguard our children and teachers as they attend school?

Permit me to look at human and social services. In the area of human and social services, the Government makes shouts of pro-poor and the likes when the people in dire need of government services, such as public assistance, are deprived daily by the now installed board of guardians. Single mothers are refused; sick and differently abled books are cancelled; and over 100 eligible

persons were knocked off the public assistance list in Region 5. This was after this installed Government took Office. This is the evidence of what is happening in Region 5.

Our senior citizens still decry the meagre increase of just a mere \$4,500 on old age pension, taking it to \$25,000, which is some \$15,000 shy of the failed People's Progressive Party/Civic's manifesto promise.

Permit me to look at public security. The APNU/AFC, through wise consideration, regionalised the Guyana Police Force (GPF) and started construction of regional headquarters across this country. The region would soon have its own regional headquarters completed and would house the Regional and Deputy Regional Commanders, along with their support staff from Human Resources (HR), Finance, Traffic and Criminal Investigation Department (CID), among others.

Again, I willingly invite not only the Hon. Minister of Home Affairs, but all those on the other side of the House to come and cut the ribbons at the grand opening ceremony to share in real development, real progress, real administration and real vision of the APNU/AFC Coalition Government. Again, I say this Government has no new plans.

Sports, culture and youth development – the youths of Region 5 are shocked and disturbed at the delivery of this 2021 handbook dubbed a budget. With great disappointment, they are left to bear the full blunt of hardship and dark gloomy days again, since the Hon. Minister's Budget seeks to take our region into great relapse and, undoubtedly, a recession from the high hallmarks of the quality of life set by the APNU/AFC Government.

In the *Guyana Chronicle* dated 17th December, 2019, there was a letter titled "The APNU/AFC Government has delivered in the area of education":

"73% CSEC passes in 2019 was not as a result of a magic wand, but it was careful implementation of President Granger's 5 Bs initiative. His Excellency and his administration have made education a top priority and have spent between 8 to 20 billion dollars more in the education system than the PPP. The APNU+AFC government spent 40.3 billion in 2016, 43.1 billion in 2017, 45.1 billion in 2018, and 52.2 billion in 2019."

That is the notes our young people of this nation need to take along with the Hon. Minister, Ms. Rodrigues that speaks to the preparation and development of young people.

The Coalition delivered in training, poetry, and sciences, robotics and engineering, sports and job creation. That is the 'Good Life' we delivered.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you have to wind down.

Mr. Jordan: In conclusion, the purpose of a budget is to improve the quality of life of the people, and not just a few in selected communities. It is the right of every Guyanese to have the best out of a budget and to be the beneficiary from every area of service.

The Hon. Minister of Finance wasted five precious hours of the nation's time when he read from this 77-page handbook. He could have simply said to the people that his Government has no real plan for the improvement of the lives of the ordinary Guyanese and no new ideas on how to bring about real economic boom. As such, as an elected representative of the people, I cannot support this Budget; not now; not ever.

In closing, I want to sound the warning, once again, to this stiff-necked Government bent on depriving the average of a 'Good Life'. Proverbs 29, verses 1 and 2, states:

“He that being often reprov'd and hardeneth his neck...”

Hon. Bishop.

“...shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice, but when the wicked beareth rule, the people mourn”.

I submit to you that this Budget is plagued with disparity and riddled with inaccuracies and will not offer good to this nation.

I thank you. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you, Hon. Member. Hon. Prime Minister, you may move the extension beyond 8' o'clock.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER NO. 11

BE IT RESOLVED:

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

[*Prime Minister*]

Brigadier (Ret’d) Phillips: With your permission, I am asking that we do the extension in relation to Standing Order No. 11.

Question put and agreed to.

Standing Order suspended.

Mr. Narine: Mr. Speaker, as I rise to make my contribution to this 2021 Budget debate, I begin by commending the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, and his team for a budget that sought to bring relief to the ordinary people.

Indeed, when I looked at the menu of measures proposed in *Budget 2021*, I could not help but wonder if the Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance had taken on the role of Santa Claus, giving out presents here, there and everywhere. He did not miss one sector and he sought to ensure that the Budget reached everyone. This is commendable but not surprising. The PPP/C Administration now, like those in the past, has always sought for the fruits of development to reach all Guyanese.

Indeed, it is the PPP/C that is delivering the vaunted ‘Good life’ to all Guyanese. *Budget 2021* builds on the progress commenced in *Budget 2020*. It seeks to further dismantle the hardships and the burdens the Coalition placed on the backs of the working people during its short but destructive term in Office.

Indeed, *Budget 2021* was highly anticipated and clearly delivered. It is a far cry from what we experienced during the APNU/AFC’s term in Office. The fact that the PPP/C could enhance relief to the ordinary people, without increasing or adding any tax or fees, signals that the country is in the hands of the right people. It must be recalled that some 200 taxes and fees were *shoved down our throats* by the former leaders of the APNU/AFC Government, who sought to insult our intelligence by telling us, barefacedly, that they had the nation’s interest heart. Undoubtedly, those

cunning statements have unveiled themselves as downright deception. Just in recent weeks, we have seen several scandals emerging, thus demonstrating where those leaders' interest really is.

My Colleagues on the other side of this honourable House, except the Hon. Deputy Speaker, are trying desperately to employ every means necessary, even transcending to figments of their imagination, to find talking points to denounce this Budget.

7.57 p.m.

Just imagine, their only reaction was to say that public servants would get no increase. When their folly was exposed, it appeared that *the cat got their tongues*. They have now changed tunes and are speaking no more of collective bargaining but of wanting an announcement. Similar to when they were in the driver's seat, imposition after imposition was the order of the day.

The Hon. Members on the other side of the House and, I said except the Hon. Deputy Speaker, while saying that they speak for the working people, are really far away from their travails. Let me say to them that public servants are not the only group of workers in this country.

Let us not forget that it was that same APNU/AFC grouping that diluted the Ministry of Labour into a mere department, refusing to acknowledge calls for its resuscitation. Today, the Ministry of Labour is not only resuscitated but is being actively revamped. Hon. Minister Hamilton spoke to the many efforts of the Government to advance the protection of the working class. I must remind that the Coalition, during its term, did not advance a single piece of legislation to enhance workers' protection. I recognise, too, the efforts of the Ministry of Labour to advance its training agenda and matching skills with vacancies. The PPP/C is *walking the talk* and not engaging in idle talk, as we see emanating from the APNU/AFC on the other side of this House.

The 2021 Budget was presented under the theme, *A Path to Recovery, Economic Dynamism and Resilience*. As I consider the theme, my mind was immediately jolted to the agriculture sector. This industry plays a seminal role. Yet, the Coalition downplayed, diminished and degenerated the sector. During the Coalition's term in Office, the country had an office and Georgetown-based Minister of Agriculture. I repeat that: the country had an office and Georgetown-based Minister of Agriculture. He could not have been found in the fields, grounding with farmers and workers. Imagine, the then Minister of Agriculture told the media, when he was asked, that he was not aware

that the then Government had borrowed \$30 billion for the Guyana Sugar Corporation (GuySuCo). Really? Could we have had any hope that the sector would have developed under such leadership? It is interesting for us to note that this Government is saddled with the debt contracted by the APNU/AFC Government.

Today, the sector is on the path to recovery, dynamism and resilience. Our new Minister of Agriculture, I recognise, is working dedicatedly to reverse the damage inflicted. I have known of the Minister's unflinching stance to alleviate the plight of the farmers and agricultural workers. I know, too, of his connection to the ordinary people, and that is why I am not surprised, when I open the newspapers, to see him interacting with farmers, sugar workers, fishermen and others on a regular basis. It is that sort of practical, hands-on leadership that is required to put agriculture back to its rightful place.

The Coalition's disdain for agriculture was probably most visibly manifested in the sugar industry. The APNU/AFC took an industry, which was showing great signs of recovery, to its lowest ebb. It was as if they had a reverse Midas Touch. When the APNU/AFC entered Office in 2015, the former Prime Minister, Mr. Moses Nagamootoo, was quoted in a statement of 28th November, 2015 as saying:

“The GuySuCo will recover this year! 2015 will mark a turning point in the performance in the performance of the industry!”

By May, 2020, former GuySuCo Chairman, Mr. John Dow, was seeking the intervention of the then President, Brigadier Granger:

“... to use your good offices to arrange for funding to prevent the impending closure of the Industry”.

That is the reverse Midas Touch at work.

I saw, a few nights ago, Hon. Member Khemraj Ramjattan on the news contending that the Government's support to sugar was akin to pouring good money into a bad industry. I am informed that the Hon. Member may know a lot about pouring. He is not here; he has probably gone pouring. But I urge him to remove his blinkers. The Hon. Member chooses, it seems, to ignore what sugar means to our nation or what it contributes economically and socially to our people. It was the same

Hon. Member who, during the 2015 elections campaign, promised sugar workers that their lives would be assured with a 20% increase, among other things. He turned around and betrayed them. Today, the Hon. Member called the sugar workers “blood suckers”. I wish he were here so that I could have looked him in the eyes and say to him that he is nothing but shameless – to put it mildly. He must know, however, that this nation is listening. Those thousands of Guyanese who suffered will, undoubtedly, remember, forever, the Coalition’s crime against them.

What is worse is that it seems the Hon. Member and his Colleagues are disdainfully seeking to perpetuate policies that impoverish and pauperise our people. Yet, they want to call themselves leaders. In passing, the Hon. Member, Mr. Ramjattan, said that ginger production was 29,000 tonnes. Well, at \$200 per pound, Region 1 would have earned \$12.76 billion. That did not happen and, clearly the Hon. Member, we can conclude, is not thinking straight. Some people may say some other things about “straight”.

The reality is that a great deal of support is directed towards repairing what I consider the deliberate damage inflicted on the sugar industry. I am convinced that the Coalition had one clear intention, which was to remove sugar from the map of Guyana. Inasmuch as I am convinced about that, I remain at a loss as to what motivated them to pursue such a policy of spitefulness. Is it that they despise sugar workers? Is it that the workers harmed or hurt them? What did the sugar industry do for the APNU/AFC to heap such scorn unto them? Is it because they are now sitting in different seats in this House?

History will record the harsh treatment the Coalition meted out to the sugar industry. It was completely reprehensible, and it appeared that the industry was executed at the altar of political expediency. While we must lament the past, wisely, it is said that we should not live in it. It is, therefore, heartening that the sugar industry is on the path of recovery and ultimate resilience. Significant efforts are being made, at this time, to breed new life into the industry. At this time, the new board and management are actively focused on bringing the industry back unto its rightful path. This is a task that is worth the reward, and one that future generations will forever cherish.

The Budget informed that an estate by estate plan is being developed to bring estates back to profitability. Several practical and workable measures are already being pursued to improve the state of affairs. Increased packet sugar, which attracts superior prices, is being maximised and

other areas for improvement are being considered. Apart from that, diversification opportunities are being examined in the areas of agro-energy and other product diversification.

In a nutshell, what sets apart the PPP/C from my Colleagues on the other side is seeing the glass half full rather than empty half. Simply put, it was that sort of thinking that pushed the industry down into the doldrums.

Sugar was just one of the main victims of the Coalition's disdain for agriculture. Our farmers were asked to swallow hefty hikes in costs of land rental and drainage and irrigation fees. They suffered with the removal of tax concessions for equipment and confronted other anti-farmer policies. Again, I am at a loss to rationally explain the logic to punish those who feed us and keep us strong. Many farmers were barely able to keep their noses above water and faced painful times during the APNU/AFC's term. That is why I am heartened to recognise and applaud the reversal of those policies. Today, our farmers can once again breathe easy that the shackles that held them back have been removed. Today, our brothers and sisters in the agriculture sector are excited, anxious, and motivated to put their best foot forward. Indeed, we have significant agricultural potential and the industry can play an important role in ensuring economic diversity, as we seek to build a resilient economy that is not dependent on a few sectors. This is testament to the forward-thinking approach of the PPP/C, which does not consider just today but tomorrow and the days after as well.

As a trade unionist interacting regularly with the ordinary man and woman, I cannot fail to use this opportunity to speak to the pro-poor and the pro-people measures outlined in the Budget. Undoubtedly, the people have much to celebrate. The school children's grant has not only been restored but has been improved as well. This will go a far way in assisting many Guyanese to be able to acquire items for their children's schooling. This is now being deemed inadequate by the APNU/AFC, whose legacy was one of removal or take away.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you would need an extension to talk more about legacy.

Ms. Teixeira: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask for my Colleague to have five minutes more to continue his presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, you may continue to conclude.

Mr. Narine: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. There is much jubilation with the decrease in water rates, coming after value added tax (VAT) was removed a few months ago. Similarly, the expansion of the zero-rated list of goods will see the cost of living further reduced, while our pensioners and public assistance recipients are to receive a well-deserved hike. Taken together, the disposable income of our people has gone up by several thousand dollars. This is a significant win for all Guyanese. Clearly, there is a great lot for our people to be excited about. Undoubtedly, there have been several gains, and I am certain that there is more in the pipeline. Indeed, with a fast expanding economy, the expectations of our people are heightening.

8.12 p.m.

The Government has committed itself to bringing relief and betterment to all Guyanese. Aptly put, His Excellency, President Irfaan Ali, when he addressed the House a few days ago, said:

“There is a bright future ahead.”

I am convinced this Government will build a future that is secure, strong and sustainable. *Budget 2021* is another step in that direction where Guyanese will be proud, happy and contented. This is a future we must all aspire for, one which we all deserve and one which we must work collectively to realise as we advance the lot of all Guyanese.

Mr. Speaker, I commend *Budget 2021*. Thank you very much. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Members, before I call the final speaker, just a few announcements.

From tomorrow, after having discussions between the Chief Whips and the Clerk, we will establish two podiums on either side. Persons are talking about the difficulty of speaking with the mask. Those who would like to make a presentation from the podium without the mask can so do. Otherwise, all other presentations would be from your seats.

As we are about to close, I will close with a happy note that the Hon. Member, Mr. Lee Williams, is celebrating his birth night tonight. So, you know where the party is. Congratulations, Hon. Member.

Hon. Member, Dr Jennifer Westford, you may proceed.

Dr. Westford: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I, like my Colleagues before me, rise to add my contribution to *Budget 2021*.

My first task is to congratulate the Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance, Dr. Ashni Kumar Singh, for his eloquent presentation of this Budget. Congratulations are also extended to the staff of the Ministry of Finance, as well as the other line agencies, for their hours of hard work, meticulous research and analytic depth. I also express my gratitude to those individuals from other political parties, the private sector, the labour movement and civil society whose contributions have also informed this Budget.

Over the past 32 hours of this debate, we were overwhelmed with episodes of orchestrated racist and inflammatory untruths and half-truths from the Opposition benches. Two recurring mantras of the Members of the opposite side were the Budget has nothing for black people and there is nothing for public servants. Both of these venomous assertions are misleading and, to say the least, mischievous. The Opposition must be reminded that they are entitled to their opinion but not to their own twisted set of facts.

Firstly, without a doubt, all Guyanese, irrespective of ethnicity, religious persuasion or political affiliations, shall benefit equally from the measures outlined in this Budget. The operative words here are ‘all Guyanese’.

Secondly, every Member, who spoke so far, has repeated the misinformed untruth of no moneys being allocated for salary increases for public servants. These pathological untruths propagators on the opposite side continue to spew their divisive propaganda, even though explanations were provided, on several occasions, as to where the moneys for salary increases are located in the Budget. Once again, let me reiterate that the funds allocated for salary increases are located within line item 6141 in this *Budget 2021*. This Administration will be engaging the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU) and other relevant trade unions before announcing a percentage increase.

These Opposition Members are barefaced and cunning, to say the least. These said Members, who continue to rant and rave about wanting to see the mention of a percentage salary increase in the

Budget, never themselves ever mentioned any percentage increase for public servants in their budgets from 2016 to 2019.

For ease of reference, I would like to point Members to the Budget Speech 2019 – Motion for the Approval of the Estimates of Expenditure for 2019 of the Ministry of Finance where a question was asked by the then Member of the Opposition of Parliament, Mr. Irfaan Ali. I quote the response that was given by the then Minister of Finance:

“...I could tell you that until we finish discussions with the Guyana Teacher’s Union (GTU) and the Guyana Public Service Union (GPSU), in respect to 2019, it would be presumptuous of me to give you numbers or percentages. We have set aside a total there, and, hopefully, it will be enough for any increases that we agree to with these unions.”

This exact statement is mentioned twice in that very *Hansard* at page 28 and page 29 when that question was asked, again, by the Hon. Member, Mr. Irfaan Ali.

The Hon. Senior Minister in the Office of the President with Responsibility for Finance detailed a comprehensive Budget and a plan to steer this country out of what seemed like a dark night of nepotism, wastage and mismanagement and put us in a direction to kickstart our economy and stymie the resource leakage of the past Government.

Specifically, we will focus on macro economy stability, investor confidence, productivity, international competitiveness, development of the country’s manpower resources, improving governance and structures, social advancement and significant improvement in the quality of life of all citizens.

This Government shall strengthen governance and human resource management in the public service. This will require a sustained effort at developing a culture of efficiency and customer care in all of our Government Ministries, Departments and State Agencies. We will accelerate the use of information and communication technology across the public service to improve decision making and to deliver quality service to the citizens of Guyana.

The Ministry of Labour will intensify the National Skill Needs Assessment programme, which has already commenced. This study will identify the skill gaps within the local economy, thereby guiding education and training needs that are aligned with labour market information.

The Government will intensify its focus on improving the operational efficiency and financial sustainability of the Guyana Water Incorporated (GWI). Already, we have begun to see the results of these efficiency measures. The results are beginning to happen. The anxiety on the other side would probably rise but we have committed ourselves to resolving people's water problems and resolved they shall be.

Allocations are also made for our agricultural incentive programme, aimed at assisting local farmers in overcoming the major challenges faced in that sector. This programme will provide support to farmers in the form of subsidised fertilisers, land preparation, pest management, post-harvest marketing and enhanced livestock extension services. There are also incentives to encourage youth entrepreneurship in agriculture and fisheries. There is provision of security in the agricultural sector and for agro-processing. Not to forget, this PPP/C Administration has removed the duty from all agricultural machinery.

We will also upgrade the youth entrepreneurship and apprenticeship centres to increase the intake of students, as well as to further engender the shift to one of self-reliance and empowerment. It is envisaged that every region will have a training centre.

The task ahead is great, indeed, and heavy is the responsibility. Yet, it is a noble and glorious challenge, one which calls for courage, resilience and commitment of all. Surely, without a doubt, this Budget sows the seed for renewal, growth and radical transformation of our communities and, by extension, our country as a whole. It is the duty of all of us to nurture the seeds and ensure that they blossom into bountiful harvest.

This is a Budget that surely reopens the door to a brighter, prosperous future for all Guyanese to finally enjoy that promised 'Good Life' that has evaded them for the last five years. The fact is that the present environment calls for proactive management, visionary leadership and the ability to create partnerships with stakeholders throughout the economy. It also requires, especially, that the poor and vulnerable are not unduly impacted, not only because this is morally justified but also because it ensures a social stability and continuing commercial activities which keeps business (*inaudible*).

It is obvious that the Opposition has missed the mark. The Opposition is out of touch with the realities and aspirations of the very everyday ordinary Guyanese. All of a sudden, the Members on

the opposite side are professing concern about the measures in the Budget which are designed to provide a better life for all. They want to know by what mechanism the poor and needy, as they have described our people, will benefit from the measures...by the Ministry of Finance implementing tax measures.

Believe it or not, this same APNU/AFC cabal from the former Administration is unashamedly trying to tell us how to conduct our safety net policies. It will serve them well for their future political careers if they would look, listen and learn from the PPP/C when it comes to building the economy and providing for our people.

I want to assure you that we can and we will implement the policies and programmes to create wealth for our people and for this great nation.

I need not remind this House that the PPP/C Government emerged out of the citizens' desire to be governed by a political party which reflects the diversity of a nation and which stands willing and ready to pilot the journey to a new horizon of growth and development. This is the basis of the national consensus which endorsed our philosophy of a people-centred development and our vision of building a secure, prosperous and sustainable nation.

Constructive engagement is also about 21st century international benchmark where practices of political civility and comity are paramount. Objective disagreement and cordial discussion should be the preferred relationship between Government and Opposition, rather than in engaging in public posturing and brinkmanship.

8.27 p.m.

It is clear that the Opposition's doctrine is that, once one is in the Opposition, one's duty is to oppose anything introduced into this House by the Government. Just a few minutes ago, the Hon. Member, Mr. Duncan, said that they will not support this Budget and that they will never ever support any budget brought to this House by the Government. This currency of hate and divisiveness has no place in our society. We ought to know better than that.

Respect in our society is becoming an increasingly scarce commodity. There seems to be a general breakdown in basic good manners and respect across many spheres, even in this honourable House.

It is my hope that all of us in this honourable House will re-commit ourselves to ensuring that we rise above the political fray and keep our gaze firmly focused in the central objective of uplifting and advancing the development of our country and our people.

We in the Government have not claimed that everything is going right; we could not claim that everything is going right. Challenges remain but, there is no one in this House who could have predicted the positive outcomes we are experiencing, given the negative results we faced even six months ago.

No one could have predicted a recovery in the level of confidence in our economy by our international partners. This did not come about by chance. This came about because of focused, dedicated hard work. There are real prospects for expanding economic activity and employment, which is reason enough to continue on the path we outlined. This is not the time for wild speculative policy shifts based on inadequate or out of date information.

Mr. Speaker: Hon. Member, this is the time for you to get an extension.

Ms. Teixeira: I would like to ask for an extension of five minutes for my Colleague to conclude her presentation.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Minister. Hon. Member, Dr. Westford, you may continue to conclude.

Dr. Westford: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This is a time to address issues and problems using analysis rather than appeal to magical solutions. The public response, both domestic and external, has been rewarding. The message is clear. There is increased confidence in the economy and in our ability to meet the challenges which we face.

Guyana is a country of ambitious people all trying to get ahead. We all want better for our own lives and for our families, and we all want to get ahead, and rightly so. This Government has prepared a historic Budget that is focused on empowering every Guyanese, providing them with greater economic freedom, opportunity and independence, while protecting the most vulnerable in our society, especially our young people. We are moving in the right direction, and we fully intend

to continue to improve on these achievements as we seek to build a society that promotes growth and equity.

The people of Guyana were presented with two options going into the elections of 2nd March. One option was to keep things as they were: unrelenting hardships, unending belt-tightening, lack of accountability in Government, arrogance in Government, negligible economic growth, joblessness and increased crime. The other option was to enter into a partnership for prosperity with the PPP/C and traverse the road to prosperity and a better life. The people chose PPP/C and prosperity.

The path to prosperity is not an easy one, but we must face the task in a surefooted and purposeful way. There will be the inevitable obstacles. This Government has a plan to achieve that prosperity as a people. We know that plan must be inclusive, providing educational opportunities, proper healthcare, support for our entrepreneurs, providing decent housing for our people and improving our environment. In return, our plan calls for us to be more productive in everything we do. We must be prepared to confront each obstacle with diligence and courage. We must continue to make bold and essential decisions that will rescue our future by building prosperity, first, in our minds and then in our pockets. This is the essence of our partnership for prosperity.

As I close, there is a famous prayer that I feel moved to leave with everyone in our beloved country. In this prayer, there is a three-fold request to God for serenity, courage and wisdom. Serenity is a prayer for peace to accept what cannot be altered in oneself. Courage is a request for fortitude to overcome obstacles to achieve what is possible, and wisdom is a prayer for discernment to know when to accept a situation and when to be bold and to challenge it. Today, let us pray to God that he will give us the strength of our conviction to provide good governance to our people, and to be bold and courageous as we make decisions that are essential to our success.

The prayer goes as follows:

“God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.”

I, again, call upon the public sector workers not to be influenced by political rhetoric.

The development of our human resources is the most vital element in the development of our nation. We have demonstrated the necessary leadership to make this vision a reality. Together, let us press on to prosperity, as we partner together in shared sacrifice and collective vision.

Together, let us work on building the foundation of our economy. We have the opportunity to make a lasting difference to be felt over time by ourselves and our children for generations to come. It is time to unite and press on to prosperity with the firm determination and hard work that will make us great as Guyanese. If we hope together, endure together and work hard together, we will achieve together.

I, therefore, would like to register my endorsement and support for this 2021 Budget. [*Applause*]

Mr. Speaker: Thank you Hon. Member. Hon Members, just before I call on the Prime Minister to move the adjournment motion, at least I may not have mentioned to persons who choose to come to the podium to speak that they can do so with their masks on. That is just a reminder.

Hon. Prime Minister, I invite you to move the motion.

ADJOURNMENT

BE IT RESOLVED:

“That the Assembly do now adjourn to 10.00 a.m. on Thursday, 25th February, 2021.”

[*Prime Minister*]

Brigadier Ret’d Phillips: I move the adjournment of the Assembly to 10.00 a.m. on Thursday, 25th February, 2021.

Motion put and agreed to.

Mr. Speaker: Hon Members, the Assembly now stands adjourned to 10.00 a.m., Thursday, 25th February.

Adjourned accordingly at 8.35 p.m.